



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
ES/CO: CDOT
TAILS: 06E24000-2015-I-0016

OCT 30 2014

Jeff Peterson
Colorado Department of Transportation
4201 East Arkansas Avenue, Shumate Building
Denver, Colorado 80222

Dear Mr. Peterson:

Based on the authority conferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) by the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), the Service reviewed your October 9, 2014, report regarding improvements at the Kingsview intersection located on SH340 between mile markers 1.5 and 2.0 south of Fruita, Mesa County, Colorado, and its potential effects on the threatened Colorado hookless cactus (*Sclerocactus glaucus*), and the proposed endangered Gunnison sage-grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) and the candidate greater sage-grouse (*C. urophasianus*).

SH340 at the Kingsview intersection is a two-lane highway with 2-foot to 4-foot shoulders and no turn lanes. To address concerns over safety and visibility at the intersection, you are proposing to add turn lanes and realign the east leg of the intersection. The new road will be approximately 12 feet wider, and guardrail will be installed on two quadrants of the intersection. No detour will be needed. The work is planned for the summer of 2015 and is expected to last approximately two months.

Best management practices will be implemented to prevent project-related sediment and contaminants from leaving the project area. Other general measures to minimize impacts to wildlife and habitat include reseeding all temporarily disturbed areas with native seed, placing storage and staging areas on sites that are already disturbed, and following CDOT's specification to protect migratory birds.

Vegetation in the project area consists primarily of weedy annuals adjacent to the roadway, upland desert salt-shrub communities and riparian/wetland communities adjacent to an unnamed tributary to the Colorado River. Much of the area appears to be degraded from previous transportation projects and weeds.

Both the Gunnison and Greater sage-grouse depend entirely on sagebrush-dominated habitats and prefer large contiguous areas of sagebrush on flat or gently rolling terrain; they also tend to

avoid steep slopes. Preferred habitat for these species occurs in the project area and will be affected by the project. However, sizable amounts of similar habitat occur in the area that will not be affected by the roadway, and most impacts from the project are expected to be temporary. It is unlikely that either species would regularly use the roadway right-of-way for feeding, breeding, or sheltering, so impacts due to the project are expected to be discountable and insignificant.

The Colorado hookless cactus occurs on alluvial benches along the Green, Colorado, and Gunnison Rivers on cobbly, gravelly, or rocky surfaces on river terrace deposits and lower mesa slopes. Because this type of habitat exists in the project area, the area was surveyed for the species and several possible individuals were found. These individuals will be protected with orange fencing to prevent equipment or individuals from harming or removing the plants. An additional survey will occur prior to construction, and any additional plants will be also be protected. Recent genetic analyses of populations in this area indicate that most plants belong to the species *S. parviflorus*, rather than *S. glaucus*. Because it's likely that the individuals detected during your survey are *S. parviflorus*, and that you will prevent them from being harmed or removed during the project, impacts from the project are expected to be discountable and insignificant.


Given your project description and locations, the Service finds the report acceptable and concurs with your determination that the impacts resulting from the proposed project are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Gunnison or the Greater sage-grouse or adversely affect the continued existence of the Colorado hookless cactus.

If a proposal to list the Gunnison sage-grouse becomes final during project construction, the action agency may request (in writing) that the Service adopt this concurrence as a final concurrence satisfying the 7(a)(2) requirements of the Act. Adoption is dependent on no significant changes to the proposed action or the information used in the conference.

Please note that should project plans change or if additional information regarding listed or proposed species becomes available, this determination may be reconsidered under the ESA. If the proposed project has not commenced within one year, please contact the Colorado Field Office to request an extension.

We appreciate your submitting this report to our office for review and comment. If the Service can be of further assistance, please contact Alison Deans Michael of my staff at (303) 236-4758.

Sincerely,


Susan C. Linner
Colorado Field Supervisor

cc: CDOT, HQ (Jeff Peterson)
Michael