BUFFALO HORN LAND EXCHANGE – FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS
Serial No. COC-76595

BACKGROUND
Buffalo Horn Properties, LLC (Buffalo Horn), approached the White River Field Office (WRFO) in 2008 about a land exchange involving private parcels in the Indian Valley area and Federal lands in the Strawberry Creek area. At the time, the WRFO was not able to dedicate the time necessary for considering a land exchange.

In 2011, the WRFO and Buffalo Horn began work on the proposed exchange. Buffalo Horn’s December 2011 proposal included approximately 6,645 acres of private land in 6 parcels and 7,629 acres of Federal land in 18 parcels. This preliminary exchange proposal was evaluated by a BLM interdisciplinary team and revised to the current proposal in January 2013.

EXCHANGE PROPOSAL
Buffalo Horn is offering to exchange 3 non-Federal parcels comprising 4,035.77 acres for 16 Federal parcels totaling an estimated 3,646 acres. The exchange does not include mineral estates or water rights. All of the parcels included in the exchange are Federal mineral estate with the exception of Parcel B which has 838.20 acres with split mineral estate. The offered non-Federal lands are described in Exhibit A. The Federal lands are described in Exhibit B. A map of the proposed exchange is shown in Exhibit C.

Parcel B is the BLM’s highest priority for acquisition because it would provide improved public access to two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Parcel A-5 is the second priority for acquisition due to sage-grouse habitat and its location within an important cultural landscape. For disposal, the BLM would first prioritize those parcels identified for disposal in the White River Resource Management Plan (RMP), then other small, isolated parcels with those adjoining BLM land as a lower priority that those surrounded by private land. For the larger parcels, the BLM would prioritize Parcel C-1 for disposal due to limited public access. The last parcel the BLM would exchange would be Parcel E-2 due to concerns associated with a recent increase in public big game hunting in this area.

Parcels D-3 and E-2 would be re-surveyed since the boundary of the parcels are not aliquot parts. The boundary for Parcel D-3 is a ridgeline and the boundary for Parcel E-2 is a road.

CONSISTENCY WITH LAND USE PLANS
The proposed land exchange is in conformance with the White River RMP and the Little Snake RMP (a portion of Parcel C-1 is within the Little Snake Field Office). Parcels D-4, E-1, F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-6, F-8 and G are identified for disposal in the White River RMP. The White River RMP requires that public access rights be reserved on all disposal tracts that control access to BLM lands so Parcel E-2 has been configured to maintain public ownership of the ridge road.

PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF RESOURCES

Federal Lands
The Federal lands are all located in the Strawberry Creek area. Riparian areas on Federal lands
are limited to Price Creek in Parcel C-1. Most of the Federal lands are characterized by mountain shrub, pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, and rock outcrops. Federal Parcels C-1, D-3, and E-2 are dominated by steep topography with half of them having slopes greater than 35 percent.

Greater sage-grouse is a BLM sensitive species. There are 20 acres of sage-grouse priority habitat within Parcel E-1. There are no other proposed, listed, or candidate species known to occur on the Federal lands. However, there is potential habitat for BLM sensitive plants on Parcel E-2. The Federal parcels provide habitat for both elk and mule deer. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) identifies all of the parcels as summer range for mule deer and those parcels west of the Strawberry Creek road as winter range. Parcel E-2 is identified as an elk winter concentration area, but all of the parcels provide both winter and summer range habitat for elk.

The Federal parcels have not been surveyed for cultural resources. The BLM typically does not require cultural resource surveys on steep, brushy slopes due to the difficulty in detecting resources and the low probability of their occurrence. Due to the topography and vegetation, only half of the Federal parcels would likely be surveyed for cultural resources.

The subsurface mineral rights for all minerals associated with the Federal lands will be reserved to the United States. All the parcels have a high potential for oil and gas occurrence, and portions of Parcel C-1 and all of Parcels D-3, F-1, and F-7 are currently encumbered by Federal oil and gas leases. There is one abandoned oil and gas well on Parcel C-1 and two abandoned locations on Parcel D-3. There are no active mining claims or coal leases; however, six parcels are in an area identified as suitable for coal development.

Non-Federal Lands

The non-Federal lands are located in Indian Valley between the Windy Gulch and Black Mountain WSAs. The only riparian area is Deep Channel Creek on Parcel A-3. In contrast to the Federal lands, the non-Federal parcels have much gentler topography with vegetation predominately being pinyon-juniper and sagebrush with some rock outcrops.

Parcels A-3 and A-5 contain approximately 1,300 acres of sage-grouse priority habitat and 200 acres of general habitat. There are no other proposed, listed, or candidate species known to occur on the non-Federal lands. All of the parcels provide winter range habitat for mule deer and elk. Parcel B provides summer range habitat for mule deer and elk, and portions of Parcel A-5 are identified as summer range for elk. Parcel A-3 and a portion of Parcel A-5 are within the overall range for pronghorn.

A very small portion of the non-Federal parcels have been inventoried for cultural resources. These limited surveys have identified five sites that have been determined as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Due to other known sites within the general area, the BLM considers the Colorow Mountain/Indian Valley area an important cultural landscape.

The United States reserved all minerals in Parcels A-3 and A-5. There are 997.06 acres of Federal minerals in Parcel B. All of Parcel A-3 and a portion of Parcel A-5 are encumbered with Federal oil and gas leases. There are no oil and gas wells on Parcels A-3 and B, but there are 13 abandoned oil and gas wells on Parcel A-5. There are no active mining claims or coal leases.
ANTICIPATED LAND USE

Proposed Disposal
The Federal lands proposed for disposal would become part of Buffalo Horn Ranch, a working cattle ranch that also provides outfitting for big game hunting. Buffalo Horn currently participates in CPW's Ranching for Wildlife program which provides some public hunters with access to private land. It is anticipated that Buffalo Horn would continue their participation in this program.

Disposal of Parcels F-7 and F-8 would require a change in the boundaries of two grazing allotments. The BLM would modify the grazing permits in the affected allotments.

Proposed Acquisition
The non-Federal lands acquired in the exchange would be managed similarly to adjacent BLM lands. The BLM would issue right-of-way grants for the existing pipelines on Parcels A-5 and B. Any proposed future development associated with the fee mineral estate on Parcel B (e.g., well pads, roads, pipelines) would be processed by the BLM through right-of-way grants.

As part of the review of the proposed land exchange, the BLM would survey Parcel B and that portion of Parcel A-5 east of the Indian Valley Truck Trail for the presence of lands with wilderness characteristics. Parcel A-5 is adjacent to lands with wilderness characteristics which are to be managed to protect wilderness characteristics as a priority over other uses in accordance with the WRFO's Oil and Gas Development RMP Amendment. Parcel B is located between two WSAs. Even if wilderness character is present, it is unlikely the BLM would manage it for wilderness characteristics due to the private mineral estate.

PUBLIC BENEFITS
While inclusion of all the parcels in the proposed exchange appears to be in the public interest, the heart of the exchange is the disposal of Parcel C-1 and the acquisition of Parcel B. Parcel C-1, while providing excellent big game habitat and potential hunting opportunities, is very difficult for the public to access. BLM law enforcement has investigated vandalism and suspected illegal outfitting in the area. Parcel B would provide improved public access to the Black Mountain and Windy Gulch WSAs.

The BLM generally discourages creation of split-estate during land exchanges. While there are currently about 3,198 acres of split-estate, there would be an increase of approximately 1,280 acres of split-estate under the proposed exchange.

Proposed Disposal of Federal Lands
The disposal of the Federal lands would improve management by disposing of isolated tracts of public land.

The majority of the Federal lands in the proposed exchange are not accessible by the general public. Parcel E-2 is the only parcel accessible to the general public by an existing road. Parcel F-5 is adjacent to the Windy Gulch WSA, but it requires hiking through the Windy Gulch WSA. Access to Parcel D-3 requires hiking over steep terrain. Parcel C-1 is part of a larger block of
BLM land but has very limited public access. The only public access to Parcel C-1 is to walk a minimum of four miles in steep terrain from either Pine Tree Gulch State Trust Land or Rattlesnake Hill State Trust Land, both only seasonally open to the public.

**Proposed Acquisition of Non-Federal Lands**
The acquisition of the non-Federal lands would provide improved public access, and it would allow for management of sensitive resources such as cultural sites and sage-grouse habitat.

While there is some public access to the Black Mountain WSA, it is difficult for the public to access the Windy Gulch WSA. The Windy Gulch WSA can be accessed from the west by hiking 2 miles across rugged terrain from County Road 142 or from the north by traveling 8-miles using off-highway vehicles, then hiking 1.5 miles from the southern end of Parcel E-2. There is an existing road that traverses Parcel B between the two WSAs which would provide not only improved public access but also provide the opportunity to develop a staging/parking area.

**VALUATION ANALYSIS**
The WRFO worked with the Office of Valuation Services (OVS) to develop a preliminary valuation of the parcels in April 2015. The OVS provided comparable market data and discussed different criteria to consider when comparing different properties. Based on those discussions, the WRFO determined a preliminary value of $3,323,914 for the Federal parcels and $4,191,296 for the non-Federal lands.

The highest/best use for the majority of the Federal parcels is assemblage with other acreage because many parcels are landlocked with Buffalo Horn. The parcels are estimated at $550/acre. The highest and best use of Parcels E-2 and C-1 is recreation, and the parcels are valued at $900/acre and $1,100/acre, respectively. The highest/best use for all the non-Federal parcels is determined to be recreation/agriculture with Parcel B valued at $1,100/acre, Parcel A-5 at $1,000/acre, and Parcel A-3 at $900/acre.

The preliminary values for the non-Federal lands are greater than the Federal lands. When the BLM receives the final appraisal, some non-Federal lands may be dropped from the exchange or be re-configured to equalize values. Because the value of the Federal lands exceeds $2,000,000, the BLM is required to notify the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and provide a 30-day review by the Committees before the exchange can be consummated.

**TITLE CONSIDERATIONS**
Because the mineral estate is not included in the proposed land exchange, Exhibits A and B do not list oil and gas leases. Exhibit B also does not identify the livestock grazing permits or special recreation permits held by Buffalo Horn on the Federal parcels. The exchange proposal would not affect potential development of oil and gas leases. The exchange proposal would also not affect the livestock grazing and special recreation permits held by Buffalo Horn.

**Federal Lands**
Title considerations for the Federal lands are listed in Exhibit B. All ditches, canals, and mineral estate would be reserved to the United States. Parcels C-1 and F-8 have livestock grazing permits issued to parties other than Buffalo Horn, and both of these parcels contain fences for which the
grazing permittee may be eligible for compensation. Parcels C-2, D-3, and E-3 have special recreation permits for big game outfitting issued to parties other than Buffalo Horn. Parcels E-2 and F-6 have rights-of-way for pipelines.

**Non-Federal Lands**

Title considerations for the non-Federal lands are listed in Exhibit A. For Parcel A-3, the title confirms that ditches and canals have been reserved to the United States. The title also acknowledges that the Patent reserved all minerals to the United States which corresponds to the Master Title Plat and records at the Moffat County Assessor’s Office. There are notations on the preliminary title work that refer to mineral estate being assigned to private individuals; however, this refers to other parcels included in those transactions. The mining claims listed on the preliminary title work are closed.

In Parcel A-5, the United States holds an access easement for the Indian Valley Truck Trail. There are also several pipeline rights-of-way within the parcel and a lack of a right of access.

For Parcel B, mineral estate is reserved to the United States on 997.06 acres. There is a natural gas pipeline right-of-way on the parcel. The preliminary title work also refers to the Sunny Point Reservoir. It is unknown if this reservoir was ever constructed, but it is no longer visible on aerial images in GIS.

**SUPPORT FOR EXCHANGE**

The WRFO met with staff members of Rio Blanco County, Moffat County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in January 2015 to solicit their initial feedback on the proposed exchange.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is concerned about inclusion of Parcel E-2 in the exchange because of the recent increase in elk hunting in that area. The Colorow Mountain State Wildlife Area was acquired by CPW in 2013 and provides increased public access through Tschuddi Gulech to Parcel E-2. While the public has vehicular access along the boundary of Parcel E-2, it is not possible to drive into the parcel itself without trespassing on Buffalo Horn property. The WRFO has identified Parcel E-2 as the lowest priority for exchange.

Moffat County did not express any concerns. The FWS had no concerns since there would be an increase in grouse habitat managed by the BLM.

The Rio Blanco County Commissioners expressed concerns about a reduction in the amount of taxable property in the county. In tax year 2014, property taxes for Parcels A-5 and B were $315.64 and $196.72, respectively. In Fiscal Year 2014, the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) for Rio Blanco County was $539,122 for 1,498,908 acres. The PILT payments would be expected to fully offset any reduction to the local tax base; however, the county remains concerned about the uncertainty of future funding for the PILT program.

Rio Blanco County is concerned that the increase of split-estate would be detrimental to energy development and the County’s economy due to additional federal requirements. There are 878.20 acres of private mineral estate within Parcel B. The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation
Commission does not identify any active or plugged oil and gas wells in Parcel B, although there are producing wells two miles west on BLM land.

Rio Blanco County also expressed concern about grazing and recreation permittees whose operations depend on predictable permits. The BLM is required to give two years notice to all affected grazing permittees.

Rio Blanco County is concerned that the BLM would consolidate the Black Mountain and Windy Gulch WSAs and to possibly designate them as Wilderness. If acquired, the BLM would evaluate Parcel B to determine if there are any lands with wilderness characteristics. However, even if these resources were present, it is unlikely that the BLM would manage for wilderness characteristics due to private mineral estate. The BLM does not have the authority to designate the WSAs as Wilderness and previously recommended to Congress that these two WSAs not be carried forward as Wilderness.

PROCESSING COSTS AND FUNDING
The WRFO and Buffalo Horn entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the proposed Buffalo Horn land exchange in May 2014. Buffalo Horn submitted $34,997.39 to reimburse the BLM for costs incurred to process the feasibility analysis. The MOA will terminate upon execution of an Agreement to Initiate an Exchange (ATI).

Buffalo Horn will provide all funding necessary to process the proposed exchange. Buffalo Horn will provide $247,647 to reimburse the BLM for costs incurred to process the exchange. Buffalo Horn will directly contract for professional services including cultural resources, paleontological resources, and special status plant surveys for $196,005. The estimated total cost for the remaining processing steps is $443,652 (including BLM labor and contracts).

SCHEDULE
The schedule for the land exchange allows for a two-year notification period to affected livestock grazing permittees from the time the Notice of Exchange Proposal (NOEP) is published to closing in April 2018. If the BLM Director approves the feasibility package by March 2016, the WRFO will segregate the public lands and complete necessary resource surveys during the 2016 field season.

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RECOMMENDATION

The proposed Buffalo Horn Land Exchange is consistent with both the White River and Little Snake Resource Management Plans and appears to be in the public interest. Funding for processing the exchange would be provided by the Proponent. Disposal of the selected Federal lands and acquisition of the non-Federal lands would improve the management efficiency of public land resources, provide greater public access to recreational lands, and result in protection of important wildlife habitat and cultural landscapes.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Kent E. Walter  
Field Manager  
White River Field Office

J. Hunter Seinn  
Acting Field Manager  
Little Snake Field Office

Joseph F. Meyer  
District Manager  
Northwest District Office

APPROVED BY:

Kath L. Welch  
Colorado State Director  
Bureau of Land Management
EXHIBIT A
OFFERED NON-FEDERAL LANDS

Parcel A-3 (Moffat County)
T. 3 N., R. 97 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 17, SW¼NW¼, N½SW¼, SW¼SW¼, N½SE¼, and SE¼SE¼.
The area described contains 280 acres.

Parcel A-5 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 3 N., R. 96 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 30, lots 7 and 8, and E½SW¼;
sec. 31, lots 5, 6, and 7, and E½NW¼.
T. 3 N., R. 97 W.,
sec. 25, SW¼NE¼, NW¼, E½SW¼, NW¼SE¼, and SE¼SE¼;
sec. 26, S½SE¼;
sec. 27, E½SE¼;
sec. 34, NE¼NE¼;
sec. 35, NE¼, NW¼, NE¼SW¼, and N½SE¼;
sec. 36, NE¼, NW¼, SW¼, and N½SE¼.
The area described contains 1,920.51 acres.

Subject to:
1. Big Hole Pipe Line natural gas transmission line, Rocky Mountain Natural Gas Company, Reception No. 162188.
6. Terms and conditions of Findings, Conclusions and Judgment in Per Sten Johnson v. The Board of County Commissioners of Rio Blanco County, Action No. 89CV10, recorded April 19, 2011 as Reception No. 301079.
7. Easement or right-of-way for Big Hole and Blue Gravel Pipeline as evidenced by plat recorded as Reception No. 307235.

Parcel B (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 18, SW¼SE¼;
sec. 19, lots 3 and 4, W½NE¼, SE¼NE¼, E½SW¼, and SE¼;
sec. 20, SW¼NW¼;
sec. 30, lots 2, 3, and 4, W½NE¼, SE¼NW¼, E½SW¼, and W½SE¼;
sec. 31, N½NE¼, SE¼NE¼, and NE¼NW¼;
sec. 32, NW¼, E½SW¼, and W½SE¼.
T. 2 N., R. 96 W.,
  sec. 25, SW¼, and SE¼;
  sec. 36, NW¼NE¼, and N½NW¼.
The area described contains 1,835.26 acres.

Subject to:
1. An undivided 4/5ths interest in and to any oil and/or gas reserved in Warranty Deed from Herbert H. Grizzard to Zack P. Mathes recorded April 18, 1928 in Book 73 at Page 427 as Reception No. 43096.
   T. 2 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 30, SE¼SW¼, SW¼SE¼;
   sec. 31, NE¼NW¼, NW¼NE¼, E½NE¼;
   sec. 32, W½NW¼.
2. Reservation of all oil, gas, and other minerals reserved in Warranty Deed from O.R. Ivory to Lee C. Watson, Lovina Watson, and Chester C. Watson recorded August 14, 1952 in Book 142 at Page 434 as Reception No. 85532, and any assignments thereof or interests therein.
   T. 2 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 18, SW¼SE¼;
   sec. 19, lots 3 and 4, W½NE¼, SE¼NE¼, E½SW¼, and SE¼;
   sec. 20, SW¼NW¼;
   sec. 30, NW¼NE¼, SE¼SW¼, SW¼SE¼;
   sec. 31, NE¼NW¼, NW¼NE¼, E¼NE¼;
   sec. 32, W½NW¼.
5. Plat and statement for Sunny Point Reservoir filed April 19, 1919 as Document No. 27102.
EXHIBIT B
SELECTED FEDERAL LANDS

Parcel C-1 (Moffat County)
T. 3 N., R. 95. W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 4, lot 6.
T. 4 N., R. 95 W.
   sec. 28, SW¼NE¼, NW¼, SW¼, W½SE¼, and SE¼SE¼;
   sec. 29, E½NE¼, SE¼SW¼, and SE¼;
   sec. 33;
   sec. 34, S½SW¼ and W½SE¼.
The area described contains 1,599.57 acres.

Subject to:
1. Grazing Permit No. 0501032, John and Steve Raftopoulos, Colowyo Commons Allotment (04400).
2. Grazing Permit No. 0501044, Albert Bruchez, et al., Colowyo Commons Allotment (04400).

Parcel C-2 (Moffat County)
T. 4 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 30, lot 6, NW¼NE¼, and SE¼NW¼.
The area described contains 117.31 acres.

Subject to Special Recreation Permit No. CO-110-SRP-097-009, Louisiana Purchase Ranch.

Parcel D-3 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 94 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 4, that part of lot 4 lying west of the ridge line;
   sec. 5, that part of lot 1 lying west of the ridge line.
T. 3 N., R. 94 W.,
   sec. 32, E½SE¼;
   sec. 33, that part of W½NE¼, E½NW¼, E½SW¼, and SW¼SW¼ lying west of the ridge line.
The area described contains approximately 323 acres.

Subject to Special Recreation Permit No. CO-110-SRP-099-041, Crawford Ranch.

Parcel D-4 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 26, Tract 37, lots 7 and 8.
The area described contains 40.01 acres.

Parcel E-1 (Moffat County)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
   sec. 17, lot 6.
The area described contains 20.17 acres.
Parcel E-2 (Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 17, SW¼SW¼;
  sec. 19, E½NE¼, and that part of W½NE¼ and E½SE¼ lying east of Gray Hills Ridge Road
  (BLM Road 1710);
  sec. 20, N½NW¼, SW¼NW¼, W½SW¼, and SW¼SE¼;
  sec. 29, NE¼, and that part of N½NW¼, SE¼NW¼, NE¼SW¼, N½SE¼, and SE¼SE¼
  lying east of Gray Hills Ridge Road (BLM Road 1710).
The area described contains approximately 751 acres.

Subject to:
2. Right-of-way COC-71536 for pipeline, Overland Pass Pipeline Company.

Parcel E-3 (Moffat County)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 9, SW¼NW¼.
The area described contains 40 acres.

Subject to Special Recreation Permit No. CO-110-SRP-10-126, Strawberry Creek Outfitters.

Parcel F-1 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 94 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 7, lots 8, 18, and 19.
The area described contains 35.32 acres.

Parcel F-2 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 35, SW¼SE¼.
The area described contains 40 acres.

Parcel F-3 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 36, S½SE¼.
The area described contains 80 acres.

Parcel F-4 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 1, NE¼SW¼.
The area described contains 40 acres.

Parcel F-5 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
  sec. 2, E½SW¼, SW¼SW¼, and S½SE¼;
  sec. 3, SE¼SE¼.
Parcel F-6 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 12, N½NW¼.
The area described contains 80 acres.

Subject to:
2. Right-of-way COC-71536 for pipeline, Overland Pass Pipeline Company.

Parcel F-7 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 2 N., R. 94 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 5, NW¼SW¼;
sec. 6, N½SE.
The area described contains 120 acres.

Parcel F-8 (Rio Blanco County)
T. 3 N., R. 95 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 36, SW¼NE¼ and SE¼NW¼.
The area described contains 80 acres.

Subject to:
1. Grazing Permit No. 0502948, Vannoy Ranch LLC, Goff Camp Gulch Allotment (06616).
2. Grazing Permit No. 0501473, Lyle McKee, Goff Camp Gulch Allotment (06616).

Parcel G (Moffat County)
T. 3 N., R. 96 W., Sixth Principal Meridian,
sec. 2, lot 7.
The area described contains 39.62 acres.