

0029

C/067/041 dc
Incoming

Memo

9 October 2001

To: Westridge Mine File
From: Chris Colt

Subject: Mexican Spotted Owl Habitat Survey near Grassy Trail Reservoir and Left Fork Whitmore Canyon

In order to determine if a Mexican spotted owl (MSO) survey was necessary for the Whitmore Canyon Coal lease for the Westridge Mine, Brad Crompton (DWR District Biologist) and I flew over the proposed lease area to determine if there was suitable habitat for MSO. The flight was chartered by Westridge Mine, and flown on 10/9/01. Dave Shaver (Westridge Mine) intended to accompany us on the flight, however, due to the fact that only a Cessna 172 was available, he did not. Once the flight was completed, I phoned Dave and relayed our assessment of the habitat.

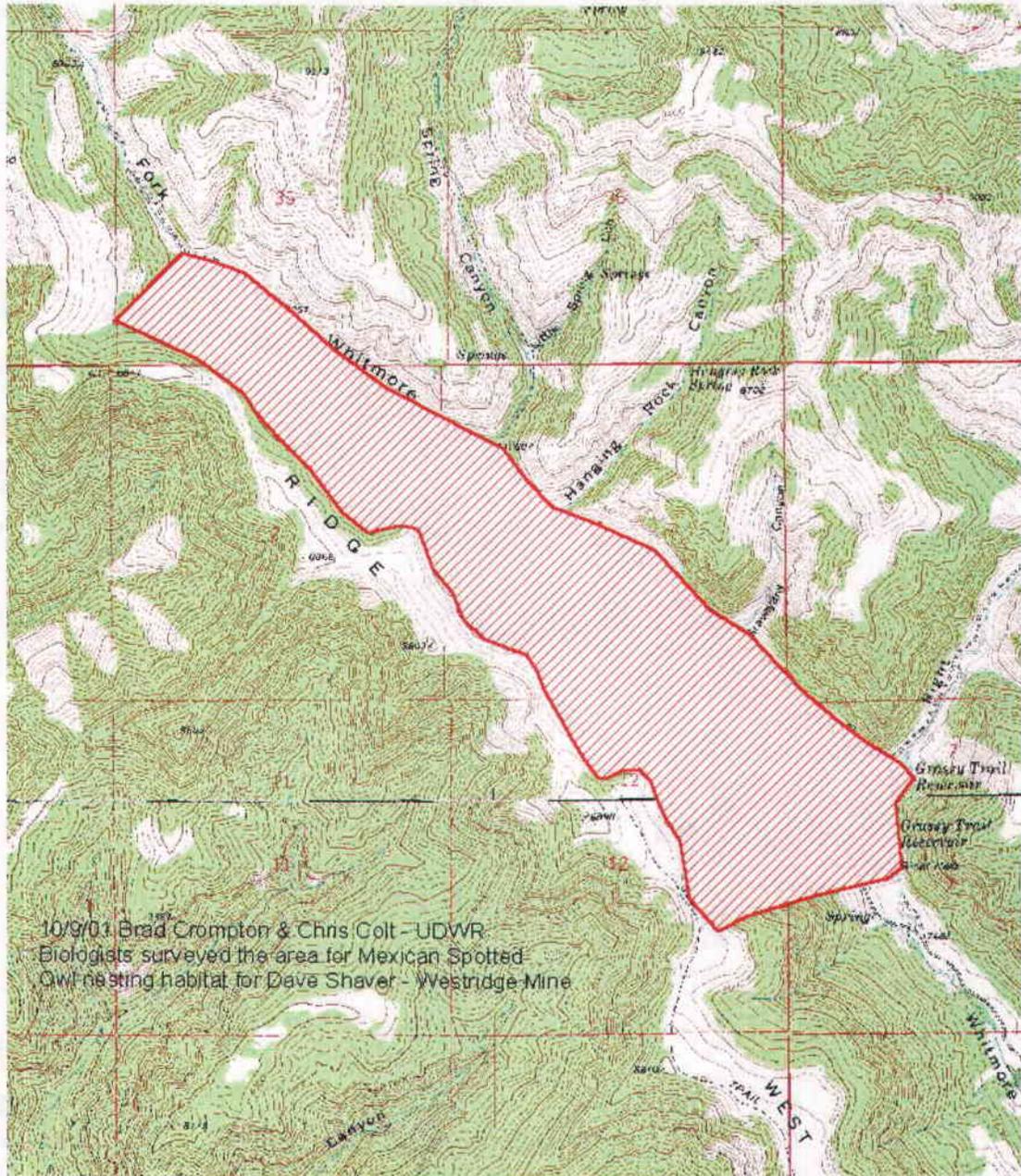
The area surveyed is indicated in red on the attached map. It was our determination that suitable MSO habitat did not exist for the following reasons:

- There was little to no cliff habitat within the survey area.
- There were no closed canyons within the survey areas which would provide cool, protected nesting areas. The entire area consists of open slopes with smooth contours.
- Much of the area is < 40% slope.
- The area was primarily mountain brush, as opposed to mixed conifer. There was only one small patch of young Douglas fir in the area.
- The area receives > 4' of snowfall.

The surveyed area was all within Whitmore Canyon, and not along the Book Cliff face. We do feel that there is suitable MSO habitat along, or in canyons cross-cutting the Book Cliff face.

Chris Colt

DWR Mexican Spotted Owl Habitat Survey



Memo

20 December 2001

To: Paul Baker - DOGM
From: Chris Colt - DWR

RE: Wildlife issues with Westridge Mine proposal to undermine Grassy Trail Creek

Paul,

My first response to this is, "Wow, another perennial drainage being undermined?!"

There are two tributaries that feed Grassy Trail Reservoir. The left fork does not contain a perennial flow, therefore cannot maintain a fishery. The right fork is perennial, and could maintain a fishery. In the past DWR has proposed to plant fish, particularly the Colorado Cutthroat trout, in the reservoir as well as the right fork of the creek, but this proposal was shut down by East Carbon City over concerns for T&E issues shutting down their culinary water supply if the fish was ever listed as endangered. I guess the short of it is that the right fork could support a fishery, but for political reasons, it is currently fishless. Nevertheless, we would hate to see this water source interrupted. I'm sure East Carbon City would have issues with any threats to their water supply.

An additional concern with potential loss of the creek is loss of available free-water for big game animals. This area is enrolled in the Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit program and is managed as a high dollar private hunting preserve. Deer and elk are important monetary assets for the landowner/CWMU operator. Not having been on the ground there, I do not know how limited free-water is, but the stream may be important. This may be particularly so during the summer. Are there any springs in the area, which may be used by big game animals? Is there the potential to intercept these springs also? As a final issue, we are concerned over any impacts to riparian vegetation, which would compromise neotropical bird habitat. Riparian habitat is extremely limited in this area, and therefore very critical.

I suggest doing a survey of the riparian vegetation through the impacted area. This should be relatively easy to do from aerial photos (available on the Division of Water Rights website). Then maybe ground truth your data in the spring using GPS. I would also recommend surveying the springs on and adjacent to the area of influence. If you don't already have the 2001 raptor survey data, I can email it. Finally, I can also send you the latest big game habitat data, as we have updated it this year. Feel free to contact me, and we can discuss these issues (435-636-0279).

Sincerely,

Chris Colt

>>> Paul Baker 12/19/01 06:31PM >>>

West Ridge is planning to mine under Grassy Trail Creek above the reservoir. They will be pretty deep, so the chances of affecting the stream are less than for Skyline. I'm wondering, though, if there's a fishery in the creek that we need to be concerned about. We got a copy of your letter on Mexican spotted owls, and we should get raptor survey information. We also have the maps showing big game habitat. Is there any other baseline information you think we need?

C: Westridge Mine file
Louis Berg