



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

MANUAL TRANSMITTAL SHEET

Release
8-66

Date
7/5/95

Subject 8550 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR
LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW

1. Explanation of Material Transmitted. This release transmits 8550 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW, which is a Manual Section that provides the conceptual framework and specific policy for managing public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) which are under wilderness review. This Manual Section replaces the previous Manual Section by the same title issued November 10, 1987, as Manual Release 8-35.
2. Reports Required. None.
3. Material Superseded: Manual Section 8550, Release 8-35 dated November 10, 1987.
4. Filing Instructions: File as directed below.

REMOVE:
8550 (Rel. 8-35)
(Total: 4 sheets)

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8550
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8550 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR
LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW

Table of Contents

- .01 Purpose
- .02 Objectives
- .03 Authority
- .04 Responsibility
- .05 References
- .06 Policy

8550 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR
LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW

.01 Purpose. This manual section identifies the Bureau's role in administering public lands under wilderness review, provides policy guidance for Bureau personnel, and sets the framework for interim wilderness management program development.

.02 Objectives. The Bureau's primary interim management goal is to manage and protect those public lands which are under wilderness review, in such a manner so as to not impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness, until they are designated by Congress as wilderness, or until they are released from further wilderness consideration.

A. There are three categories of public lands to which this policy applies: (1) Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) identified by the wilderness review required by Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), (2) legislative WSAs (WSAs established by Congress), and (3) WSAs identified through the land-use planning process in Section 202 of FLPMA. These categories together are referred to as "lands under wilderness review."

B. The handbook which accompanies this manual section describes the policy and guidelines under which the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will manage the lands under wilderness review. This policy is referred to as the "interim" management policy (IMP) because it is temporary and applies only during the time an area remains a WSA. The purpose of the handbook is to guide BLM staff in the specific decisions that arise in the management of lands under wilderness review.

.03 Authority. Principal authorities affecting use and management of lands under wilderness review are:

A. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, 43 USC 1701, et. seq.

B. Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 USC 1131.

.04 Responsibility.

A. The Assistant Director, Assessment and Planning, through the Group Administrator and Team Leader, Special Areas and Land Tenure, must:

1. Establish policy, goals, objectives, and procedures for managing lands under wilderness review within the framework of public law and departmental policy.

2. Provide direction, management, and leadership relating to the management of lands under wilderness review.

3. Identify, address, and reconcile interrelationships, policy issues, and conflicts between wilderness and other programs.

4. Maintain liaison with other governmental agencies, land users, and other organizations concerned with management of lands under wilderness review.

8550 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR
LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW

.05 References.

- A. Wilderness Protection Stipulations.
- B. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-579).
- C. Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of September 3, 1964 (P.L. 88-577).
- D. Wilderness Review Program (43 CFR 3802). (These regulations pertain only to mining operations and means of access for these mining operations under the 1872 Mining Law.)
- E. Surface Management (43 CFR 3809) addresses the requirements for reclamation.

.06 Policy.

A. The Department of the Interior's management policy is, except in the cases stated below, to continue resource uses on lands designated as WSAs in a manner that does not impair the area's suitability for preservation as wilderness. This IMP will be in effect until one of the following occurs:

1. If Congress designates a WSA as wilderness, the BLM will manage the area for preservation of its wilderness character. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) requires that designated wilderness areas be managed under provisions of the Wilderness Act. The BLM will manage any areas designated by Congress as wilderness under Manual 8560 -- "Management of Designated Wilderness Areas," and the regulations at 43 CFR 8560.

2. If Congress determines that a WSA or other public lands will not be designated as wilderness, the IMP will no longer apply, except if provided for otherwise in the congressional determination.

3. WSAs studied under the authority of Section 202 of FLPMA and subsequently found to be nonsuitable for wilderness designation may be released from interim management by the BLM State Director 30 days after approval of the land-use plan for the areas involved. In the interest of consistency with related land-use plans, the State Director also has the option of keeping such areas in wilderness study status, and under interim management, until final decisions have been made on adjacent areas under wilderness review.

B. The law provides for, and the Department's policy is to continue, grazing, mining, and mineral leasing uses on lands under Section 603 of FLPMA wilderness review in the manner and degree in which these uses were being conducted on October 21, 1976, if they do not cause unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands and their resources. These are referred to as "grandfathered" uses.

8550 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR
LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW

2. When the use, activity, or facility is terminated, the wilderness values must not have been degraded so far as to significantly constrain the Congress's prerogative regarding the area's suitability for preservation as wilderness. The wilderness values to be considered are those found in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964.
3. Surface disturbance is any new disruption of the soil or vegetation requiring reclamation within a WSA. Uses and facilities necessitating reclamation (i.e., recontouring of the topography, replacement of topsoil, and/or restoration of native plant cover) are definitely surface disturbing and must be denied. Cross-country vehicle use off boundary roads and existing ways is surface disturbing because the tracks created by the vehicle leave depressions or ruts, compact the soils, and trample or compress vegetation. Certain activities recognized as acceptable within a WSA, such as hiking, use of pack stock, or livestock grazing, are allowable within a WSA even though in the strictest sense, they cause surface disturbance.

G. Although some proposed activities in WSAs may not be fully subject to the nonimpairment standard, BLM is required to regulate those activities to prevent undue or unnecessary degradation of lands and resources. "Undue or unnecessary degradation" is defined as: impacts greater than those that would normally be expected from an activity being accomplished in compliance with current standards and regulations and based on sound practices, including uses of the best reasonably available technology. Failure to initiate and complete reasonable mitigation measures, including reclamation of disturbed areas, or creation of a nuisance may constitute unnecessary or undue degradation. Failure to comply with applicable environmental protection statutes and regulations will constitute unnecessary or undue degradation.

H. The term "substantially unnoticeable" means something that either is so insignificant that it is only a minor feature of the overall area or is not distinctly recognizable by the average visitor as being manmade or man-caused because of age, weathering, or biological change.

I. Individual intrusions when considered by themselves may not impair wilderness suitability. However, when the impact of existing intrusions are combined with any new proposed action that purports no substantially noticeable impacts, the total effect may be sufficient to impair an area's suitability for preservation as wilderness. The BLM will consider cumulative effects in making decisions on whether to approve actions in WSAs. If the proposed activity would create an unacceptable additional increment of impact, it will not be allowed.