

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This draft environmental impact statement (EIS) documents the comprehensive analysis of alternatives for the planning and management of public lands and resources administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Little Snake Field Office (LSFO) in Colorado. The BLM LSFO administrative area is located in northwestern Colorado. The LSFO includes approximately 4.2 million acres of land in Moffat, Routt, and Rio Blanco Counties.



Within that area, the LSFO administers approximately 1.3 million acres of public land surface and mineral estate and 1.1 million acres of federal mineral estate where the surface is privately owned or State-owned.

The public lands and federal mineral estate within the Little Snake Resource Management Plan Planning Area (RMPPA) are the subject of the planning effort and this associated EIS document. Neither this document nor the LSFO's current land use plan applies to lands or minerals within the RMPPA that are administered by federal agencies other than BLM, such as the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

This Draft EIS provides analysis of potential management direction for important resource values and resource uses within the RMPPA and allocates the use of public lands for multiple uses. The Draft EIS also provides management direction for the protection of certain resources, while allowing for leasing and development of mineral resources, livestock grazing, and other activities at appropriate levels.

BACKGROUND

In 1989, a Record of Decision (ROD) was signed implementing the current Little Snake Resource Management Plan (RMP) for management of resources and resource uses within the Little Snake RMPPA. Since the ROD was approved, the RMP has been amended three times.

- ❑ 1991–Amendment for Oil and Gas Leasing and Development
- ❑ 1996–Amendment for Black-Footed Ferret Reintroduction
- ❑ 1997–Amendment for Colorado Land Health Standards

Because BLM identified wilderness characteristics through an inventory of Vermillion Basin in 2001, the LSFO initiated an RMP amendment for this area. While exploring the option of a plan amendment, however, BLM identified other issues outside of Vermillion Basin related to the management of oil and gas resources and travel. BLM also received input from Moffat County and several environmental organizations requesting that BLM revise the RMP for the entire resource area to address these issues.

Northwest Colorado Stewardship (NWCOS), an independent community-centered stewardship group, was established in April 2003 with the mission of fostering a working relationship among diverse interests, and empowering the affected public to provide substantial input into the decisionmaking process

for federal land management. In February 2004, the LSFO sent NWCOS a proposal for the RMP revision. In March 2004, NWCOS responded and expressed its interest in participating in the revision process. In response to the NWCOS' willingness to participate in the process, BLM, with assistance from the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (USIECR), developed a collaboration strategy to design ways in which the NWCOS could assist BLM throughout the revision process in a collaborative manner, yet within the limits of existing laws and regulations. The RMP revision was initiated in 2004.

PLANNING ISSUES

The following planning issues were identified through public scoping and incorporate information from the analysis of the existing management situation in the RMPPA. Public scoping was conducted from November 18, 2004 to January 31, 2005. During this time three public open houses were held in Steamboat Springs, Craig, and Maybell, Colorado, to solicit public comment on the planning process. A total of 477 comments and issues were received during the scoping period. The Draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) for the LSFO was made available for public comment in January 2005. Comments received were reviewed and incorporated, as appropriate, to develop the Final AMS, published in April 2005.

Planning issues identify demands, concerns, or conflicts regarding the use or management of public lands and resources. These issues typically express potential impacts that some land and resource values and uses have on other land and resource values and uses. They can be input from BLM, the public, and government agencies and private organizations.

Issue 1: Energy and Minerals

The RMPPA contains known deposits of coal, oil and gas, bituminous sandstone, gold, rare-earth elements, uranium, copper, lead, zinc, silver, sand, and gravel. Based on known occurrences or known favorable geologic relationships, the area has the potential for other considerable deposits of these commodities, as well as other mineral resources, including base and precious metals, oil shale and associated commodities, geothermal energy, zeolites, construction stone, and clays. Management of these resources, including identifying areas and conditions in which mineral development can occur, is crucial to the planning process. Issues regarding where and how mineral resources could be developed will be a principle focus of this plan.

Issue 2: Special Management Areas

Colorado conservationists have presented BLM with a statewide Citizens' Wilderness Proposal (CWP) that includes the compilation of numerous citizen wilderness inventories and area-by-area justification for areas conservationists consider eligible for wilderness protection. Seven of these areas fall within the RMPPA: Cold Spring Mountain, Cross Mountain, Diamond Breaks, Dinosaur Adjacent (which includes six units and is also referred to as Dinosaur Wilderness Additions), Pinyon Ridge, Vermillion Basin, and Yampa River). BLM conducted an inventory of Vermillion Basin in 2001 and determined that more than 77,000 acres contained wilderness character. Many of the proposed wilderness characteristic areas also have oil and gas potential and support other uses, which could affect how BLM determines appropriate management.

BLM resource specialists conducted a Wild and Scenic River (WSR) technical analysis in 1991, in which 172 stream segments in the RMPPA were inventoried and analyzed for potential eligibility. Seven stream segments on the Yampa River and one stream segment on the Little Snake River were found to be

potentially eligible. Currently, there are no river segments within the RMPPA that have been through the entire WSR review process. The WSR analysis will be completed as part of this RMP revision process.

Issue 3: Transportation and Travel Management

BLM often connects travel management with recreation, as recreation is the primary activity associated with travel management. Recreational activities occur throughout the area and include motorized and non-motorized vehicle touring; big and small game hunting; backpacking; horseback riding; hiking; mountain bike use; sightseeing; pleasure driving; and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, including motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and full-size, four-wheel drive vehicles such as jeeps and sport utility vehicles (SUVs). Increased OHV use and non-motorized visitation over the years in areas such as Sand Wash Basin have led to increased concerns regarding resource protection and conflicting uses.

Other land management activities such as oil and gas exploration and range management, are also associated with travel management. Use and proliferation of roads greatly contribute to resource impacts and user conflicts.

Another travel management-related issue is Revised Statute (R.S.) 2477, which states in its entirety, “The right-of-way for the construction of highways over public lands not reserved for public uses, is hereby granted” (Act of July 26, 1866, Chapter 262, § 8, 14 statute 251, 253 codified in 1873 as Section 2477 of Revised Statutes, recodified in 1938 as 43 U.S.C. § 932). Sec. 706(a) of The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) repealed R.S. 2477, but FLPMA Section 701 also stated that rights-of-way (ROW) existing when the Act was approved are not affected; however, FLPMA did not address the procedures to be followed with respect to recognition of pre-1976 R.S. 2477 ROW. When the Department of the Interior (DOI) proposed regulations that would address recognition of such ROW, Congress enacted a moratorium, which DOI recognized in January 1997.

On January 10, 2003, the Moffat County Commissioners identified routes asserted as R.S. 2477 ROW across federal lands into the county’s road system. A map of Moffat County’s assertions is provided (Map 3-41) as part of Section 3.2.6 in Chapter 3.

BLM recognizes that R.S. 2477 assertions are made by Moffat County and that many of these routes existed before 1976 on public lands that were unreserved. The authorizing authority for many of these roads may well be R.S. 2477, but only the courts have authority to make a binding determination on the validity of an R.S. 2477 assertion. However, the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management (SUWA v. BLM)*, 425 F.3d 735 (10th Cir. 2005) expressly authorized BLM to make non-binding determinations concerning the validity of R.S. 2477 claims for its own planning and management purposes.

In *SUWA v. BLM*, Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, September 9, 2005, the Tenth Circuit stated that BLM does not have authority to adjudicate an R.S. 2477 ROW nor can BLM impose federal rather than State law criteria when evaluating an R.S. 2477 ROW claim. The Tenth Circuit concluded that, “Federal law governs the interpretation of R.S. 2477, but that in determining what is required for acceptance of a rights-of-way under the statute, federal law ‘borrows’ from long-established principals of state law, to the extent that state law provides convenient and appropriate principals for effectuating congressional intent” (*SUWA v. BLM*, 25 F.3d at 768). Importantly, the Tenth Circuit also recognizes that BLM could make a non-binding administrative determination on the validity of an R.S. 2477 claim for its own planning purposes.

As such, the RMP is not the venue to resolve the R.S. 2477 issue, but the RMP/EIS will address transportation and access issues and will disclose impacts of travel management decisions on resource

uses and motorized access. Potential conflicts might exist between BLM planning decisions and R.S. 2477 assertions to different degrees in the different management alternatives. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of which R.S. 2477 assertions conflict with proposed management in each alternative.

The LSFO has assured the Moffat County Commissioners that the RMP/EIS will acknowledge the existence of the R.S. 2477 assertions, and that the RMP/EIS decisions are subject to valid existing rights. Valid existing county ROWs are not subject to BLM closures; therefore, should some or all of the R.S. 2477 assertions be recognized as valid, routes that were closed in the RMP would become open to vehicle travel. Such use could change the character of the area, including but not limited to the recreation experience, and ultimately could result in a change in management if vehicle use were inconsistent with the management objectives described in the RMP for that area. Alternative B provides the least potential conflict with Moffat County's R.S. 2477 assertions, while Alternative D offers the most potential conflict.

Transportation planning is not part of the RMP but will take place subsequent to the signing of the ROD. Close cooperation with Moffat County during transportation planning will be required to address any specific issues that might arise. Discussions will focus on attempting to resolve issues about individual routes in the planning area.

Issue 4: Wildlife

Public lands within the RMPPA provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Special management attention might be needed to restore, maintain, or enhance priority species and their habitats. Increased uses throughout the RMPPA, including recreational use, grazing, and motorized and mechanized vehicle use, have the potential to critically affect wildlife populations and their habitat if not properly managed. Integrating habitat management with other resource programs requires careful planning to minimize impacts on wildlife species and their habitats, while still providing for other uses on public lands. Special attention will be given to many species, including but not limited to big game, white-tailed prairie dog, black-footed ferret, Canadian lynx, greater sage-grouse, raptors, migratory birds, and native fish.

Issue 5: Socioeconomic Values

People value northwest Colorado for a variety of reasons—it is a source of livelihood, has scenic qualities and open spaces, and is a place to recreate. Local levels of government and citizens have and will continue to provide input on an array of issues regarding both traditional and emerging uses of public land, and their potential social and economic effects on local communities and values. This RMP will describe the social and economic values associated with public lands in the area and the potential impact of planning decisions on them.

Issue 6: Lands and Realty

BLM regularly receives ROW applications for pipelines, roads, legal access, and communication sites. This plan will provide some direction for these uses.

BLM is interested in consolidating its lands to benefit public access, use, and resource management. The planning process will include developing guidance for how and when BLM may consider sale or exchange of public land.

BLM also anticipates an increasing need to consider the sale or exchange of mineral rights, particularly for split-estate lands, to simplify land management and mineral leasing throughout the RMPPA. BLM has seen a steady annual increase in mineral leases over the past several years and since the last RMP

decision document; however, the 1989 RMP does not contain language for the sale or exchange of mineral rights.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAFT EIS ALTERNATIVES

Chapter 2 describes four alternative resource management plans: the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) and three action alternatives—Alternative B (Emphasis on the Development of Resources), Alternative C (Conservation Alternative—Preferred Alternative), and Alternative D (Preservation Alternative). Alternative A is a continuation of existing management and includes direction provided by the Little Snake RMP (1989) as well as new direction and policy that have been developed since completion of the Little Snake RMP and resulting amendments to the plan. The three action alternatives were developed to present a range of management options. Each alternative management plan is intended to minimize adverse impacts on cultural and natural resources while providing for compatible resource use and development opportunities consistent with current law, regulation, and policy.

Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) mandates consideration of a No Action Alternative. This Alternative provides a basis for comparing the impacts of the other alternatives. This Alternative involves continues the management activities that already occur in the planning area and is based on reasonably foreseeable actions, available inventory data, existing planning decisions and policies, and existing land use allocations and programs. These activities are now governed by the existing LSFO RMP and ROD (1989) and by amendments including the Oil and Gas Amendment (1991), the Black-Footed Ferret Reintroduction Amendment (1995), and the Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado Amendment (1996). These amendments are described in Table ES-1. Some actions have been determined unnecessary to carry forward into the RMP revision because they are not land use planning decisions, they reiterate existing policy, or they repeat similar management actions. Ongoing programs initiated under existing legislation and regulations would continue, even as new plans are developed or new planning efforts are conducted within the RMP area.

Alternative A would maintain present uses by continuing present management direction and activities. Mineral and energy development would be allowed throughout most of the planning area. The level of resource functionality to meet Standards for Public Land Health and seasonal protections for wildlife would be maintained. Existing special management areas and special recreation management areas (SRMA) would also be maintained. Minimal limitations on motorized travel would provide an enhanced motorized recreational experience.

Table ES-1. Relevant Plans and Amendments

Document Title	Year	Description
Little Snake Field Office RMP & ROD	1989	Current RMP for the Little Snake Field Office
Oil and Gas Amendment, Little Snake RMP/EIS	1991	Amendment/EIS for compliance with the Supplemental Planning Guidance for Fluid Minerals released in 1987
Black-Footed Ferret Reintroduction Amendment, Little Snake RMP/EIS	1995	Amendment/EA for proposed reintroduction of black-footed ferret as a nonessential experimental population into the Little Snake Black-Footed Ferret Management Area.
Standards for Public Land Health and	1996	Amendment/EA for adoption of the standards for

Document Title	Year	Description
Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado		public land health and guidelines for livestock grazing management (Standards and Guidelines)

Alternative B

Alternative B would allow the greatest extent of resource use within the planning area, while maintaining the basic protection needed to sustain resources. Under this alternative, constraints on commodity production for the protection of sensitive resources would be the least restrictive possible within the limits defined by law, regulation, and BLM policy. However, BLM would apply conditions of approval (COA) as needed through site-specific analysis prior to authorization. Potential impacts to sensitive resource values would be mitigated on a case-by-case basis. The level of resource functionality to meet Standards for Public Land Health would be maintained. Protections such as currently designated areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC) would be removed, and no new ACECs would be recommended. No WSR segments would be recommended as suitable for designation. Current SRMA designations would also be removed and no new SRMAs would be identified. Opportunities for “unmanaged” motorized recreational experiences would increase where fewer OHV areas are limited or closed. Unlike in Alternative A, areas designated as no surface occupancy (NSO) for oil and gas in Alternative B would also be designated as no ground disturbance (NGD) for other uses (Map 2-1).

Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative C would emphasize multiple resource use in the planning area by protecting sensitive resources and applying the most current information to allow BLM to set priorities for flexible, proactive management of public lands. Commodity production would be balanced against wildlife and vegetation protection; however, exceptions would be granted according to established adaptive criteria (Appendix E). Protection of greater sage-grouse and other wildlife habitat characteristics would be maintained or increased. Adaptive management criteria would be used to prioritize implementation planning in areas with the greatest need (Appendix F). Area protections such as designation as ACECs and WSRs would be limited to those areas where such designations are necessary to protect sensitive resources, and specific management prescriptions would be applied to areas that do not receive such designations. Existing SRMAs would remain in place and additional SRMAs and backcountry areas would be identified to provide diverse recreational experiences. There would be an increase in the areas closed to or with limitations on OHV use, but there would also be some open OHV areas. Similar to Alternative B, areas considered NSO for oil and gas in Alternative C would also be designated as NGD for other uses (Map 2-2). Alternative C would be implemented using principles of adaptive management. Appendix M provides an explanation of the adaptive management approach to be employed in implementation of this alternative.

Alternative D

Alternative D would allow the greatest extent of resource protection within the planning area, while still allowing resource uses. Commodity production would be constrained to protect natural resource values or to accelerate improvement in their condition. However, exceptions would be granted according to adaptive criteria (Appendix E). Protection of greater sage-grouse and other wildlife habitat characteristics would increase. Management would focus on restoring vegetation communities to ecologically desirable levels. Area protections such as designation as ACECs and WSRs would be maximized, and more restrictions on uses would apply in designated areas to protect sensitive resources and values. Existing SRMAs would remain in place and additional SRMAs and backcountry areas would be identified to

provide diverse recreational experiences. There would be an increase in the areas closed to or with limitations on OHV use. Similar to Alternatives B and C, areas considered NSO for oil and gas in Alternative D would also be designated as NGD for other uses (Map 2-3).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The environmental consequences that could result from the management prescriptions of the four alternatives are described in Chapter 4 and are summarized and compared in Table 2-2, Summary of Impacts. These potential consequences are discussed for each resource program, providing an analysis of environmental effects resulting from management of all resources and resource uses. This discussion includes an analysis of cumulative effects, which are defined as the impacts that result from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions.

OVERVIEW OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (ALTERNATIVE C)

Key points of the Preferred Alternative are listed below.

Adaptive Management

BLM would implement the Preferred Alternative using principles of adaptive management. Appendix M provides an explanation of the adaptive management approach to be employed in implementation of this alternative.

Air Quality

BLM would minimize, within the scope of its authority, any emissions that could add to atmospheric deposition, cause violations of air quality standards, or degrade visibility. Special requirements to alleviate air quality impacts (e.g., use of flareless completions) would be considered on a case-by-case basis in processing land use authorizations. BLM would cooperate in the collection of basic climate and meteorological data from remote automatic weather stations.

Soils Management

Protection of areas meeting fragile soil criteria would continue by implementing performance standards and objectives for surface disturbing activities in these areas. For new oil and gas lease and surface disturbing activities authorized by the RMP, a plan of development would be required to demonstrate compliance with performance objectives.

Water Resources

NSO and NGD stipulations would be applied up to one-quarter mile from perennial water sources, if necessary, depending on type and use of source, soil type, and slope steepness. Exceptions would be granted according to Appendix E.



Vegetation

The Colorado Standards for Public Land Health (Standards) apply to all resource uses on BLM-administered public lands. These standards are the minimum acceptable conditions for the health, productivity, and sustainability of the rangeland. The standards direct the management of public lands and focus implementation toward the maintenance or attainment of healthy rangelands.

Upland and riparian vegetation would be managed to achieve desired plant community (DPC) objectives established for a localized area to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health and objectives for the planning area. DPC objectives will be determined by using a variety of reference information, including NRCS Range Site Guides and updated ecological site inventory data, in conjunction with the specific objectives for the area. DPC objectives would emphasize wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, watershed, and biodiversity values while maintaining or enhancing habitat for Special Status Species.

Vegetation treatments would be used to restore bitterbrush, other important winter forage species, and mountain shrub and to reduce encroachment of juniper and woody species to mimic natural conditions. Vegetation treatments would also be used where Land Health Standards are not being met for reasons other than livestock (such as areas where reclamation efforts have not been successful or heavy-use OHV areas) to improve conditions.

Forests and woodlands would be managed to make forest areas more resilient to disturbances such as wildfire, insects, and disease and to provide wood products. Old-growth forests and woodlands would be managed to protect old-growth structure and composition.

BLM would work with the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Working Group to identify, maintain, and restore sagebrush with an emphasis on creation of functional blocks of sagebrush as greater sage grouse habitat.

BLM would work to prevent the spread of noxious weeds and eliminate invasive species by focusing on areas of new infestations, and where possible, extirpate existing populations, especially in Axial, Powder Wash, Douglas Mountain, Sand Hills, and Williams Fork LHAs, and in selected Routt and Moffat County parcels. It would also partner with resource users and other stakeholders to reduce the occurrence of noxious weeds and maximize utilization of cooperative agreements for control of invasive species.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Special Status Species



The LSFO would implement recent BLM management direction regarding greater sage-grouse habitat. For the purpose of reducing potential impacts on greater sage-grouse lek integrity, NSO/NGD stipulations would be applied within a one-quarter mile radius of a lek site. NSO/NGD area could be altered depending upon the active status of the lek or the geographical relationship of topographical barriers and vegetation screening to the lek site. To prevent the disturbance of up to 75 percent of nesting birds, from March 1 to June 30 greater sage-grouse nesting and early brood-rearing habitat (as defined in Chapter 3) would be designated as controlled surface use (CSU) for oil and gas exploration and development and avoidance areas (site-specific relocation [SSR]) for other surface disturbing activities within a 4-mile radius of the perimeter of a lek.

All surface disturbing activities would avoid only nesting and early brood-rearing habitat within the 4-mile radius of the lek during this time period. The actual area to be

avoided would be determined on a case-by-case basis dependent on applicable scientific research and site-specific analysis and in coordination with commodity users and other appropriate entities. Crucial winter habitat would be closed from December 16 to March 15. Best management practices (BMP) would be encouraged for surface disturbing activities. BLM may require implementation of some BMPs. Use of BMPs becomes even more important once disturbance reaches 10 percent of nesting habitat within the 4-mile radius of an active lek. As new BMPs are developed, they may be added to the following list or replace some of the following BMPs.

Surface disturbing and other activities potentially disruptive to nesting raptors would be prohibited within distances and time periods necessary to allow raptors to complete breeding and nesting activities. Distances and time periods vary between one-quarter and 1 mile and between February 1 and August 15, respectively, for different raptor species. NSO/NGD protections would also be provided from one-eighth to one-quarter mile of nesting sites to preserve the integrity of the sites.

Surface disturbing activities in big game crucial winter habitat would not be allowed during the period of December 1 to April 30. Surface disturbing and disruptive activities within big game crucial winter range would require the use of BMPs designed to reduce the amount of human presence and activity during the winter months. Big game birthing areas would be closed to surface disturbing activities for the following species and dates: elk calving–April 16 to June 30; pronghorn antelope fawning–May 1 to July 15; and bighorn sheep–May 1 to July 15.

Surface disturbing activities that are larger than 1 acre would not be permitted in active prairie dog towns less than 10 acres in size. These activities would be relocated to the edge of the active prairie dog town. To protect prairie dog pups, surface disturbing activities smaller than 1 acre or within towns that are larger than 10 acres would not be permitted between April 1 and June 15.

Exceptions, modifications, or waivers would be considered on a case-by-case basis as detailed in Appendix E.

BLM would implement final Statewide Programmatic RMP Conservation Measures and Recommendations as outlined in Appendix J.

Wild Horses

The appropriate management levels (AML) in the herd management areas (HMA) would remain in the range of 163 to 362 wild horses. The AML is a dynamic number that would be adjusted as range conditions warrant. Guidelines and criteria for adjusting AML include the following: current monitoring data, rate of herd increase, competing uses, frequency of gather cycle, other population, management options, and herd genetics.



Fire Management

BLM would use appropriate fire management response in areas where fire is not desired at all, or in areas such as ecosystems where fire never played a positive role in its function, areas where suppression is required to prevent direct threats to life or property, on private lands and urban interfaces, where there are important cultural resources, in areas with unnatural fuel buildups, and in those areas where a seed bank does not exist for natural reseeding.

BLM would use conditional fire suppression in areas where fire is desired but where there might be social, political, or ecological constraints such as air quality (proximity to Class I airsheds or nonattainment areas), threatened or endangered species, or habitat considerations. BLM would also use minimal to no fire suppression in areas where fire is desired.



Cultural and Heritage Resources

BLM would evaluate all proposed surface disturbing actions to determine inventory needs and sites potentially affected by such activities. BLM would also ensure that all sites listed on or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are identified and assessed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act before any surface disturbing action is permitted. Class III cultural surveys would be conducted in the Area of Potential Effect (APE), which includes where both direct and indirect impacts will occur. The preferred mitigation treatment for adverse effects will be site avoidance. Project implementation will occur only after completion of the Section 106 process. BLM will implement a proactive management program to carry out its responsibilities under Section 110 of NHPA and the Colorado Protocol (1998). Section 110 requires that all federal agencies shall assume responsibility for the preservation of historic properties which are owned or controlled by such agency. The level of proactive cultural resource program work would be determined annually within constraints of available funds and staff. If necessary, the surface disturbing activity would be relocated to a site in which surveys reveal little or no cultural resources. In addition, BLM would prioritize non-project driven Class III surveys in the Sand Wash area and Vermillion Basin.

Paleontology

BLM will evaluate all proposed surface disturbing actions to determine inventory needs and the identification of sites and localities potentially affected by such activities as required under FLPMA. Paleontological resources would be managed to protect their important scientific values. Area closures, restrictions, or other mitigation requirements for the protection of paleontological values would be determined on a case-by-case basis.



Special Management Areas

Wilderness study areas (WSA) (78,250 acres) are closed to all mineral development. Existing mining claims must meet the “non-impairment mandate” for WSAs. WSAs are managed according to the Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review until Congress makes decisions on WSAs. OHV use within West Cold Spring, Ant Hills, Chew Winter Camp, Peterson Draw, and Vale of Tears WSAs would be limited to designated roads and vehicle routes. All other WSAs would be closed to OHV use.

The Irish Canyon ACEC (11,910 acres) would be managed to protect sensitive plant, remnant plant communities, scenic, cultural, and geologic values. Management actions have been tailored to the

specific needs of the above-mentioned areas and the resources present.

Yampa River Segments 1, 2, and 3 (22 river miles) would be managed to maintain or enhance the outstanding remarkable values and classification and be recommended as suitable for inclusion in the WSR system.

Visual Resources

Visual Resource Management would maintain scenic value by managing impacts and intrusions through mitigation (Table ES-2).

Table ES-2. Visual Resource Management Classes (Acres)

Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
78,250	96,490	991,460	184,890

Minerals

Oil and Gas

BLM is integrating the results of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act Inventory into its RMPs. EPCA inventory data is integrated into the reasonably foreseeable development (RFD) scenario that predicts future mineral development within the RMPPA (Table ES-3). RMP actions that apply to mineral resource development are evaluated to—

- ❑ Clearly present mitigation requirements necessary to reduce impacts of oil and gas operations on other resources
- ❑ Ensure that such mitigation is either statutorily required or scientifically justifiable and is the least restrictive measure necessary to accomplish the desired level of resource protection
- ❑ The mitigation requirements would be monitored to determine if more or less restrictive measures might accomplish the same goal.

Table ES-3. Oil and Gas Reasonably Foreseeable Development for the 20-Year Planning Period

Action	Total
Wells Projected to be Drilled	3,031
Acres of New Oil and Gas Roads	36,372
Acres Disturbed in the Short Term	49,216
Wells Abandoned	340
Well Sites Reclaimed	138
Acres of Roads Closed (Reclaimed)	11,640
Acres Disturbed in the Long Term	23,030

Oil and gas opportunity for leasing, exploration, and development on 1,900,280 acres of subsurface fluid mineral within the Little Snake RMPPA are subject to the constraints (Table ES-4 and **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Table ES-4. Oil and Gas Categories for Mineral Estate

Classification	Acres*
Open to leasing consideration and subject to standard lease form stipulations	417,790
Seasonal timing limitations	1,216,190
Open to leasing consideration and subject to minor lease constraints such as controlled surface use	184,840
Open to leasing consideration and subject to major lease constraints such as no surface occupancy	216,040
Closed to leasing	160,870

*Acres do not equate to the total BLM mineral estate due to overlap of the leasing categories with the seasonal timing limitations.



Oil and gas lease stipulations may be modified or eliminated using the exception, waiver, or modification criteria outlined in this RMP. Stipulations that do not accomplish the desired resource protection would be changed based on monitoring or new scientific data.

All lands open to oil and gas leasing consideration also would be open to geophysical exploration, subject to appropriate resource surveys, surface protection measures, adequate bonding, and adherence to State of Colorado standards for geophysical operations.

Coal and Oil Shale

Approximately 49,190 acres were unsuitable for surface coal mining. Approximately 638,570 acres were identified as acceptable for further leasing consideration. Applications would be considered on a case-by-case basis and the remaining steps of the coal screening process would be completed.

There are 88 existing coal leases (16 are on private lands) that are exempt from the coal screening process and are subject to existing lease terms.

BLM would consider leasing oil shale as each application is received. Lands available for leasing are consistent with lands available for oil and gas leasing or coal leasing, depending on the extraction method (e.g., in-situ or mined).

Locatable Minerals

Approximately 194,400 acres would be recommended for withdrawal from locatable mineral entry. The remainder of the planning area would be open to locatable mineral entry.

Mineral Material Sales

Approximately 157,910 acres would be closed to mineral material sales. The remainder of the planning area would be open to mineral material sales.

Livestock Grazing

BLM would manage livestock grazing using the Colorado Public Land Health Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management process while working closely with permittees to develop sustainable ranching operations. Appropriate actions for improving allotments not meeting Standards and Guides could include, but would not be limited to, adjustment of permitted animal unit months (AUM), modified turnout dates, livestock water developments, range improvements, modified grazing periods, growing season rest, modified grazing systems, closing areas, riparian pastures, exclosures, implementation of forage utilization levels, and livestock conversions.



BLM would work closely with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) to reduce livestock/big game conflicts that would improve vegetative and forage conditions.

When consistent with healthy rangeland ecosystems, BLM would emphasize vegetation treatments to maintain a variety of habitats and sustainable livestock grazing. BLM would also consider range improvement developments for the purpose of improving rangeland diversity, condition, and sustainability, by such actions as control of pinyon-juniper encroachment and decadent sagebrush.

Criteria in Appendix F would be used to establish Reserve Conservation Allotments (RCA). Management plans would be developed for all allotments to be used as an RCA. Criteria for permittee/lessee use of RCAs would be that those permittees/lessees whose customary allotments are under an approved rangeland restoration/recovery project or under emergency conditions such as wildfire would be given priority. RCAs would not to be used for drought or for overuse of a customary allotment.

Recreation Resources

Special recreation management areas (Little Yampa Canyon, Juniper Mountain, South Sand Wash, Cedar Mountain and Serviceberry) would be designated to manage for quality camping, big game hunting, and non-motorized and motorized boating; quality OHV experiences; and back country non-motorized hunting experiences (Table ES-5).

Table ES-5. Special Recreation Management Areas

SRMA	Acres	Purpose
Little Yampa Canyon	27,310	Provide quality camping experiences related to river boating in the region and big game hunting. Zone 1 (Yampa River Corridor) would provide non-motorized boating, motorized boating, and camping activities. Zone 2 (North of CR 17) would provide predominantly motorized big game hunting and some non-motorized hunting, camping, and wildlife watching activities.
Juniper Mountain	1,780	Zone 1 (Yampa River Corridor) would provide day use motorized and non-motorized boating activities. Zone 2 (outside river corridor) would provide

SRMA	Acres	Purpose
		hunting and camping activities.
Cedar Mountain	900	Provide opportunities in close proximity to the City of Craig for hiking, nature interpretation, and picnicking. Zone 1 (picnic area) would provide day use picnicking, hiking, and wildlife viewing activities. Zone 2 (trail system) would provide hiking, jogging, horseback riding, and wildlife viewing activities.
South Sand Wash	35,570	Provide quality OHV experiences. Zone 1 (road corridors) would provide motorized recreation experiences and associated developed and undeveloped camping activities. Zone 2 (open play area) would provide off-road motorized recreation activities. Zone 3 (designated routes) would provide single-track and double-track OHV riding activities, novice to expert levels.
Serviceberry	12,380	Provide backcountry, non-motorized hunting experiences. Zone 1 (Willow Creek and north Serviceberry access) would provide non-motorized hunting and associated camping activities. Zone 2 (Serviceberry back country) would provide non-motorized big game hunting and associated undeveloped camping activities.

Existing recreation sites would be maintained or improved to ensure continued availability and use to the recreating public. Additional recreation sites would be considered for development in the SRMAs. Within the Yampa River Corridor BLM would monitor the quality of indicators of recreation experience (site disturbance, user conflict, public health and safety, other resource impacts) and regulate the use of sites and access points.



BLM would manage the Dinosaur North area (outside the WSA) and Cold Springs area (outside the WSA) to protect naturalness, opportunities for semi-primitive recreation, and solitude.

BLM would evaluate special recreation permits, commercial outfitter camps, and commercial events in the extensive recreation management area (ERMA) and non-back country SRMAs (Cedar Mountain SRMA, South Sand Wash SRMA, Little Yampa Canyon SRMA, and Juniper Mountain SRMA) on a case-by-case basis. BLM would also authorize motorized and non-motorized competitive events consistent with OHV area and route designations.

Forestry

BLM would manage forest and woodland communities to improve forest health conditions and to make forest areas more resilient to disturbances from insects, diseases, and fire.

Lands and Realty

The BLM-administered lands in the RMPPA would be divided into three retention and disposal zones: the East, Central, and West Zones (Map 2-37). Disposal and exchange criteria specific to each zone have been established. BLM would actively seek opportunities to exchange or sell lands within the East Zone to better facilitate management of BLM lands. Lands in the Central Zone would only be evaluated for exchange or sale when the opportunity arises. In the Western Zone, exchange or sale of lands would be

rarely evaluated. In all zones, additional retention or acquisition areas can be identified during the life of the plan for the benefit of the public.



ROWs would be encouraged in existing corridors, such as major roads (including county roads), power transmission lines, and oil and gas pipelines. Approximately 91,560 acres would be ROW exclusion and 141,260 acres would be ROW avoidance.

All communication sites would be open except in ROW exclusion areas and the priority for authorization would emphasize the use of existing sites to minimize the number of total sites. BLM would use, where possible, the best available technologies to reduce migratory bird mortality (e.g., tower guy wires).

BLM would encourage wind energy development in areas rated “excellent and above” (Map 3-36), as well as solar energy development, as long as development is consistent with resource objectives. BLM would use, where possible, the best available technologies to reduce migratory bird mortality.

Transportation and Access and Travel Management

BLM would develop a transportation plan that would enable access where needed; limit points of access to reduce the amount of redundant roads and trails; reroute, rehabilitate, or eliminate existing roads and trails causing resource damage; reroute roads and trails where landlocked by private parcels; restrict access to meet resource objectives (e.g., seasonal road closures, gating); concentrate stream and riparian crossings; and reduce habitat fragmentation. BLM would actively pursue access to specific parcels to improve access to public lands for land management purposes.

BLM would designate areas as open, limited, or closed to vehicle use (Table ES-6). Designated routes would be determined through adaptive management and travel management planning on a case-by-case basis using criteria to prioritize areas for identification of designated routes. All areas not designated as open or closed would be managed as limited to existing routes until routes could be designated.

Table ES-6. Off-Highway Vehicle Classifications

Classification	Acres
Open	21,940
Limited to existing roads and vehicle routes	1,039,500
Limited to designated roads and vehicle routes	203,100
Seasonally closed to OHV use	0
Closed to OHV use	86,710
Closed to over-the-snow vehicles	839,940

COOPERATING AGENCY SUMMARY

Moffat County, the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, USFWS, Juniper Water Conservancy District, and the City of Steamboat Springs accepted and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BLM. This MOU outlines responsibilities of the cooperating agencies and resources they can contribute to the planning effort. Coordination and consistency for this planning effort were primarily

accomplished through the assistance of the cooperating agencies formally involved in the project. The planning process also requires consultation with Native American tribes to develop strategies for managing and protecting recognized traditional uses and areas of cultural and religious significance.

COORDINATION WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

Four Native American tribes with cultural and historical ties to lands administered by the LSFO were identified—

- ❑ Shoshone Tribal Council
- ❑ Ute Mountain Tribal Council
- ❑ Uintah and Ouray Tribal Council
- ❑ Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

BLM made efforts to consult with Native American tribes that might have ties to the Little Snake RMPPA. In addition to consultation with tribes under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) required under NEPA, tribes were consulted further as part of the scoping process. The Draft RMP/EIS will be sent to the tribes concurrently with its release to the public. Consultation will continue throughout the planning process. Chapter 5 of the final EIS will be updated to reflect consultation.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the *Federal Register* on November 18, 2004, to formally announce that the BLM LSFO was preparing an RMP and associated EIS. The notice invited participation of affected and interested agencies, organizations, and members of the public in determining the scope and issues to be addressed in the planning alternatives and analyzed in the EIS. The notice also included information on the scoping meeting schedule and announced the opportunity for the public to provide input and help identify resource issues and concerns, management alternatives, and other information that could assist the LSFO in determining future land use decisions. The scoping period ended on January, 31, 2005; however, the BLM considered additional issues brought forward during the planning process.

Public scoping meetings were held in Steamboat Springs, Craig, and Maybell, Colorado, on January 4, 5, and 6, 2003, respectively. During the three scoping meetings, a total of 98 people registered their attendance. The meetings were structured in an open house format, with BLM specialists representing issues such as livestock grazing, mineral and gas development, and other resource areas. BLM specialists were available to provide information and responses to questions. Comments from the public were collected during the scoping meetings and throughout the scoping period by mail, fax, and e-mail. A total of 921 comment letters were submitted and 478 specific comments and issues were received during the scoping period.

This Draft RMP/EIS represents the culmination of extensive public and cooperating agency involvement. BLM conducted an iterative alternatives development process with NWCOS and cooperating agencies. NWCOS and cooperating agencies also provided input on the adequacy of the alternatives analysis relative to their knowledge of the RMPPA. In addition, the independent community group, NWCOS, provided recommendations to BLM on the Draft RMP/EIS.