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Idaho Falls District Office

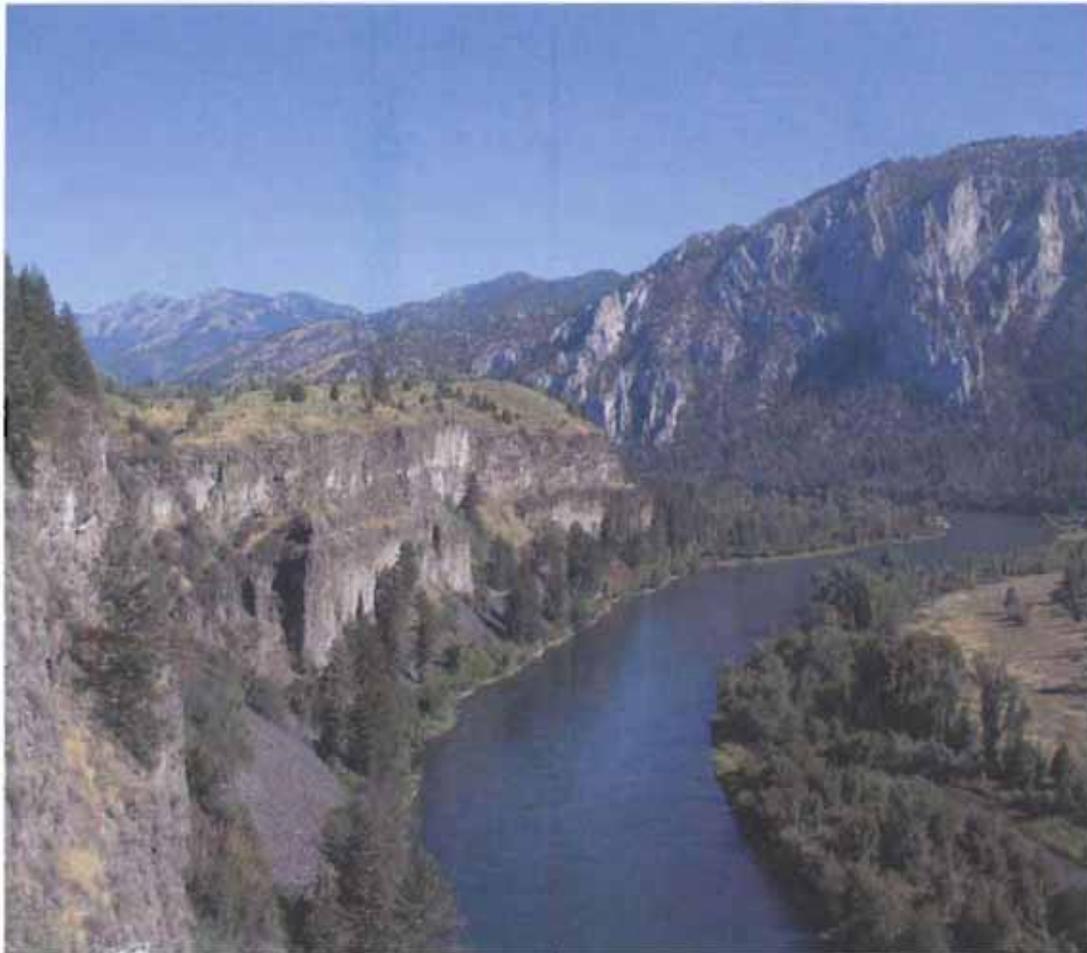
Upper Snake Field Office

July 2008



Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record

Environmental Assessment of the Snake River
Activity and Operations Plan Revision
EA# ID-310-2006-EA-3398



Prepared by
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**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD**

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Introduction

The Snake River Planning Area consists of approximately 119 miles of river corridor, including the South Fork of the Snake River (South Fork) from Palisades Dam to the confluence with the Henrys Fork of the Snake River (Henrys Fork), the Henrys Fork from the confluence to St. Anthony, and the main stem of the Snake River (Main Snake) from the confluence south to Market Lake Canal below Lewisville Knolls (Figure 1).

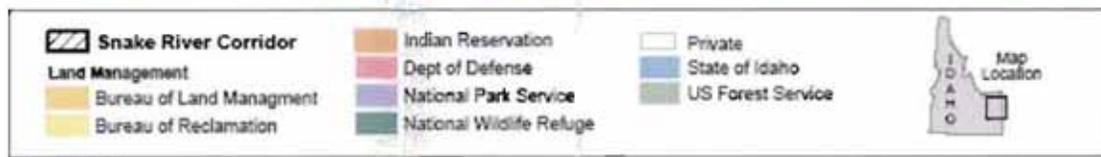
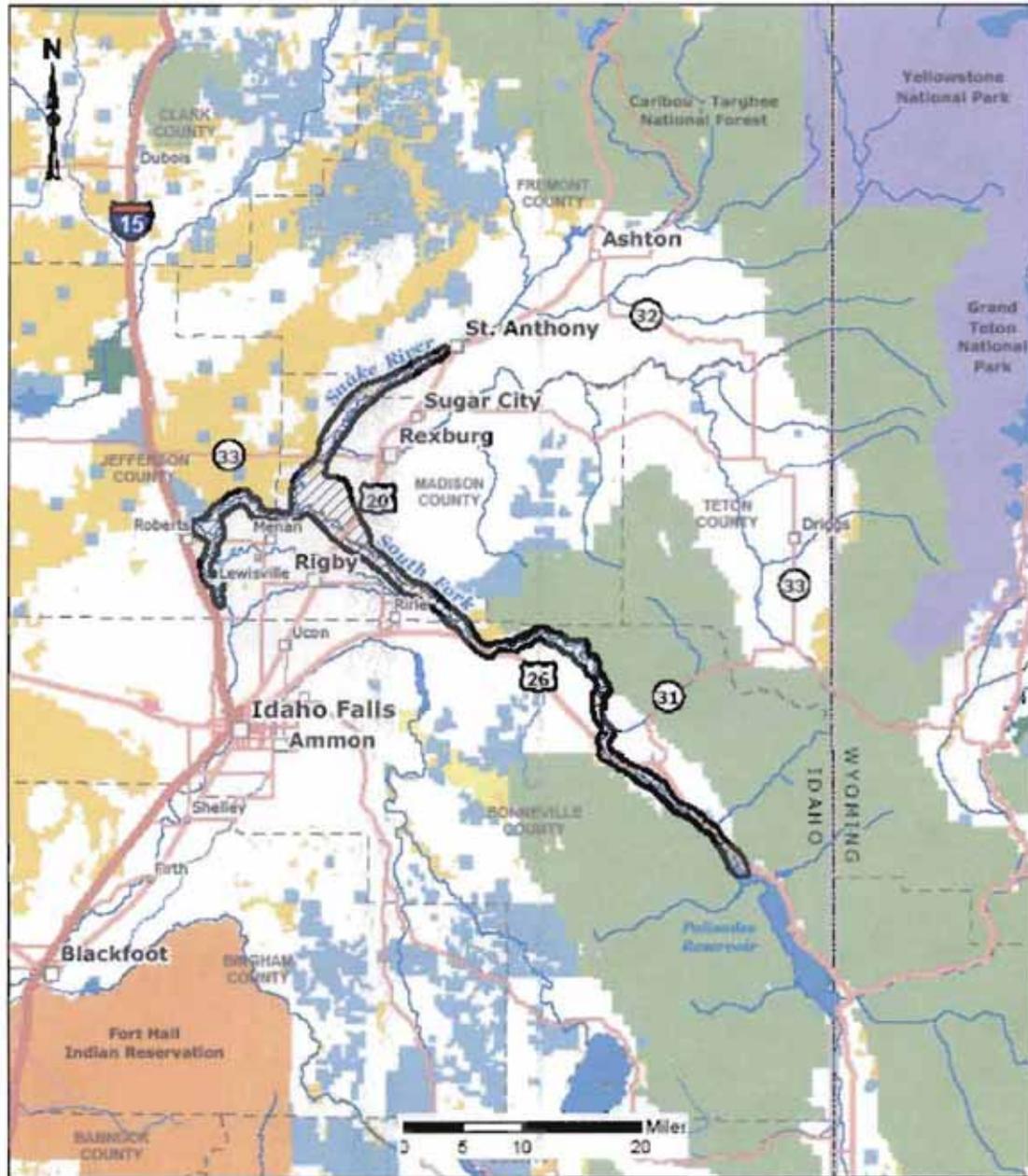
Three distinct environmental zones characterize the planning area; the upper section of the South Fork near Palisades Dam is in a mountain valley; a rugged canyon characterizes the middle section on the South Fork, and the lower section (including the Main Snake and Henrys Fork) includes the river with a broad, open flood plain.

Unique geologic features, wildlife, rare plants, and a cottonwood gallery forest make the planning area an important ecological resource. Due to these unique qualities, the South Fork has been designated by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and the South Fork from Palisades Dam to the confluence with the Henrys Fork is considered eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System.

The Snake River is the lifeblood of the Eastern Idaho region. In addition to providing irrigation for millions of acres of agricultural land, the river and associated recreational developments are local, regional, national, and international attractions for recreation seekers. Amongst the most popular recreational activities are boating and rafting, fishing, camping, and hiking. Approximately 250,000 people visit the planning area each year. These visitors contribute in a very substantial way to the health of the local and regional economy.

Management direction for the planning area has been provided by the *Snowy Mountain Snake River Activity/Operations Plan*, a joint BLM–Forest Service planning document. The plan contains a series of standards and management objectives based on the delineation of the planning area into nine site-specific management classes. The plan describes an array of management actions for each of the classes designed to conserve natural and cultural resources while providing for recreational opportunity in the area. The adoption of this management direction was based on public concerns expressed at that time and levels of use and environmental conditions that existed 17 years ago.

Figure 1. Snake River Corridor



DRAFT 9-20-2007

Purpose and Need for a Decision

Since the adoption of the 1991 plan, increases in use stemming from expanding popularity, population growth, and changes in state and federal regulations have resulted in an increasing level of user conflict and environmental impacts, prompting mounting concern from federal land managers and the public.

These circumstances point to the need to consider alterations or adjustments to current management direction to respond to these changing conditions. The decision to be made by federal land managers is how to best adjust the management direction in the interest of all concerned parties.

Issues

During the internal scoping process, management representatives and interdisciplinary team members from the BLM and United States Forest Service (USFS) identified a series of issues in the planning area that suggested that alterations in management direction were needed. All of the issues are related to increased use of the planning area. These included:

- *Increased winter and spring use* – Increases in use of the planning area during these times is a result of the initiation by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) of a spring turkey hunt and opening the area to year-round fishing. Increases in use during these times is a concern because wintering wildlife and nesting bald eagles have or are likely to be displaced or otherwise affected. In addition, increased traffic on the river could complicate search and rescue operations.
- *Demand for camping areas*– The increased year-round use of the planning area has resulted in greater competition for designated and dispersed camping areas. This has resulted in user and resource conflicts and increasing sanitation concerns.
- *Increasing commercial activity* – Given the increasing use of the area, a trend towards increasing commercial activity is likely. While much of the anticipated increase will probably come from existing commercial fishing outfitters, other commercial entities offering a variety of recreational experiences such as scenic floating trips, rope courses, and photographic tours are likely to increase the demand for commercial permits.
- *Adequacy of existing facilities* – The increasing use of the planning area calls into question the adequacy of existing recreational facilities. The need for additional facilities such as boat ramps, parking areas, sanitation facilities, and trails requires evaluation to address existing and anticipated resource and user conflicts.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the BLM and USFS engaged in an extensive public participation process, including external scoping. The scoping process, which consisted of direct mailings and coverage by a variety of media outlets, generated over 100 separate public comments. Comments were received from a variety of public interests including

recreational groups, landowners along the river, conservation groups, wildlife advocates, members of the general public, and state and federal agencies.

The issues and concerns generated during the external scoping process illustrate the intense competition existing for use of the planning area and the serious conflicts that a plan revision should address. The various comments were organized into 12 issue categories. These included:

Issue No. 1 – Education of River Users

Concerns – River users need to be informed of:

1. Their possible impacts to riparian areas.
2. Hazards associated with irrigation diversions.
3. Management policies and goals.
4. Their possible impacts to wintering wildlife and special status species.
5. The natural hydrologic regime and how it relates to Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout and riparian management.
6. How their actions impact other users.
7. Areas open for Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use.
8. Non-motorized public access to levees on public land, if access is gained from public land or from the river. Access is not allowed on levees located on private land, unless prior permission is established with the landowner.
9. Archaeological sites, artifacts and paleontological resources are protected by Federal Laws and Executive Orders.
10. Human prehistory and history of the South Fork.

Issue No. 2 – Protection of Riparian Habitat

Concerns – Enhance riparian habitat through proper management of:

1. Grazing in planning area
2. OHV activities (USFS travel guidance in Forest Travel Plan).
3. Federal land developments.
4. The cutting of live or standing dead trees for firewood.
5. Designated and dispersed camping areas.
6. Facilities and trails.
7. Conservation of lands through land acquisitions and conservation easements.

Issue No. 3 – Protection of Watershed

Concerns – Protect watershed from accelerated erosion:

1. Erosion on federal lands along the river caused by recreation, grazing and other uses.
2. Rehabilitation of damaged areas where erosion has occurred for a long time.
3. Invasion and control of noxious weeds and other exotic plant species on federal lands.
4. Preservation of visual and scenic resources.
5. Erosion impacts to cultural/palaeontological resources.

Issue No. 4 – Land Ownership

Concerns - Need for federal agencies to identify boundaries between federally managed lands and private lands:

1. Delineate boundaries and post signs where needed.

2. Access to planning area through land acquisitions.
3. Monitor unauthorized uses on federal lands.

Issue No. 5 – Protection of Fish, Wildlife, and Botanical Resources

Concerns – Agencies need to maintain or enhance these resources:

1. Management of scarce mature and decadent deciduous trees for perching and nesting habitat.
2. Maintenance or enhancement of fishery habitat (spawning areas).
3. Maintenance of goose nesting areas.
4. Protection and enhancement of habitat for sensitive species, waterfowl, and big game species.
5. Protection of nesting and wintering Bald Eagle habitat.
6. Potential impacts of year-round fishing.
7. Cooperation with IDF&G to protect trumpeter swans, eagles, waterfowl, elk, and deer from becoming overly stressed during winter months.

Issue No. 6 – Management of Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs)

Concerns – Agencies need to manage OHVs to an acceptable use within the planning area:

1. Provision of OHV trails where conflict with other resources would be minimal.
2. Regulation of OHV activities to prevent unacceptable damage.
3. Limitation of OHV use to existing roads/boat launch sites.
4. Jurisdiction clarification of OHV use below mean ordinary high water mark; need authority to regulate if necessary.

Issue No. 7 – Management of the River Corridor Uses

Concerns – Agencies need to plan for future growth and enforce existing laws and regulations:

1. Improved enforcement of existing laws and regulations.
2. Agencies need to control trash left by users.
3. Agencies need to address year-round recreation.
4. Agencies need to address the increase in demand for designated and dispersed camping.
5. Agencies need to address the increase in demand for commercial activities.
6. Development of tools to deal with the increase in recreation use within the planning area (e.g., visitor use, outfitters, increase in motorized use).

Issue No. 8 – Management of Camping and Facilities

Concerns – Agencies need to provide adequate, well-maintained camping opportunities:

1. Identification of developed and dispersed camp areas (e.g., Henrys Fork, Wolf Flat, and Swan Valley).
2. Need for sanitary services along the river.
3. Need for adequate campsites for both outfitters and the general public.
4. Need for identification of designated campsites within designated camp areas from Conant Boat Access to Lufkin Bottom.

Issue No. 9 – Present and Future River Access Needs

Concern – Agencies need to look at new recreation demands:

1. The level of access provided during the winter.

2. Identification of facilities in the plan that should be further developed and those facilities that should be maintained at their current level of development.
3. Development of trails.

Issue No. 10 – Protection and Management of Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive, and Candidate Species

Concerns – Agencies must provide for adequate management of these species in light of new threats:

1. Spring turkey hunting during the bald eagle nesting season is a concern. Need to cooperate with ID F&G to alleviate human impacts to nesting bald eagles.
2. Invasion of non-native New Zealand mud snail into Utah valvata snail habitat. Need to educate the public about washing boats, waders, etc. to prevent the spread of New Zealand mud snail population.
3. Currently there are three listed species and one candidate species in the Snake River Planning Area; over 50% of sensitive species are dependent on river-associated habitat.
4. Conduct appropriate levels of inventory for identified species if not current.
5. Ensure existence of management plans adequate for protection of all identified species.

Issue No. 11 - Enforcement

Concern – Agencies need to provide adequate enforcement:

1. Improved enforcement of existing laws and regulations.

Issue No. 12 –Management of Cultural and Paleontological Resources

Concerns – Agencies need to protect and inventory cultural resources within the planning area:

1. Protection of historic properties threatened by soil and water erosion, livestock grazing, recreational use, vandalism and other agents of destruction and deterioration.
2. Interpretation of selected historic properties in the South Fork corridor.
3. Coordination with Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to identify Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs).
4. Effects of recreation on the traditional prehistoric and historic Native American and historic Euro-American cultural landscape.

The Alternatives

In deciding upon the most appropriate course of action, the BLM and USFS evaluated three alternative revisions of the plan and a No Action alternative (e.g., continuation of current management direction). The various revisions are alternative means of responding to the issues and concerns expressed during the internal and external scoping processes.

The alternative revisions represent adjustments to the 1991 Snake River Plan. Under all alternatives, activities in the planning area would continue to be governed by the existing Medicine Lodge RMP, Targhee National Forest RFP, and BLM Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management and USFS allotment decisions. Those elements of the 1991 Snake River Plan that will continue to guide management of the planning area are described in the section of the environmental assessment titled, **Management Actions Common to all Alternatives**.

Alternative A- Continuation of Current Management

Under this alternative, the current management direction would remain unchanged, and existing decisions which are based on reasonably foreseeable actions, available inventory data, RMP-level planning decisions and policies, and existing land use allocations and programs would not be altered.

Recreation opportunities would continue to be enhanced through an aggressive visitor information program, research on trends and preferences in recreation use would continue, and the construction or placement of additional sanitary facilities would move forward.

In SSM Class IA, South Fork Canyon, public camping would be restricted to designated areas. These areas would be managed to maintain a high quality experience. Campsites not meeting monitoring protocols for use would be closed until rehabilitation of the campsite has been completed. Dispersed camping would be allowed elsewhere in the planning area.

Through a Federal Register Notice, off-highway vehicles (OHVs) would be restricted to designated existing roads and trails in areas limiting OHV use. Signs are placed to help the public identify open routes. On USFS lands, users would refer to the Caribou-Targhee Travel Plan map.

Wildlife habitat for threatened or endangered species, non-game species, waterfowl and big game species would be improved. All primary nesting zones for bald eagles would be closed to human activity from February 1 to July 31 and the primary management parcels (nest and feeding zones) would be monitored for conflicts between eagles and human use. If standards are exceeded in the bald eagle parcel, those factors causing the problems would be identified and changed. A 500-foot closure above the river's surface would continue to be pursued with the FAA to protect both bald eagles and peregrine falcons from aircraft disturbances. Peregrine falcon nesting sites, if established, are to be protected. On-going improvements to the riparian habitat and retirement of some allotments from grazing would move forward.

Vegetative cover would be maintained at or near current levels to provide for suitable nesting and wintering habitat for bald eagles, wildlife security habitat, shade and cover for fish, and high scenic quality.

Alternative B – Emphasis on Intensive Resource Management with Less Recreational Development

This alternative would intensively manage natural resources to limit impacts to riparian resources, wildlife, and threatened and endangered species. Alternative B would allow the greatest extent of resource protection within the planning area, while still allowing resource uses.

Recreation development would be constrained to protect natural resource values or to accelerate improvement in their condition. Protection of threatened and endangered species and other wildlife habitat characteristics would increase. Wildlife areas would be closed to

human access during crucial seasons if needed. Boat access sites would remain open year-round, but snow removal would be prohibited. Management would focus on restoring vegetation communities to ecologically desirable levels. Area protections such as the ACEC and RNA designations would be maximized and more restrictions on uses would apply in designated areas to protect sensitive resources and values. The existing SRMA designation would remain in place to provide diverse recreational experiences. There would be an increase in the areas closed to or with limitations on OHV use.

Public camping would be restricted to designated areas within the river corridor in the riparian area to maintain a high quality experience and limit resource and recreation conflicts. Group size and allocation of campsites would be required (based on visitor capacity study).

User-created access (slides) within the planning area would be closed where feasible and limited facilities would be developed or improved.

Alternative C – Emphasis on the Development of Resources for Recreational Opportunities

Alternative C would allow the greatest extent of resource use within the planning area, while maintaining the basic protection needed to sustain resources. Alternative C places an emphasis on maximum appropriate human use or influence and the widest array of recreation opportunities. Under this alternative, constraints on opportunities for recreation for the protection of sensitive resources would be the least restrictive possible within the limits defined by law, regulation, and BLM and USFS policy. Potential impacts to sensitive resource values would be mitigated on a case-by-case basis. The alternative expands the existing access in the planning area by expanding existing sites and adding new sites for development. Opportunities for BLM “unmanaged” motorized recreational experiences would increase because fewer OHV areas would be limited or closed.

Public camping would be restricted to designated areas within SSM Class IA (South Fork Canyon). In the remaining classes, dispersed camping on BLM and USFS managed lands and areas would become designated camping areas if necessary to reduce user conflicts. Group size and allocation of campsites would be implemented during high periods of use (i.e., weekends and holidays) if necessary to reduce user conflicts.

User created access (i.e., slides) within the planning area would be allowed and hardened and facilities would be developed or improved. Snow removal at access sites would occur all winter or beginning in March at the boat access sites along the river corridor to allow for recreation opportunities (except Fullmer Boat Access would remain closed to vehicle access during winter months). BLM OHV routes would be designated and new opportunities for OHV trails would be pursued.

Alternative D – Compromise between Alternatives A, B, C – Preferred Alternative

Alternative D would emphasize multiple resource use in the planning area by protecting sensitive resources and applying the most current information to allow BLM and USFS to set priorities for flexible, proactive management of public and forest lands. Recreational

development would be balanced against wildlife and vegetation protection. Protection of threatened and endangered species and wildlife habitat characteristics would be maintained or increased. The planning area protections such as management of the ACEC and the SRMA would be necessary to protect sensitive resources.

Fullmer Boat Access would continue to be closed to motorized vehicle access during the winter months. The only designated OHV trail would be the Stinking Springs trail (Figure 2). All other undesignated trails would be closed to OHV use. OHV use would continue to be allowed on existing county roads. In the future, additional designated OHV routes may be considered and analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

There would be no dispersed camping in either SSM Class LA (South Fork Canyon) or within riparian areas along the river corridor from the Black Canyon to Cress Creek. All campsites in these areas would be designated.

Dispersed camping would be allowed elsewhere in the planning area, although additional campsites may be designated in high use areas as needed to reduce resource impacts. Users would be required to use fire pans if fire rings are not available and human waste would be required to be removed if sanitary facilities are not available.

A visitor capacity study would be conducted to determine visitor thresholds for the planning area. A check-in or reservation system would be considered when the threshold is reached.

Comparison of Alternatives by Issue – Alternative Summary

Table 1 summarizes the various actions comprising each alternative revision and describes how they respond to the issues derived from the internal and external scoping effort. Issues 10-12 are not addressed in the comparison of alternatives because management actions for these issues are addressed in the section of the environmental assessment titled, **Management Actions Common to all Alternatives**.

Analysis of Environmental Impacts

As described in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations that implement the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a key element in making an informed decision in relation to the alternative revisions is the interdisciplinary evaluation of environmental impacts associated with their implementation. Table 2 provides a brief synopsis of the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the alternative revisions and the no action alternative.

As presented in the Table 2, all of the alternatives would be associated with some level of environmental impact. In general, the greatest impact to both the natural environment and the character of recreational experiences would be associated with taking no action (Alternative A). The fewest and least intensive environmental impacts would be associated with Alternative B, although recreational opportunity would probably decrease. Under Alternative C, recreational experiences would be enhanced, but some of the natural character of the area would probably be lost.

Figure 2. Stinking Springs Trail

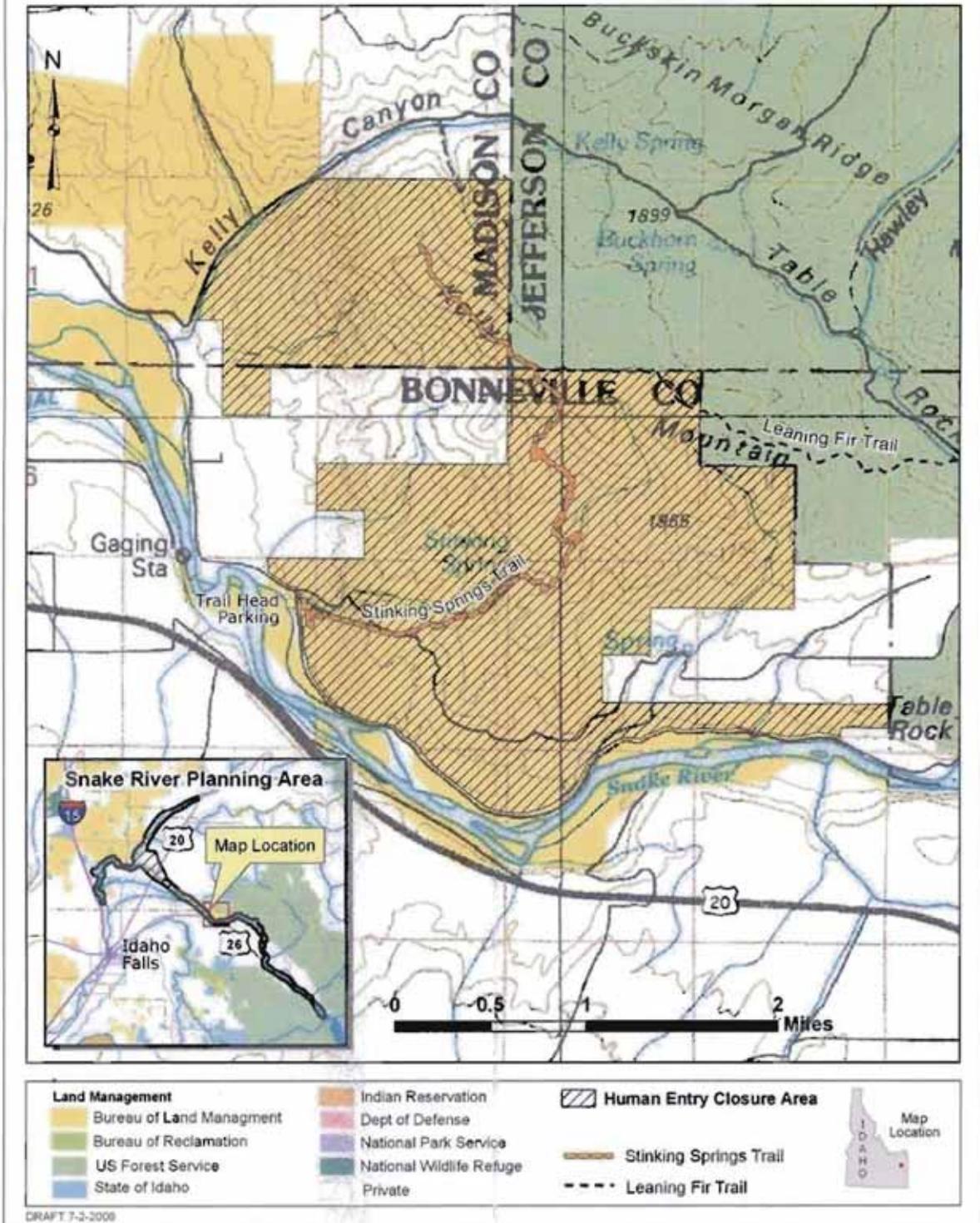


Table 1. Comparison of Alternatives by Issue.

Issue No.1 Education of River Users				
Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
1A. Education Tools and Media	Information kiosks at all boat access sites. Boaters Guide, East Idaho Visitor Information Center, and Conant Visitor Center provide information.	Same as A., in addition Boaters Guide updated and reprinted more frequently. Boat etiquette information and cultural brochures developed. Coordinate with the Shoshone- Bannock Tribes, state and federal agencies.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
1B. Outfitters and Guides	Annual meeting.	Annual meeting with periodic training.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
1C. Camp Hosts and Recreation Technicians	Annual training.	Annual and continued training.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
1D. Signs	Limited signs at kiosks and along corridor.	Sign hazards, boundaries and day use areas, keeping signs small.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B; also develop partnership with state, county and irrigation company.
1E. Maps	Boater's Guide (does not include Henrys Fork)	Update guide, including conservation easements, fee acquisitions, Henrys Fork and Main Snake. Include designated trails for BLM and USFS.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B; also develop partnership with the State of Idaho.
1F. Website	None available.	Develop joint website.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B; develop commercial business link to agency website.

Issue No. 2 Protection of Riparian Habitat				
Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
2A. Grazing	BLM: Management according to Grazing Regulations (43 CFR 4100) USFS: Refer to Targhee National Forest RFP and NEPA information as indicated in Table 16 of this document	BLM: Same as Alternative A. In addition, identify vacant BLM allotments for change in status from available to unallocated for grazing in RMP revision. USFS: Same as Alternative A	BLM: Same as Alternative A. USFS: Same as Alternative A	BLM: Same as Alternative B. USFS: Same as Alternative A
2B. Non-Motorized Trails	BLM: Designate Cress Creek and North Menan Butte. USFS: Refer to Forest and Travel Management Plan.	BLM: Same as Alternative A, plus designate levee trails, Lorenzo and Wolf Flats. USFS: Same as Alternative A.	BLM: Same as Alternative B, plus look for new trail opportunities. USFS: Same as Alternative A.	BLM: Same as Alternative B, plus designate or close user-created trails. USFS: Same as Alternative A.
2C. Human Waste Disposal (All Users)	Require human waste carryout system (e.g., sealable portable toilet, or EPA approved disposal bag - Wag Bags®) for overnight camping in South Fork	Require human waste carryout system for all day and overnight users along river corridor in riparian areas.	Require human waste carryout system for all visitors in South Fork Canyon.	Require human waste carryout system for all day and overnight users along river corridor in riparian

	Canyon.			areas except where public facilities are available.
2D. Camp Fires (All Users)	Campfires allowed anywhere. Can burn dead and down wood, but no girdling of trees or use of chainsaws.	All users must provide their own fire pan and carry out ash unless agency provided fire rings are available along river corridor in riparian areas. Dead and down wood may be burned, but no girdling of trees or use of chainsaws.	All users are encouraged to provide their own fire pan or utilize agency provided fire rings; pack out ashes. Can burn dead and down wood, but no girdling of trees or use of chainsaws.	Same as Alternative B.

Issue No.3 Protection of the Watershed

Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
3A. Erosion Control	BLM Only: Control upland erosion and rehab any feasible, damaged areas. Limit upland erosion at Stinking Springs. BLM and USFS: Limit new development.	Same as Alternative A, except no special numerical limit for Stinking Springs. BLM and USFS: Where feasible, close and rehab unauthorized boat ramps.	Same as Alternative B. BLM and USFS: Identify and develop unauthorized boat ramps where sites are desirable.	Same as Alternative B.
3B. Vegetation Management	Limited vegetation projects.	Consider projects benefiting river restoration, wildlife and special status species habitat.	Consider projects benefiting recreation.	Same as Alternatives B and C, projects guided by ecological necessity and acceptable to the public.
3C. Undesirable Species and Noxious Weeds (Including plant and insect pests)	Treat under existing BLM and USFS treatment plans. Treat noxious and invasive species emphasizing biological control along corridor. Treat upland areas with chemical and some riparian areas where feasible. Follow BA, BO, and letters of concurrence requirements.	Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative A, but treat noxious species only (BLM Only).	Same as Alternative A.
3D. Undesirable Aquatic Species	No educational outreach program.	Interagency work group develop a joint education and response plan to improve public's awareness.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.

Issue No. 4 Land Ownership

Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
4A. Signing levees BLM Only	No signing.	Identify public access locations and map access points.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B, plus coordinate with irrigation companies, other agencies, and county sheriff. Identify in boaters guide (corridor guide).
4B. Unauthorized use	Periodic BLM LEO, USFS Forest Protection Officer and LEOs, and recreation technician patrols.	Same as Alternative A, plus develop partnerships, and work with local groups to identify and report unauthorized uses.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
4C. Public access	Pursue public access with willing	Consider acquiring public access where it does	Acquire all public access	Same as Alternative B, plus work

	land owners.	not conflict with resource values and there are minimal impacts to wildlife.	locations where feasible. Work with other agencies to pursue access in order to avoid duplication.	with other agencies.
4D. Conservation easement/Land acquisition	Pursue land acquisitions and easements when funding is available. Currently working with three non-profit partners.	Pursue land acquisitions and easements within planning area when funding is available and there are willing land owners. Continue to work with non-profit partners and look for opportunities to work with other federal and state agencies and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Same as Alternative B, plus pursue public access for recreation activities on acquisitions and easements.	Same as Alternative B. Promotion of program in maps and boaters guide. Education with public and outfitters about the Acquisition/Easement Program.

Issue No. 5 Protection and Enhancement of Fish, Wildlife and Botanical Resources

Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
5A. Tributary stream flow	Maintain existing reconnect projects to reconnect stream tributaries to main river.	Same as Alternative A, plus pursue new opportunities for minimum instream-flow.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B, plus work with IDF&G in determining and prioritizing tributary reconnects.
5B. Winter access to boat ramps	No agency snow removal, yet boat access sites are still open for use.	Prohibit snow removal at federal boat access sites, yet boat access sites are still open for use.	Snow removal at the federal boat access sites dependent on funding, <i>except Fullmer Boat Access.</i>	Same as Alternative A.
5C. Wildlife closures	Work with IDF&G to close Stinking Springs to human access during crucial periods. Monitor wildlife closures for compliance. The USFS has winter travel closures identified in the Targhee Travel Plan. Currently Heise Road is closed upriver from Table Rock. Bald Eagle nesting areas signed in South Fork Canyon.	Close Stinking Springs to human entry Dec. 1 to April 30 on a permanent basis and close other wildlife areas to human access during crucial seasons if needed. State the methods of closure and predicted time frames for closures on the website and kiosks. Same as Alternative A. Sign Bald Eagle nesting areas in entire planning area where there is pressure.	Do not consider human access closures. Same as Alternative A. Bald Eagle nesting areas signed in South Fork Canyon.	Same as Alternative B, plus if mule deer population improves, authorizing officer has the authority to remove human entry closure and the trail would remain open April 15 – November 15 to motorized access. Wildlife closure areas would be monitored for compliance. Same as Alternative A. Same as Alternative B.
5D. Fish passage inventory	Inventory complete for the USFS.	BLM inventory all tributary streams within the planning area. Prioritize and pursue fish	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.

Fish Passage Treatment	No plans for non functional fish passage.	passage where fish passage is non functional.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
5E. Fish Entrainment Inventory of Diversions	None	Complete an interagency inventory of diversions for fish entrainment. Interagency work group prioritize and screen diversions where feasible. Work with irrigation companies and private right-of-way holders.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
5F. Inventory for plant, pollinator, neo-tropical migratory birds, and amphibian species needed.	Currently little data is known on the extent of the floristic diversity, pollinators, neo-tropical migratory birds and amphibians.	Complete floristic, pollinator, neo-tropical migratory birds and amphibian inventories.	Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative B, plus inventories to be completed as funding and resources allow.

Issue No. 6 Management of Off Highway Vehicles (OHV's)

Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
6A. OHV Trails and Trail Closures (summer/winter)	Designate routes; close all other undesignated sites to motorized use.	Review all OHV trails with USFWS, IDF&G, and Shoshone- Bannock Tribes to identify conflicts. Identify potential areas, review for erosion. Designate or close routes. Identify designated routes on website and on aerial photos.	Same as Alternative B, plus pursue new OHV trail opportunities.	OHV would still be allowed to use existing county roads. The Stinking Springs trail would be the only designated OHV route. All other undesignated routes would be closed. In the future, additional designated OHV routes may be considered and analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Identify designated routes on website and on aerial photos.
6B. Unauthorized Motorized Access	No overall planning area motorized closure, only a 2001 motorized closure for specific areas. Periodic BLM patrols.	Correct unauthorized use. Develop partnerships to identify and report unauthorized uses.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
6C. Signing of Designated Trails	Minimal signing on designated routes. Routes are displayed on maps, boaters guide and USFS travel plan maps.	Signing on designated routes and to explain OHV designations and information.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B plus designated routes would be signed and placed on website and aerial photographs.
6D. Motorized Closures	The existing plan does not address	Work with IDL to eliminate motorized	No limitation on motorized	Same as Alternative B.

(including 4WD trucks) below High Water Mark (BLM and USFS)	motorized use below the high water mark.	access points on public land that provide access to the dry river channels below the high water mark. Coordinate with counties on problem access areas (e.g., Fall Creek, Spring Creek, Heise, Lorenzo) and as others problem areas develop	access points on public land that provide access to the dry river channels below the high water mark.	
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Issue No. 7 Management of River Corridor Uses

Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
7A. Visitor Capacity Study	Conduct study for planning area, addressing motorized and non-motorized boat activity and recommending options to minimize recreation conflicts. Study findings adopted administratively by BLM and USFS.	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
7B. Special Recreation Permits and Special Use Permits	Permit commercial activity on case-by-case basis with no limit. Maintain eight commercial fishing outfitters.	Based on a visitor capacity study, the number of commercial permits issued may be adjusted. Until the study is completed, the eight commercial fishing outfitters will be maintained and additional applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Commercial fishing outfitter stipulations may change to address conflicts.	Consider different commercial permits issued on a case-by-case basis, with no limit. Otherwise, similar to Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B

Issue No. 8 Management of Camping and Facilities

Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
8A. Corridor-Wide Management of Facilities	Partnership with county and state agencies for managing boat access facilities. Fee program in place.	Maintain partnership and fee program. Fee increase at boat access sites if needed to fund future projects. Work with working group on recommending fee increases.	Same as Alternative B. Include other projects on the South Fork, Henrys Fork and Main Snake in fee program.	Same as Alternative C.
8B. Corridor-Wide Condition of Camp Areas	Use existing monitoring protocols to evaluate camping areas, determine if closure/rehab is necessary.	Adjust protocols and evaluate camp areas. Harden campsites if necessary. BLM/USFS develops method to monitor the quality of the recreational experience on the South Fork.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.
8C. Corridor-Wide Campsite Use	Camping is first come, first serve.	Allocate campsites. Consider check-in or reservation for sites when necessary.	First come, first serve. Allocate campsites only during high use periods.	Conduct capacity study to determine visitor thresholds for corridor; consider check-in or reservation system when thresholds are reached. Allocate campsites. If needed, assess fee for camping within corridor if reservation

				system is implemented.
8D. Corridor-Wide Group Size (day use and camping)	Unlimited group size.	Limit and designate group size to 16 people. With the exception of large camp areas that can accommodate larger groups.	Limit and designate group size to 25 people. With the exception of large camp areas that can accommodate larger groups.	Group size limits would be based on the individual physical site capacity and the social threshold from the outcome of a visitor study.
8E. Corridor-Wide Boat Camping	Dispersed camping allowed; campers encouraged to use LNT practices.	Camping only in designated campsites; campers required to use LNT practices.	Dispersed and/or designated campsite camping; users encouraged to use LNT practices.	Similar to Alternative B. Phased process for designating campsites, starting with Swan Valley and Black Canyon to Heise. Below Heise and Henrys Fork determine as needed.
8F. Corridor-Wide Vehicle Camping	Dispersed camping allowed. USFS: 5 day limit	Designate campsites in high use areas as needed. USFS and BLM: 5 day limit	Same as Alternative A. USFS and BLM: 5 day limit	Dispersed camping allowed except in South Fork Canyon and in riparian areas from Black Canyon to Cress Creek. Designate campsites in these areas; limit camping to five days. Continue to designate campsites elsewhere as needed.
8G. South Fork Canyon Boat Camping	Designated camp areas and campsites may be identified in future.	No dispersed camping. Designate campsites in 11 areas.	Designate campsites within 11 designated areas. Designate additional camp areas in South Fork Canyon.	Similar to Alternative B; designate additional campsites if needed.

Issue No. 9 Present and Future River Access Needs				
Issue Component	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
9A. Recreation Development	Recreation Developments in Plan (Map) Gravel Pit and Box Canyon Restroom. Palisades Dam – not in plan Irwin – Boat ramp, develop parking, and retain as a day-use area. Footbridge Parking Improvement. Fall Creek Falls Overlook –	No development of Gravel Pit and Box Canyon Restroom. Developed boat ramp (fee program) and developed camping area. Irwin – Remove buildings and retain as a day-use area, no boat ramp. No Footbridge Parking and no boat ramp. Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative B. Same as Alternative B. Same as Alternative B plus develop parking within easement, near road. Footbridge Parking and boat ramp. Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative B. Same as Alternative B. Same as Alternative C. Same as Alternative B. Same as Alternative A.

interpretive sign, parking lot, trail, safety fence, toilet.				
Snake River Boat Access Admin site, boat ramp/parking area, campground.	Administrative site	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.	
Wolf Flat Boat Access – Day use, not identified in the 1991 Plan.	Harden ramp, define and limit parking, create main parking at Wolf Flat camp area and toilet.	Harden ramp, create parking near ramp, toilet, signing.	Same as Alternative B.	
Little Kelly	Close campsite on creek, day-use only. Non- motorized trail.	Allow dispersed camping. Non-motorized trail.	Same as Alternative B.	
Heise Bridge – boat ramp and parking.	Harden road and keep ramp open. Parking exists.	Harden road, develop boat ramp. Develop trailhead for levee trail, mark trail.	Same as Alternative C.	
Hibbard Bridge - no developments or facilities at this time.	No developments or facilities, but maintain public access.	Maintain public access and develop parking.	Same as Alternative B.	
Fisher Allotment (across from Hibbard) – public use, dispersed camp, unimproved boat ramp.	Same as Alternative A.	Overnight camping, develop boat ramp and parking area.	Same as Alternative A.	
Trestle Bridge – camping, parking area, signs, picnic.	Harden and define roads, parking area, signs, day-use. St. Anthony greenbelt may connect to this recreation site in the future.	Harden and define roads, parking area, camping and day-use, develop boat access.	Harden and define roads, parking area, signs, camping and day-use, no development of boat access – yet allow launching from bank.	
St. Anthony Gauging –negotiate for walk-in easement.	No access.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.	
SE side of St. Anthony Bridge – walk in access, St. Anthony Greenbelt trail.	Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative A.	
Big Six Canal - Obtain walk-in access and parking.	No Access.	Same as Alternative B.	Same as Alternative B.	

9B. User created access	Do not allow user created slides/boat access. Rehabilitate sites where feasible.	Same as Alternative A.	Allow user created slides/boat access. Harden sites and allow for additional access.	Same as Alternative A.
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Table 2. Synopsis of Environmental Impacts by Alternative.

Resource	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D (Proposed Action)
Cultural Resources	<p>Current uses have resulted in illegal collection, vandalism, and unintended destruction of cultural resources.</p> <p>The types and intensity of impacts would increase due to higher levels of use, resulting in a relatively rapid accumulation of cumulative impacts compared to the other alternatives.</p>	<p>The types of impacts would be similar to Alternative A. However, the intensity of impacts would be reduced by public education efforts and less recreational development.</p> <p>Educational efforts and less recreational development would result in a relatively slow accumulation of impacts.</p>	<p>The types of impacts would be generally similar to Alternative A, but the intensity of impacts could increase due to greater recreational development.</p> <p>High levels of recreational development would result in a relatively rapid accumulation of impacts similar to Alternative A.</p>	<p>The types of impacts would be generally similar to Alternative A. The intensity of impacts from a moderate amount of recreation development would be balanced by a strong emphasis on public education. Impacts would be most similar to Alternative B.</p> <p>Moderate levels of recreational development and public education efforts would result in a moderate rate of impact accumulation.</p>
Livestock Grazing Management	<p>Grazing acreage would remain unchanged. However, increasing levels of human use would increase the level of conflict between livestock and users.</p>	<p>Vacant allotments would be reclassified from allocated to unallocated in association with RMP amendment. There would be no immediate impacts to grazing management. Educational efforts would reduce conflicts between livestock and users.</p>	<p>No reduction in available grazing acreage. Increased recreational development would increase conflicts with livestock.</p>	<p>Impacts would be the same as Alternative B.</p>
Recreation and Visual Resources	<p>Given the increasing demand, a continuation of current management of the planning area would likely result in the loss of recreational opportunity and degraded experiences.</p>	<p>Under this alternative, there would be less recreational opportunities. Increasing demand would not be met and user conflict would likely increase. However, the natural character of the area would be largely maintained.</p>	<p>Increasing demand could be met by high levels of recreational development. However, some of the natural character of the planning area would be lost.</p>	<p>A moderate amount of recreational development would improve the ability to meet demand while reducing user conflicts and maintaining most of the natural character of the area.</p>
Soils/Surface	High use areas, especially	This alternative would	High levels of recreational	An intermediate amount of

Water/Floodplain/Water Quality	those used by motorized watercraft and OHVs would continue to degrade, reducing floodplain functionality, and soil stability. Further compaction of floodplain soils and continued streambank and road erosion would increase suspended sediment loads in the river.	implement the most protective management actions and as such, would result in relatively minor impacts to soils, water, and the floodplain.	development and use would result in increased potential for erosion and off-site sedimentation. However, these impacts would be mitigated to some degree by educational programs, requirements to dispose of human waste, and the hardening of areas that are susceptible to erosion.	recreational development would result in some erosion and off-site sedimentation potential. Other management actions such as requirement to dispose of human waste, designating more campsites, and the hardening of some facilities would have beneficial effects. Impacts would be greater than Alternative B, but less than alternatives A and C.
Vegetation	Riparian-wetland areas that are currently impacted by recreational activities would continue to decline. Further reductions in riparian-wetland habitat are likely. Adverse impacts to upland vegetation have been and would remain limited.	The health and vigor of riparian-wetland vegetation would improve and further reductions in riparian-wetland habitat would be unlikely. Impacts to upland vegetation would be similar to Alternative A.	The high degree of recreational development could result in adverse impacts to currently undisturbed riparian-wetland areas. However, impacts to riparian-wetland habitat from unauthorized uses would be reduced. Impacts to upland vegetation would be similar to Alternative A.	The condition of wetland-riparian habitat would improve somewhat and further losses of riparian-wetland habitat would be reduced. Impacts to upland vegetation would be similar to Alternative A.
Wildlife and Aquatic Species Habitat Management	Increase in demand especially during the winter season has resulted in habitat degradation and displacement of wildlife species. Recent winter closures, conservation easements and acquisitions have mitigated these impacts to some degree. Aquatic species have benefited from the reductions in erosion and off-site	Under this alternative, habitat would be enhanced because fewer recreational facilities would be developed and actions would be taken to reverse declining trends in habitat condition. Fewer recreational developments and educational efforts aimed at protecting and conserving aquatic species resources would have a beneficial impact.	Increased recreational development and use would result in an increase in direct and indirect habitat loss and further decreases in habitat quality for wildlife. The high degree of recreational development and associated erosion and off-site sedimentation potential could adversely affect aquatic species	A moderate amount of recreational development, including the closing of unauthorized trails, removing human waste, prohibiting the removal of dead and down wood, and the implementation of erosion controls would benefit wildlife. However, increased visitor use, especially during winter, would disturb or displace some wildlife species. Impacts would be generally similar to Alternative B.

	sedimentation associated with soil and vegetation management actions.			
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The analysis indicates that Alternative D, the Proposed Action, would be associated with an intermediate level of environmental impact and a modest increase in recreational opportunity. The management actions associated with this alternative are not the most protective of the environment nor the most beneficial to recreational experiences. Instead, it represents a management direction that strikes a balance between the two desires. As such, this alternative is a compromise between the protection and conservation of the natural environment and the promotion and enhancement of recreational opportunity.

Recommendation

I recommend that the Proposed Action (Alternative D) be implemented through the Snake River Activity and Operations Plan Revision. The river will be managed to protect and enhance the river's resource values while allowing the continuation of compatible existing uses, including a wide range of public outdoor recreation opportunities, and minimizing user conflicts. These recreation opportunities will be provided in a manner that does not substantially impair the natural beauty of the Snake River, diminish its aesthetic, fish and wildlife, scientific or recreational values. River management will take into account the rights and interests of private landowners, state and federal agencies, and Tribal treaty rights.

The Proposed Action is in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 as amended (43 U.S.C. 1761).

Rationale

Implementation of this management plan is in conformance with the goals and objectives established in the Medicine Lodge RMP, approved in April 1985, and as a result, no plan amendments are warranted. In considering the resources and the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant impacts, I have determined that the Proposed Action (Alternative D) will not have any significant impact on the human environment when managed in accordance with the specific guidelines listed in the environmental assessment. Prior to the implementation of individual actions contained within the revision, additional NEPA analysis may be required.

Decision

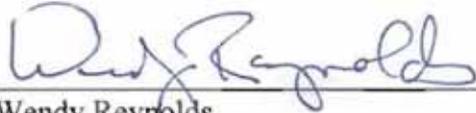
The recommendation and its rationale are adopted as my decision. It is my decision to authorize the actions proposed under the Proposed Action (Alternative D) for the Snake River Activity and Operations Plan revision. This decision is applicable to those parts of the planning area under BLM authority. A separate decision will be issued by the Forest Service authorized officer for those parts of the area under the jurisdiction of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

Finding of No Significant Impact

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, implementing the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1500-1508), I find that the Proposed Action (Alternative D) described in the attached environmental assessment (Snake River Activity and

Operations Plan revision) is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

Approved by:



Wendy Reynolds
Field Manager, Upper Snake Field Office

7/8/08
Date

Appeal Procedures:

The Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Snake River Activity and Operations Plan revision Environmental Assessment within the BLM, Upper Snake Field Office is currently available. This Decision Record and FONSI formalizes BLM's intention to adopt and implement Alternative D of the environmental assessment. For a hard copy or CD of the document, please contact the main office at the Upper Snake Field Office, 1405 Hollipark Drive, Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401, phone (208) 524-7500, or send an email to ID_SFork_Plan@blm.gov. The document may also be viewed online at <http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/info/nepa.2.html#us>

Any person or organization who is party to and adversely affected by the decision may file an appeal to the Board of Land Appeals. The process for appeal, summarized here, is fully described in 43 CFR Subtitle A, Part 4, Subpart E.

1. A notice of appeal must be filed in the Upper Snake Field Office within 30-days of the signed decision record at: Upper Snake Field Office, 1405 Hollipark Drive, Idaho Falls, Idaho, 83401.
2. The notice of appeal must include the serial number or other identification of the case and may include a statement of reasons for the appeal, a statement of standing, and any arguments the appellant wishes to make.
3. If the notice of appeal does not include a statement of reasons the appellant must file this statement with the Board of Land Appeals within 30-days after the notice of appeal was filed.

Board of Land Appeals
Office of Hearing and Appeals
801 North Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22203

4. The appellant shall also serve a copy of the notice of appeal and of any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs, within 15-days after filing the notice of appeal, on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, the authorized officer issuing the decision at the Upper Snake Field Office, and on the Office of the Solicitor at:

Field Solicitor
U.S. Department of the Interior
Federal Building & U.S. Courthouse
550 West Fort Street, MSC 020
Boise, ID 83724

5. A petition for stay may also be submitted pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4, Subpart B.
 - a. The petition for stay should accompany the notice of appeal and show sufficient justification based on the following standards:
 - i. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied;

- ii. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits;
- iii. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted; and,
- iv. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

b. A copy of the petition for stay must also be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the Board of Land Appeals at the same time the notice of appeal is filed with the Upper Snake Field Office.