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Chapter 6 – Consultation and Coordination

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted this planning process in accordance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and Department of Interior (DOI) and BLM regulations and policies. NEPA and the associated regulatory/policy framework require Federal agencies to involve interested publics in their decision-making, consider a range of reasonable alternatives to proposed actions, and prepare environmental documents that disclose the potential impacts of proposed actions and alternatives.

Title II, Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) directs BLM to coordinate planning efforts with American Indian Tribes, other Federal agencies, and State and local governments as part of its land use planning process.

This chapter documents the collaborative approach undertaken by BLM throughout the process of developing and releasing the Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). In developing the NCA RMP, BLM sought to do more than provide information and solicit feedback. BLM implemented a process that enabled stakeholders to participate at the level and to the degree that best met their needs and interests. Those interested in obtaining updates had the opportunity to do so via newsletters and open houses; while those interested in developing products and engaging in discussion and issue resolution had that opportunity as well. The distinction between public involvement, which is based on information sharing and feedback, and collaboration, which provides engagement in product development, is instrumental in understanding and appreciating BLM's approach.

6.2 COLLABORATIVE PLANNING PROCESS

In seeking to implement a collaborative approach to developing this RMP, the BLM sought assistance from the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (Institute). The Institute provides professional neutral process expertise designed to “assist parties in resolving environmental conflicts ... that involve Federal agencies or interests.” Specifically, its primary objectives are to:

“Resolve Federal environmental, natural resources, and public lands disputes in a timely and constructive manner through assisted negotiation and mediation, increase the appropriate use of environmental conflict resolution (ECR) in general and improve the ability of Federal agencies and other interested parties to engage in ECR effectively, and engage in and promote collaborative problem-solving and consensus-building during the design and implementation of Federal environmental policies to prevent and reduce the incidence of future environmental disputes.”

After publishing the Notice of Intent (NOI) on August 7, 2001, BLM entered into an inter-agency agreement with the Institute in November 2001 to design and implement a process that would address and potentially reduce stakeholder polarization

The purposes of this partnership were to: (1) assess opportunities for collaboration in development of the RMP, (2) develop a collaborative approach and strategies based on the results of the assessment, and (3) provide neutral facilitation.

In June 2002, the assessment report, entitled *Assessing Prospects for Collaborative Planning and Public Participation for the Bruneau and Snake River Birds of Prey NCA Resource Management Plans*, was completed and made available to the public. The Assessment was based on comprehensive interviews of numerous individuals with interests in and ties to the planning area(s).



The Assessment became the foundation for a document that outlined the rationale and approach for BLM’s planning process: *A Collaborative Process for Resource Management Planning* (Collaborative Plan). Based on Assessment results, the Collaborative Plan identified the following seven key principles to guide the process and all related activities throughout the project:

1. Realistically match internal resources to commitments;
2. Identify what is fixed and what is open for input and influence by the public;
3. Be clear and consistent;
4. Educate about the RMP process and how it links to future site-specific decisions;
5. Link to national strategies and policies (and court precedents) in order to focus on what is open for discussion and minimize debate on issues that are already decided;
6. Follow through on commitments, both procedural and substantive; and
7. Be publicly accountable for seeking input from the public.

The Collaborative Plan articulated the process goal: “To make better decisions with a greater base of public understanding, support and ownership.” To accomplish this goal, the Collaborative Plan identified six process objectives:

1. To learn as much as possible from stakeholders to improve BLM decisions. Use stakeholders to help create a good information base.
2. To understand the agency’s roles and responsibilities, and what is and is not negotiable (laws, regulations, requirements, previous decisions, etc.).
3. To engage stakeholders in product development (e.g., issue identification, issue bundling, alternatives development, review of draft EIS).
4. To provide a variety of involvement opportunities that enable stakeholders to engage at the level that best suits their level of interest.

5. To provide the public an accounting of how their input is used.
6. To seek as much consensus and common ground as possible.

6.3 STRUCTURED CHECKPOINTS

The collaborative process resulting from this guidance used “structured checkpoints” so stakeholders knew who would have input into product development and at what stage in the process. Using this iterative process of structured checkpoints, draft products were developed; then circulated through the structured checkpoints. These checkpoints provided for consistency with other planning efforts, met public expectations, and provided a two-way understanding of the actions and their impacts. Checkpoints included:

1. Product development by the Interdisciplinary (ID) Planning Team.
2. Review of products by Tribes.
3. Review of products by Resource Advisory Council (RAC) and Intergovernmental Coordination Group (ICG).
4. Public Input.
5. ID team product refinement – assimilate new information into product.

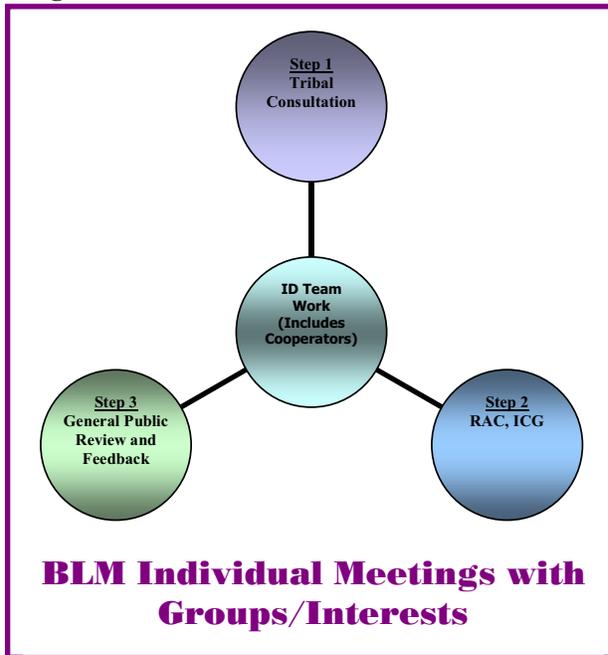
6.3.1 Interdisciplinary Team

Products circulated through each checkpoint were resubmitted to BLM’s ID Team – a team of resource specialists responsible for development of components of the plan that fall within their expertise and purview within the agency. Typically, the ID Team accepted all of the input and suggestions generated through the various checkpoints and considered, addressed and refined the product(s) as appropriate. In a number of instances, specific collaborative events were convened that provided stakeholders and the public an opportunity to work with and interact directly with the ID Team.

The following diagram illustrates the iterative nature of the process and the integration of structured checkpoint activities into the ID Team’s development of products. This iterative activity was the foundation of the collaborative process.



Figure 6.1. The Collaborative Process.



6.3.2 Tribal Consultation

In keeping with Tribal preferences, applicable laws, regulations and policies, regular and ad hoc consultations were held with Tribal officials. From a regulatory standpoint, the BLM must use the consultation process to “identify the cultural values, the religious beliefs, the traditional practices, and the legal rights of Native American People which could be affected by BLM actions on Federal lands.”

At the outset of this planning process, meetings were held with the Shoshone Bannock and the Shoshone Paiute Tribes to determine consultation procedures, format, and key junctures.

In March 2001, the BLM Boise District entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Reservation, formalizing the consultation process through an existing venue initiated by the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and the Boise District several years ago to facilitate their government-to-government relationship. In addition to the regular monthly consultation, special ad hoc meetings were held to discuss issues related to the RMP/EIS.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe chose to be involved on both a government-to-government and staff-to-staff basis. Shoshone-Bannock Tribal staff participated in a workshop with BLM personnel. The Tribe provided an orientation on the Tribal perspective and together the group identified appropriate methods for addressing Tribal issues. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council also invited the BLM to formally provide information at its Council meetings. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe and the BLM work to maintain the coordination at both levels.

All Tribal consultation and input occurred through direct interaction between BLM staff and Tribal representatives. BLM’s ID Team incorporated Tribal perspectives into products under development.

Resource Advisory Council (RAC)

The Boise District RAC is a fifteen-member Federal Advisory Committee Act-chartered group responsible for providing consensus-based advice to BLM. The RAC received briefings and was afforded opportunities to comment on product and process at their regularly scheduled meetings. The RAC has been actively involved with product development, hosting public meetings, participating in workshops where the group worked to address input, developing alternatives, and providing a unique perspective relative to other collaborative processes. The RAC appointed a land use planning sub-committee in 2001 to assist with this process.

Intergovernmental Coordination Group (ICG)

NEPA requires the BLM to work toward consistency between management plans and the “officially approved or adopted resource-related plans, policies and programs of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and American Indian Tribes.”

Relative to the above requirement, the ICG is a process innovation. Convened by the BLM, this group is comprised of representatives from State and Federal agencies, counties and



congressional staffs who meet periodically to review plan development and issues, provide for consistency review from their respective agency perspectives, and help resolve inter-agency issues that may be in conflict, not only with BLM but also among participating entities. The ICG met numerous times over the course of this planning process, and while some participated to a greater degree than others, many participants became actively involved by:

- Providing for consistency review of the BLM product with their own plans, and seeking understanding and addressing consistency issues between their own and other participants' plans;
- Providing resource-specific expertise to similar elements and issues of the BLM product;
- Attending and interacting with individuals at public meetings on issues related to their areas of expertise;
- Participating in workshops to develop planning products; and
- Reviewing and commenting on the document.

ICG Representation:

- Ada County Parks and Waterways
- Ada County Planning and Zoning
- Canyon County Commissioners
- Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
- Elmore County Commissioners
- Governor's Office
- Idaho Army National Guard
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho Department of Lands
- Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Idaho Department of Water Resources
- Idaho Soil Conservation Commission
- Idaho Department of Agriculture
- Idaho Office of Species Conservation
- Mountain Home Air Force Base
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Owyhee County Commissioners
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The formal 60-day consistency review by the Governor will occur when this document is published.

6.3.3 Other Formal Consultation

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS)

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended, directs Federal agencies to ensure that actions they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the existence of any listed species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat (50 CFR 400). The ESA authorizes Federal agencies to enter into early consultation with the USF&WS to make those determinations. BLM entered into an agreement with USF&WS on April 17, 2002 and periodic meetings have taken place throughout the planning process. In addition, USF&WS staff has attended ICG meetings, providing comment and feedback at key junctures.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

The SHPO must be consulted concerning any resource management proposals that might affect a cultural property listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Consultation with the SHPO is a normal part of the planning process.

6.3.4 Cooperating Agencies

Cooperator status was offered to the Idaho Army National Guard (IDARNG) and County officials from Ada, Canyon, Elmore and Owyhee Counties. To be a cooperating agency, there must be jurisdictional overlap with BLM, the agency must be able to offer special expertise, and their involvement should enhance coordination and consistency. The IDARNG and Owyhee County signed formal cooperating agency agreements and their representatives participated on a regular basis as members of the ID Team. They also participated in the ICG.

6.3.5 General Public and Other Collaborative Activities

The project *Assessment* advised the BLM that different people and stakeholders will prefer



different levels of involvement, and that multiple types of opportunities should be available so that individuals and entities can participate at the level that best suits them. Therefore, opportunities for involvement were designed to range from simple information sharing and feedback to involvement in product development. The venues were selected to meet specific stakeholder needs and their desired level of involvement in the process.

The participation and engagement of special interests groups, landowners, the general public and all stakeholders was solicited throughout the process. A variety of venues for participation were made available, including public open houses, community meetings, a data fair, and focused large and small group work sessions.

One of the notable events of the collaborative process was the assemblage of the RAC, ICG, and the ID Team to assimilate information collected during the scoping meetings and use that information, in combination with the desired future condition statements, to initiate the drafting of a range of alternatives. The public was invited to observe the meeting and was afforded an opportunity to comment and provide suggestions.

Personal contacts, news releases, newsletters, e-mail notices, the BLM planning website, and Federal Register notices were the primary tools used to communicate with stakeholders and collaborators. Upon request, BLM provided presentations and had informal discussions relative to specific issues of concern.

Through collaboration, processes and products were built upon those that came before. As a result, RMP/EIS alternatives were designed, to the extent possible, to achieve the desired future conditions, which were developed in consideration of the issue statements.

6.4 COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT

Important components of the collaborative process were the periodic assessment activities conducted by the neutral facilitators to assess

stakeholder perspectives of the process and products to date. Based on this information, facilitators would identify process adjustments, and would provide BLM recommendations for appropriate adjustments. While much of this assessment was conducted through informal conversations, structured interviews were conducted and documented (without attributing comments to specific individuals) in January 2003 and March 2005.

6.5 ADDITIONAL COLLABORATION

The collaborative process will continue through the completion of the NCA RMP and during development of an implementation plan that will begin once the ROD is signed. Future public involvement will be based on existing understandings, processes, and structured checkpoints.

- Public notifications will be made via newsletter announcements, media releases, web postings, and key contacts with stakeholders. Such communications will continue throughout the release of the ROD.
- Community meetings, will be held to clarify information and help the public understand the proposed actions. As decisions are implemented, public meetings will be held, as appropriate, to keep the public informed and allow communities to help identify opportunities to collaborate on future management.
- Formal consultation, with Tribes, USFWS, and SHPO will occur throughout the duration of the RMP process and as appropriate during plan implementation.
- Ongoing coordination with local governments and special interests will continue as appropriate.
- Changes between the Draft and Proposed RMP were made based on public comment. These changes were reviewed by the RAC, ICG, cooperating agencies and Tribes. Those who provided comments on the draft plan were contacted regarding the responses to their comments and meetings were held as appropriate to keep organiza-



tions and special interest groups aware of changes.

- Proposed RMP/Final EIS addressed, where appropriate, substantive written comments received during the comment period, and incorporated changes resulting from the collaborative revision process. The Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued by BLM after the release of this document, the Governor’s Consistency Review, and resolution of any protests to the Final RMP/EIS.
- Formal mediation services will be available if needed.

6.6 LIST OF RECIPIENTS

The following is a partial list of the agencies, organizations, and individuals who expressed interest in the RMP/EIS during the preparation of this document. Each will be sent a notice of availability and, upon request, either the summary of the Proposed RMP/EIS, the entire document, or notification of where the document may be viewed on the BLM planning website.

6.6.1 American Indian Tribes

- Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
- Shoshone-Paiute Tribes

6.6.2 Government Agencies and Representatives

- Ada County Commissioners
- Ada County Planning and Zoning
- Boise City Public Works
- Canyon County Commissioners
- Canyon County Planning and Zoning
- Department of Agriculture – Boise and Payette National Forests
- Department of Defense – Washington, DC
- Department of Defense – Mountain Home Air Force Base
- Department of Defense – U. S. Army Corp of Engineers
- Department of Energy – Washington, DC
- Department of Interior
- Department of Interior – Bureau of Indian Affairs – Idaho and Nevada

- Department of Interior – National Park Service
- Department of Interior – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Elmore County Commissioners
- Elmore County Growth & Development
- Elmore County Planning and Zoning
- Idaho Air National Guard
- Idaho Army National Guard
- Idaho Department of Agriculture
- Idaho Department of Commerce
- Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
- Idaho Department of Lands
- Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Idaho Department of Water Resources
- Idaho Environmental Council
- Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
- Idaho Fish and Game Commission
- Idaho Geological Survey
- Idaho Migrant Council
- Idaho State Historical Society
- Office of the Governor
- Owyhee County Commissioners
- Owyhee County Natural Resources
- Owyhee County Planning and Zoning
- State Historic Preservation Office
- State of Idaho Elected Officials – Local Area
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Senator Larry Craig
- U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
- U.S. Congressman (now Governor) C.L. “Butch” Otter
- U.S. Congressman Mike Simpson

6.6.3 Business Organizations and Other Groups

In addition to the specific businesses, interest groups, and other organizations listed below, numerous individuals expressed an interest in the RMP/EIS and requested to be notified of the availability of the RMP/EIS.



- American Endurance Riders
- American Hiking Society
- Association of Idaho Cities
- Audubon Society
- Blue Ribbon Coalition
- Bogus Creek Outfitters
- Boise District Grazing Advisory Board
- Boise District Resource Advisory Council
- Boise State University
- Boise Valley Point Dog Club
- Capital Trail Vehicle Association
- Chamber of Commerce –
Local Communities
- Committee for Idaho’s High Desert
- Desert Bighorn Sheep Council
- Desert Raiders
- Desert Rats of Idaho, Inc.
- Elmore County Motorcycle Club
- American Ecology (Envirosafe)
- Far & Away Adventures
- Foundation for N American Sheep
- Foundation for N American Wild Sheep
- Friends of the Mustangs
- Friends of the West
- Gem/Boise Economic Development
- German Shorthaired Pointer Club
- Heritage Program
- High Desert Coalition
- Idaho Association of Counties
- Idaho ATV Association
- Idaho Bird Hunters Association
- Idaho Brittany Club
- Idaho Capital Trail Association
- Idaho Cattle Association
- Idaho Conservation League
- Idaho Ducks Unlimited
- Idaho Gem Club
- Idaho Gold Prospectors Association
- Idaho Native Plants Society
- Idaho Outfitter and Guides Association
- Idaho Power Company
- Idaho Rangeland Resources Committee
- Idaho Rivers United
- Idaho Rural Partnership
- Idaho Soil Conservation Commission
- Idaho Snowmobile Association
- Idaho Trail Machine Association
- Idaho Water Users Association
- ID Whitewater Association
- Idaho Watershed Project
(Western Watershed Project)
- Idaho Wildlife Council
- Idaho Wildlife Federation
- Idaho Wool Growers
- Ilowan’s Children
- Institute for High Desert Studies
- International Society for the Protection of
Horses & Burros
- Juniper Mountain Outfitters
- Libraries – Local Public and University
- Little Gem Motorcycle Club
- Mile High Outfitters
- Nampa Gold Prospectors Association
- National Wildlife Federation
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Owyhee Back Country Horsemen
- Owyhee Cattlemen's Association
- Owyhee County Historical Complex
- Owyhee Gem & Mineral Society
- Owyhee Land Use Planning Commission
- Peregrine Fund World Center for BOP
- Resolution Advocates
- River Odyssey's West
- Sevey Guide Service
- Sierra Club of Idaho
- Snake River Alliance
- Snake River Outfitters
- Snake River Raptor Volunteers. Inc.
- Sportsmen for Fish & Wildlife
- Squaw Butte Backcountry Horsemen
- Stanley Potts Outfitters
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Wilderness Society of Idaho
- Treasure Valley Trail Machine
Association
- Trout Unlimited
- Western Range Service
- Western Whitewater Association
- Whiskey Mountain Outfitters
- White Cloud Outfitters
- White Horse Associates
- Wild Rockies Inc.
- Wilderness River Outfitters
- Wildlife Management Institute
- Woolgrowers Association of Idaho



6.7 KEY COLLABORATIVE EVENTS FOR NCA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Table 6.1. Key Collaborative Events.

| Topic (# of Meetings) | Audience | When |
|---|--|------------------------|
| Scoping (6) and stakeholder comment | All stakeholders (Tribes through formal consultation) | Nov 2001 – Jan 2002 |
| Collaborative Process/ Issue Development (4) | All stakeholders (Tribes through formal consultation) | July 2002 |
| Review and comment on issues | All stakeholders (Tribes through formal consultation) | July – August 2002 |
| Issue Refinement (1) | Interdisciplinary Planning Team/RAC/ICG with public observation and input | September 2002 |
| Review and comment on Planning Criteria | All stakeholders (Tribes through formal consultation) | Fall 2002 |
| Desired Future Conditions (3) | All stakeholders (Tribes through formal consultation) | December 2002 |
| Data Fair (3) | All stakeholders | June 2003 |
| Objectives and Management Actions (5) | ID Team/RAC/ICG with public observation and input (Tribes through formal consultation) | Sept – Nov 2003 |
| Preliminary Draft Alternatives (3) | All stakeholders (Tribes through formal consultation) | June – July 2004 |
| Draft Alternatives (3) – Traveling Coffee Shops – Alternatives, Questions and Answers and How Comments were Incorporated | All stakeholders/RAC/ICG (Tribes through formal consultation) | June – July 2005 |
| Public Comments (numerous) – Phone conversations and briefings | Individuals Providing Comments on the Draft EIS. RAC/ICG/Congressional Staff (Tribes through formal consultation) | Jan-Feb-Mar 2007 |



6.8 LIST OF PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA

Local and regional newspapers and radio stations disseminated information on the NCA

RMP/EIS scoping and planning process. Press releases were provided to the following media outlets.

Table 6.2. List of Print and Broadcast Media Used to Disseminate Information.

| Newspapers | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Idaho Statesman – Boise | Times News – Twin Falls |
| Owyhee Avalanche – Homedale | Kuna-Melba News – Kuna |
| Boise Weekly – Boise | Capital Press – LaGrande, OR |
| Messenger Index – Emmett | Mountain Home News – Mountain Home |
| Idaho Press Tribune – Nampa | Weiser Signal American – Weiser |
| KBCI Channel 2 – Boise | KTVB Channel 7 – Boise |
| KTRV Channel 12 – Nampa | KIVI Channel 6 – Meridian |
| KAID Channel 4 – PBS | |
| Radio | |
| KBOI-AM-670 – Boise | KBSU-AM-730 (NPR) – Boise |
| KGEM-AM-1140 – Boise | KIZN-FM-92 Country – Boise |
| KTSY-FM-89.5 – Caldwell | KQFC-FM-98 Country – Boise |

A series of newsletters and project specific flyers were mailed to approximately 600 individuals, organizations, agencies, American Indian Tribes and elected officials.

- November 2001 (Newsletter on RMP process and scoping meeting schedule).
- March 2002 (Newsletter on scoping comments and call for Special Designations).
- August 2002 (Newsletter on Issue Development).
- November 2002 (Newsletter on Planning Criteria, Desired Future Conditions and meetings).
- March 2003 (Newsletter on Public Involvement, Desired Future Conditions and Alternatives).
- August 2003 (Newsletter on Alternative Development and public meetings).
- June 2004 (Newsletter on Preliminary Alternatives, Route Designations and public meeting schedule and process).
- August 2004 (RMP Update on Preliminary Draft Alternatives).
- December 2004 (RMP Update on schedule and staffing changes).
- June 2005 (Newsletter on Route Designations, Mid-Course Assessment, Proposed

Alternatives and schedule for Traveling Coffee Shops).

- December 2005 (Newsletter on the RMP Process and an Outline of the Four Alternatives).
- June 2006 (Newsletter on availability of the NCA Draft RMP/EIS).
- 2007 (Newsletter announcing availability of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS and Protest Procedures).

6.9 RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

During the public comment period, 17 individuals and/or groups provided comments relative to the Draft RMP/EIS. These comments, which are paraphrased for brevity and to reduce redundancy, were sorted by topic and include the BLM response to each. Comments concerning general editorial changes (i.e., spelling, punctuation, etc.) were incorporated in the document, but are not included as a comment/response. Original letters (without attachments) have been included as Appendix 20. Some of the comment letters provided additional information as attachments to their letters. The attachments may be viewed during regular business hours at the BLM Boise District Office, 3948 Development Ave., Boise ID 83705.



| LETTER NUMBER CROSS REFERENCE | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|
| Letter Number | Last Name | First Name | Organization |
| 1 | Nielsen | Rep. Pete | House of Representatives State of Idaho |
| 2 | Binder | Angelia M. | Mountain Home Air Force Base |
| 3 | Reichgott | Christine | U.S. EPA Region 10 |
| 4 | Cook | Jeff | Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation |
| 5 | Swanson | John R. | Individual |
| 6 | Whitlock | Clair | Snake River Raptor Volunteers, Inc. |
| 7 | Taylor | Bill | Idaho State 4x4 Association |
| 8 | Richards | Jeff | PacifiCorp |
| 9 | Culver | Nada | The Wilderness Society |
| 10 | Steenhof Kochert | Karen Michael N. | USGS Snake River Field Station Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center |
| 11 | Taylor Davidson | Bill Nate | Idaho State 4x4 Association |
| 12 | Black | Doug | Joe Black and Sons |
| 13 | Nordstrom | Jenifer | Western Watersheds Project |
| 14 | Belt | Doug | Western Elmore County Recreation District |
| 15 | Turner | Terry | Military Affairs Committee |
| 16 | Smith | Bradley | Idaho Conservation League |
| 17 | Chatburn | John | Idaho Department of Agriculture |

Cultural Resources Management

Comment: Sec. 4.2.2, page 4-4: Natural weathering and erosion are adverse effects, as is neglect. Adverse effects to cultural resources must be mitigated, no matter the cause, as required under the National Historic Preservation Act, and protected as required by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and other cultural resource laws. There is an ongoing tolerance, and seemingly acceptable current and anticipated level of adverse effects to cultural resources throughout this entire section. (Ltr 2)

Response: Section 4.2.2 includes an assumption that cultural sites would continue to be impacted by natural weathering and erosion. As a minimum, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must comply with cultural resource laws and regulations (Appendix 2). To the extent possible, we will attempt to reduce weathering and erosion by improving the ecological conditions in the NCA. However, even in those situations where we have the greatest success, weathering and erosion will still occur. These are natural processes over which

BLM has no control. For significant cultural resources BLM may undertake specific protective measures. These measures would be site specific and would not require a Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Comment: Idaho Army National Guard (IDARNG) Activities, page 4-8: Adverse effects to cultural resources from military training (and from all proposed actions) must be identified and mitigated. Expansion of an impact area could only occur after Cultural Resources sites are mitigated. (Ltr 2)

Response: None of the alternatives proposes expansion of the Impact Area. BLM has proposed expansion of the Orchard Training Area (OTA) under two of the alternatives. The referenced section discusses only unidentified cultural resources, the impacts to which would also be unknown. Any development would involve cultural resource clearance consistent with laws and regulations. The site-specific impacts to cultural resources will be addressed through monitoring and mitigation. The IDARNG has a very active cultural resource program that includes surveys, monitoring,



education and when necessary, mitigation. See Affected Environment (IDARNG 2.2.12 Cultural Resource Management)

Comment: Cultural and Tribal Table 3.1 Last Management Action: We believe education of the public regarding cultural resources to be very important. We think interpretation can be done in a manner that will not jeopardize the integrity of sites while still relating the relevance of sites to today's world. This can be done regardless of whether the site/resource is pre-historic or historic. (Ltr 6)

Response: The BLM also believes that public education is important; however, when sites are interpreted, some religious or research values are traded off for values of public education and interpretation. There is a fine line between interpretation that increases respect and appreciation and interpretation that results in vandalism through exposing sites to the public. There is concern that the interpretation of cultural sites will increase vandalism and lead to the loss of some of the intrinsic (religious) values of these sites. Comments ranging from fully supporting interpretation to no interpretation were received. This range of perspectives was analyzed through the various alternatives.

Comment: The RMP fails to commit to inventory and protection of cultural resources. (Ltr 9)

Response: As identified in the planning criteria (Appendix 2), there are numerous laws to provide for the protection of cultural resources. The RMP has identified a Desired Future Condition (DFC) for cultural resources (Section 1.6.2) and management actions have been developed to achieve that condition. BLM will continue to inventory for cultural resources on a project-by-project basis, and complete additional surveys as funding allows.

Comment: The RMP should establish a timeline for conducting a complete inventory of the cultural and historical resources present in the NCA and commit to managing these resources when they are located. The BLM should also complete a Cultural RMP providing for inventory and monitoring to ensure

protection of cultural, historical, and tribal resources. (Ltr 9)

Response: The IDARNG has a Cultural RMP for the OTA that includes monitoring and surveys. The BLM has a Cultural RMP for the NCA and site-specific plans for areas such as the Oregon Trail. These plans will be updated as necessary following the completion of the RMP. A complete inventory of the NCA is important; however, funding is not available.

Energy and Utility Corridors

Comment: PacifiCorp would like to encourage the BLM to leave open the option of wind resource development and be willing to review any future proposals based on the current technology and potential resource impacts. The BLM should not preclude this renewable resource (wind energy) because existing and future technologies for siting and operation of proposed wind turbines and associated facilities may not have a negative impact on raptor populations within the NCA. (Ltr 8)

Response: Decisions can only be made based on the most current state of technology. Based on research and monitoring of wind developments worldwide, a significant amount of data suggests that these developments can adversely affect raptor populations. As such, we have no recourse but to restrict an activity that has the potential to affect the densest nesting raptor population in North America, at the very least until the wind energy industry can show that their developments are compatible with the protection, conservation, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats, as required by the NCA enabling legislation. We believe this decision will have little effect on the wind energy industry, as Southern Idaho is replete with wind energy sites that are suitable (and available) for development.

Comment: The DFCs for lands and realty include a provision that all wind energy sites would be located within an identified right-of-way use area (DRMP/EIS, p. 1-16). However, this approach is not consistent with the NCA requirements to manage these lands to protect raptors and their prey or with the Record of Decision (ROD) for Wind Energy Develop-



ment on BLM Lands. Wind energy development in the NCA would be inconsistent with the purpose of the enabling legislation to protect raptors, raptor prey species, and their habitat. 16 U.S.C. [section] 406-iii(5)(D). In addition, wind energy development is prohibited by the ROD governing wind energy development on BLM lands. The RMP should state that wind energy development is not permitted within the NCA. (Ltr 9)

Response: DFCs were developed by the public during the initial RMP scoping process. Although BLM made a commitment to carry the DFCs forward throughout the planning process, BLM later determined that wind energy development was incompatible with the purposes of the NCA, which rendered that portion of the DFC moot. As such, wind energy developments will not be allowed.

As for energy corridors, the alternatives propose the continuation of the existing corridor, as well as new corridors. The preferred alternative in the Final RMP will include a revised energy corridor proposal that is consistent with the WWEC Study.

Comment: We request that BLM consider not only our existing rights and uses but the potential for future energy development, which would require ROW on federal land identified in the EIS and RMP for NCA. PacifiCorp believes that the EIS and RMP should better emphasize and promote issues related to electrical energy development. PacifiCorp's existing rights must be recognized and maintained. The company requests that we be notified if lands are planned for disposal. (Ltr 8)

Response: All land use proposals, whether RMP or project-level, are subject to valid existing rights. BLM will continue to recognize rights that have been previously granted to access, develop, and maintain various facilities. If public lands are proposed for disposal, affected parties are provided an opportunity to comment on the proposal, and land ownership is always transferred subject to valid existing rights.

Comment: PacifiCorp has concerns about granting additional rights-of-way (ROW)

within existing utility ROW or adjacent to an existing ROW. PacifiCorp has concerns about the potential for conflict and overlap when a new ROW is added to a utility corridor. PacifiCorp recommends the EIS and final RMP include guidelines for ROW clearances. For transmission lines, we recommend a ROW width of at least 100 feet. To avoid conflicts and overlaps, BLM should adopt procedures that require all existing entities to be notified when there are plans for an applicant to install a new ROW in a utility corridor to be sure the issues do not conflict with each other. (Ltr 8) The RMP should include the definition of an Electrical Emergency Condition. (Ltr 8)

Response: Applications for ROW on public land are reviewed by BLM through a site-specific environmental analysis, which includes an opportunity for potentially affected parties, such as other right-of-way holders, to review and comment on the proposal. Since adequate clearance heights and widths between facilities could vary significantly depending on the location and type of facilities, there appears to be no benefit in prescribing fixed ROW clearance guidelines. Site-specific conflicts between authorized and proposed right-of-way facilities will continue to be resolved during the application process. "Electrical Emergency Condition" is an industry term that BLM does not use, and does not need to be included in the RMP.

Comment: Table 3.1, page 3-68: Placement of a Utility Corridor south of the Snake River immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of Saylor Creek Air Force Range, as described in Alternative C, could negatively impact use of the Military Operating Areas and training ranges. Placement of a Utility Corridor - 1-2 miles south of Mountain Home Air Force Base (MHAFB) could negatively impact aircraft operations. (Ltr 2)

Response: To be consistent with alternatives proposed in the WWEC study, Alternative D has been amended to include an energy corridor south and west of the Snake River. The specific alignment was discussed with and agreed to by Air Force representatives. The proposed corridor would run east and west



about two miles north of the Saylor Creek Bombing Range, and would then run north-west on the west side of Highway 78. (See Lands Map 2)

Comment: We urge a prohibition of cell towers be included in the Rational section until there is data on impacts on raptors that shows no effect. (Ltr 6)

Response: We are unaware of research that shows that cell towers (generically) have a significant effect on raptors. However, if information to that effect is forthcoming in the future, the RMP can be amended to exclude them. Until then, BLM has discretionary authority to not authorize construction of facilities that an environmental analysis finds would adversely affect raptors (or other sensitive resources).

Comment: PacifiCorp generally supports most components of alternative D but has concerns with the no new energy corridor and that all transportation systems "would be located within the existing utility corridor" (pg 3-68 table 3.1). PacifiCorp would prefer to see alternative D include the new energy corridor as proposed in alternative C and continued use of existing road network transportation language as described in alternative B (pg 3-65). Please refer to the enclosed table for our extended comments on the Draft Resource Management Plan (DRMP). (Ltr 8)

Response: Proposals in the RMP are subject to valid existing rights. The referenced language refers only to new utility transportation systems being located within the existing corridor. PacifiCorp would be allowed continued access to their facilities, as provided by their existing right-of-way; however, the specific alignment of that access may be affected by the route designation process. To be consistent with the WWEC Study, Alternative D has been amended to include an energy corridor south and west of the Snake River.

Comment: PacifiCorp recommends that the BLM take active steps to work with stakeholders at the federal, state, and local level to expand the concept of federal Corridors to

statewide utility corridors that include state and local government lands. These corridors should be identified in RMPs as they are updated or renewed. In addition to addressing existing energy needs, the established of statewide utility corridors must take into consideration reasonable foreseeable development. (Ltr 8)

Response: As stated above, Alternative D has been amended to include a utility corridor south and west of the Snake River, much like that originally proposed in Alternative C. This change was initiated for the purpose of consistency with proposals being analyzed in the WWEC Study, which is evaluating future energy corridor needs across the entire western U.S. and which would automatically amend all affected land use plans.

Comment: PacifiCorp recommends that the BLM designate areas that are currently occupied by high voltage electric transmission lines as energy corridors. The existing 500 kV line occupies a 160' ROW and this route as well as 1/4-1/2 mile wide area on either side of the line should be designated as an energy corridor for future uses. This designation would be in addition to the other energy corridor alternatives proposed in the RMP. (Ltr 8)

Response: Energy corridors will not be designated along existing transmission lines simply because the lines already exist. The purpose for energy corridors is to provide locations for future utility development, while at the same time, protecting and conserving sensitive resources and resource uses.

Comment: The RMP should include a specific provision stating that ROW facilities will not be placed adjacent to each other if issues with safety or incompatibility or resource conflicts are identified. All utilities must be placed so as to meet reliability and safety standards, particularly with an eye toward reducing the risk of losing all lines due to a common disaster (lightning strike, earthquake, etc.) within a single corridor. The Western Electric Coordinating Council recommends that that interconnected transmission systems should be planned to avoid outages due to the



loss of any two-transmission circuits in a common corridor. (Ltr 8)

Response: This is a project-related issue that needn't be addressed at the RMP level. Applications for ROW on public land are reviewed by BLM through a site-specific environmental analysis, which includes an opportunity for potentially affected parties, such as existing right-of-way holders, to review and comment on the proposal. Since adequate clearance heights and widths between facilities could vary significantly depending on the location and type of facilities, there appears to be no benefit in prescribing fixed guidelines for ROW clearances. Site-specific conflicts between previously authorized and proposed right-of-way facilities will continue to be addressed and resolved during the application process.

Comment: Lands Map 3 – avoidance area – The map does not show some existing facilities. PacifiCorp is concerned that the proposed avoidance area could include portions of its existing 500 kV transmission line right-of-way. The avoidance area should not include the existing line; it should allow for designation of a 1/2 mile wide energy corridor that could accommodate future needs. Lands Map 4 - the avoidance area appears to include the additional utility corridor alternative B. T1S R1W and T2S R1W just north of the Snake River. Avoidance area should be amended to exclude the new utility corridor shown as alternative B. Lands Map 5 - the avoidance area appears to include the additional utility corridor alternative B. T1S R1W and T2S R1W just north of the Snake River. Avoidance area should be amended to exclude the new utility corridor shown as alternative B. (Ltr 8)

Response: There is no need for the avoidance area maps to show existing facilities, since the alternatives affect only future utility developments, and then only major developments. The utility corridor in Alternative B lies immediately adjacent to the boundary of the avoidance area, and the affected maps have been corrected to reflect this. There is no conflict on Lands Map 5, since the utility corridor shown in Alternative B would not exist in Alternative

C. Alternative C includes only the proposed corridor south and west of the Snake River.

Comment: Alternative C with 187,200 acres of Visual Resource Management (VRM) II classification appears to strongly conflict with Alternative B Proposed utility corridor location. One of the objectives of a VRM II classification is that, "management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer", as defined on page A-163. Therefore, the utility corridor presented as Alternative B would be in direct conflict with meeting the objective Alternative C for VRM

Alternative D with 298,600 acres with VRM III classification could conflict with Alternative B Proposed Utility Corridor location. Class III VRM categorically states that any management change to the landscape should be "subordinate to the existing characteristic landscape. Structures located in the foreground distance zone (0-1/2 mile) often create contrast that exceeds the VRM class." (pg. A-163). The Proposed Utility Corridor for Alternative B could also be in conflict with the viewshed of 1-1/2 mile. (Ltr 8)

Response: Proposals within a specific alternative are evaluated only against the objectives of that specific alternative, and thus, cannot conflict with proposals in another alternative. The analysis of different alternatives is necessary to determine potential impacts and to identify a preferred alternative and its ability to meet the DFCs. We would only have a concern if proposals within the same alternative were in conflict.

Comment: Timing and spatial stipulations for sensitive biological resources should be regarded as guidelines only and not as definitive dates and distances. A one-size fits all approach puts an undue burden on the applicant. The Agency should present recommendations for controlling surface disturbing and disruptive activities as guidelines, not as mandates. (Ltr 8)

Response: The RMP contains no timing or spatial stipulations for sensitive biological resources. In the criteria proposed for evaluating routes during the route designation process,



distances from various resources were identified as triggers to denote a potential need for more critical analysis. However, the distances were not meant to be stipulations to be imposed on authorized land uses.

Comment: Recreation Alternative B: PacifiCorp must be allowed access to inspect, maintain, operate, or repair its structures and facilities without vehicle access restrictions. Any special management designations should not preclude or impede any existing uses, rights or future reauthorizations. (Ltr 8)

Response: Any and all management actions and special designations proposed in the RMP would be imposed subject to valid existing rights. As such, under all alternatives, PacifiCorp would retain the authority under their BLM right-of-way to access, operate, maintain, and repair their existing facilities.

Comment: The preliminary map of proposed corridors WWEC Study appears to show a corridor running along the southern edge of the NCA, similar to that shown for Alternative C on Lands Map 2. DRMP, p. A-101. BLM should encourage the WWEC PEIS team to utilize this existing corridor as opposed to designating a new corridor near or through the NCA. National Conservation Areas and critical wildlife habitat are two such areas; both factors are present in this situation to guide against permitting any additional corridors to be designated in the NCA. (Ltr 9)

Response: Because ongoing development in the region will require additional electrical transmission lines and petroleum pipelines, the most appropriate locations for these future facilities must be determined. It is desirable to have physical separation of energy corridors for safety and health, as well as for system redundancy. Thus, to be consistent with the WWEC Study, Alternative D has been modified to include an energy corridor located south and west of the Snake River, much like that proposed under Alternative C, with a slight modification to reduce impacts to the Saylor Creek Bombing Range air space restriction (Lands Map 2). Most of the proposed corridor would be outside of the NCA. We

believe that the proposed energy corridor is located far enough south of the Snake River to significantly reduce potential impacts to raptors and their prey. However, this analysis will be completed in the WWEC EIS.

Fire and Fuels Management

Comment: We request that the preferred alternative not include 100,000 acres of fuels management projects. (Ltr 13)

Response: Fuels management would be applied to annual dominated grasslands to reduce their susceptibility to wildfire, and thus, help to protect the monetary and ecological investments we make in habitat restoration projects. Shrublands will not be managed with fire; however, greenstrips will be improved, fire breaks will be developed, and intensive livestock grazing and any other necessary measures will be used to return shrubs and perennial grasses to their former dominance in the NCA.

Comment: The DRMP states that the northern harrier is "unaffected by wildfire..." However, the DRMP immediately refutes the conclusion within the very same sentence, continuing ". . . and nest in burned habitats significantly more often than expected. They also prefer to nest in patches of Russian thistle and stands of tumble mustard that have invaded disturbed areas." Therefore, the species is not "unaffected" by wildfire, but is apparently beneficially impacted by wildfire that disturbs shrub overstory and the ecological condition of the range. (Ltr 12)

Response: The narrative has been clarified to state that "Although we have no statistical evidence that northern harrier populations benefit from wildfires, they have been found nesting in burned habitats significantly more often than expected."

Hunting/Shooting

Comment: Shooting would absolutely be allowed on this land [Canyon Creek OHV area], if proper steps are taken to improve safety. Additionally, shooting is allowed almost everywhere adjacent to this land and most anywhere on State and Federal Land. Further, in



compliance with the request from the BLM, shooting will only be allowed in this area if a facility is constructed for the purpose of range shooting. This facility would have to comply with NRA guidelines and all plans will have to get approval from the Idaho State 4x4 Association as well as be open for public input and approval. Any costs, plans or implementation of this facility would be at no expense to the Idaho State 4x4 Association; however, we openly offer our support and volunteer our time towards fundraising for this cause. (Ltr 11)

Response: Although the approximate 300 acre Canyon Creek site is intensively used by OHV users, it will not be designated for off-road vehicle activity unless and until an acceptable management plan is developed by local entities or government that provides for management, maintenance, and supervision. Because shooting in this area would be a major safety issue, particularly if promoted for OHV use, an acceptable management plan would stipulate that no hunting or recreational shooting of any kind would be allowed in the area.

Comment: Recreational shooting is not consistent with the purposes for which the NCA was established. The NCA enabling legislation "emphasizes management, protection, and rehabilitation of habitat for raptors and other resource values of the area to the extent consistent with the maintenance and enhancement or raptor populations and habitats." Recreational shooting poses the potential for direct mortality of raptors within the NCA due either to intentional shooting or stray bullets. Recreational shooting also poses the potential to reduce raptor security within the NCA, thereby causing raptors to vacate portions of the NCA. Indirect effects to raptors may result from impacts to raptor prey species in the NCA associated with recreational shooting. (Ltr 16)

Response: We have no data to suggest that recreational shooting is causing harm or jeopardy to raptor or raptor prey populations. Lacking supporting evidence, we will not issue a determination that recreational shooting is incompatible with the NCA-enabling legislation.

Lands Management

Comment: We request that the RMP and ROD include the recommendation to Congress to change the boundaries of the NCA so as to exclude (at least) the entirety of the Browns Gulch Allotment. To this extent, we support the Lands Alternative C, Map 6. (Ltr 12)

Response: The location of the NCA boundary was based initially on the foraging requirements of raptors, with some modification to reflect land ownership and management needs. Proposed boundary modifications along Highway 78 northwest of Grandview, as well as along Pleasant Valley Road south of Boise were included in the DRMP to address the need for enhanced management resulting from increasing resource degradation caused primarily by off-road vehicle activity within and adjacent to the NCA. We have not experienced this issue in the Browns Gulch Allotment to a degree that would warrant a boundary adjustment. A boundary modification proposed merely to benefit a private landowner would be contrary to the intent of the NCA-enabling legislation and as such, your proposal is not included in the Final RMP.

Comment: Lands and Realty 3.1 Management Actions: In the third Management Action we suggest that the phrase - or at least not adversely affect - be stricken. We are concerned that there will not be a net loss of acreage from the NCA after the proposed boundary adjustments are made by the Congress. Of major concern is the need to trade out the state lands for BLM lands outside of the NCA. We are also aware that an existing major exchange proposal for the Boise Front includes the conveyance to private ownership of State Section 16, T. 3 S., R. 1 E. This is a key state section that straddles the Snake River and should be in Federal ownership. We urge BLM to take steps to make certain this section is removed from the Boise Front proposal so it can be acquired when the Lands and Realty portion of the plan is implemented. We also urge the NCA staff to give high priority to implementing the state land exchange portion of the plan. (Ltr 6)



Response: BLM manages a number of resources and programs that could potentially benefit from land consolidation. The phrase “or at least not adversely affect” was included to recognize those instances when BLM might pursue a land exchange for purposes other than improving raptor and raptor prey habitat, for example, to acquire significant cultural resources or recreation values. In those cases, we believe this language will ensure that (at the very least) the exchange will not adversely effect raptors populations and habitats. No wording change needed.

The proposed boundary adjustment in the Preferred Alternative would actually add about 10,000 acres to the NCA, and private and State lands would be unaffected. General support has been expressed for the proposal to adjust the NCA boundary for the purpose of enhancing both public use and BLM management. The boundary adjustment would require an amendment to the NCA-enabling Act, so it is possible that the proposal could change somewhat before the boundary adjustment is written into law.

A land exchange with the Idaho Department of Lands would be a high priority, since it would allow BLM to consolidate land ownership by acquiring several thousand acres of scattered State land in the NCA. The State section you reference, however, is part of the Boise Front Exchange, which in November 2006, became a legislated land exchange under the title of “Idaho Lands Enhancement Act”. As we understand it, the exchange would result in the referenced State section being exchanged into private ownership, and the private landowners would subsequently donate the property to the Peregrine Fund. Since the land is owned by the State of Idaho and is included in a legislated land exchange, BLM has no jurisdiction over disposition of the property.

Livestock Grazing Management

Comment: Livestock Grazing, Alternative C, page 4-69: In what way does removal of grazing result in a moderate to high long-term benefit to perennial communities? Please cite

long-term landscape scale studies that support this assumption. What are the slight benefits to annual communities? Is a benefit to an annual community something that would decrease the distribution and density of annual plants? (Ltr 2)

Response: We believe the positive effects of livestock removal are adequately shown by Anderson and Holte (1981) and Anderson and Inouye (2001), who reported that the removal of grazing for over 25 years at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory in southeast Idaho led to increased plant vigor, increased availability of seeds, and increased species richness and habitat diversity. We have incorporated these citations into the *Indirect Impacts* portion of the “How Activities Affect Upland Vegetation Resources” section of Chapter 4. The statement regarding benefits to annual communities has been deleted.

Comment: Conclusion-Grazing Alternative C, page 4-99: Eliminating grazing would be highly adverse to what over the short- and long-term? Adverse to grazing or to the landscape? (Ltr 2)

Response: The statement has been changed to read “Eliminating grazing, with the exception of intensively managed grazing for fuels management, would highly adversely affect livestock grazing permittees across the NCA.”

Comment: Livestock Grazing 3.1 Standard Operating Procedures/Management Actions: We suggest that there be a statement in the SOP section Page 3-48 that addresses the need for livestock graziers and the Bureau to work closely to attain the DFC. (Ltr 6)

Response: The RMP deals only with actions that BLM authorizes or otherwise has ownership in. While BLM desires to cooperate with permittees to attain DFC, we cannot require their cooperation.

Comment: We recommend an enclosure be built around occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat in the OTA and Kuna Butte area (to prevent livestock grazing). (Ltr 9, 16)

Response: Large grazing enclosures would not significantly increase protection over and



above the conservation measures contained in the 2003 slickspot peppergrass candidate conservation agreement (CCA). The vast area across which slickspot peppergrass exists in southern Idaho essentially makes grazing exclusions unworkable as a management tool for protecting the entire population. Although we cannot prevent livestock trampling, annual monitoring has shown that implementation of the conservation measures has significantly reduced trampling. BLM will continue to monitor known occurrences of the species and make appropriate adaptive management decisions, as provided for in the 2006 BLM/(U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) F&WS conservation agreement. If conditions warrant, this could include fencing of specific populations. However, additional fencing would increase the local accumulation of tumbleweeds, which could necessitate prescribed burns to remove the weed build-up. While beneficial for weed removal, prescribed burning could potentially affect nearby slickspot peppergrass plants or habitat

The 2003 slickspot peppergrass CCA provides the most comprehensive set of conservation measures aimed at ensuring that authorized activities do not jeopardize slickspot peppergrass populations or habitats. In its January 8, 2007 news release regarding its decision not to list the plant as threatened or endangered, the F&WS stated that:

“While the quality of some of the plant’s known habitat has decreased, the current population trends do not appear to be significantly influenced by this habitat degradation. It appears that the lack of spring rain is the major limiting factor for the plant’s population growth, but as survey efforts continue, new occurrences of the plant are being discovered.”

Every known slickspot peppergrass element occurrence is monitored annually to determine whether the plant or its habitat has been affected by various land uses, including livestock grazing and off-road vehicles. Further,

the 2006 conservation agreement between BLM and F&WS incorporates an adaptive management process that, based on the results of annual monitoring, identifies triggers for additional restrictions.

Comment: Since the Standards and Guides (S&Gs) are the key tools for allocating forage for livestock and managing vegetation, we urge you to give them prominent attention somewhere in the document. (Ltr 6)

Response: Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, which was developed by BLM Idaho’s Resource Advisory Council in 1997, has been included in the Final RMP as Appendix 3. Changes to forage allocations are the result of an adaptive management process that incorporates data from allotment assessment, monitoring, and evaluation.

Comment: The DRMP fails to specify a mechanism to determine changes in livestock permitted use if S&Gs are met on a grazing allotment, or determine changes in permitted use if the S&Gs are not met on such allotment. In other words, what method quantifies such change? Although the document claims that livestock stocking rates will be determined via the "S&G process", such process is not a process which can provide a quantification of livestock grazing capacity. This lack of specificity results in a failure to inform and assess for the public the quantifiable changes in permitted livestock operation that may be predictable within the foreseeable future. (Ltr 12)

Response: An RMP does not determine stocking rates or forage allocations. This is done through an adaptive management process that incorporates data from allotment assessment, monitoring, and evaluation. If an allotment is meeting S&Gs, permitted use would only be increased if monitoring showed sufficient additional permanent forage production to merit an increase in AUMs. The mechanism that would be used if an allotment was not meeting S&Gs is set out in the following regulations. Preference would only be affected if monitoring and evaluation showed that the allocated



stocking rate was not supportable by the allotment's average annual forage production.

Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 4100, Section 4180.2 S&G for grazing administration, subsection (c) states:

The authorized officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable but not later than the start of the next grazing year upon determining that existing grazing management practices or levels of grazing use on public lands are significant factors in failing to achieve the standards and conform with the guidelines that are made effective under this section. Appropriate action means implementing actions pursuant to subparts 4110, 4120, 4130, and 4160 of this part that will result in significant progress toward fulfillment of the standards and significant progress toward conformance with the guidelines. Practices and activities subject to S&Gs include the development of grazing-related portions of activity plans, establishment of terms and conditions of permits, leases and other grazing authorizations, and range improvement activities such as vegetation manipulation, fence construction and development of water.

43 CFR 4110.3 Changes in grazing preference, subsections (a) through (c) state:

- (a) The authorized officer shall periodically review the grazing preference specified in a grazing permit or lease and make changes in the grazing preference as needed to:
 - (1) Manage, maintain or improve rangeland productivity;
 - (2) Assist in making progress towards restoring ecosystems to properly functioning conditions;
 - (3) Conform with land use plans or activity plans; or,
 - (4) Comply with the provisions of subpart 4180 of this part.

(b) The authorized officer will support these changes by monitoring, documented field observations, ecological site inventory or other data acceptable to the authorized officer.

(c) Before changing grazing preference, the authorized officer will undertake the appropriate analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.). Under NEPA, the authorized officer will analyze and, if appropriate, document the relevant social, economic, and cultural effects of the proposed action.

Comment: 2.2.14 Livestock Grazing. Permitted Use (Brown's Gulch) is erroneously shown as 1,056 AUMs. It is 4,300 AUMs (subject to the Federal Court Order). Please also note that Appendix 9, p. A-35 incorrectly reports that no S&G determination has been conducted for the Browns Gulch Allotment. Appendix 9, p. A-35 reports correctly that our season of use is 3/1 to 2/28, but fails to note that we do not use the Allotment throughout the year, and that we rotate use of areas of the allotment through water manipulation (turning water troughs on and off). (Ltr 12)

Response: Appendix 10 (previously appendix 9) has been amended to incorporate the correct AUM figures with a footnote that clarifies that the actual use and type of grazing system are not identified.

Comment: Many allotments are grazed in the fall and winter, so that the ground squirrels and other small mammals get "first shot" at the year's yearly forage growth, whether it be perennial or annual species, and many of the allotments are not grazed until after the Piute ground squirrels have completed their annual above-ground activities and aestivated/hibernated. Therefore, in (at least) these circumstances, competition does not exist from the viewpoint of the small mammals, because they are already afforded unfettered access to the available forage. What actions will be taken to minimize competition between ground squirrels and livestock? (Ltr 12)



Response: Conflicts between livestock and raptor prey may not be a problem in most allotments; however, the purpose for the RMP is to set the management direction that BLM will follow if and when we need to address this situation in the future. Since the NCA was created “...to provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats...” it follows that the primary food source for raptors must be of sufficient quantity and quality to support the resident and migrant raptor populations. Therefore, any action that might tend to reduce that food source must be mitigated. Through monitoring, we would determine whether livestock grazing is affecting ground squirrels. If so, site-specific actions would be taken through adaptive management to minimize that effect.

Comment: The DRMP reports that areas treated under restoration or rehabilitation projects would be rested from livestock grazing until they achieve the desired resource objective. However, the DRMP does not specify what such objective is to be. (Ltr 12)

Response: The DRMP identifies landscape-level DFCs; project-specific objectives are developed to help move toward achieving the DFC. Prior to a vegetation treatment project BLM would develop a project specific restoration plan. The plan would include specifics pertaining to the implementation of the project: i.e., description and rationale for treatment(s); resource objective(s); time of implementation; NEPA documentation (including a site-specific environmental assessment); monitoring protocol(s); and description of quantifiable measurements to be used to define success.

Comment: The DRMP does not specify by what means BLM will quantify the livestock grazing capacity, or make determinations as to related livestock management actions such as rotation use, etc. (Ltr 12)

Response: The DRMP identifies areas open and closed to livestock grazing and does not set stocking rates or determine site-specific management actions, which are actions addressed through the allotment assessment and

evaluation process. That process would employ standard rangeland assessment protocols to quantify forage production, including clipping studies, to determine annual production, and establish initial carrying capacity for the treated area. Available forage would be allocated in accordance with watershed protection, as well as the needs of wildlife and livestock.

Comment: The DEIS fails to address the indirect impacts from livestock associated changes to vegetation and to address livestock grazing in a manner that would make the practice compatible with PL 103-64. In order for the RMP to meet the mandate to make compatibility determinations for domestic livestock grazing within the NCA with the revision of each RMP the BLM must accurately and quantitatively determine how much forage (i.e. forage capacity) is currently available. On top of this, the RMP DEIS must properly allocate that forage to watershed and stream protection, wildlife habitat and food, then to livestock if available. The NCA DRMP and Environmental Impact Statement fail to do this, and therefore violate NEPA and FLPMA. (Ltr 13)

Response: We know of no information that would suggest that, generically, livestock grazing is incompatible with the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats. The appropriate question is what level of livestock grazing is most compatible with the purpose of the NCA? That question will be answered through the allotment assessment and evaluation process. RMPs no longer allocate forage, but rather identify which lands are either available or unavailable for grazing.

Comment: The DEIS fails to define what constitutes a sustainable level of livestock grazing that conforms to the requirement to protect, conserve, and enhance raptor habitat within the NCA discussion fails to include allowable use S&Gs and/or objectives that are paramount to achieving or maintaining the above listed standards, including those for sensitive and/or threatened and endangered species. More importantly, the DEIS fails to take the required "hard look" at the impacts of domes-



tic livestock grazing. The DEIS fails to scientifically and accurately determine those lands which are capable and suitable for livestock grazing. The RMP fails to provide for long-term rest to facilitate recovery. (Ltr 13)

Response: We know of no data that shows that sustainable livestock grazing, at some level, is incompatible with the purposes of the NCA. The purpose of the S&G process is to determine what levels, locations, seasons and types of grazing are appropriate. The RMP is a landscape level document that merely identifies lands available or unavailable for livestock grazing.

Livestock grazing has been reduced or eliminated along the Snake River and its tributaries to protect the endangered Idaho springsnail and its habitat. In addition, conservation measures from the 2003 slickspot peppergrass CCA have been incorporated as a management action common to all alternatives to protect and conserve this sensitive species. The emphasis on habitat restoration will benefit raptors as well as the prey populations on which they depend.

As for long-term rest, the RMP states that areas treated for habitat restoration or fuels management will be rested for whatever time is required to ensure the treatments are adequately established and that treatment goals have been reached. The length of the rest period will continue until project objectives have been reached as determined on a project basis through monitoring. We recognize that this will likely take longer than two growing seasons.

Comment: The requirement to focus on improvement of range condition is explicit in the Public Rangeland Improvement Act (PRIA), which provides that the goal of public land range management is to improve range condition. The DEIS fails to address the lowered productivity found in the NCA and to adjust livestock grazing accordingly. The DEIS shows that domestic livestock grazing is not compatible with the purpose of the NCA, and has resulted in many negative impacts to the

ecosystem. This is particularly disturbing because, as the BLM admits, "anything that reduces the already small populations of raptors is especially critical to their survival (Marti 2002, p. 1)" (DEIS p. 2-11). (Ltr 13)

Response: BLM conforms to the requirements of PRIA through the allotment assessment and evaluation process, in which range improvement and subsequent livestock utilization are determined. The RMP does address lower productivity through management actions related to restoration and fuels management. Any changes to grazing permits would occur through the allotment assessment and evaluation process. We disagree that the DEIS shows grazing as incompatible with the purposes of the NCA. Grazing-related impacts to soils and vegetation certainly exist and will be addressed through the allotment assessment and evaluation process. However, these impacts fall short of an incompatible determination.

Comment: Under actual field conditions, light grazing (25% or less by livestock) is most appropriate to meet BLM's mandate for sustainable use and to meet the requirement for conserving, protecting, and enhancing raptor habitat. These utilization rates are the minimum needed to ensure proper functioning condition, which is the minimum acceptable condition. The BLM would do well to require at least minimum compliance with these standards in the RMP until these standards can be evaluated at the site-specific level. (Ltr 13)

Response: As stated above, forage allocations and utilization levels are set during the allotment assessment and evaluation process, not in the RMP.

Comment: Special status species in the project area include peregrine falcon, short-eared owl, and burrowing owl. Domestic livestock grazing is known to have negative impacts to these species that are not discussed in the DEIS. The FEIS should be expanded to include these negative impacts and should show how management of these species complies with the BLM Sensitive Species Manual. (Ltr 13)



Response: Peregrine falcons are spring and fall migrants in the NCA, and are likely not significantly affected by livestock grazing. Burrowing owls prefer open habitat. King (1996) found that 85.3% of occupied burrowing owls nest sites were in open grassland dominated by cheatgrass and tumble mustard. Only 17.6% of the owls had mature sagebrush growing within a 300m radius of their nest burrow. Short-eared owls may benefit from reduced grazing levels, as they are ground nesters and are usually more abundant when ground cover (in which they nest) increases from two consecutive wet springs. However, the NCA biologist has found territorial short-eared owls nesting both within and outside of the big sagebrush enclosure (constructed in 1980 north of Swan Falls) in the years following wet springs. This fact shows that the current grazing level in this area is compatible with the habitat needs of the owls. These observations are based on the NCA biologist monitoring this site a minimum of eight times annually during the breeding season (March to July).

Comment: The removal of livestock from sagebrush communities in less than satisfactory condition should be a seriously considered alternative in the RMP. Anderson and Inouye found that contemporary state-and-transition models do not fit the sagebrush ecosystem because viable remnant populations of native grasses and forbs are able to take advantage of improved growing conditions when livestock are removed. They found further that despite depauperate and homogenous conditions of permanent plots in 1950, after 45 years vegetation had been anything but static, clearly refuting claims of long-term stability under shrub dominance. Mean richness per plot of all growth forms increased steadily in the absence of domestic livestock grazing. Grasses and forbs increased significantly. (Ltr 13)

Response: Complete removal of livestock from the NCA is included as a part of Alternative C, even though livestock removal from areas dominated by annual grasses has not been shown to be an effective tool for restora-

tion. It is highly doubtful that cheatgrass-dominated sites will ever naturally recover in the NCA. There has been no visible change in the population of annual and perennial grasses in livestock enclosures built in 1980 (J. Doremus, pers com.). Cheatgrass production decreases in drier years and increases in wetter years, but for over 25 years there has been no sign that native grass is crowding out cheatgrass in the enclosures. In addition, density and canopy cover of remnant sagebrush stands have not been substantially reduced in the NCA except in areas affected by an aroga moth infestation. We believe that Anderson did much of his work at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL), which lies over 2,500 feet higher and receives more precipitation than the NCA. The NCA lacks the variety of native grasses and forbs found at the INL. The NCA is predominately cheatgrass and Sandberg's bluegrass with scattered squirrel-tail.

Comment: We request that all alternatives in the EIS include a provision for permanently retiring domestic livestock grazing allotments when conditions permit. (Ltr 13)

Response: Livestock grazing at some level is compatible with the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats. If an allotment is vacated in the future, we will determine through the allotment assessment and evaluation process whether maintaining the allotment in an ungrazed condition is desirable and meets the purposes of the NCA. The RMP states that the authorized officer will determine through the S&G process when, how, and to what extent livestock grazing will be authorized in a vegetation treatment area once it has been determined to be successful. If warranted, the resulting grazing decision would adjust authorized AUMs to reflect a new level of sustainable forage production. For example, in 1994, a grazing decision retired 2394 AUMs from the Sunnyside Spring/Fall Allotment.

Comment: Areas that are not capable of supporting grazing should be permanently retired. The BLM should address how it will handle the buy-out of grazing permits from willing



sellers by conservation and other organizations, and should work with permittees to identify those who are interested in retiring their permits or being relocated to prevent resource damage. (Ltr 16)

Response: Decisions to designate areas as unavailable for grazing are appropriately included in the RMP, and we have noted those areas where grazing will not be allowed. However, AUM reductions (through buy-outs or other means) are allotment-specific grazing decisions that result from allotment assessment and evaluation.

Comment: The FEIS must address in one or more reasonable alternatives establishing reference areas on all allotments that will not be grazed by livestock in the future. These reference areas need to include landscapes that are comparable with the portions of the allotment that remain authorized for livestock use so as to provide a comparison area for the rate of recovery of areas that do not currently meet standards for rangeland health. WWP recommends that no such reference area be less than 20% of an allotment area, and that to simplify their creation that existing units of allotments be chosen for closure to livestock as ungrazed reference areas to avoid any need for additional fencing. (Ltr 13)

Response: Forage allocation and stocking rates will be determined through the allotment assessment and evaluation process, and will be accompanied by a determination of whether livestock grazing at the determined level is compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established. There is no requirement, however, to establish reference areas on allotments, or portions thereof. While they may be established on an allotment basis through the assessment and evaluation process, the RMP will not establish reference areas.

Comment: The "Decision Framework" for the FEIS must be enlarged from the DEIS to include the possibility that if the deciding official chooses to continue livestock grazing on these allotments that he or she shall also consider if a lower level of authorized numbers,

season of use, and total AUMs is needed. (Ltr 13)

Response: As discussed above, the livestock grazing section of the RMP states that the authorized officer will determine through the allotment assessment and evaluation process when, how, and to what extent livestock grazing will be authorized in a vegetation treatment area once it has been determined to be successful. If warranted, the resulting grazing decision would adjust authorized AUMs (either up or down) to reflect a new level of forage production.

Comment: The FEIS must address additional more restrictive standards of use for livestock grazing that will ensure the protection and recovery of all springs, seeps, wet meadows and aspen clones in the project area. The BLM appears to be choosing not to protect these areas adequately and an alternative showing how a more restrictive livestock use regime could accelerate the recovery of these areas is needed to comply with NEPA. (Ltr 13)

Response: We agree that springs, seeps, and other riparian areas need special management. However, there are few seeps and springs, and no wet meadows accessible to livestock in the NCA. Also, there are no aspen trees in the NCA. Two springs north of Hammett, Idaho have been diverted into stock water troughs. All other springs and seeps are protected from grazing by not allowing Cattle in the springs and seeps during the growing season. This action is addressed in an agreement with the permittees.

Comment: The FEIS must address in one or more alternative the conflicts between recreational users and livestock in the project area. For example recreation contact with livestock wastes and smells is a topic completely unanalyzed in the DEIS. (Ltr 13)

Response: Potential conflicts between recreationists and livestock was not raised as an issue during the RMP's public scoping process. Conflicts between recreationists and livestock have only been reported from the Snake River Pasture of the Melba Seeding Allotment, which lies immediately upstream from Cele-



bration Park. This conflict is being addressed by reducing the river frontage grazed in the Snake River Pasture from over six to about three miles.

Comment: The FEIS must analyze for each alternative the impacts of the deposition of livestock solid and liquid waste on the ecology of the permitted areas of livestock use including on water quality. Typically cattle and sheep deposit thousands of tons of waste on public lands every year and the Forest service never assesses, as required by NEPA, the effect of that waste on native plants, local ecology, wildlife and microfauna including insects, amphibians, fish and small mammals. (Ltr 13)

Response: As with recreation, the affect of the deposition of livestock solid and liquid waste on the water quality and ecology of the NCA was not raised as an issue during scoping. Furthermore, we know of no information, and have collected no data, that would support such an analysis. However, we have taken steps to reduce or eliminate livestock grazing along the Snake River and its tributaries through conservation measures developed in the Biological Assessment that addressed the potential effects of livestock grazing on bald eagles and the Idaho springsnail.

Comment: The FEIS must analyze for each alternative the impacts on potential wild ungulate numbers if no livestock grazing takes place and if 50% of current livestock grazing use were selected. The FEIS must address for all alternatives the impacts of livestock grazing on hiding cover for raptor prey species as well as the potential numbers of those prey species under differing alternatives. (Ltr 13)

Response: We are unaware of the requirement to assess the impacts of 50% grazing reductions on wildlife. Section 4.2.3. states that livestock grazing has the indirect effect of damaging or eliminating shrubs where livestock concentrate, or when resources are most susceptible to damage (i.e. moist soils). Further, livestock grazing results in trampling or defoliation of forage species. Although we recognize these potential grazing-related proc-

esses, the effects analysis states that implementation of S&Gs at a landscape level, as proposed in the plan, would result in a slight reduction of livestock related impacts to upland dependent species, such as ungulates and raptor prey. The limiting factors; however, for use of the NCA by big game are lack of water and green forage in the summer. The lack of water is being addressed by the placement of water catchments in the area. Green forage in the summer will be improved by establishing perennial bunchgrasses that stay green longer than Sandberg's bluegrass. Also, maintaining a minimal amount of residual litter in annual grass communities would provide minimum food and cover for small mammals and other ground dwelling species.

Comment: Sheep and cattle grazing should be defined as permitted livestock grazing to distinguish DFCs from other goals for large game, wildlife, and wild horses. BLM should ensure grazing conforms to the S&Gs by placing a priority on assessing areas to see if they are in compliance. If the areas are not in compliance, immediate action should be taken to rectify the grazing management. (Ltr 16)

Response: In the NCA, livestock grazing, by definition, includes only sheep and cattle. The NCA would contain no wild horse herd areas in the preferred alternative. By regulation, BLM's process dictates compliance with grazing standards through annual monitoring and subsequent modifications to grazing permits if needed. Permit modifications must occur by the beginning of the grazing season immediately following the issuance of a determination that a standard(s) is not being met.

Comment: The BLM should consider the timing and levels of grazing occurring on the restoration sites post-recovery. About 40-60% utilization is considered moderate grazing, and should be the maximum allowable utilization permissible on the allotments in the treatment areas by any livestock type. (Ltr 16)

Response: This is not an RMP level decision. Post recovery grazing will be addressed through the allotment assessment and evaluation process. The actual level of permissible



grazing would be based on the habitat objectives established for the treated site.

Comment: The BLM should not allow intensive grazing management systems of any kind, whether in riparian locations or in upland locations. Preferably, grazing should be eliminated from riparian areas as delineated by PACFISH S&Gs developed for the Interior Columbia Basin no summer grazing should occur in riparian areas when they are most susceptible to grazing impacts. Grazing should also be eliminated from all riparian areas where water quality standards are not being met in accordance with TMDLs, state water quality standards, and the Clean Water Act. (Ltr 16)

Response: Grazing systems are appropriately implemented through the allotment assessment and evaluation process and are not RMP level decisions. PACFISH standards do not apply to the river system in the NCA. With exception of the 96 miles of Snake River/Bruneau River shoreline, less than five miles of riparian area are located on public lands in the NCA. Most public land riparian areas are protected from livestock grazing by fencing, natural inaccessibility, or agreement with permittees. The only grazing allotment containing an identified riparian area that is actively grazed during the summer season is the Rabbit Springs (00837) allotment. The riparian area in the Rabbit Springs allotment is less than one-half mile in length. The permittee is presently authorized to use the area every other year between August 15 and August 29.

Comment: Livestock grazing schedules should include period(s) of rest during times of critical plant growth and re-growth. Year long grazing should not be authorized. Stocking rates must include consideration of topography, distance to water, forage availability, etc. to determine realistic stocking rates. Stocking rates must also consider long-term weather/moisture history and not overstock lands based upon optimistic single-year events. Mineral, protein, and other supplements, including forage should be placed at least a quarter of a mile away from riparian/wetland areas, springs, seeps, and peren-

nial streams and rivers. The location of such materials must also not impair important biological, geological, paleontological or cultural resources and their locations. (Ltr 16)

Response: The RMP is a landscape level plan and does not identify allotment specific management actions. The allotment assessment and evaluation process will address schedules, stocking rates, etc. All grazing permits for those allotments within the NCA that are known to support viable populations of perennial forage species contain some provisions for rest/rotation. Further, all grazing permits contain stipulations for the appropriate placement of salt/mineral supplement.

Comment: All allotments containing slickspots should be retired. (Ltr 16)

Response: Conservation measures from the 2003 slickspot peppergrass CCA have been imposed on affected grazing permits to promote conservation and protection of slickspot peppergrass. The protections from grazing provided by the CCA conservation measures were part of the basis upon which the USF&WS decided not to list the species as threatened or endangered. As such, if allotments are retired it would likely not be because they contain slickspot peppergrass or its habitat.

Comment: Late spring grazing will not always prevent bunchgrasses from completing their normal growth cycle or automatically lead to failure of the seeding. The final RMP should recognize such variables rather than make generalized statements. (Ltr 17)

Response: This statement is taken out of context. The referenced section (page 2-42) states “When moisture is limiting, late spring grazing can prevent bunchgrasses from completing their normal growth cycle.” We believe our original statement is correct in regards to the effects to bunchgrasses from late spring grazing when soil moisture is limiting. However, we modified the paragraph in the RMP to include the following statement:

“When adequate soil moisture is present after livestock removal bunch-



grasses can still complete their growth cycle. Therefore it is possible to utilize grazing systems that ensure that bunch-grasses are able to set seed every year or most years.”

Comment: Page 2-46 states that heavy livestock use may result in mechanical damage to sagebrush and allow root-sprouting species such as rabbitbrush to increase. Unless the BLM can cite specific examples of where livestock grazing is producing such results on the NCA statements such as these should be deleted. (Ltr 17)

Response: The purpose for Chapter 2 is not to discuss what type of management should occur, but rather to discuss or illustrate what is actually occurring in the NCA as a consequence of current and past management. Regardless of the reasons, we have experienced impacts to shrub communities from concentrated livestock use. However, the referenced sentence has been revised to read as follows:

“Mechanical damage (crushing/breaking) to sagebrush may occur in areas where livestock are concentrated, including salt grounds, watering sites, or areas where livestock are gathered and sorted.”

Comment: On page 2-47, the DRMP states the livestock consumption of cheatgrass may result in reduced soil productivity. Does cheatgrass deplete soil carbon and nitrogen more with the presence of livestock? ISDA suggests that the final RMP cite where this information comes from. It should also be acknowledged here or in the upland vegetation section that livestock grazing on cheatgrass can prevent cheatgrass from seeding if grazed at the right time, thus enabling native grasses an opportunity to establish themselves. (Ltr 17)

Response: Cheatgrass does not deplete soil carbon and nitrogen more with grazing. The referenced text on page 2-47 has been amended to read as follows:

“In most years, livestock grazing has a limited impact on exotic annual plant communities. However, when reduced forage production results from below normal precipitation, excessive removal of annual vegetative cover has led to reduced spring soil temperatures, reduced water-holding capacity, delayed seed germination, and increased soil loss from wind/water erosion.”

Comment: There are some confusing aspects about livestock grazing closures and seasonal grazing restrictions in the description of alternatives in Chapter 3. Alternative B on page 3-49 states that 3,400 acres at Kuna Butte would be closed to grazing and an additional 1,300 acres along the Snake River would have seasonal restrictions to reduce conflicts with spring recreation. Under Alternative D, Kuna Butte would be grazed only for fuels and weed reduction on an as-needed basis as it has been classified as chiefly valuable for purposes other than grazing (pg. 3-50). More information is needed here to justify these actions. Please explain why seasonal restrictions on 1,300 acres are put on the Snake River in Alternative B and not in Alternative D. If this restriction is not in the preferred alternative, is it really necessary have it be a part of another alternative?

Response: Alternatives B and D were meant to be the same except for the change in designation of the 3,400 acre Kuna Butte area. We have corrected the livestock grazing discussion for Alternative D, as well as Livestock Grazing Table 3.1 and Grazing Map 6.

Comment: BLM should disclose how it came to the determination that Kuna Butte is "chiefly valuable for purposes other than grazing." Why are "recreation, special status plants, and cultural resources" ranked above livestock grazing as far as their value on that allotment?

Response: The decision to classify Kuna Butte as chiefly valuable for uses other than grazing took into account the following conditions:



- The area has no boundary or internal fencing, and is bordered by Swan Falls and Kuna-Mora Roads, which represent serious safety hazards for the livestock as well as vehicle occupants.
- The area abuts several dairy farms and the Forrey Heights subdivision, which requires a more intensive herding effort to keep livestock out of those properties.
- The area supports occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat, which requires special management under the 2003 slickspot peppergrass CCA.
- The area contains the historic Boise to Silver City Road, an historic feature that is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Because of its proximity to the City of Kuna, the area supports unusually large numbers of recreationists, many of whom operate off-road vehicles that disturb livestock.

The above conditions not only make livestock management difficult, but reduce the acreage usable by livestock. As such, permittees have chosen to graze their livestock on the area only once in the past 25 years. This, alone, indicates that the potential costs to be incurred by permittees in managing their livestock on the parcel exceed the value of the forage their livestock could harvest from the area.

Comment: Under the description of the "Livestock Grazing." portion of the alternatives in Chapter 3, we are concerned with the 10-year average time that areas would be rested from livestock grazing after being treated for restoration or rehabilitation (pg. 3-50). Though the DRMP states that this 10-year average is used for purposes of analysis, we feel that it is unnecessary and inappropriate to use this 10-year average even for purposes of analysis. The DRMP even acknowledges that this average is significantly longer than would normally be used. Instead, we suggest that the RMP use adaptive management for analysis purposes to determine when livestock grazing can continue on land that has been restored or rehabilitated. Restoration and rehabilitation pro-

jects can be extremely variable in their effectiveness and success depending on climate, soils, quality of seed, method used, condition of the area being treated, that even attempting to put an average time frame is purposeless. Using adaptive management to determine when livestock grazing should continue will give the BLM and the grazing permittees whom you are impacting more flexibility in making the determination as to when grazing can be re-initiated. (Ltr 17)

Response: We agree that, for any given vegetation treatment, the establishment period can vary greatly. However, for the purposes of analysis, we felt it was fair to assume a 10-year establishment period for upland projects. Although many projects might establish much faster, an average 10-year period would account for those projects that were unsuccessful or only partially successful, which would require follow-up actions that could significantly extend the establishment period. In practice, however, monitoring and adaptive management will be utilized to determine the appropriate time to re-establish land uses in the affected area. The use of monitoring and adaptive management, however, provides no consistent basis upon which to determine the relative effects of the different alternatives.

Comment: The discussions on "Livestock Grazing Management Activities" throughout the plan are an over simplification of the impacts livestock grazing. We suggest that the final RMP recognize that adverse impacts of livestock grazing on resources depends on how livestock are managed; therefore blanket statements about livestock grazing should be avoided. ISDA strongly encourages the BLM to state in this section that these adverse impacts can be mitigated through proper managed grazing and the S&G process. (Ltr 17)

Response: The "How Activities Affect..." sections are not a discussion of impacts, but rather are meant to inform the reader about the mechanisms and processes by which various effects occur. The actual effects of livestock grazing are discussed separately in each resource or land use section. The role of S&Gs and adaptive management in mitigating the



effects of improper livestock grazing has been clarified in Section 2.2.14 to include the following statement:

“...The purpose for S&G assessments is to determine whether allotments or portions of allotments are meeting the eight standards for proper rangeland health. If the assessments determine that one or more standards are not being met, grazing decisions are issued which include measures designed to mitigate the impact and to bring the allotments into conformance with the standards. These changes could include such measures as timing, seasons, duration, etc.”

Comment: The BLM needs to be cautious in the literature cited when discussing these adverse impacts in this section. For example, the RMP cites a study by Kimball and Schiffman (2003) to state that livestock grazing may benefit exotic species that are better adapted to grazing at the expense of native species. The Kimball and Schiffman (2003) study may not be applicable to southern Idaho or to every grazing system. The study was performed in California annual grasslands which is a different system than southern annual grassland with regards to biotic and abiotic factors. The researchers also clipped their plants manually rather than use livestock, which could make a difference in results. Other studies cited in this section have similar weaknesses and limited applicability ISDA suggests BLM carefully consider how it uses its literature cited in this section and others, and their limitations. (Ltr 17)

Response: We believe the study cited is applicable. We cited this study not because we believe the California annual grasslands reflect conditions in southern Idaho, but because annual grasses in arid environments respond much the same way regardless of where they occur.

Comment: Section 4.2.9 misrepresents impacts of livestock grazing to riparian/wetland areas. There are several key elements missing

in the RMP's discussion on how livestock grazing management activities impact on riparian areas and wetlands on page 4-73. The first bulleted item states, "Riparian areas can be affected by grazing in different ways depending on the season of use." How livestock affect riparian areas during a particular season of use also depends on the class of livestock, grazing intensity, duration, herding practices, other available water sources, etc. For example, even during times of high temperatures, sheep will not congregate in riparian areas if properly herded. Also, the last bulleted item of that section states, "Management actions that restrict or eliminate livestock use in riparian areas...would have beneficial direct and indirect impacts on riparian and water resources over the long-term." This, again, goes back to the idea of distinguishing between unmanaged and managed livestock grazing. There is an abundance of literature and technical references that describe grazing management schemes that benefit riparian areas without restricting or eliminating grazing (i.e. BLM Technical Reference 1737-14 1997, Grazing Management for Riparian-Wetland Areas). ISDA suggests this section be rewritten so as to not give the reader the impression that restricting or eliminating livestock grazing from riparian areas is the only way to realize positive impacts. This should also be done in the RMP's discussion on Indirect Impacts of Livestock Grazing Management Activities on Page 4-75. Section 4.2.14 "Livestock Grazing" has the same problem on page 4-96 when discussing indirect impact of livestock grazing to riparian/wetland management activities. (Ltr 17)

Response: The items you mention (class of livestock, grazing intensity, duration, herding practices, other available water sources, etc.) may exacerbate or moderate the processes discussed in the referenced section, but the processes still operate at some level. Section 2.2.14 has been clarified to show there are no sheep grazing permits that affect riparian areas in the NCA. In addition, the first sentence of the last bulleted item has been modified to read as follows:



“Management systems or actions that use grazing to modify vegetation in a prescriptive manner, including those discussed in BLM Technical Reference 1737-14, would have beneficial direct and indirect impacts on riparian and water resources over the long-term.”

Comment: In the discussion on livestock grazing and springsnails, page 4-25 states, "Livestock grazing restrictions and closures would benefit springsnails slightly at the landscape level over the long-term." There is no peer-reviewed literature to substantiate this claim. The literature contained in the two Biological Assessments cited in this paragraph have neither quantitative nor qualitative data to support adverse impacts on springsnails from grazing. The alleged threats of livestock grazing to springsnails in this literature are merely presumed. We suggest this paragraph and the paragraph on page 4-26 regarding springsnails and livestock grazing, be rewritten to recognize the limitation of data on adverse impacts of livestock grazing to springsnails; that impacts of livestock grazing on springsnails are not known. (Ltr 17)

Response: We know of no scientific literature discussing the effects of livestock grazing on Idaho springsnails. We based our discussion of potential effects to Idaho springsnail on what we believe is a reasonable and prudent assumption that fewer livestock in areas along the river and its tributaries will result in less soil disturbance, more residual standing litter, greater sediment capture, and reduced erosion and runoff. Direct benefits include reduced numbers of snails being crushed by livestock wading in and along the shoreline. Indirect benefits stem from fewer snails, eggs, and snail habitat being buried under or adversely affected by silt. We will continue to manage under this assumption until research or monitoring shows it to be in error. The last sentence in the subject paragraph has been changed to read as follows:

“...Lacking scientific evidence to the contrary, it is assumed that fewer livestock in areas along the

Snake River and its tributaries will result in less soil disturbance, more residual standing litter, greater sediment capture, and reduced erosion and runoff. Direct benefits include reduced numbers of snails being crushed by livestock wading in and along the shoreline. Indirect benefits stem from fewer snails, eggs, and snail habitat being buried under or adversely affected by silt. We assume these benefits to be landscape-wide, since only about one-eighth of existing riparian areas are now available for livestock grazing.”

Comment: On page 4-33, under "Livestock Grazing Management Activities," the DRMP states, "A lack of livestock grazing would result in a general improvement in habitat condition and quality over the long-term, which would be...slightly beneficial for SSA in annual communities." This paragraph neglects to mention the short-term benefits to livestock grazing in annual communities, which would not be realized under Alternative C. Page 4-16 states, "Reducing fuels through grading, plowing or intensive grazing along fuel breaks would result in additional short- and long-term impacts" such as preventing fire spread and "thereby precluding native habitat loss." we strongly encourage the BLM to add this language to the aforementioned paragraph on page 4-33. (Ltr 17)

Response: The following wording has been added to the referenced section. “A lack of grazing would allow hazardous fuels to accumulate, which could result in larger and more intense wildfires that have locally significant impacts on SSA and their habitat. Reducing fuels through grading, plowing, or intensive grazing along fuel breaks would result in additional short- and long-term benefits, such as reducing fire spread and associated habitat loss.”

Military Operations

Comment: Table 1.2, page 1-12: The USAF does not train in the NCA. The topic is



IDARNG and comments should pertain to the Guard's use of NCA. (Ltr 2)

Response: Table 1.2 reflects the Scoping Issues that were developed by the public during the scoping meetings. During this process, the Tribes brought forward the notion of Air Force activities having an impact on the entire area underlying their Military Operations Area. We agreed early on in the scoping process not to amend issues, but to address them to the extent possible. We have inserted a parenthetical statement at the end of the Tribe's issue, stating that there are no MOAs in the NCA.

Comment: Sec. 2.2.12, page 2-55: Military Operations Areas are not addressed in the Affected Environment or in the alternatives. If this is a non-issue, it should be stated that this issue will not be addressed by this Management Plan and EIS. (Ltr 2)

Response: Wherever "Military Training" is mentioned, it references only the activities of the IDARNG. We have clarified this in the Final RMP by adding the following comment in Section 2.2.12 of the Affected Environment Chapter: "Current training in the OTA is primarily conducted by IDARNG units, with National Guard and Reserve units from other States permitted on a space available basis. The MOU excludes active duty military units (such as Mountain Home Air Force Base) from training on the OTA except in support of the IDARNG."

Comment: Table 3.1, page 3-63: Military Training Sites should be avoided according to weapons safety footprints, as applicable. (Ltr 2)

Response: In describing the distance from training facilities, the safety zone is considered part of the facility. The distance represented in the table is beyond the safety zone.

Comment: IDARNG 3.1 Management Actions: We could not find any reference to the IDARNG taking responsibility for restoration of depleted vegetation sites within the OTA. We believe they should finance any work inside the OTA. It is also not unreasonable to

expect the IDARNG to help fund projects outside the Area. (Ltr 6)

Response: The IDARNG is mandated only to rehabilitate areas that they have disturbed through their activities. Through their environmental and fire suppression programs the IDARNG works to minimize the effects of their activities to natural resources (IDARNG 2.2.12) As stated in the RMP (4.2.8 Upland Vegetation), up to 80,000 acres of the OTA cannot be restored because of IDARNG's need for continued live firing and off-road military maneuver training. This is an unmitigated impact. BLM will work with the IDARNG to address the ongoing effects of IDARNG activities and to seek opportunities to resolve this unmitigated impact.

Comment: Ensure ongoing management to protect resources in the Orchard Training Area. (Ltr 9)

Response: We cannot respond to your comment without more specifics about which resource protections you believe are lacking. IDARNG conducts military training activities in the OTA under the authority of the 2002 BLM/IDARNG MOU. The MOU imposes on IDARNG the requirement to manage natural and cultural resources in the OTA pursuant to federal laws and regulations, including the NCA-enabling Act. Further, IDARNG is a signatory to the 2003 slickspot peppergrass CCA, which imposes on them the same management restrictions as all other signatories to the CCA.

Comment: Our concern with the military boundary changes lie with the impact this boundary change will have on the IDARNG's ability to monitor slickspot peppergrass and protect its habitat from fire. It is unclear in the preferred alternative if the IDARNG will be allowed to continue monitoring those populations of slickspot peppergrass that occur in the excluded military training area if it is removed from military training. Management decisions must ensure that the agency that has contributed the greatest amount of knowledge to slickspot peppergrass be allowed to continue monitoring the species. BLM should enter into



a MOU with the IDARNG to ensure that the IDARNG continues to monitor slickspot peppergrass habitat and populations in the Bravo area that are excluded from the training area. In addition, the MOU should specify that the IDARNG will continue to receive adequate funding in order to have the capability to quickly respond to all fires that threaten slickspot peppergrass habitat. (Ltr 9)

Response: Under the preferred alternative, IDARNG would not be excluded from the Bravo Area or any other part of the OTA. Their training activities, however, would be restricted, and would have to be conducted in a manner that protects sensitive resources, including slickspot peppergrass. The existing MOU between BLM and IDARNG specifies that IDARNG will:

“Conduct all training activities in accordance with [the NCA-enabling Act] and other applicable federal laws and regulations, as well as any Conservation Agreements and Conservation Strategies to protect special status plant and animal species.” Emphasis added.

The IDARNG environmental staff will continue to monitor cultural sites, as well as slickspot and Davis peppergrass, giant fairy shrimp, and other special status species to ensure that the above requirement is carried out. The MOU also requires IDARNG to suppress and control all fires occurring in the OTA. BLM, however, has no control over the State of Idaho and the National Guard Bureau funding mechanisms that provide for this capability.

Comment: We support restricting IDARNG training activities on 22,300 acres within the OTA to protect existing shrub communities, but providing additional acreage outside of the OTA is not compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established and we request that this expansion be removed from the preferred alternative. (Ltr 13)

Response: The net result of the preferred alternative is a reduction of military training activities on thousands of acres, which we be-

lieve is highly beneficial ecologically. As such, when assessed at the landscape level, we maintain that the preferred alternative is compatible with the purposes of the NCA. The 4,100 acres that would be added to the OTA is an area that is already substantially degraded from wildfire, and as such, has reduced value for meeting the purposes of the NCA. Additional IDARNG presence in this area for fire suppression purposes, as well as their environmental management programs, is important for reducing impacts. Reducing the impacts on 22,300 acres and increasing impacts on 4,100 acres of degraded habitat is a net benefit to the overall management of the NCA.

Comment: Sec. 2.2.18, page 2-73: In reviewing MHAFB real estate records, the area was found to be a BLM permitted landfill site for MHAFB. The section should be re-written to reflect this new information. (Ltr 2)

Response: This section has been rewritten to reflect that the area was previously used as a landfill.

Monitoring and Inventories

Comment: Indicators should be provided in the implementation plan, so monitoring can be adequately measured. (Ltr 4)

Response: Chapter 5 discusses triggers and indicators. These are somewhat general in nature and are viewed on a landscape wide basis. As a part of implementation, site specific indicators will be used that address local impacts resulting from specific implementation actions, such as recreation facility development

Comment: The RMP objective for Recreation is to provide a diversity of quality, resource based recreation opportunities. Use estimates do not measure quality. A better indicator/trigger for adaptive management would be to ask, Are quality recreation opportunities on a downward trend? A visitor survey could help answer this question. (Ltr 4)

Response: Table 5.2 has been modified to include “visitor satisfaction surveys”.

Comment: We were surprised and concerned that the section on monitoring in Chapter 5 did



not call for any monitoring of raptor populations. Managers must define and monitor "success" at all trophic levels. The monitoring section in Chapter 5 does mention monitoring the two main prey species; we will be curious to see the specifics of the proposed approach, as prey monitoring can be very expensive. (Ltr 10)

Response: There will be monitoring at all trophic levels, and Table 5.2 has been modified to include raptor population monitoring.

Comment: It is critical for the planning team to review and update the draft information to reflect current conditions in Chapter 2, Affected Environment. We are also concerned with the DRMP's proposed implementation. A 20-year time frame for a comprehensive plan is a long time. Natural and social conditions can significantly change in 20 years. Adaptive management requires monitoring. These monitoring reports really determine whether an RMP needs to be amended or revisited. (Ltr 4)

Response: The final RMP/EIS includes the most current data available to the BLM. Information about the giant fairy shrimp was added to Chapter 2. Chapter 5 discusses monitoring and identifies triggers that will be used as a part of our adaptive management process to determine when management changes are needed to achieve the objectives. Although RMPs have a 20+ year life, there is a mechanism for amending the plans, if and when conditions warrant.

Purpose and Need

Comment: There exists no valid "Purpose and Need" to pursue the RMP, or certainly anything other than the "no action" alternative. The DRMP in large part fails to specify intentions relative to each resource, i.e., which grazing Allotment(s) - the actions and impacts are expected to occur, and this lack of specificity deprives the public of the opportunity to assess the accuracy of the "Purpose and Need" for the DRMP (Chapter 1), the purported Affected Environment (Chapter 2), the appropriateness of the Alternatives (Chapter 3), and the veracity of the purported Environmental Consequences (Chapter 4). (Ltr 12)

Any activity which does not meet the NCA legislation and other applicable laws should be discontinued within the NCA. In addition, maintaining and improving wildlife habitat and restoring degraded range conditions should be reflected in the purpose and need. (Ltr 13)

Response: Because it is a landscape level document, the RMP lacks the site-specific analysis found in project or site specific environmental documents. Section 1.3, Need for the RMP, states "Among the issues and concerns to be addressed in the NCA are: "...landscape level changes in ecological condition caused by the loss of shrub habitat...the expansion of invasive and noxious weeds contributing to landscape wide changes in plant communities and ecological processes." As stated in Section 1.2 of the DRMP, the 1993 enabling legislation stated that the NCA was to be managed for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats. In essence, this requires the NCA to be managed for a dominant use, which is a significant change from the existing land use plans that prescribe multiple use management. However, dominant use does not preclude other uses. The enabling legislation allows for diverse and appropriate uses consistent with the purposes of the NCA. The emphasis on dominant use versus multiple use justifies a standalone plan for the NCA. The fact that the RMP will consolidate management from five different land use plans merely underscores the need. Maintaining and improving wildlife habitat and restoring degraded range conditions are processes that allow BLM to meet the legislative requirement to conserve, protect, and enhance raptor populations and habitats.

Comment: We understand the need to balance resource uses and assure they are sustainable over the long-term even when some uses may be in conflict. The document demonstrates that raptor conservation, protection and enhancement can be in conflict with recreation, military training and livestock grazing activities. Because Alternative C would provide the most protective management measures for the



NCA, we recommend that BLM select this alternative. (Ltr 3)

Response: As stated in Section 1.2 of the DRMP, the 1993 enabling legislation stated that the NCA was to be managed for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats. In essence, this requires the NCA to be managed for a dominant use, which is a significant change from the existing land use plans that prescribe multiple use management. However, dominant use does not preclude other uses. The enabling legislation allows for diverse and appropriate uses consistent with the purposes of the NCA. Alternatives B, C and D meet the purposes for which the NCA was established. Alternative C has the greatest social and economic impacts because of the loss of livestock grazing and limitations on the IDARNG.

Recreation Management

Comment: Other new recreation activities such as geocaching and river surfing can increase much faster than the general population growth. The RMP needs to be adaptive enough to address new and emerging recreation activities over the next 20+ years. (Ltr 4,)

Response: While the increase in population may not be directly correlated with an increase in recreation use, the demand for recreational opportunities will increase as more people move into the Treasure Valley and as new recreational activities emerge. The overall goal of the NCA plan is to allow continued recreation while protecting raptor populations and their habitat. We believe that the identified management actions along with adaptive management monitoring have provided the needed flexibility. In most areas, we have not identified a level of detail that would emphasize a given recreational activity but rather identified an “experience” such as semi primitive motorized or a desired resource condition. This should provide sufficient flexibility to meet future needs. If a specific recreation event is determined to be more than casual use, then a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) would be required. Conditions under which a SRP is required are detailed in BLM Manual 2930-1.

Comment: We suggest that you have an option for finding and developing other recreation sites as the demand grows with our ballooning population growth on or near the NCA. (Ltr 4, 6)

Response: We believe that the areas indicated for development will meet the needs into the foreseeable future. However, we have added the following wording to alternatives B and D: “As necessary, small secondary sites could be developed to accommodate the ever increasing demand for recreation”. Future site-specific facility development will be considered as part of the overall objective of enhancing resource protection, providing for visitor health and safety, and providing for user demands.

Comment: BLM ROS definitions - The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation recommends that semi-primitive be deleted from the RMP and just use non-motorized to describe these areas. (Ltr 4)

Response: Within the BLM ROS system there are two categories for a non-motorized experience; semi primitive non-motorized and primitive non-motorized. We concur that there is very little opportunity for a primitive non-motorized experience within the NCA. However, we believe there is opportunity for a semi-primitive non-motorized experience and therefore we propose managing the area for that type of experience (Appendix 17).

Comment: The DEIS states "Alternative C would provide the greatest diversity of recreation opportunities." on Page 4-108. Alternative C does not provide the greatest diversity of recreation opportunities. Alternative D provides more diversity because it provides on and off route non-motorized (hiking and equine use) travel. Alternative C greatly restricts existing motorized access in the NCA. Alternative D provides a balance between motorized and non-motorized access. (Ltr 4)

Response: The level of recreational diversity differs little between the various alternatives. While Alternative C provides for more non-motorized areas compared to Alternative D, the vast majority of the NCA (97 percent) is still accessible for motorized opportunities.



We believe this provides users with additional recreational diversity not found in Alternative D.

Comment: The NCA does not offer any semi-primitive non-motorized opportunities. The term should be changed to non-motorized opportunities. (Ltr 4)

Response: The DRMP uses traditional BLM terminology for the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). These terms divide the ROS into six categories ranging from urban to primitive. While the Halverson Bar area may not meet the strict definition of semi-primitive non-motorized, it was the only term available, using traditional ROS terms, to describe the fact that non-motorized opportunities are available in the area. Recent planning efforts have used various other terms in an attempt to better describe the six ROS categories to the general public. Some examples of these terms include “front country”, “middle country”, and “back country”. However, these terms by themselves may not accurately describe exactly what types of uses are or are not allowed or other attributes of the area. The term “non-motorized” describes only that motorized uses are not allowed in the area. The term non-motorized could be used across a range of settings from wilderness to an urban park.

Comment: Transportation Section 3.2.18 on Page 3-66 outlines the transportation options offered under Alternative D. This alternative closes 4,400 acres to motorized use, sets a route density standard of 2 miles per square mile, and designates 428,000 acres as limited to designated routes for motorized vehicles. Is the route density standard an overall standard for the NCA or is it broken into different areas? Some areas in the NCA currently have more than 2 miles of road per square mile. We are concerned that this standard could be used to prevent motorized access. In general, the IDPR is supportive of eliminating duplicate routes or dead-end routes that don't lead to a recreation destination. (Ltr 4)

We are dismayed that the agency's preferred alternative lists a route density target of no

more than 2.0 miles per square mile when Alternative B, the access alternative lists a route density of no more than 1.7 miles per square mile. DRMP, pp. 3-65 - 3-66. We recommend BLM revise Alternative D to set a route density target of no more than 1 mile per square mile as the agency-preferred alternative, with lower route densities where appropriate for species of concern. (Ltr 9)

Response: Expressing route density objectives in number of miles of route per square mile left too much room for interpretation, since the figures were averaged across the entire NCA. We are currently working with our GIS specialists to define polygons that contain specific route density categories (i.e., low, medium, high) and then develop alternatives that show varying percentages of the NCA in each category. This percentage method will be incorporated into the final document.

Comment: Please seek input from EPA regarding soils within the project area – especially for reconfiguring of landscape soils, and sewer/toilet issues. There is a concern about groundwater contamination if sewage is not handled adequately. (Ltr 2)

Response: Installation of sewer systems and vault toilets will meet all Federal, State, and local health and safety standards and regulations.

Comment: We wonder if the Management Action concerning campfires may be too stringent considering the limited availability of developed camping facilities. We recommend you're considering seasonal restrictions that consider weather, ground moisture and location in regard to flammable vegetation. (Ltr 6, 16)

Response: Historically 2/3 of the fires within the NCA are human caused. The loss of vegetation has resulted in serious impacts to the raptor prey habitat and BLM efforts at restoration have, thus far, been minimally successful and costly. Considering the extensive resource damage and the limited demand for dispersed camping within the NCA, it does not seem too onerous of a restriction to close the area to fires outside of developed camping sites. This



management action is easier for people to understand and easier to enforce than an area or seasonal limitation or one based on moisture conditions.

Soils Management

Comment: Soil Condition and Trends (p. 2-40) The DRMP states that "in areas of the NCA where historic livestock grazing has degraded the watershed, an early- to mid-seral or disturbed vegetation condition now exists". However, we are unable to find any site-specific identification of any portion of any allotment which would permit substantive review and comment of this statement by the public. The DRMP lacks any specificity and any data to make such a broad conclusory statement. The DRMP makes generic statements regarding "mechanical disturbance" resulting in "compaction and structural breakdown", and purports (p. 2-41) that several studies consider heavy livestock trampling to be more harmful to the watershed than excessive grazing. Notwithstanding whether the two cited studies (both of which share the same author) constitutes "several", the DRMP again lacks any specificity so as to identify where (which pastures or areas of which allotments, if any) such generalization of potential impacts has been documented as being fact rather than a "potential". (Ltr 12)

Response: The RMP's landscape scale of analysis should not be confused with more site-specific or allotment-specific and detailed analysis used for S&Gs. The Affected Environment chapter is a generalized description of a given resource or land use, and is not meant to be allotment or pasture specific. The statements describing vegetative trend in the NCA are based on BLM studies, photo interpretation, fire history, and a number of other sources that verify that ecological conditions in the area have been degrading over time from vegetation communities that once supported shrubs with an understory of deep-rooted cool season bunchgrasses to communities that are now dominated by annual invasive grasses and short-rooted cool season bunchgrass with little or no shrub overstory. BLM recognizes that the level of grazing-related

impacts throughout the NCA, both positive and negative, vary by season and type of management.

Comment: The DRMP demonstrates an unsupported, unscientific, and unfounded bias regarding, "biological crust" at page 2-46, wherein the DRMP states, "Native communities are most susceptible to mechanical damage because their native biological soil crusts have not as yet been compromised." However, it is self-contradictory, because the passage follows a lengthy description of how the entire NCA has been severely disturbed by historic livestock grazing that forever altered the vegetative state and removed the desirable understory species, leaving only Sandberg bluegrass. The DRMP states that "Degraded areas would be restored to shrub/bunchgrass habitat with a forb component and biological soil crust to provide additional habitat for small mammals, invertebrates, lizards, snakes, and birds." However, we know of no evidence that "biological crust" is a necessary, nor even beneficial, habitat requirement for any animal species. The DRMP also lacks any specificity as to how or where "biological crusts" will be "restored". (Ltr 12,)

Response: A significant portion of the NCA has been impacted by historic livestock grazing, as well as wildfire, military training, and off-road vehicle activity. However, areas of native vegetation still exist and many of these have an intact or relatively intact biological crust component. The biological crust component is not usually referred to as a segment of the understory because it includes organisms such as lichens, fungi, and cyanobacteria that are technically not considered plants (vascular plants). A recent study (Serpe *et al.* 2005) revealed that a biological soil crust dominated by short mosses had a negative effect on seed water status and significantly reduced seed germination of cheatgrass. Many invertebrates, including insects and arthropods, are dependent upon soil crusts (lichens and bryophytes) for habitat (Serpe *et al.* 2005). Currently there is no well-established method for reestablishing soil crusts on a site. However, the RMP appropriately outlines a need to do



this restoration if and when suitable cost effective methods are developed. The priority identified in the DEIS for restoration focuses on the restoration of areas that at one time had a shrub component. Restoration would initially target areas with the greatest likelihood of successful restoration, primarily areas near existing shrub communities and areas that are being rehabilitated following wildfires. As technology advances and as opportunities arise, we will work toward the re-establishment of biological crusts as a part of our restoration.

Comment: Precipitation data needs to be updated to include the most recent years. Further, the precipitation data appears to hold no relevance unless compared "to" something else. Did the vegetative trend decline when the precipitation was below average? We know from the discussions regarding prairie falcons and golden eagles that the below-average precipitation years obviously had no impact on the "barometer" raptor species, so what is relevant about this statement? (Ltr 12)

Response: More recent data about precipitation trends for the NCA has been incorporated. Precipitation at the Bruneau weather station was 7.34", 5.67", and 10.21" in 2003, 2004, and 2005, respectively. Section 2.2.8 has been rewritten to include information relative to the affect of drought on raptors.

Comment: Soil Table 3.1 summarizes BLM's purported intention to "prevent the potential for future localized soil erosion process on all soils with a moderate to very high soil erosion potential", under all alternatives. It would appear that BLM intends to prohibit any and all activities that "might" have an impact on soil erosion, no matter how miniscule such impact may be. This is not rational, reasonable, nor realistic, and in fact conflicts with other management and objectives. (Ltr 12)

Response: We should have said "minimize potential soil erosion". This change has been incorporated in the Final RMP. The objective is specific to localized types of authorized activities on these soils, not natural processes. By "localized", the objective is referring to

site specific activities that can accelerate erosion and that can be mitigated by implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) or by adding stipulations to permits, agreements, contracts, or other authorizations.

Special Designations

Comment: Table 3.1, page 3-60: Are there altitude restrictions/parameters that would be implemented for aircraft if a W&SR designation were made. Designation as W&SR could negatively impact MHAFB aircraft operations. (Ltr 2, Cmt 8, Federal Agency/Elected Official)

Response: Air space and altitude restrictions are imposed only by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), not the BLM. The outstandingly remarkable values identified for these sections of the Snake River are wildlife (raptors) and associated recreation (primarily raptor/bird viewing). If these river sections were designated by Congress as Wild and Scenic Rivers, the resulting management direction would be to protect the identified outstandingly remarkable values. Designation would only have negative impacts to MHAFB aircraft operations if the operations were shown to have negative impacts to the identified wildlife (raptors) or recreation (raptor/bird viewing) values.

Comment: BLM has severely restricted the public's ability to provide the agency with significant new information or to provide an alternative analysis. BLM readily admits that these four river segments are free-flowing and contain outstandingly remarkable values, BLM fails to explain how Alternative D will continue to protect these values, including protection from future dam construction, in light of the BLM's determination that these segments are not suitable for recommendation to Congress for WSR consideration. Instead of providing a detailed description of the management prescriptions BLM will use to protect the outstandingly remarkable values present on the 49 eligible miles of the Snake River within the planning area, the DRMP/EIS simply states, "The existing NCA legislation provides protection for the outstandingly remark-



able values associated with the Snake River Canyon" (pg. 3-58). BLM must provide specific and detailed descriptions of the management prescriptions it will use to protect outstandingly remarkable values and free flowing conditions of the Grand View, Indian Cove, Jackass Butte, and Swan Falls segments of the Snake River. (Ltr 9)

Response: For Wild and Scenic Rivers, the range of alternatives included one alternative where all eligible river segments were considered suitable for designation and one alternative where no river segments were considered suitable for designation. Alternative D determined that the four segments would not be recommended to congress for designation because the values that made them suitable are adequately protected under the proposed management identified in the RMP. The determination that each segment would qualify under the W&SR Act was based on a determination of eligibility and suitability at the recreational river level. This level of protection generally does not provide for any additional coverage over that provided by the NCA enabling legislation. The NCA legislation does not necessarily preclude future dam sites along the Snake River from being considered as a possible site for dam construction. However, based on discussions with Bureau of Reclamation and Idaho Power Company, we believe that possibility to be extremely remote. We believe that the VRM management class designations along with increased management emphasis for recreation will provide a similar level of protection to that provided by the NCA enabling legislation. Wild and Scenic River suitability determinations have been completed for the Snake River and will be included in the Final RMP/EIS.

Comment: I urge that this area be established as a wildlife fish plant habitat sanctuary preserve. To designate each of the following streams as a National Wild and Scenic River: Sand Creek, Rabbit Creek, Conden Creek, Squaw Creek, Canyon Creek, Rattle Snake Creek, Bennett Creek. (Ltr 5)

Response: Rabbit Creek and Conden Creek do not exist in the NCA. The other five creeks

do not meet the basic eligibility requirements for consideration as a Wild and Scenic River. As an NCA, the area is managed to protect the raptors and their habitat, which affords special protection over and above that provided on most public lands in the West.

Comment: Recreation Alternative C: The designations of Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) for Snake River Canyon, Owyhee Front and Oregon Tail are in relative close proximity to PacifiCorp's line. The Wild and Scenic River (W&SR) designation could pose the same conflicts as the SRMA's making it impossible for PacifiCorp to renew our permit for the existing transmission line. (Ltr 8)

Response: SRMA and W&SR designations are proposed to protect special resource values or land uses, and would have no effect on prior existing rights, including your existing utility line. In making the determination that the designations are appropriate, consideration of existing facilities and uses are a part of the determination.

Comment: Enlarge the NCA to 726,813 acres, with a wilderness of 618,192 acres. (Ltr 5)

Response: We cannot respond specifically to your suggestion, since you did not identify which lands you want added to the NCA. The initial NCA boundary was based, in part, on the foraging area needed by raptors and we believe the boundary generally meets the intended purpose. The NCA-enabling legislation formally released the NCA from further consideration under the Wilderness Act. The boundary adjustment proposed in the preferred alternative would enlarge the NCA by about 10,000 acres.

Comment: The RMP fails to comply with FLPMA's requirement to "give priority to the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC)" in order to ensure appropriate management of vulnerable resources such as slickspot peppergrass and the giant fairy shrimp. (Ltr 9, 16)

Response: ACECs are established to protect unique and sensitive resources from the effects of land use activities. BLM, however, will im-



pose no ACEC designation without understanding how and to what extent additional protection is needed to enhance the species or its habitat. Areas proposed for ACEC designation require an evaluation of both relevance and importance. While slickspot peppergrass may be both relevant and important, the protection provided by an ACEC designation within the NCA would be ineffective because: 1) the range of the species extends far outside of the NCA; 2) the species is currently managed under the 2003 CCA (Appendix 12) that contains specific conservation measures to protect the species; and 3) the NCA legislation already provides the protective segregative effect that would be provided through an ACEC withdrawal. The F&WS recently released slickspot peppergrass from further consideration as a listed species because in its view, "...current population trends do not appear to be significantly influenced by this habitat degradation." Slickspot peppergrass will continue to be protected through our imposition of CCA conservation measures on all applicable land use authorizations, as well as through our travel management planning process. Further, adaptive management protocols contained in the 2006 BLM/F&WS conservation agreement provide a mechanism for identifying those instances where additional management protections may need to be imposed.

We have incorporated a discussion of the giant fairy shrimp in Chapter 2 and management actions in Chapter 3. The giant fairy shrimp was recently identified as a new species. However, no data exists to suggest that the giant fairy shrimp or its habitat is threatened. Because we know virtually nothing about the species' range, its population biology, or its biological and ecological requirements, we are concerned that we could unknowingly harm the species in an attempt to protect it. For instance, we have been asked to fence out the two playas within which the giant fairy shrimp has been found. However, it is possible that tumbleweeds caught on the fence might pile up or otherwise accumulate in the playas, thus modifying existing ecological balances in a way that harms or jeopardizes the species. The

species has apparently tolerated historic and current land uses. However, we do not yet know whether current land uses are a benefit or detriment to the species, or whether there is any effect. Until we know more about the species' biological and ecological requirements, we cannot reasonably assess relevance, determine importance, or develop effective special management prescriptions, if indeed they are warranted. We fully expect that playas will be designated as off-limits to motorized vehicles through our travel management plan. The Final RMP includes the following management action in section 3.2.6.1: Giant fairy shrimp habitat would be managed with protection of the fairy shrimp as a priority. As more is learned about the fairy shrimp's biological and ecological requirements, BLM will incorporate appropriate protection measures.

Technical and Editorial Comments

Comment: Sec. 4.2.3 etc., page 4-12, etc.: "Assumptions" appear to be goals or objectives. Is this really adaptive management if the plan needs to make major assumptions to be valid? (Ltr 2)

Response: Assumptions listed for each resource or resource use are not goals or objectives, but rather provide "side boards" to proposed management actions, which help clarify the purpose, intent, and extent of the management action for analysis purposes.

Comment: Page 2-37. Please provide a reference for the statements "it is unlikely...that voles play a major role in short-eared owl densities away from agriculture or riparian areas. Density of vegetation is more likely the key to their nesting in upland areas." The 3-fold difference in Short-eared Owl density during the 1990s appeared to be related to vole abundance. (Ltr 10)

Response: The referenced statement was deleted.

Comment: The DRMP fails for the most part to reference the proposed and alternative actions to the maps and tables included within the document. It seems logical that if BLM can specify 10,000 acres to 130,000 acres



within a planning document, it has reasonable knowledge as to where it expects such acreage to occur, and it is incumbent upon BLM to report such knowledge in the DRMP document for public review and comment. The DRMP fails to do so. The DRMP fails to specify what "mosaics" of different seral states it anticipates as the DFC within the NCA, but instead is driven by a generic "restoration" goal. This lack of specificity of the DRMP renders it impossible for the public to provide adequate review and comment to the document. (Ltr 9, 12)

Response: The RMP is an umbrella planning document that sets the management direction for an area. The examples you cite provide direction to substantially increase restoration efforts within the NCA, which is appropriate for this level of planning. The exact location of proposed restoration projects will be determined on a site-by-site basis following RMP completion. The RMP states in Section 3.2.8 that restoration efforts would be prioritized using a variety of criteria, including soils, ecological types, and precipitation zones, as well as proximity to existing shrub communities, sensitive species habitat, raptor nesting sites, roads, and fences. At that time, the projects will be subject to public comment and site-specific analysis.

Comment: There are several areas of the DRMP that fall short of complying with the NCA enabling legislation and management goals directed by Congress, as well as with the BLM's obligations under FLPMA. Specifically, our concerns include the RMP's failure to commit to a sufficiently definitive approach to restoration. (Ltr 9)

Response: Specific restoration techniques were purposely not defined to ensure that the most current technology and available science was utilized in our restoration efforts. We have also provided for areas to be set aside for research purposes, specifically to encourage research that may help us improve our restoration efforts.

Comment: A review of page 4-14 reveals that the preparers of the document believe that any

and all livestock grazing creates negative impacts (e.g. "collapse of burrows"), notwithstanding the fact that ground squirrels plug their burrows themselves, and don't seem to have any difficulty digging their way out each spring), and that livestock grazing has absolutely no positive impact, under any circumstance (i.e. dormant season grazing, rotational grazing, etc). This section fails entire to recognize and report that livestock grazing at appropriate levels and time can reduce the likelihood of recurrent wildfires, which have more devastating impacts upon the forage and cover requirements of all wildlife species. By contrast, the section at page 4-16 attributes absolutely no adverse impacts, either short-term or long-term, to activities associated with "restoration activities". However, such restoration activities will almost certainly involve rangeland seeding, with rangeland drills and heavy equipment that are most certainly more likely to cause short-term "collapses of tunnels" and disturbance of surface soils. Likewise, the chemical treatment of areas to reduce cheatgrass and other species will in at least the short-term decimate the food base for countless Piute ground squirrels and other small mammals using the immediate area. In the case of Alternative D, this will likely entail 230,000 acres of habitat over 20 years (an average of 11,500 acres per year), with obvious short-term and possible long-term adverse impacts to the prey base populations. The DRMP also fails to specify and fully discuss the short-term and long-term impacts upon the raptors as a result of predictable, at least short-term, declines in prey base populations and their habitat as a result of "restoration" activities. (Ltr 12)

Response: The discussion in the "How Activities Affect..." sections has been expanded to include the statement "Restoration activities (including chemical treatment to reduce cheatgrass) that disturb soils and/or temporarily eliminate forage will cause at least short-term localized adverse impacts to raptor prey populations and potential short-term impacts to raptors that depend on them".



Comment: Fish and Wildlife Table 3.1 Management Actions: Since the work started on this RMP, the Bureau has acquired the property near Grandview temporarily known as the Bull Pasture. The acres of woodland to be planted should be increased from 100 to include the acres envisioned for this site. Also, there is an existing pond that will be renovated which should be reflected in this management action. (Ltr 6)

Response: The parcel you reference was acquired prior to the start of the RMP, and thus, is included in the 100 acres to be developed as woodland. The pond that exists on the parcel is part of the riparian area that is addressed as needing rehabilitation. The riparian rehabilitation will include sealing the bottom of the pond to enhance its water holding capability.

Comment: The DEIS claims on page 3-26 that "...where livestock grazing is permitted it would be managed through the S&G process." BLM is required to ensure that management plans and programs provide for the conservation of listed and sensitive species and their habitats. The development of S&Gs to ensure that this requirement is met should be completed at the RMP level as described in the manual. The FEIS should include this important step in the process. (Ltr 13)

Response: Allotment assessments and evaluations are not land use plan-level documents. Rather, they incorporate management direction from existing land use plans and relevant regulations and policies, and prescribe management that is meant to move affected grazing allotments toward their desired condition. In circumstances where listed or sensitive species are affected, adaptive management decisions would provide for livestock grazing management that ensures the continued conservation and protection of the species and its habitat.

Comment: The DRMP, on page 1-13, states that the plan will address the need for boundary changes to enhance the public's ability to use the NCA and BLM's ability to manage the area. We caution BLM in its approach to the proposed changes. Under the descriptions of

the alternatives C and D, the DRMP makes no mention of an effort to consult with landowners on this issue. The RMP in its current form does not analyze how changing the boundary to increase the size (Alternatives C and D) of the NCA will impact the value of the private land and the change of management of BLM lands from a multiple use to the purpose identified in the law that established the NCA. (Ltr 17)

Response: The NCA boundary adjustment proposal has been discussed with many groups and individuals throughout the planning process. In every instance, we received full support for the proposal once we explained the reasoning behind the proposal, and why we felt it would facilitate both BLM management and public use.

Section 4(h) of the NCA-enabling Act clearly states that "Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed as constituting a grant of authority to the Secretary [of Interior] to restrict recognized agricultural practices or other activities on private land adjacent to or within the conservation area boundary." Further, Section 6 (a)(3) states that "Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed as by itself altering the status of any lands that on August 4, 1993, were not managed by the Bureau of Land Management."

As such, there is no indication that Congress felt the NCA designation would adversely impact adjacent private land uses or their value.

Your recommendation to evaluate impacts on private lands from a change in management caused by a proposed NCA boundary adjustment is not possible, since comparable sales in the private sector would provide no information that would illuminate this effect, if it exists. If anything, having the NCA adjacent to private lands could potentially have a positive effect on their appraised value, since the landowner could count on the BLM lands being managed for a specific purpose over the long-term.



Comment: Why are all tables labeled Table 3.1? (Ltr 2)

Response: For simplicity (or so we thought), each separate resource or activity discussed in Chapter 3 has its own Table 3.1, which shows the objectives and management actions proposed for that specific resource or activity. For clarity, each Table is prefaced by the name of the resource or activity being discussed, such as Air Table 3.1, Cultural and Tribal Table 3.1, etc.

Comment: On Page 2-68 in Section 2.2.16, Recreation Sites, the DRMP states that the NCA only has two developed recreation sites (Cove and Dedication Point); however, the draft lists three sites (Cove, Dedication Point and Rabbit Creek). Celebration Park is also another developed recreation site within the NCA, but is managed by Canyon County Parks and Waterways. (Ltr 4)

Response: We have clarified in the Final RMP that three BLM-managed developed recreation sites exist on public lands in the NCA (Cove Recreation Site, Dedication Point, and Rabbit Creek Trailhead). Please note, however, that under Preferred Alternative, Rabbit Creek Trailhead would no longer be within the NCA.

Comment: Page 1-1. The text refers to the 1996 NCA Management Plan. The reference list shows the management plan as having been published in 1995. The copy we have in our office shows 1995 not 1996 as the publication date. (Ltr 10)

Response: Although the NCA Management Plan was published in December, 1995, it did not become final until the appeal period elapsed in February, 1996, after which the District Manager signed the ROD.

Transportation and Off-Road Vehicles

Comment: It is unclear whether Off-Highway Vehicle use to maintain power transmission and distribution lines is expressly authorized or otherwise officially approved. Right-of-way holders must be allowed access to inspect or repair their structures and facilities without vehicle access restrictions. These vehicles will

use existing roads and trails as much as feasible, but in some cases, the use of overland travel may be required. The definition of administrative tasks should be expanded to include power delivery operation and maintenance (O&M) activities and include emergency actions necessary to restore power. Authorization for travel access should be given within and outside of existing ROW on designated roads, trails or other routes as required. (Ltr 8)

Response: The RMP includes no provisions or proposals that would alter or reduce valid existing rights. Holders of authorized ROW are permitted access across public land to inspect, maintain, and repair their facilities according to the stipulations attached to their specific authorization(s). If no specific stipulations are attached, then the right-of-way holder is subject to applicable federal regulations. BLM could restrict right-of-way holders to specific access routes to protect sensitive resources, but would not preclude access altogether.

Comment: PacifiCorp generally supports most components of alternative D but has concerns that all transportation systems "would be located within the existing utility corridor" (pg 3-68 table 3.1). PacifiCorp would prefer to see the continued use of existing road network transportation language as described in alternative B. (Ltr 8)

Response: Proposals in the RMP are subject to valid existing rights. The alternative refers only to new utility transportation systems being located within the existing corridor. To be consistent with the WWEC Study, Alternative D has been amended to include an energy corridor south and west of the Snake River.

Comment: BLM should complete a comprehensive travel management plan or, at a minimum, commit to completing such a plan within one year. (Ltr 9)

Response: BLM is committed to begin the Travel Management Planning process following completion of the RMP.



Comment: The route evaluation criteria in the RMP should be strengthened to ensure that routes designated within the NCA are consistent with BLM's legal obligations and responsible management. The current arrangement of the eight criteria for route evaluation set out on pages 3-61 and 3-62 of the DRMP is skewed towards keeping roads open regardless of their impact on the ecosystem. The last criteria, "Is this consistent with the RMP and the intent of the NCA-enabling legislation", should be the primary criteria used for evaluating routes. We Recommend BLM use question number eight as a filter through which only those roads which are found to be consistent with the NCA enabling legislation can be further analyzed to be kept open in the TMP.

Response: We agree that question #8 on page 3-62 of the DRMP should be the primary consideration during the route designation process. We disagree, however, that the eight questions are skewed toward keeping roads open. Although the questions are not listed in priority order, we believe that answers to some of the questions are critical to determining whether designation of a particular route is consistent with the enabling legislation.

Comment: ARS Tree should eliminate yes/no questions, and remove the branches that imply an order of issues to be raised: By phrasing the data-gathering inquiries as yes or no answers and by placing them in the order shown, inquiries should be phrased to report all information on a route, including impacts. ARS Tree should incorporate information on potential cumulative impacts. In order to comply with NEPA, the ARS Tree must gather information regarding how-and to what degree-the designation of individual routes as either open or limited would cumulatively affect sensitive and non-sensitive resources. Laws require that motorized routes can only be located in a manner that minimizes impacts to soils, water, wildlife, and other recreational users. When presenting the information specify that any routes designated to be opened or to remain open are consistent with the laws, Executive Orders and regulations. ARS Tree should include description/evaluation of mitigation

measures. Further, monitoring is not an appropriate form of mitigation, because monitoring for expected damage does not actually reduce or alleviate any impacts. (Ltr 9)

Response: Many of these concerns are premature because the route designation process will not begin until the RMP has been finalized. BLM's intent in the RMP was to get public understanding and acceptance of the criteria (Transportation 3.2.18) that would later be used during the analysis and designation of specific routes. Reference to the ARS process has been deleted. BLM used the ARS software merely as a tool to sort and categorize data that will later be used to designate routes. BLM will determine the best method of analyzing data at the start of the route designation process. We will go forward with a route designation process as soon as possible following issuance of the NCA RMP ROD. While BLM will use the latest and most up-to-date information available, it is not reasonable to postpone decision making because of data gaps for which we are unaware. Rather, we will make decisions based on the best and most current information available, and then allow those decisions to be amended through adaptive management. Proposed mitigations will be developed during the route evaluation process.

Comment: BLM should follow the following eight travel planning principles and use an approach that ensures that only routes which comply with the NCA legislation and BLM's ORV regulations, and which truly serve a valid purpose for the public, remain open. Further, the involvement of ORV groups in the travel planning process should be limited in practice to obtain input from all users of the public lands and make informed, responsible designations of areas and routes suitable for ORV use. (1) Travel management is part of land use planning and should address both recreation and transportation needs from a landscape perspective; (2) Prior to conducting an inventory or designation of routes, BLM should assess the present resources, requirements for protection, and which uses for recreation and development are compatible with these resources, requirements and other users;



(3) BLM should use a legal definition of "road" when designating routes; (4) BLM's consideration of ORV use should take into account its potential damage to resources and other uses, including exclusion of other users; (5) Where BLM presents a baseline travel system, it must present route maps in a responsible manner that does not legitimize illegally-created routes; (6) BLM should include a detailed closure and restoration schedule in the plan; (7) BLM should include and implement a monitoring plan; (8) BLM should include and implement education and outreach in the plan. (Ltr 9)

Response: The eight principles outlined are good suggestions that will be incorporated as appropriate when BLM initiates travel management planning following the final RMP. We will not, however, limit the involvement of any interested individual or group in the travel management planning process.

Comment: BLM should use the information provided in "Habitat Fragmentation from Roads: Travel Planning Methods to Safeguard BLM Lands" (Appendix 1) or the criteria from the Dillon MT RMP to measure habitat fragmentation, then conduct a thorough fragmentation analysis and revise the route evaluation criteria that will be used when making road closure and/or other limitations on motorized use during implementation of the NCA RMP. (Ltr 9)

Response: Following the ROD, criteria will be refined during the route evaluation process. We encourage your involvement throughout this process.

Comment: In the Transportation Cumulative Impacts on Page 4-141, the DEIS states "Route designations in the Bruneau, Owyhee, and NCA could initiate or accelerate route designations on State and other land ownerships." This statement is inaccurate. Also on this page, the DEIS states "Overall the USFS and State Parks have begun to develop route designation processes, which could further limit opportunities in the region for cross country ORV use." The IDPR is not developing a route designation process, though we are

working cooperatively with federal and state agencies in their travel planning processes. (Ltr 4)

Response: The referenced comment was deleted.

Comment: The 4x4 community would ask to designate the canyon trail that leads north from the Simplot feedlot to the canyon rim for technical 4WD/Rockcrawling. We would suggest mitigation and management of this trail as follows: (1) Use of the trail would not be in the season of high fire impact; (2) Use of the trail would not be used during known raptor nesting periods; (3) Limitation of the number of vehicles that are on the trail during each visit; (4) Agree to limitation to season use and (5) The 4x4 community would provide trail maintenance as needed, under the guidance provided by the BLM. (Ltr 7)

Response: The referenced trail lies within an area that is proposed for OHV limited designation, in which vehicles would be limited to designated routes. As such, proposed use of the trail will be reviewed during the route designation process that follows the RMP. We encourage your involvement throughout that process.

Comment: Sec. 2.2.18, page 2-73: The reference to the "Air Force OHV Area" should be removed. The activity is not sanctioned by the Air Force or connected to the Air Force. Off-duty AF personnel may be using the area, but the area is heavily used by other non-AF OHV users. (Ltr 2)

Response: The narrative now references the area as being located along the Canyon Creek sand wash.

Comment: Several individuals and organizations have expressed an interest in maintaining the use of the Canyon Creek site for OHV activity. Current support of this management request by Elmore County and officials in nearby cities, gives the opportunity and possibility for a land swap that would exchange this land, value for value, with land that is a better candidate for conservation designation. We hope to secure the designation of this area as



an open motorized recreation area and implement management ideals that would satisfy most members of the public with an interest in this land. (Ltr 1, 7, 11, 14, 15)

Response: We have met on several occasions with individuals interested in keeping the area open for continued OHV use. Off road vehicle activity disturbs soil and displaces vegetation, both of which are detrimental to raptor populations and habitats which the NCA was established to protect. As such, these activities are incompatible with the purposes of the NCA, which is the reason the area has been designated as limited to designated routes and not open to cross country travel. However, we recognize that the activity has occurred in the Canyon Creek area for decades, and this area does not easily lend itself to restoration. Therefore, we will not limit use to designated routes for a period of one year after signing the ROD so that we can work with local government and/or user groups to establish a workable solution that will ensure impacts from the activities do not extend outside of the area. An acceptable management plan would require a local user group(s) or government entity to assume responsibility for management, maintenance and supervision of the area. Section 3.2.18 has been modified to include this information

Comment: On page 2-81, the DRMP states, "Socio-economic Tables 2.5 and 2.6 show that off-highway motorbikes and ATV registrations have had the largest increase compared to snowmobiles (22.7%)". The Idaho snowmobile registration increase has been driven by the non-resident registration requirement. Resident snowmobile registrations increased 10.1% between 1998 and 2002. Resident snowmobile registrations decreased 9.1% between 2001 and 2005. The 2004-2005 snow season was below average, which decreased registration sales. (Ltr 4)

Response: Tables 2.5 and 2.7 and the associated narrative have been modified to incorporate the latest available data. New data for Table 2.6 is not available.

Vegetation Management

Comment: Vegetation-Restoration bullet, page 4-5: Degradation and erosion are adverse effects that must be mitigated. There is thread through this section that seems to imply that natural processes acting on a [cultural] site that cause the loss of context and data are acceptable. (Ltr 2)

Response: Section 4.2.2 includes an assumption that cultural sites would continue to be impacted by natural weathering and erosion. We accept this reality even under the very best of conditions. However, the best of conditions is not the reality in the NCA. As such, to the extent possible, we will attempt to reduce weathering and erosion by improving the ecological conditions in the NCA. However, even in those situations where we have the greatest success, natural weathering and erosion will continue, over which we have no control.

Comment: Surface Disturbing Activities, pages 4-58, 4-59: Repeated localized impacts can limit the ability of desirable plants to re-establish and facilitate the establishment of undesirable plants, such as noxious or invasive species. (Ltr 2)

Response: Sentence was changed to read: "Repeated localized impacts can limit the ability of desirable plants to re-establish by reducing their numbers and reproductive capability, thereby facilitating the establishment of undesirable plants, such as noxious or invasive species."

Comment: Is green stripping not contemplated or will some of these new fire breaks actually be green strips? We believe that green stripping is as important for any fire protection plan where Cheat Grass is a major component of the landscape. (Ltr 6)

Response: The term "fire break" is a generic term that includes greenstripping. The actual fire break method to be used would be determined on a project-by-project basis. "Green-strip" was added to the glossary.

Comment: Winterfat doesn't show up as a particularly important shrub. The blocked up patches of this plant may be unique this far



north in Idaho. We suggest that this plant should be given higher status than just another shrub. The NCA may host the northernmost Winterfat monoculture patches in Idaho and it should receive extra attention as to how it is grazed and how it is protected from fire. We believe Winterfat should qualify as a SSP, or at least as a plant of significant concern. (Ltr 6)

Response: The patches of winterfat to which you refer are not monocultures, as many other plants species occur in these areas. Special status is generally inferred on those plant species that are rare, locally endemic, or significantly threatened in some way. Winterfat does not meet these criteria. However, it is an important component in the NCA and critical for the prey base as a food source. We consider winterfat as an important component of the shrub community that we are trying to protect.

Comment: The RMP alternatives provide no management solution to ensure the future of slickspot peppergrass. The slickspot peppergrass populations in the NCA are relevant and important. These nominations meet the relevance requirement as a significant wildlife resource because they involve the protection of habitat for a sensitive species and a natural process. This nomination meets the importance requirement for ACEC nominations because of the crucial role the slickspot peppergrass populations in the OTA and near Kuna have in ensuring the future survival of this species. In order to ensure that the best-known populations of this rare plant species are protected, the areas identified on the attached map should be protected from all grazing activity. The best and most effective means to accomplish this is to build an enclosure surrounding the areas.

BLM should impose the following management prescriptions to protect slickspot peppergrass populations from adverse impacts:

- Limit seeding use after fires: The study done by Meyers et al. identified that the use of *Kochia prostrata* and other non-native species, as well as the use of pre-

emergent herbicides were threats to slickspot peppergrass. Because re-seeding efforts outside of the ACEC nomination areas can affect slickspot peppergrass populations within the ACECs, the use of non-native species for re-seeding anywhere in the NCA should be prohibited. In addition, any herbicide or pesticide demonstrated as having or with the potential to demonstrate a negative effect on slickspot peppergrass should not be used within the ACECs.

While the agency preferred alternative addresses several of the documented threats to slickspot peppergrass, it fails to provide viable solutions to all of the threats. The DRMP does not define what "minimize impacts" means nor does the DRMP provide specific management prescriptions. Pursuant to BLM Manual section 6840, recreational OHV use should not and cannot supersede the need for protection of slickspot peppergrass. (Ltr 9, 13)

Response: BLM shares your concern for slickspot peppergrass, but an ACEC designation for slickspot peppergrass protection would be ineffective since the species' habitat range extends across an area much larger than the NCA. For the past few years, BLM has worked diligently with the F&WS to develop management strategies for all activities that pose a potential threat to the species. In 2003, BLM and several federal, state, and private entities entered into a Candidate Conservation Agreement, the purpose of which was to develop and impose conservation measures to protect and enhance slickspot peppergrass populations and habitats. In 2006, BLM entered into a Conservation Agreement with the F&WS, which included conservation measures that were refined to include the latest information known about the species. Some of the conservation measures address activities across the species' range, and are designed to reduce or eliminate impacts that could affect the species and its habitat. More specific conservation measures address activities within various slickspot peppergrass management areas, while others affect activities within specific priority element occurrences. Further, the



Conservation Agreement contains an adaptive management process that identifies triggers that would require new protective actions. Based in part on the above strategies, F&WS issued their January 8, 2007 decision to not list the species as threatened or endangered. Thus, BLM will not designate an ACEC for slickspot peppergrass, but will continue to manage the species under the requirements of the Conservation Agreement until new information warrants a change in management.

It should be noted that the 2006 Conservation Agreement disallows the seeding of forage kochia (*Kochia prostrata*) in occupied or potential slickspot peppergrass habitat. The RMP's restrictions of military and recreational off-road vehicle travel provide additional protection to the species and its habitat.

Comment: The DRMP fails to specify what "mosaics" of different seral states it anticipates as the DFC within the NCA, but instead is driven by a generic "restoration" goal. This lack of specificity of the DRMP renders it impossible for the public to provide adequate review and comment to the document. (Ltr 12)

Response: The exact location of proposed restoration projects will be determined on a site-by-site basis following RMP completion. As stated in the Upland Vegetation section (3.2.8), priorities for restoration are in part driven by opportunity (i.e. following wildfire), and part by probability of success (i.e. near existing shrub communities). At that time, proposed restoration projects will be subject to public comment and site-specific analysis. The DFCs were developed by the public during the scoping phase of planning. During scoping we agreed to incorporate the DFCs into the RMP exactly as they were written. As such, they reflect exactly what was developed by the public, and will not be modified.

Comment: The RMP should not only set out goals for restoration, but also specify how these goals will be accomplished, including a requirement that only native species will be used in restoration efforts. The RMP does not provide specific criteria, targets, or manage-

ment prescriptions outlining what species will be used for restoration, or how the BLM will ensure that restoration work is successful. The seeding of non-native invasive species, such as forage kochia, is one of the biggest threats to slickspot peppergrass. Since forage kochia is a known threat, it should not be used in any restoration efforts. It is important that surface disturbing activities including livestock trampling and recreational OHV use are not allowed until vegetation has reached a level that can withstand some level of disturbance; and then these activities must be actively managed to prevent damage to restored areas. In order to accomplish the restoration goals it is extremely important that only native species be used in all restoration efforts. The Final RMP should provide a list of native species that will be used in restoration efforts and all implementation plans must also use only seed mixtures containing these approved species. Also, the Final RMP needs to provide specific restoration efforts and methodologies BLM will use to ensure that restoration will be successful. BLM must also describe its plan to manage surface disturbing activities in restoration areas. (Ltr 9)

Response: The RMP is not the venue for making project-level decisions about individual species to be used in restoration projects. The NCA is in a precipitation zone that makes habitat restoration very difficult. As such, we will not prescribe methods of restoration in the RMP, since future research may identify improved methods for restoration. BLM will determine restoration success, on a project-by-project basis through site specific vegetation monitoring. In regard to the use of forage kochia, the 2006 Conservation Agreement specifies that forage kochia will not be used for habitat restoration or fuels management purposes in areas supporting slickspot peppergrass habitat. As the DRMP states, activities in areas affected by restoration and fuels management projects will be restricted for whatever period of time is needed for the projects to fully establish. Following project establishment, the authorized officer will determine which activities and what levels of those activities will be allowed in the affected area, to



ensure that the area continues to function in its new higher ecological condition. We do not believe that a mandate to use only native species for restoration efforts is reasonable or practical, given the level of ecological degradation across the NCA. Desirable non-native species exist that can enhance restoration success, while mimicking the habitat structure and function of native species. In addition, many desirable non-native species are more readily available, less expensive, hardier, more competitive, and more easily established than native species. No change required.

Comment: The DRMP characterizes native grasslands as those shrub-grasslands that have been disturbed by fire, and states that native grasslands are dominated by Sandberg bluegrass. However, this is not a correct description of the native grasslands of the Browns Gulch Allotment. Nearly the entire Browns Gulch Allotment has had the overstory shrubs removed by past wildfire. Some areas have been seeded to crested wheatgrass. In addition, unseeded areas of the allotment are dominated almost entirely by a mosaic of Needle-and-Thread and Indian Ricegrass, with very little acreage dominated by Sandberg bluegrass. This drastically departs from the conditions described in the DRMP Chapter 2. (Ltr 12)

Response: Although the referenced description for a native grassland (pg. 2-10) does not accurately describe each individual native grassland area on every allotment in the NCA, BLM contends that because of its frequency of occurrence, Sandberg bluegrass is the predominate native bunchgrass present on the public lands within the boundaries of the NCA. We have added the following statement to the referenced section in Chapter 2: “Some areas of more sandy soil may support significant stands of needle-and-thread and Indian ricegrass.”

Comment: 2.2.8 Upland Vegetation. The entire discussion of what was here before European settlement occurred is irrelevant. The DRMP lacks specificity as to the trampling and other impacts of herds of antelope, mule deer, elk, bison, or "Native American" horses

prior to the settlement of the area by Europeans. The DRMP is wrong in its reporting of existing vegetation types within the NCA. Nowhere does Vegetation Table 2.1 show any native perennial species (other than Sandberg bluegrass) to exist within the NCA. However, a substantial percentage of the Browns Gulch Allotment is dominated by Needle-and-thread and by Indian ricegrass. DRMP Vegetation Map 2 incorrectly depicts the extent of sagebrush cover within the Browns Gulch Allotment, which cover is considerably less than depicted on Vegetation Map 2. A comparison of Vegetation Map 2 to Vegetation Map 1 shows some areas that were dominated by big sagebrush in 1979 became dominated by winterfat in 2001. However, such transition is not possible due to the differences in ecological potential of the soils on which the two species are found. The DRMP is vague and non-specific at page 2-45 when it states that approximately "77% of the sagebrush communities have an understory that is dominated by Sandberg bluegrass and/or other native perennial bunchgrasses". Specifically, what other perennial bunchgrasses? The DRMP claims that the only species left is Sandberg bluegrass, and yet admits that other perennial native bunchgrasses dominate the understory. The DRMP must be revised to be more specific as to which perennial understory grasses dominate the various areas of the numerous grazing allotments within the NCA. BLM contends that BLM's reliance upon remote sensing to determine and report to the public the existing vegetation conditions within the NCA is erroneous and has fatally flawed the development of the DRMP, including the "Affected Environment", the range of "Alternatives", and the determination of "Environmental Consequences". BLM should, before publishing a revised DRMP, ground-truth its satellite imagery and conduct on-the-ground production and/or ecological condition sampling on the whole of the NCA so as to accurately portray existing vegetation conditions. BLM should then accurately report those findings as the "affected vegetation" in the revised DRMP, and revise the Purpose and Need, Affected Environment, Alternatives, and Envi-



ronmental Consequences sections of the DRMP. (Ltr 12)

Response: The DRMP neither states nor implies that BLM is “mandated to manage for conditions that existed prior to European settlement.” The restoration target for the NCA is to return to what existed in 1979. The reference was included as a brief illustration of the overall diversity of the complex ecological community that is commonly thought to have been present on most of the public land in the NCA prior to the initiation of European settlement. The NCA is to be managed to provide habitat for raptors, their prey, and other wildlife. This includes shrubs, forbs, and grasses to provide habitat for ground squirrels and black-tailed jackrabbits and other prey species.

Discussions about the use of fire by indigenous peoples have no relation to or bearing on the current state of land management or DFC.

Your comment relating to the data presented in Table 2.1 (pg. 2-41) is correct. The information presented in Table 2.1 does not accurately describe the composition of the vegetation on the public lands in the Browns Gulch Allotment. Nor does it accurately describe the specific vegetative composition of any other individual allotment within the NCA. However, BLM is confident that the data does provide an adequate planning-level landscape-scale description of vegetation communities across the NCA. Additionally, regarding your comment relative to the presence of winterfat (Vegetation Map 2) in habitat that was previously dominated by big sagebrush (Vegetation Map 1); you may be confusing areas represented as being predominately covered with salt desert shrubs on Vegetation Map 1. Additionally, some of the differences between the two maps are reflective of the methods by which they were created. The 1979 map was hand created from aerial photographs. The 2001 map was digitally created with 30-meter pixels from satellite imagery. You are basically correct in your statement regarding the “ecological potential of the soils on which the two species are found” (winterfat vs big sagebrush). However, given the diversity of soil

types across the lower Snake River Plain, suitable niche habitats are common throughout the area addressed by the DRMP.

Your comment regarding the “vague” description of the understory vegetation is noted. BLM has revised the text to include bottlebrush squirreltail and Thurber’s needlegrass, which are the only other native perennial grasses that are commonly found throughout the NCA.

Comment: The DRMP states that "Efforts would be made to restore native or naturalized vegetation in degraded habitats (i.e. exotic plant or seeded communities) in an effort to help create mosaics of native vegetation." However, the DRMP does not specify what BLM considers "naturalized vegetation". Some professionals have suggested that cheatgrass, having been in the United States for more than 100 years, and having shown wide ecological amplitude and the ability to adapt to different climates within the country, should be considered as part of the natural landscape - hence, it is a "naturalized" species. (Ltr 12)

Response: The statement has been amended to read: “Efforts would be made to restore native or desirable non-native perennial vegetation...”

Comment: Ultimately, Alternatives C and D (and to a lesser extent A and B) are likely not economically or logistically feasible or attainable over the extent of the acreage targeted to be "restored". The DRMP admits at page 2-48 that "Few habitat restoration efforts have been attempted in the NCA. In addition, efforts to re-establish shrub cover have had limited success primarily because of drought conditions." If BLM has had limited success on shrub establishment and has no experience in even small scale "restoration" efforts, then upon what rational basis can the public expect the expenditures of tax monies to result in the stated objectives, goals, and DFCs espoused under the grandiose plans of Alternatives C and D (and to a lesser extent Alternatives A and B)? (Ltr 12)

Response: An RMP identifies management issues that need to be addressed over the life



of the plan (20+ years). The over-riding issue addressed in the RMP is the landscape-scale ecological change that has occurred in the NCA. BLM has considerable experience in restoration projects of all sizes, and as such, fully appreciates the magnitude of the proposals outlined in the RMP. We do not claim to be able to implement all the proposed restoration and fuels management projects with current funding or technology. However, we believe it is appropriate to identify the level of restoration and fuels projects that are needed to address the habitat degradation issue, and then use the RMP as the mechanism to obtain the required funding. The plan would also provide up to 5,000 acres for research targeted at improving our ability to restore arid sagebrush communities. Restoration and fuels projects are subject to the vagaries of weather, over which we have no control. However, a failure to address the ecological degradation in the NCA would be contrary to Congressional intent as prescribed in the NCA-enabling legislation.

Comment: On page 2-40, the DRMP states that native vegetation is being altered and replaced by less desirable species. This is a very broad claim and difficult to measure on a landscape level. Is this a general observation or are there studies in the NCA to substantiate this claim? ISDA suggests clarifying where this information comes from. (Ltr 17)

Response: We believe this statement is unarguable, given the NCA's landscape-scale change from native shrub/bunchgrass communities to shrub/annual grass communities and communities dominated by annual exotics without a shrub canopy. A citation has been inserted to show that this information came from the 1996 BLM/IDARNG Research Project Final Report entitled "Effects of military training and fire in the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area".

Comment: Alternative B on page 3-31 and Alternative D on page 3-32 state, "...however, Sandberg bluegrass dominated areas would receive additional management attention in order to reduce livestock impacts to Piute

ground squirrels." Though the environmental consequences to the additional Sandberg bluegrass management are described in section 4.2.8, impacts to livestock grazing in this section are not adequately addressed. Section 4.2.14 also does not address the impact to livestock grazing when additional management will be implemented to reduce impact to Piute ground squirrels. ISDA suggests that an impact statement be added in section 4.2.14 to address the impacts that are identified in alternatives B and D. (Ltr 17)

Response: Section 4.2.14. has been amended to reflect that grazing restrictions in Sandberg bluegrass areas would adversely affect livestock grazing.

Comment: Annual grasses-2nd bullet (4-58), Livestock Grazing (4-61, 4-62), pages 4-58, 4-61, and 4-62: In years with greater than average precipitation, timing of grazing for removal of annual grass biomass is key to reducing risk of fire. (Ltr 2)

Response: Narrative changed to reflect the benefit of fuels reduction.

Comment: The DEIS claims that the main management threat to sagebrush communities is typically heavy grazing. Since sagebrush communities on private lands have been converted to agricultural or other uses or are not being managed in a manner compatible with sagebrush dependent wildlife, the importance of the DFO maintaining the integrity of sagebrush habitats on BLM lands within the planning area to provide taller, denser stands for mule deer, pronghorn, and sage-grouse is extremely important. (Ltr 13)

Response: Mature big sagebrush, greasewood and four-wing saltbush stands are important pronghorn and mule deer habitat, which is one reason that rehabilitation of shrub stands is emphasized in the DRMP. The limiting factors for use of the NCA by big game, however, are lack of water and green forage in the summer. The lack of water is being addressed by the placement of water catchments in the area. The lack of green summer forage will be addressed by establishing perennial bunchgrasses that stay green longer than Sandberg's



bluegrass, but no bunchgrass or native forb will stay green throughout the summer.

Comment: The DEIS notes that habitat for black-tailed jackrabbits has been significantly reduced since 1980 because of burned sagebrush (DEIS 2-22), and that livestock grazing impacts to wildlife will be minimized by adhering to S&Gs, and vegetation treatments in upland habitats adjoining streams may divert livestock grazing pressure sufficiently to assist in meeting riparian improvement objectives. The DEIS does not include a discussion of the expected impacts to sagebrush communities or the species that rely on them from management activities such as livestock grazing and fuel reduction nor are we told on what scale they will occur. (Ltr 13)

Response: Restoration activities are intended to benefit and expand sagebrush communities and as such, we do not expect our activities to have an adverse affect on existing sagebrush.

Comment: Exactly how will sagebrush communities be manipulated? What are the expected impacts from treatment of these communities? These are serious questions that must be answered in the FEIS. (Ltr 13)

Response: Because of the importance of big sagebrush to many species of special concern, it is unlikely that sagebrush in the NCA will be manipulated to reduce its density. The BLM is much more interested in reestablishing robust sagebrush and other native shrub stands. Sagebrush communities will be treated with herbicides to control annual exotic species and to increase perennial bunchgrasses and forbs. Areas adjacent to and between remnant sagebrush stands will be restored so that they become habitat corridors to facilitate the movement of animals between sagebrush patches until the area between patches fills in with native shrubs.

Comment: Bald Eagle, page 4-27: A comparison of your stated outcomes for restoration of 20 miles of trees for bald eagles is the same as restoration of 1 mile. Both would have a moderate effect. 40 miles of tree restoration is considered to be highly beneficial. Shouldn't

the difference between 1 mile and 20 miles be "slightly" to "moderately" beneficial? (Ltr 2)

Response: Alternative A reflects moderate benefits at the LOCAL level, while Alternative B reflects the benefits at the LANDSCAPE level. No change needed.

Visual Resources Management

Comment: Visual Resources 3.1 Objectives: We believe that the Alternative D Objective should give the Snake River Canyon equal emphasis with historical areas. (Ltr 6)

Response: The canyon is a very significant visual resource and the area is protected in both alternatives. The wording has been changed to reflect that the Snake River Canyon is also protected as VRM Class II under Alternative D.

Comment: RMP fails to apply appropriate VRM classifications. (Ltr 9)

Response: The RMP designated VRM classifications. We do not know what you mean by "appropriate". The NCA was not established as an area with vast landscapes of high scenic quality. The principal purpose of the NCA is to conserve and protect raptor populations and habitats.

Comment: None of the slickspot management area is classified as VRM Class II. Since slickspot peppergrass is considered a type 1 species by the BLM and is to be managed as though it were an endangered species, classifying the slickspot peppergrass management areas as VRM class III and allowing the landscape to only be "partially retained," is inconsistent with not only the NCA legislation but also with BLM Manual 6840, which states that the BLM is required "to ensure that BLM actions will not reduce the likelihood of survival and recovery of any listed species or destroy or adversely modify their designated critical habitat." Manual 6840.06A2. (Ltr 9)

Consistent with the reasons for which the NCA was established and the guiding management principles, the majority of the NCA should be classified as VRM Class II, Specifically, areas of key raptor habitat, important



raptor prey species habitat, and slickspot peppergrass populations and habitat should be classified as VRM Class II. In addition, a DFC and Standard for visual resources should be set out, identifying conditions and standards to ensure that habitat areas are managed to be consistent with needs of raptors and prey species. (Ltr 9)

Response: The intent of the VRM program is to protect high quality visual resources. Areas along the Snake River qualify as high visual quality and have identified VRM classes to protect those values. The VRM program, however, is not the appropriate tool to protect special status plants and animals. Other tools and requirements exist for that purpose, such as the slickspot peppergrass conservation agreement. Much of the NCA does not have a high scenic quality and, therefore, protecting the scenic quality of the NCA was not an issue that led to the development of a DFC.

Additional Comments

Comment: On May 6, 2007, BLM met with the Idaho Congressional staff, IDARNG, and the Governor's Office staff, to discuss concerns over the proposed shooting restrictions. At that meeting the IDARNG and Governor's office expressed the concern that the expanded

shooting restriction would displace recreational shooters into an area of the OTA that receives more concentrated use as a result of restrictions imposed on off-road maneuver training in the Bravo area. In addition, the congressional delegation and the Governor's Office believed that insufficient site-specific information existed to support the expanded restriction.

Response: A review of available BLM and IDARNG data revealed that information on user conflicts in the OTA had not been collected in a format that provided quantifiable site-specific information. Additionally, BLM recognizes that the expanded shooting restriction could, and would likely, displace use into other areas, including the Bravo area. To address these concerns, the expansion of the shooting restriction was removed from the Proposed Alternative. To address the safety and user conflict issues, BLM and the IDARNG will incorporate into the Law Enforcement Standard Operating Procedures for the OTA safety protocols that are consistent with the objectives of the BLM/IDARNG MOU and section 4(d) of the NCA-enabling legislation.



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