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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA) is located in southwestern Idaho, within a 30-minute drive of Boise, and where almost half of Idaho’s population resides. It is located in Ada, Canyon, Elmore and Owyhee counties and encompasses approximately 483,700 public land acres extending 81 miles along the Snake River. The NCA includes the 138,000-acre Orchard Training Area (OTA), used by the Idaho Army National Guard (IDARNG) for military training since 1953. Within its boundary are approximately 41,200 State acres, 4,800 private acres, 1,600 military acres, and 9,300 acres covered by water; however, these lands were not affected by the NCA designation and are not affected by NCA RMP decisions.

The NCA was established in 1993 by Public Law (PL) 103-64 (16 USC 460iii-2; 107 Stat. 304) (Appendix 1). Public activities and uses that existed when the legislation was enacted are allowed to continue to the extent that they are compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established - conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor (birds of prey) populations and habitats. It contains the greatest concentration of nesting raptors in North America and the greatest density of prairie falcons in the world. About 700 raptor pairs, representing 16 species, nest there each spring, including golden eagles and burrowing owls. Eight other raptor species use the area during various seasons.

The area is a unique habitat for birds of prey because the cliffs of the Snake River Canyon provide ideal nesting sites, while the adjacent upland plateau supports unusually large populations of small mammal prey species. It is noted for having one of the highest densities of ground squirrels ever recorded, and the Piute ground squirrel is a critical food source during late winter, spring, and early summer for many of the NCA raptor species – most notably prairie falcons.

The NCA is managed by BLM under the concept of dominant use rather than multiple use. This means that prior to authorizing uses, BLM determines the compatibility of those uses with the purposes for which the NCA was established. Many historic uses that were occurring when it was established have either already been analyzed or were analyzed during this planning process.

This planning effort was undertaken to provide the BLM Boise District with a comprehensive framework, known as a Resource Management Plan (RMP), for managing the affected public lands. The purpose of the RMP is to ensure that public land uses are planned for and managed in accordance with the requirements of PL 103-64.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE RMP

The RMP provides BLM with a stand-alone comprehensive framework for managing public lands in the NCA over the next 20+ years to meet the purposes of the enabling legislation (Appendix 1):

“...to provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats and the natural and environmental resources and values associated



therewith, and of the scientific, cultural, and educational resources and values of the public lands in the conservation area....”

The enabling legislation and the management principles contained in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) guide the land use decisions within the NCA. In addition, authorized uses must be determined to be compatible with the purposes for which it was established [Section 3(a) of the NCA-enabling Act], as well as with the management guidance provided in Section 1(5) and Section 4(b) of the Enabling Act.

1.3 NEED FOR THE RMP

According to BLM’s planning manual (1610), land use plans guide management actions on the affected public lands. Land use plan decisions establish goals and objectives for resource management [i.e., Desired Future Conditions (DFC)], the measures needed to achieve the goals and objectives, and parameters for using public lands. They identify lands that are open or available for certain uses, including any applicable restrictions, and lands that are closed to certain uses. Land use plan decisions ordinarily are made on a broad scale and customarily guide subsequent site-specific implementation decisions. Among the issues and concerns needing to be addressed in the NCA are:

- Landscape-level changes in ecological condition caused by the loss of shrub habitat.
- The need to recognize the role of fire in the NCA and identify appropriate fire and fuels management.
- The expansion of invasive and noxious weeds contributing to landscape-wide changes in plant communities and ecological processes.
- The burgeoning human population in the surrounding area which has increased recreation demands and related impacts.
- The management of special status species including slickspot peppergrass and Snake River snails.
- Locations and size of military training areas.
- Areas available for livestock grazing.

Because of the increasing demand for use of public land, there is a compelling need to develop an RMP that ensures that:

- Management is more proactive about conserving, protecting, and enhancing raptor populations and habitats, including raptor prey populations.
- Authorized uses are compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established.
- Resource uses are balanced, and are sustainable over the long-term.
- Increasing demand for a comprehensive transportation plan, including off-highway vehicle use, is addressed.
- Sensitive species habitats are protected and enhanced.



1.4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

BLM published the Federal Register Notice of Intent (NOI) to plan in the NCA on August 7, 2001. The following principles for collaboration drove the public involvement process:

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 the public about the RMP process and how it links to future site-specific decisions.
5. Link to national strategies and policies 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.
7. Be publicly accountable for seeking input from the public.

The BLM designed a process consistent with its seven principles for collaboration, which was included in an internal document entitled *A Collaborative Process for Resource Management Planning*. Generally, this iterative process followed a pattern of:

- Interdisciplinary team (ID Team) product development and internal agency review.
- Review from BLM Boise District Resource Advisory Council (RAC).
- Review from Federal, State, local agencies, and cooperating agencies through the Intergovernmental Coordination Group (ICG).
- Formal government-to-government consultation with American Indian Tribes.
- Review and comment from the general public.
- ID team revisions based on this feedback.

The RAC is a 15-member advisory group which provides advice and recommendations to BLM on resource and land management issues. Membership includes a cross section of Idahoans from the southwestern portion of the state representing energy, tourism and commercial recreation, environmental, and archeological or historic interests, as well as elected officials, Tribes and the public-at-large. Council members are selected for their ability to provide informed, objective advice on a broad array of public lands issues and their commitment to collaboration in seeking solutions to those issues. Members are appointed to three-year terms, may be reappointed to consecutive terms, and must be Idaho residents.

The ICG is a group comprised of representatives from Federal, State, and local governments which meet to increase two-way information sharing about natural resource guidance, documents, data, and initiatives to ensure that information is considered, and to assist in resolving inconsistencies between Federal and State/local plans.

Meetings with individuals and interest groups occurred throughout the process. It should be noted that the ID Team included representatives from two cooperating agencies, the IDARNG and Owyhee County.



1.5 LAWS AND REGULATIONS THAT INFLUENCED THE SCOPE OF THE RMP

The BLM planning regulations (43 CFR 1610) require identification of planning criteria which guide and direct the development of the RMP. They influence all aspects of the planning process, including inventory and data collection, formulation of alternatives, estimation of effects, and, ultimately, the selection of a proposed alternative. They ensure that RMPs are tailored to the identified issues and that unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided. Planning criteria are based primarily on standards prescribed by applicable laws, regulations, and agency guidance. They are also based on consultation with American Indian Tribes; coordination with public, other Federal, State, and local agencies and government entities; and analysis of information pertinent to the planning area.

1.6 DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS AND STANDARDS FOR THE NCA

Following consultation with the Tribes and with the assistance of the RAC, ICG, public, and cooperators (IDARNG and Owyhee County), BLM developed the DFC. They are the goals that specifically address the issues and perspectives identified by the public and others, and are generally broad statements that describe the future condition of resources and/or land uses that BLM and the public identified during the scoping process. The DFC do not, however, describe the actions needed to attain those conditions. The conditions are expressed in terms of DFC and standards. The DFC aid BLM in identifying actions that will most effectively address unsatisfactory resource conditions as required by laws and regulations, national policy (i.e., BLM Strategic Plan Goals), State Director guidance, and resource or social considerations.

Standards are descriptions of physical, chemical, and biological conditions required to maintain healthy ecosystems. In addition, BLM has developed goals for specific programs. Collectively, they form the vision for future management of the area.

Resources:

1.6.1 Air Quality

Tied to National and State Guidance.

1.6.2 Cultural and Tribal

DFC:

- Cultural and historic resources would be protected, and past, present, and future traditions and practices would be preserved.

Standard:

- Protection would be provided through administrative and physical measures, education, interpretation, and special designations.



1.6.3 Fish and Wildlife (includes Special Status Animals)

DFC:

- The distribution, abundance, and quality of wildlife habitats would be maintained or improved to provide food, cover, and space for healthy populations of game and non-game wildlife through the seasons, as well as through various life stages.
- Distribution and condition of habitats would contribute to the long-term viability of federally listed and BLM sensitive species and to their resilience to environmental change.
- Raptor nest sites would be protected, maintained, and enhanced.

Standards:

- Plant communities with shrub, forb, and grass diversity and cover appropriate to the site would provide quality upland habitats.
- Quality habitat for riparian-dependent animals would be provided by streams and wetlands with plant species diversity and structure appropriate to the site.
- Connectivity between habitats for fish and wildlife populations would be maintained or enhanced.
- The number of large trees would be increased to enhance raptor roosting and nesting habitat.

1.6.4 Soil Resources

Tied to National and State guidance.

1.6.5 Vegetation

1.6.5.1 Upland and Special Status Plants

DFC:

Areas 1, 2 and 3 (See Management Area Map)

- The uplands would support healthy sagebrush and salt desert shrub communities, and provide habitats to sustain or increase raptor and raptor prey populations.
- The uplands would provide habitats to increase the populations of shrub obligate animals.
- Habitat conditions would contribute to long-term viability of special status species.
- Noxious weeds would only be present in small isolated areas.
- Plant communities would show an upward trend in species diversity, productivity, and structure.

Area 1 Specific

- Sagebrush and salt desert shrub communities would be the dominant vegetation type and would include a mosaic of multi-aged shrubs, forbs, and native and adapted non-native perennial grasses.
- There would be a decrease in the severity, frequency, and size of wildfires.



Area 2 Specific

- Sagebrush and salt desert shrub communities would increase and would include a mosaic of multi-aged shrubs, forbs, and native and adapted non-native perennial species.
- There would be a decrease in the severity, frequency, and size of wildfires.

Area 3 Specific

- Sagebrush and salt desert shrub communities would increase, but the area would remain largely dominated by cheatgrass and other exotic annuals.
- Fire would continue to be a function of cheatgrass-dominated areas.

Standards:Areas 1, 2 and 3:

- Healthy native and adapted non-native plant populations would minimize the establishment of invasive and noxious weeds. New infestations of noxious weeds would be eradicated, and existing populations of noxious and invasive weeds would be managed to prevent invasions of weed-free areas.
- The population size and habitat quality of special status plants would be maintained and/or improved.
- Special status plants would continue to exist at their present locations.
- The distribution, abundance, and vigor of special status plant species would be maintained or improved.

Area 1 Specific:

- A mixture of early to late seral sagebrush and salt desert shrub/grasslands, needed for raptor and raptor prey habitat, would exist in various sized blocks in well-distributed patterns across the landscape (including disjunct islands and corridors).

Area 2 Specific:

- Early to mid seral sagebrush and salt desert shrub/grasslands, needed for raptor and raptor prey habitat, would exist in smaller sized and less contiguous blocks compared to Area 1.

Area 3 Specific:

- Small, non-contiguous stands of early to mid seral sagebrush and salt desert shrub/grasslands, needed for raptor and raptor prey habitat, would increase in size and connectivity.

1.6.5.2 Vegetation – Riparian and Water QualityDFC:

- Upland and riparian conditions would support water quality that is consistent with Idaho water quality standards.
- Riparian areas would provide habitats to sustain or increase raptor populations.



- Riparian areas would provide habitats to sustain riparian obligate species, especially special status species.

Standards:

- Native riparian plant species would be the dominant vegetation type.
- The population size and habitat quality of special status plants would be maintained and/or increased.
- Desirable native and non-native plant populations would minimize establishment of invasive noxious weeds.

1.6.6 Visual Resources

No Specific DFC: See Recreation.

1.6.7 Water Quality

No Specific DFC: See Vegetation – Riparian and Water Quality.

Resource Uses:

1.6.8 Idaho Army National Guard

DFC:

Areas 1 and 2

- The Idaho Army National Guard would continue to administer military activities in the Orchard Training Area in a manner that is compatible with the NCA-enabling legislation.

Standard:

Areas 1 and 2

- Military activities would not adversely impact raptor and raptor prey habitats.

1.6.9 Lands and Realty

DFC:

- Public lands would be consolidated to facilitate land management.
- Administrative and public access to public lands would exist where needed and where consistent with resource values.
- All major utility and transportation rights-of-way would be located in designated corridors.
- Resource values on public lands would be protected to prevent loss of revenue due from the use of public lands.

Standard:

- Consolidation would be accomplished through a combination of land exchange, purchase, and donation.



1.6.10 Livestock Grazing

DFC:

- Forage would be made available to support ranching operations to the extent compatible with the NCA-enabling legislation.

Standards:

- Livestock grazing would not adversely impact habitat requirements of raptors and their prey base.
- Grazing management programs would be planned and scheduled to control the timing, intensity, and duration of grazing use to protect and/or enhance the ecological integrity of plant communities.

1.6.11 Recreation

DFC:

- A range of motorized, non-motorized, undeveloped and developed recreation opportunities would exist in a manner compatible with the NCA-enabling legislation.
- Environmental impacts and user conflicts would be reduced by improving public awareness of birds and their prey.

Standard:

- New recreation facilities that are compatible with the NCA purposes would be designed to protect the natural and scenic landscape values.

1.6.12 Renewable Energy

No Specific DFC: See Lands and Realty.

1.6.13 Transportation

No Specific DFC: See Recreation.

1.6.14 Utility and Communication Corridors

No Specific DFC: See Lands and Realty.

Other:

1.6.15 Fire Ecology

No Specific DFC: See Vegetation.



1.6.16 Special Designations

DFC:

- Special or unique natural, historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational values would be protected through special designations, as needed.

Standard:

- Special designations would be used for intensive management of unique resources.

1.6.17 Social and Economic Conditions

DFC:

- Consumptive and non-consumptive uses, determined to be compatible with the purposes of the NCA, would contribute to the economy of the region.

Standard:

- No standard was identified.

1.7 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Specific actions required to attain the goals and outcomes defined in the RMP are accomplished through implementation plans and subsequent monitoring. These plans apply to specific program areas, projects, or operational and development strategies for specific areas of the NCA. Future implementation plans will use the goals and DFC defined in this document as their objective. Implementation plans with potential to affect the environment will require formal analysis in compliance with NEPA and related legislation, including the National Historic Preservation Act.

FLPMA requires that: *“the Secretary shall, to the extent he finds practical, keep apprised of State, local, and tribal land use plans; assure that consideration is given to those State, local and tribal plans that are germane in the development of land use plans for public lands; assist in resolving to the extent practical, inconsistencies.... Land use plans of the Secretary under this section shall be consistent with State and local plans to the maximum extent he finds consistent with Federal law and the purposes of this act.”*

Relevant plans, policies, and programs (e.g., State/local land use plans) were considered in the preparation of this document. In addition to all local, State and Federal regulations, the IDARNG must comply with internal Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Army (DA), and National Guard Bureau directives, policies, and regulations.

As previously mentioned, BLM formed the ICG, which is composed of representatives from various Federal, State, and local agencies and government entities to ensure that, where practical, the RMP is consistent with requirements in other agency plans. Since over 20% of the NCA is located in Owyhee County, the Board of Commissioners signed a cooperating agency agreement which allowed them to have representation on BLM’s ID Team during RMP development. IDARNG also signed a



cooperating agency agreement. IDARNG, as a cooperating agency, provided both natural resource and military training expertise on the ID Team.

