

## CHAPTER ONE - PURPOSE AND NEED

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Idaho Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers almost 5 million acres of land in south-central and eastern Idaho (Figure 1-1) in the Upper Snake Field Office (USFO), Pocatello Field Office (PFO), Burley Field Office (BFO), and Shoshone Field Office (SFO). This area is hereafter referred to as the planning area, comprising portions of the Idaho Falls and Twin Falls Districts<sup>1</sup>. The planning areas encompass 23 southern Idaho counties: Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Blaine, Bonneville, Butte, Camas, Caribou, Cassia, Clark, Elmore, Franklin, Fremont, Gooding, Jefferson, Jerome, Lincoln, Madison, Minidoka, Oneida, Power, Teton, and Twin Falls. Major communities in the planning area include Burley, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Shoshone, Sun Valley, and Twin Falls. Four BLM field offices—Burley, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, and Shoshone—manage numerous parcels of public land that range in size from less than 40 acres to more than 100,000 acres (Figure 1-2 and Table 1-1).

BLM-administered lands under jurisdiction of the four field offices are adjacent to National Forest System (NFS) lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), State of Idaho lands, the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, the Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, the City of Rocks National Reserve, and the Idaho National Laboratory (INL), which is a U.S. Department of Energy, Idaho Operations Office (DOE-ID) facility. Also within the boundaries of the planning area are private lands in and around the many urban and rural communities.

| <b>TABLE 1-1. ACREAGES OF LAND UNDER LAND STATUS JURISDICTIONS WITHIN THE PLANNING AREA</b> |                   |                   |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Land Status</b>  | <b>Acres</b>      | <b>Percentage</b> |
| Private   | 7,716,000         | 40                |
| BLM   | 4,998,000         | 26                |
| USFS  | 4,084,000         | 21                |
| State of Idaho  | 899,000           | 5                 |
| DOE-INL   | 568,000           | 3                 |
| Fort Hall Indian Reservation  | 521,000           | 3                 |
| National Park Service   | 500,000           | 3                 |
| Water   | 197,000           | 1                 |
| Military  | 4,500             | <1                |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>19,487,500</b> | <b>100</b>        |

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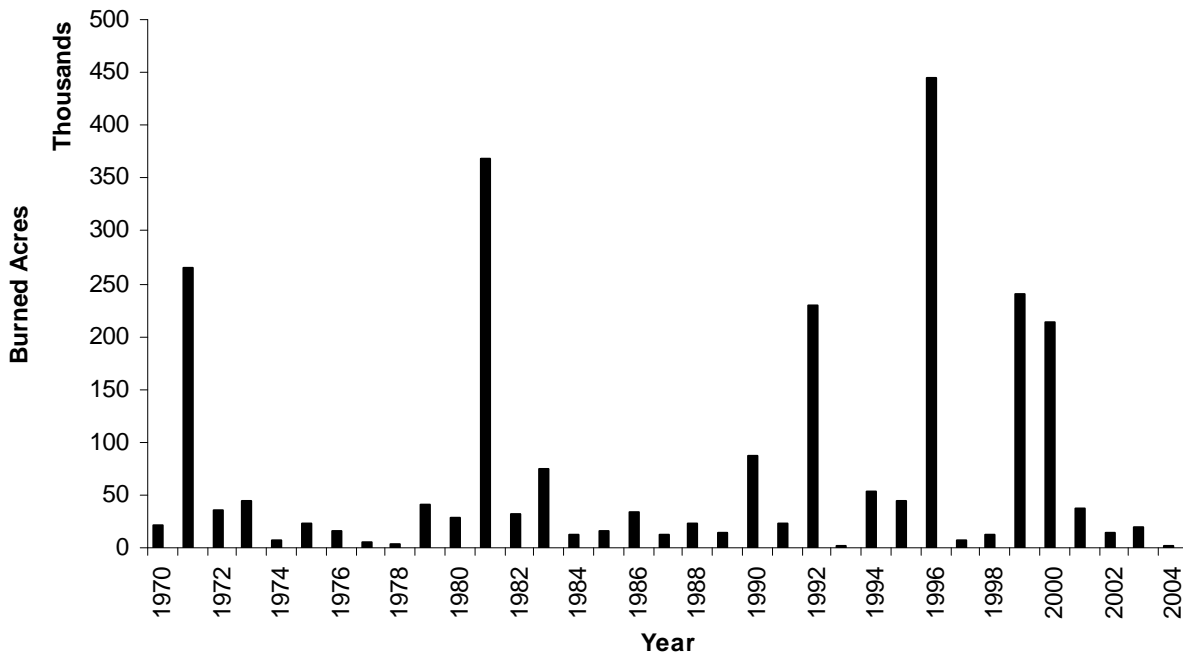
<sup>1</sup> When the FMDA was originally developed through September 2004, the four Field Offices comprised the entire Upper Snake River District (USRD). Since October 1, 2004, however, the USRD has been reorganized as the Idaho Falls District (Upper Snake, Pocatello, Challis and Salmon Field Offices) and the Twin Falls District (Burley, Shoshone and Jarbidge Field Offices).

In response to the nationwide increase in wildland fires, fire starts, and fatalities, the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (U.S. Department of Interior [USDI] and U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] 1995) was revised in 2001 (USDI et al. 2001). Currently, all federal land-management agencies are implementing or preparing to implement the National Fire Plan (USDI 2000) to various extents, which is the means by which the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy is applied. This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) proposes to amend existing land use plans (LUPs) to provide guidance and aid in implementing the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy in the planning area.

Prior to modern fire suppression, wildland fire had consistently been an integral part of the ecosystems in the planning area, as demonstrated by historical ecological evidence. To withstand this threat, numerous vegetation species and cover types have developed various responses that have enabled them to resist, tolerate, or take advantage of fire.

At present, many of the cover types within the planning area have been subjected to wildland fire that is not within the historical range of variability. Large and/or uncharacteristic fires in these cover types can threaten people and property as well as the resiliency, integrity, and long-term sustainability of ecosystem components and processes. Fires are occurring more frequently and are burning more severely in some cover types. For example, the invasion of the sagebrush steppe by invasive annual species such as cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and medusahead wildrye (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) has substantially increased fine fuel continuity in this cover type, making it more susceptible to large, frequent, and uncharacteristic fires. In other vegetation cover types, fires are occurring less frequently than they have historically, which causes undesirable changes in vegetation species composition and structure and an accumulation of hazardous fuels. For example, because of long-term fire suppression, juniper species are expanding their range at the expense of sagebrush steppe, and Dry Conifer cover types are slowly replacing Aspen and some Mountain Shrub cover types.

Since approximately 1996, wildland fires have occurred in the planning area at an overall accelerated rate (Figure 1-3), mostly due to vegetation changes and changed conditions like cheatgrass invasion into sagebrush steppe cover types. To a lesser extent, the planning area has experienced decreases in fire frequency and attendant increases in fire severity in its Aspen, Dry Conifer, and Mountain Shrub cover types. These vegetation cover types require more frequent disturbance to decrease fuel loads, facilitate aspen and forb regeneration, and decrease fire intensity. It has become clear that hazardous fuel conditions need to be managed. Altered fire regimes (i.e., changes in fire frequency, severity, and size) not only threaten resources such as wildlife habitat, cultural resources, air/visual quality, and grazing, but also affect public and firefighter safety within and around areas of human development.



**Figure 1-3. Wildland fire activity in the planning area, 1970 through 2004.**

## 1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

### 1.2.1 PURPOSE

The purpose for this multi-plan amendment is to amend 12 existing land use plans within the planning area to incorporate fire, fuels, and related vegetation management direction that is consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. This approach will allow the BLM to move toward resource conditions that minimize risk to human life and property and allow for efficient and effective wildland fire suppression efforts; to integrate fire's natural role into resource management decisions; to maintain or restore vegetation that would support special status species (SSS) and healthy, diverse, and sustainable vegetation communities; and to provide for other uses by managing vegetative conditions to achieve desired conditions.

The purpose of the Proposed Plan Amendment is to:

- Establish programmatic fire management guidance, objectives, policies, and actions.
- Identify resource goals and methods, including desired future condition of vegetation resources and management actions necessary to achieve objectives.
- Form the basis to update fire management plans (FMPs) and integrate them with allotment management plans, wildlife management plans, recreation management plans, and other applicable guidance.
- Provide LUP-level direction to enable incremental steps toward resource conditions that minimize risk to human life and property and that function within the natural fire regime.

### 1.2.2 NEED

There is a need for the present plan amendments in order to provide contemporary fire management issues in a comprehensive or consistent manner within the planning area. A need has been identified for increased use of vegetation treatments for hazardous fuels reduction. The current LUPs do not provide consistent direction regarding the importance of fire in the ecosystem. The recent increases in wildland fire (natural occurrences and intensities) and the large number of acres recently burned in sagebrush steppe in the planning area has impacted the natural environment of the public lands. This could impact the conservation of sage grouse or other wildlife species and indirectly affect public land users. A need has been identified for increased use of vegetation treatments for hazardous fuels reduction consistent with the National Fire Plan to reduce the risk of fire impacts on communities and resources. Action is needed to move toward resource conditions on BLM administered lands that allow productive use of these lands and enhance the social, cultural and economic stability of the communities that depend on them. As described in the Federal Regulations (43 CFR 1610.5-5): “An amendment shall be initiated by the need to consider monitoring and evaluation findings, new data, new or revised policy, a change in circumstances or a proposed action that may result in a change in the scope of resource uses or a change in terms, conditions and decisions of the approved plan...”. The advent of the National Fire Plan and resource conditions as a result of fire, warrant a revision of existing plans.

Fire management direction in the 12 existing LUPs in the planning area (Figure 1-4; see Table 1-2) emphasizes wildland fire suppression, briefly touches upon using RxFire and fuels treatments, and is generally silent concerning the use of WFU to benefit the resources. The existing LUPs do not address the management of fire's role in the landscape. Other issues not well addressed in the current LUPs include:

- Communities-at-risk and issues surrounding the WUI.
- Public and firefighter safety.
- Fire impacts on air quality/visibility.
- Fire hazard and fuels reduction treatment methods.
- The departure of existing fire regimes from historical conditions.
- The desired role of fire and how fire can help meet resource objectives.

The BLM's planning process forms the basis for every on-the-ground action the BLM undertakes. The Proposed Plan Amendment would update the planning area's FMPs, which are to be prepared based on objectives in the LUPs. The Proposed Plan Amendment would facilitate resource and fire management activities throughout the planning area, as well as set a new standard for integrating resource management and fire management activities at the field office and regional levels. The Proposed Plan Amendment will amend the LUPs listed in Table 1-2.

**TABLE 1-2. LAND USE PLANS (LUPS) CURRENTLY DIRECTING RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE PLANNING AREA, WITH DATES OF IMPLEMENTATION**

| Year, Land Use Plan                     | FO <sup>1</sup> | Year, Land Use Plan      | FO    |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------|-------|
| 1975, Magic MFP                         | SH              | 1982, Twin Falls MFP     | BU    |
| 1976, Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP | SH              | 1983, Big Lost MFP       | US    |
| 1981, Big Desert MFP                    | US              | 1985, Cassia RMP         | BU    |
| 1981, Little Lost-Birch Creek MFP       | US              | 1985, Medicine Lodge RMP | US    |
| 1981, Malad MFP                         | PO              | 1985, Monument RMP       | SH/BU |
| 1981, Sun Valley MFP                    | SH              | 1988, Pocatello RMP      | PO    |

<sup>1</sup> Field Offices (FO): BU = Burley, US = Upper Snake, SH = Shoshone, PO = Pocatello/Malad

The proposed programmatic fire management direction plan amendment respond to the following needs:

- Wildland fire is a necessary element in the development and maintenance of healthy ecosystems of the Interior Columbia Basin, Snake River Plain, and Great Basin. Fire management direction is needed to establish objectives on the role of fire in the ecosystem.
- Fire management direction is needed to establish objectives to guide vegetation treatments using mechanical, seeding, chemical, RxFire, and wildland fire use (WFU).
- Wildlife management agencies, tribes, and the public are concerned over the decline in sage grouse numbers in recent years. In some areas, invasive plant species are replacing natural sagebrush steppe communities. These trends have caused an increased need for the protection of sagebrush steppe communities (i.e., sage grouse habitat). Fire management direction is needed to establish objectives to treat vegetation and properly use and/or suppress fire to improve degraded and protect existing sagebrush steppe communities.
- Aspen, Douglas-fir, Mid-elevation Shrub, Juniper encroachment, and Mountain Shrub require vegetation treatments that include increased use of RxFire and WFU to ensure ecosystem health. In some areas, extensive buildup of fuels and/or unnaturally-dense woodland stands could lead to fires outside the natural fire regime. Existing suppression policies have not accommodated this need.
- Fire management direction is needed to provide appropriate objectives in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to reduce threats to communities-at-risk from wildland fire.
- Priorities, management objectives, and management restrictions need to be established for wildland fire suppression.

This plan amendment is programmatic, meaning it provides broad-scale planning direction at a landscape level to guide future site-specific projects. Because the plan amendment is programmatic, this EIS analysis is also programmatic in that it analyzes potential impacts at the landscape level. It does not evaluate site-specific impacts, which are impossible to determine at this time because actual projects have not been proposed. Future proposed site-specific projects

will be required to conform to the stipulations of this plan amendment, as well as conduct the appropriate level of site-specific NEPA analysis. Throughout this EIS, this proposed plan amendment is referred to by three terms: Fire Management Direction Amendment (FMDA), the proposed programmatic fire management direction amendment, and the proposed plan amendment. These terms are interchangeable and all refer to Alternative E – Proposed Plan Amendment (See Section 1.3).

### **1.3 THE PROPOSED ACTION**

In accordance with BLM planning policies, the following basic elements would compose the programmatic LUP-level plan regarding fire management direction:

- Programmatic landscape-level fire management goals and objectives, including desired wildland fire conditions.
- The suite of management actions that can be used to meet desired future conditions, including areas that are suitable for WFU for resource benefit and areas where WFU is not suitable due to social, economic, political, or resource constraints.
- Fire management priorities and treatment criteria.
- Restrictions on fire management practices, if any are needed to protect natural or cultural values.

These elements are briefly summarized below. A complete description of Alternatives A - No Action Alternative, B, C, D, and E - Proposed Plan Amendment are described in Chapter 2, Descriptions of Alternatives.

#### **1.3.1 LANDSCAPE-LEVEL FIRE MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Landscape-level fire management goals and objectives are described for the 12 specific vegetation cover types identified in the planning area. These goals and objectives provide programmatic direction for the field offices to maintain or make progress toward Desired Future Conditions (DFC) for areas within the planning area, in which:

- Wildland fire should occur less frequently and at a smaller scale.
- Wildland fire should occur more frequently across the landscape.
- Wildland fire should remain within the historical range of variability.

Ultimately, vegetation cover types would be maintained at or improved toward Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) 1. FRCC is an indicator of fire risk to key ecosystem components. A full description of FRCC is given in Section 3.2, Vegetation Resources and Fire's Natural Role (Issue 1).

#### **1.3.2 SUITE OF MANAGEMENT ACTIONS THAT CAN BE USED TO MEET DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS (DFC)**

The following sections describe types of activities that would be used to achieve the desired future conditions for vegetation identified in this effort. The intent of this LUP amendment is to

allow for the use of various fire and related vegetation treatments to occur on lands not meeting desired vegetative conditions as priority, opportunity, and funding allow. As such, this fire management direction amendment (FMDA) identifies areas suitable or non-suitable for various treatments (suitable identifies those areas where that activity could occur but that actual implementation appropriateness would be verified through site-specific project analysis). For example, this effort may identify broad areas where RxFire or wildland fire use is suitable; however, site specific analysis may identify other resource concerns that would make another treatment activity, such as mechanical thinning, more appropriate. For these reasons, this FMDA does not allocate or designate minimum, maximum, or specific treatment acres. However, to display relative differences in alternatives and their effects, an estimated treatment level over a 10-year period is quantified. This treatment level is not intended as a target or a not-to-exceed value, and actual on-the-ground treatments may meet, exceed, or fall short of this level based on priorities, opportunities, and funding.

### ***1.3.2.1 Wildland Fire***

A wildland fire is an unplanned fire, either lightning-caused or human-caused, against which suppression actions are taken using an appropriate management response. Within the planning area, if a wildland fire exceeds initial attack capabilities, an appropriate management strategy, consistent with the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA), would be chosen based on wildland fire-fighter safety, suppression cost, and resource objectives.

### ***1.3.2.2 Fire Vegetation Treatments***

#### ***1.3.2.2.1 Wildland Fire Use (WFU)***

WFU is a pre-planned vegetation treatment that involves taking advantage of a naturally-ignited wildland fire in an area where fire would benefit resources.

In suitable areas, WFU could be conducted within the planning area needing treatment after a site-specific plan and National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) analysis are completed, and only if predetermined prescriptive parameters (e.g., weather/fire behavior) can be met. Until this planning and NEPA analysis are accomplished, wildland fires would be suppressed using an appropriate management response.

#### ***1.3.2.2.2 Prescribed Fire Treatments (RxFire)***

An RxFire is a pre-planned, management-ignited fire designed to meet specific resource objectives, such as reducing fuel loads, preparing a site for chemical treatment or seeding, or promoting vegetation regeneration.

In the planning area, Rx Fires could be performed anywhere that specific fire prescriptions can be met and fire risks to resources and public health and safety are mitigated after site-specific planning and NEPA analysis. Rx Fire would be used to reduce undesirable species and hazardous fuels conditions in Low-elevation Shrub (especially areas dominated by cheatgrass, in preparation for chemical and seeding treatments), to reduce juniper encroachment on Mid-elevation Shrub, reduce conifer encroachment into decadent aspen stands, and rejuvenate decadent Mountain Shrub.

### ***1.3.2.3 Non-fire Vegetation Treatments***

#### *1.3.2.3.1 Chemical*

Chemical treatments involve applying herbicides to control invasive species/noxious weeds and/or unwanted vegetation. To meet resource objectives in the planning area, the preponderance of chemical treatments would be used in areas where cheatgrass or other invasive species or noxious weeds have invaded sagebrush steppe. In these areas, fine fuel loads are extremely high due to cheatgrass dominance of the understory. The effectiveness of chemical treatments increases if they are applied following RxFire or wildland fire.

#### *1.3.2.3.2 Mechanical*

Mechanical treatments include mowing, chaining, chopping, drill seeding, and cutting vegetation. To meet resource objectives within the planning area, the majority of mechanical treatments would occur in areas where conifer/shrub densities or invasive species need to be reduced, often prior to RxFire application; when fire risk to resources is too great to use WFU or RxFires; or where opportunities exist for biomass utilization or timber harvest. Examples include:

- Mountain shrub or juniper encroachment areas adjacent to WUI areas.
- Crucial wildlife habitat (e.g., sage grouse key habitat).
- Vegetation cover types in which burning would increase the likelihood of cheatgrass invasion (e.g., juniper encroachment into Mid-elevation Shrub).
- Juniper or Aspen/Conifer cover types in which the use of trees may be desirable.

#### *1.3.2.3.3 Seeding*

Seeding treatments include applying grass, forb, or shrub seed (either aerially or from the ground) and planting shrub and tree seedlings. Native species would be used where appropriate and practical. In areas of gentle terrain, ground applications of seed are often accomplished with a rangeland drill. Seeding allows the establishment of a perennial-dominated vegetation cover type, thereby decreasing the risk of subsequent invasion by undesirable non-native grasses.

Within the planning area, seeding would be used primarily as a follow-up treatment.

### ***1.3.2.4 Post-fire Rehabilitation: Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ESR)***

Actions associated with ESR are reactive and occur following a wildland fire:

- Emergency stabilization actions are implemented within one year of a fire. Their purpose is to stabilize and prevent unacceptable degradation of natural and cultural resources; to minimize threats to life or property resulting from the effects of fire; or to repair, replace, or construct physical improvements necessary to prevent degradation of land or resources.
- Rehabilitation actions are implemented within three years of a fire. Their purpose is to repair or improve affected lands unlikely to recover to a management-approved condition on their own, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire.

### ***1.3.2.5 Restoration: Restoration Actions on BLM-administered Lands***

Treatment actions that are not included within ESR are referred to as restoration actions, which are proactive and occur before unplanned wildland fires. Restoration actions usually occur as hazardous fuels reduction treatments to meet management objectives and would consist of one or a combination of the following: RxFire, mechanical, chemical, or seeding treatments identified above.

### **1.3.3 FIRE MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES AND TREATMENT CRITERIA**

Based on human safety and resource protection (i.e., threatened and endangered species) the Proposed Action ranks the following priorities for fire suppression and fuels treatment activities:

- Protect communities-at-risk (WUI areas) where public health and safety is a concern.
- When multiple ignitions occur, use the following criteria for establishing suppression priorities:
  - Risks to sagebrush steppe.
  - Risks to Dry Conifer.

Criteria for establishing vegetation treatments are:

- Sagebrush steppe protection/maintenance (e.g., prioritize treatment to areas that are adjacent to existing sagebrush cover types).
- Sagebrush steppe restoration.
- Aspen/conifer, Mountain Shrub, and Dry Conifer restoration.
- Areas that are at high risk of loss of key ecosystem components.

It is expected that activities would be conducted with the goal of accomplishing all of the above priorities. The criteria are to be followed when fire suppression resources or funding for projects are limited.

### **1.3.4 RESTRICTIONS ON FIRE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

To protect resource values, general restrictions on fire management practices could be applied to both fire suppression and fuels treatment projects. Restrictions and guidelines were developed to protect the following resources:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Cultural Resources and Historic Trails | • Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species |
| • Special Management Areas               | • Wildlife   |
| • Riparian Areas                         | • Native Vegetation                                  |
| • Soils                                  | • Visual Resources                                   |
| • Water Quality                          | • Air Quality  |
| • WUI                                    | • Hazardous Materials and Abandoned Mines Management |

Restrictions and guidelines vary by location and are structured to allow the local manager the flexibility to apply them as appropriate, based on resource conditions, weather factors, and operational capability. Full descriptions of these restrictions and guidelines are provided in Appendix Q, Management Restrictions.

## 1.4 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

Comments regarding issues surrounding this project were solicited from tribal governments, the public, and federal, state, and local agencies. Additionally, management concerns were identified through discussions with BLM field office managers and resource specialists. Relevant issues were divided into two categories: (1) those that drove the formulation of alternatives and (2) those that can be addressed within the general context of this EIS and were used to determine the level of analysis for each resource discipline. These issues are described in detail below.

Several issues were raised during scoping that were deemed outside the scope of this EIS analysis. These issues, along with a complete list of public concerns and issues identified during the scoping process can be found in the FMDA Content Analysis (BLM 2002a).

### 1.4.1 ISSUES DRIVING DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

During internal, public, and agency scoping, two issues were identified that suggested a need for alternatives. These issues and the means of addressing them via alternatives are summarized below.

***Issue 1: What fire and non-fire vegetation treatment levels for the Upper Snake River Plain ecosystem would best meet the goals of the Cohesive Strategy?***

The Proposed Action does not fully incorporate the recommended level of treatment in the national-scale program option outlined in the draft *Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People and Sustaining Natural Resources* (U.S. Forest Service [USFS] 2000) (hereafter, Cohesive Strategy). Additionally, the Proposed Action does not directly address the goals and priorities identified in both the Cohesive Strategy and the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy, (USFS 2000<sup>2</sup>; USDI and USDA 2001). The goals of the Cohesive Strategy/10-year Comprehensive Strategy include:

- Improving fire prevention and suppression.
- Reducing hazardous fuels.
- Restoring fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Promoting community assistance.

The Cohesive Strategy, prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), projects the quantity and rate of fuels reduction treatments required on a landscape scale to restore altered fire regimes and protect communities from wildland fire. Central themes in the Cohesive Strategy/10-year Comprehensive Strategy include the return of fire to its *natural* role in the ecosystem, as well as an aggressive, collaborative approach for reducing wildland fire risk to

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<sup>2</sup> Since the development of the Draft EIS, the Cohesive Strategy has been updated (USDA and USDI 2006). The issue, as described in the Draft EIS, is appropriate to both the original and updated Cohesive Strategy.

cover types in fire-prone areas. The Cohesive Strategy estimates that fuels reduction treatments need to be increased fivefold to achieve these goals.

***Issue 2: The types of treatments under the Proposed Action may negatively affect sage grouse habitat. What effect would different types or levels of treatment have on the sagebrush steppe ecosystem and sagebrush-obligate wildlife species?***

This issue concerns the impact of treatment levels in the Proposed Action on sagebrush and the subsequent impacts to sage grouse and other sagebrush-obligate wildlife species. Treatment could occur in sagebrush, potentially affecting sage grouse habitat and populations.

#### **1.4.2 ISSUES DRIVING THE ANALYSIS**

This section summarizes the general issues that helped determine the pertinent resources and scope to be analyzed during the planning process.

- ***Water Quality, Watershed, Soils, and Riparian Resources:*** What would be the impacts on biological crusts, wind, and water erosion?
- ***Vegetation:*** What would be the impacts on vegetation cover types and/or the spread of noxious and invasive weeds?
- ***Wildlife:*** What would be the impacts on sagebrush steppe wildlife species, as well as big game winter range and calving areas?
- ***T&E Species:*** What would be the impacts on terrestrial and aquatic T&E species?
- ***Fire Management:*** How would each of the alternatives impact wildland fire risk to the WUI, including people and property?
- ***Air Quality:*** What would be the short-term and long-term impacts on air quality?
- ***Cultural Resources:*** What would be the impacts on significant cultural resources?

### **1.5 PLANNING CRITERIA AND LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS**

Planning criteria were prepared to ensure that decisions made are tailored to the issues pertinent to this programmatic planning effort and to avoid unnecessary data collection or analysis. The criteria identify the legal, policy, and regulatory constraints that direct or limit the BLM's ability to resolve issues; they also help guide the development of alternatives. The criteria were based on standards prescribed by applicable law and regulations; agency guidance; analysis of information pertinent to the planning area; results of consultation with tribal governments, the public, and government agencies; and professional judgment.

The preliminary planning criteria, provided to the public in 2002, were finalized in September 2002. These criteria can be summarized as follows:

- Comply with Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and all other applicable federal and state laws.
- Consult and coordinate with applicable federal, state, local agencies and tribal governments.

- Recognize traditional tribal uses associated with these lands and preserve values important to tribal members.
- Protect federally listed threatened/endangered species and BLM sensitive species.
- Incorporate applicable Biological Opinions, Conservation Agreements, and Strategy Plans.
- Incorporate applicable land health standards and best management practices.
- Manage resources/uses for multiple use and sustained yield.

## **1.6 DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

This EIS would provide sufficient analysis for the Idaho BLM State Director to answer the following questions:

- What fire management goals and objectives should be established at the landscape level for the LUPs in the planning area?
- What management actions should be used to meet DFC?
- What criteria should be used to establish fire management priorities?
- What restrictions are needed to protect natural and cultural values?

It should be noted that this is a programmatic EIS and analyzes broad planning-level direction to guide fire management. Proposed site-specific fire management actions would be analyzed using site-specific NEPA processes that would disclose project impacts at the implementation level.

## **1.7 RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO OTHER FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANNING EFFORTS**

This proposed LUP amendment would be the foundation for updating FMPs, fire management planning implementation documents, and on-the-ground actions and activities. The LUPs provide direction to the FMPs. This link between FMPs and LUPs is central to the Purpose and Need to amend the LUPs. In addition, guidance for developing FMPs is found in the *Wildland and Prescribed Fire Management Policy Implementation Procedures Reference Guide* (Forest Service Handbook (FSH 5108)).

The FMP prepared at the field office, Planning Area, or regional level provides implementation information for a fire management program. It is a strategic document that defines a program to manage wildland fires based on the associated LUP. The FMP contains all relevant LUP management direction to guide planning, analysis, and implementation of on-the-ground fire management actions and is updated annually to reflect changes in policy, LUP direction, and ground conditions, as well as other changes in the fire management program.

This proposed amendment to the LUPs would also offer direction for applying fire and non-fire vegetation treatments.

## **1.8 RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO NON-FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANS AND EFFORTS**

The proposed LUP amendment is interrelated with the following existing plans and ongoing efforts within the planning area.

### **1.8.1 POCATELLO LAND USE PLAN (LUP) REVISION**

This FMDA would amend the Pocatello RMP (1988) and the Malad MFP (1981). The PFO is currently preparing a separate revision to these plans, which is scheduled to be completed in fiscal year (FY) 2008. Fire management direction is addressed in the Pocatello RMP revision effort and uses similar goals, objectives, and management actions as described in this plan amendment. This planning effort would not amend the RMP revision.

### **1.8.2 THE CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT AND PRESERVE**

The NPS and the BLM have prepared a joint monument management plan for Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, which was created by Presidential Proclamation 7373 on November 9, 2000. This NPS/BLM planning area is located entirely within the administrative boundary of the FMDA planning area. Fire management planning decisions for Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve have been determined through the monument management planning process. Finalizing the FMDA would not amend any decisions nor affect management for the Monument and Preserve.

### **1.8.3 IDAHO NATIONAL LABORATORY (INL)**

The INL is located entirely within the administrative boundary of the USFO. The DOE-ID and the BLM both have management responsibilities within the INL boundaries, as identified in a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). While most INL activities are overseen by DOE-ID, certain responsibilities, such as grazing management, remain with the BLM. The INL has primary responsibility for suppressing wildland fires within its administrative boundaries, and BLM provides mutual aid for wildland fire response.

In April 2003, DOE-ID completed the *Final Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory Wildland Fire Management Environmental Assessment*. DOE-ID has completed a management plan for the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem Reserve (SSER) within the INL boundary. DOE-ID is supportive of the BLM's fire management planning effort and agrees that describing the INL lands in this planning document would be beneficial to the two agencies and interested publics.

As identified in the 2003 MOU, the Districts would consult with DOE-ID prior to making any final decisions regarding wildland fire suppression and control that might affect the INL.

### **1.8.4 INTERIOR COLUMBIA BASIN ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT PROJECT**

The BLM is guided by a 2003 MOU to use information from the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy to amend and revise RMPs and project implementation on BLM-administered lands

throughout the Interior Columbia Basin. The Interior Columbia Basin Strategy provides guidance for how to incorporate data and resource information developed by the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (completed in December 2000). The strategy facilitates the use of the project because a basin-scale Record of Decision (ROD) has been neither signed nor expected.

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project was used in the development of the Purpose and Need for the fire management direction assessed in this EIS, particularly information relating to vegetation management to control cheatgrass invasion and maintain existing sagebrush steppe cover types in the planning area. The BLM has incorporated the science and data from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project as part of the fire, fuels, and related vegetation management direction.

### **1.8.5 TRIBAL TRUST RESPONSIBILITIES**

The BLM is responsible for maintaining a formal government-to-government relationship with federally recognized tribal governments. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Governments and Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Governments have rights to and cultural/historical affiliation with lands in the planning area. The relationship between the federal government and the tribal governments focuses on ensuring that the legal rights and interests of the tribal governments are upheld and protected, in accordance with relevant treaties, executive orders, legislation, and federal policies. This includes consulting with tribal representatives; identifying and protecting important archaeological, religious, and/or sacred sites; and providing tribal members with appropriate access to these sites.

### **1.8.6 VEGETATION TREATMENTS AND HERBICIDE USE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS (EISS)**

The BLM prepared a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to address vegetation treatments using herbicides on BLM lands in 17 western states (BLM 2007). The Record of Decision (ROD) was signed on September 29, 2007. The PEIS addresses non-herbicide treatment methods, including fire use and mechanical, manual, and biological control methods, to treat hazardous fuel conditions, invasive species, and other unwanted or competing vegetation. Several new herbicide active ingredients were identified that are more effective in treating certain types of vegetation than currently approved herbicide active ingredients. The BLM has determined that the potential for increased use of herbicides, and approval for use of additional herbicide active ingredients on public lands would reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires by reducing hazardous fuel conditions, restoring fire-damaged lands, and improving ecosystem health.

### **1.8.7 UPPER SNAKE LAND USE PLAN (LUP) REVISION**

The USFO is beginning a LUP revision process that would result in replacing existing field office LUPs in 2011/2012. As with the Pocatello RMP revision, the Upper Snake RMP revision would use similar goals, objectives, and management actions as those described in this FMDA.

## 1.9 PLAN CONFORMANCE

Approval of the ROD for this project would amend fire management direction in all 12 existing LUPs listed in Table 1-2. The new fire management direction presented in the selected alternative would be incorporated into each of the 12 plans, thereby bringing them into compliance with current fire policy and planning direction. Appendix B compares how each alternative would amend each of the existing LUPs when compared to the existing LUPs' direction and current program (i.e., Alternative A – The No Action Alternative). This amendment affects only fire management direction. All other resource management direction in the existing 12 LUPs would still apply.

## 1.10 CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT AND FINAL EIS

The Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (FMDA) was published in November of 2004 (USDI 2004a). During preparation of the Proposed Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) several steps have been completed:

- public comments received on the draft plan amendment/EIS have been considered and incorporated into the Final EIS,
- Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation has been completed with the results also incorporated into the Final EIS.

However, extended timeframes associated with completing the consultation process, coupled with shifting office and personnel priorities away from this planning effort have extended the original timeframe for completion of the amendment. During this period several developments, including new information regarding the planning area and the draft EIS have occurred. The developments and new information pertinent to the FMDA since the Draft EIS was released are:

### ***Applicability of the Data***

- Specific on-the-ground conditions have changed since 2004 and there are additional datasets that have been developed since 2004.

### ***Additional BLM Policy and Direction for Management Activities***

- A National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy was completed in 2004 (USDI-BLM 2004b), which was supplemented by a Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho in 2006 (USDI-BLM 2006).
- A National EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) pertaining to vegetation treatments and chemical usage were completed in 2007 (USDI-BLM 2007).
- A Land Use Plan Amendment and ROD for the implementation of a wind energy development program was completed in 2005 (USDI BLM 2005b).
- A programmatic EIS was prepared to evaluate issues associated with the designation of energy corridors on federal lands in eleven western states (USDOE and USDI BLM 2006).

***Changes in Administrative Boundaries and Designations***

- The Idaho BLM redefined District boundaries after the release of the Draft EIS. Public Law and Presidential Proclamation also changed land management designations in the area with the expansion of the Craters of the Moon National Monument.

These events warranted consideration to validate release of the Final EIS and Proposed Plan Amendment. A Supplemental Information Report (SIR) (Appendix S) was prepared to consider the significance of the new information and to inform the State Director of the adequacy of the existing analysis prior to the issuance of a Final EIS and Proposed Plan Amendment.

The Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) state that, "Agencies shall prepare supplements to either draft or final environmental impact statements if ... (ii) there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts." 40 CFR §1502.9(c)(1). Based on the evaluation and analysis documented in the SIR, the new information and developments that have occurred since the issuance of the Draft EIS do not represent significant new circumstances or information (when considered in context and/or intensity) that is relevant to the environmental concerns and bearing on the Draft FMDA that would trigger a supplement as required by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Section 1502.9. The FMDA analysis is sufficient for the purpose of complete disclosure contemplated under the requirements of NEPA.