

SELECTION OF THE PLAN

Seven alternatives are analyzed in the Lemhi Resource Management Plan EIS (Part II of Draft). Each alternative emphasizes a different management philosophy, ranging from continuing present management to making significant changes in future management. Impact assessment of these alternatives has identified the magnitude of environmental consequences associated with each. A Plan has been selected based on the planning criteria described on pages 28 to 36 of the Proposed RMP/EIS.

PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning criteria are the factors or data that BLM must consider prior to arriving at a land use decision relative to any issue. Listed below are the planning criteria and a discussion of how the ten general criteria have been applied in selection of the Plan.

1. Social and Economic Values

The Plan considers social and economic values in Lemhi County by providing for land disposal, livestock grazing, mineral development, timber harvest and wildlife values. About 5,835 acres will be transferred from federal ownership. Livestock management will provide 43,602 AUMs of livestock forage. A total of 460,797 acres will be open for oil and gas leasing and 455,434 acres will be open for location of mining claims. Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest, with an allowable cut of 1.07 million board feet per year.

2. Plans, Programs, and Policies of Other Federal Agencies, State and Local Governments, and Indian Tribes

The BLM's resource management plans must be consistent with officially approved and adopted resource-related plans (or in their absence, policies or programs) of other federal agencies, state, and local governments, and Indian tribes. The Proposed Plan is consistent with the 1981 Lemhi County Comprehensive Plan. Public input from federal agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes does not indicate that there are any inconsistencies with their plans.

3. Existing Law, Regulations, and BLM Policy

In the Plan, there does not appear to be any discrepancy with existing law, regulation, or BLM policy.

4. Future Needs and Demand for Existing or Potential Resource Commodities and Values

The demand for minerals and energy is expected to remain low. The demand for the livestock grazing resource is high and there is a moderate demand for the timber resource. The Plan meets or exceeds these demands.

A significant portion of the Resource Area is presently leased for oil and gas or on the oil and gas simultaneous list. However, actual development for oil and gas is limited. Coal does occur in the Lemhi Resource Area but is of low quality; no coal mines have operated in the area for over 40 years. Leasing interest for geothermal resources is generally low. Phosphate rocks of low and medium grade do occur but development in the near future is unlikely.

The average use by livestock the past five years has been 52,541 AUMs. While the initial stocking rate will be 43,602 AUMs, the long-term stocking rate will increase to 52,632 AUMs.

Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest, with an allowable cut of 1.07 million board feet per year.

5. Public Input

The Plan has taken into consideration the concerns of the minerals and energy industry by making lands accessible and available for exploration. Other public concerns have dealt with range resource, wildlife habitat, wilderness, lands disposal, and timber harvest. The Plan provides for the protection and use of all of these resources.

6. Public Welfare and Safety

Facilities provided at developed campgrounds and other recreational areas will provide for public welfare and safety. While public land within areas identified as open to motorized vehicle use generally will remain available for such use without restrictions, restrictions could be imposed when there was a need to promote user safety. To provide for public safety, stipulations will be included in mining plans of operations. Public hazards will be clearly marked and fenced, if necessary, to prevent injury. Full suppression fire management guidelines would be followed on 444,770 acres. In addition, heavy fuel loading caused by logging debris and dead trees will be reduced on 10,000 acres to decrease the likelihood of having a disastrous fire.

7. Past and Present Use of Public and Adjacent Lands

The Plan provides for the continuation of past and present use of public and adjacent lands while still providing for the protection and development of other resource values.

Livestock management will provide 43,602 AUMs of livestock forage in the short-term and 52,632 in the long-term. A total of 460,797 acres will be open for oil and gas leasing and 455,434 acres will be open for location of mining claims. Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest, with an allowable cut of 1.07 million board feet per year. Game populations of 9,350 deer, 2,194 elk, 2,950 antelope, and 200 bighorn sheep will utilize

6,466 AUMs of forage. For fisheries, BLM will maintain 94.7 miles of stream in their present condition and improve 3.0 miles. A total of 15.5 miles of perennial stream riparian area will be improved.

This plan will recognize recreation as the principal use of the lands in three special recreation management areas. Lands open to unrestricted vehicle use will total 428,540 acres.

8. Public Benefits of Providing Goods and Services in Relation to Costs

It is estimated that it will cost \$1.7 million over the 20-year life of the RMP to provide goods and services. However, over a 20-year period, revenues of \$10.8 million will be generated and state and local governments will receive \$9.6 million.

9. Quantity and Quality of Noncommodity Resource Values

The Plan provides noncommodity resource values such as wildlife, fisheries, watershed, recreation, wilderness, and cultural sites. The quantity and quality of these resources will best be protected by alternative C. However, the Preferred Alternative (now the Plan) will result in game populations of 9,350 deer, 2,194 elk, 2,950 antelope, and 200 bighorn sheep. For fisheries, BLM will maintain 94.7 miles of stream in their present condition and improve 3.0 miles. A total of 15.5 miles of perennial stream riparian area will be improved.

This plan will recognize recreation as the principal use of the lands in three special recreation management areas. Lands open to unrestricted vehicle use will total 428,540 acres. The Plan recommends 14,796 acres as suitable for wilderness designation. Five cultural resource management plans will be written.

10. Environmental Impacts

Transfer of lands out of federal ownership will result in a loss of administrative control of all resource values except mineral values. Designation of the Eighteenmile WSA as wilderness will result in the loss of harvestable timber yield from suitable commercial forest land in that area. Completion of nonstructural range improvements will represent a commitment of land and resources for the lives of the projects. Recreation opportunity spectrum classes that shifted from primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized to semi-primitive motorized and roaded natural will likely never return to the original class.

On the positive side, the Plan will provide for improvement in ecological range condition. Livestock AUMs would show a minor increase over the 5-year average use. Wildlife habitat condition and available AUMs will increase. Fisheries habitat will show a moderate improvement. Improvements in riparian areas and watershed can be expected. A major increase in recreational opportunities will take place. Wilderness acreage will be 14,796 acres. Impacts to cultural resources will decrease slightly.

Rationale

The Plan gives no special emphasis to any one resource but emphasizes balanced, multiple use management and is based upon a realistic expectation of funding. Alternative G would be the Plan if the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area is not designated by Congressional action. The rationale for selection of the Preferred Alternative (now the Plan) is summarized below.

Outlined below is a discussion of how the Plan addresses the issues developed during the planning process.

LANDS - Retention and Transfer

Issue No. 1 deals with the disposal or retention of public lands. The Plan identifies a total of 5,835 acres to be evaluated through detailed studies for potential transfer out of public ownership. Of this total, 4,295 acres will be considered for transfer by public sales or exchanges; 1,340 acres through the Desert Land Act, and 200 acres by exchange only. Land acquisitions include the possibility of acquiring 1,240 acres of private and 4,360 acres of state land.

Rationale: The issue of disposal or retention of the public lands can best be handled by using a balanced land tenure adjustment program that improves management efficiency. The Plan will allow for a balanced sale, exchange, and Desert Land Entry program. This alternative maintains continuity in the grazing program and retains parcels that have high wildlife and other multiple use values. Only parcels of relatively low multiple use value that are difficult to manage or present management problems will be available for transfer.

The Plan will also recognize the expressed need to make land with agricultural potential available for development under the Desert Land Act. The lands specifically available for agricultural development will be transferred only if determined suitable as a result of the required detailed studies. Otherwise, they will be retained in federal ownership. This will assure continued multiple use management if the lands were not suitable for agricultural development.

Acquisitions will be aimed at benefitting the wildlife program (Issue No. 2b) by acquiring valuable wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

MINERALS

The Plan will maintain approximately 97 percent of the RMP area open to energy leasing, 81 percent open to solid mineral leasing and saleable mineral disposals, and 96 percent open to mineral location. All of the RMP area is prospectively valuable for oil and gas. The occurrence of known solid leasable minerals is limited to a small area, approximately half of which will be closed. Mineral materials are widespread throughout the RMP area.

Approximately 18,921 acres will be withdrawn from mineral location by the recommendation for wilderness designation on a portion of the Eighteen-mile WSA, for the protection of important historical and cultural resources, and for the protection of recreational developments. Roughly 92,596 acres will be closed to solid mineral leasing, but only 1,580 acres or 2 percent of this has any known potential for solid mineral leasing.

Rationale: The specific issues affecting minerals management are wildlife (Issue #5), wilderness (Issue #9), and recreation (Issue #7). In addition, minerals are affected by the management concern relating to cultural resources. The Energy and Minerals issue (#2) asks, "How will energy and mineral resource development be accommodated?" (2a); and "What lands would be closed to various mineral activities for the preservation of other resources?" (2b). These issues are addressed and answered in the Plan as follows:

Wildlife (Issue #5): This issue is addressed by the seasonal closures for fluid mineral leasing and by some of the closures to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales. Disruption of wildlife habitat by operations under the 1872 Mining Law can often be reduced or mitigated during the review process under the surface management regulations.

Wilderness (Issue #9): The issue is whether or not the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area (WSA) should be recommended for wilderness designation. Under this Plan, over half (roughly 60 percent) of the WSA will be recommended for wilderness designation. Designation of the area as wilderness will close it to mineral activity. Preliminary data (Geology, Energy, and Minerals Studies Phase 1 and Phase 2) indicate that potential for mineral development of this area is low. There are no known mineral occurrences within the WSA, and there are no mining claims located within the WSA. The Phase 2 study conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey is not conclusive as to the possibility of mineral occurrences within the area, since some of their geochemical data may indicate potential for metallic minerals. However, the lack of reported occurrences and mining claims is a good indicator that the industry may consider the area to have low potential. Therefore, the withdrawal of this area from all forms of mineral activity is thought to have no significant impact on national mineral production.

Recreation (Issue #7): The first recreation issue (#7a), overcrowding of facilities, would hardly affect mineral production. Developed recreational areas will be withdrawn from the operations of the mining law, closed to mineral material sales and non-energy mineral leasing, and leased for fluid minerals only with the no-surface-occupancy stipulations. None of the existing recreation sites, or future proposed sites, are in areas with known mineral potential, so any impact will be small if areas were closed or withdrawn.

The second recreation issue (#7b) is, "What management practices should occur within areas of national significance?" This issue is answered by the use of no surface occupancy for fluid mineral leasing and the closure of some areas to material sales and solid mineral leasing in the Plan. Activity under the 1872 Mining Law can be adequately managed under the

surface management regulations during the Plan of Operations review process. In general, the primary restrictions on minerals will be placed on the Lewis and Clark Trail area, the Salmon River corridor, and the Continental Divide Trail. Of these areas, only the Continental Divide Trail has a significant known mineral deposit (primarily thorium), and the trail will not be withdrawn from location under the Plan.

Cultural Resources (Management Concern #2): Under the Plan, this management concern would be answered by the use of the no-surface-occupancy stipulation for fluid mineral leasing, closure to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales, and, where necessary, withdrawal from the operation of the 1872 Mining Law. In general, closures will be small and would have little, if any, impact on local or nationally significant mineral values.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Under the Plan, over 95 percent of the suitable commercial forest land will be available for intensive forest management (see Map 5 of the Proposed Plan). The set-aside acreage under this alternative will amount to 90 acres for protection of recreation values and 1,354 acres for protection of recommended wilderness.

Of the 95 percent available for intensive management, approximately 6 percent will be restricted for protection of high value resources. Specifically, 1,179 acres will be restricted to reduce the impacts to crucial elk winter range and 581 acres to maintain the visual qualities of the existing landscape along the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Approximately 88 percent of the woodland within the planning area will be open to woodland product sales (firewood, Christmas trees, etc.). The remaining 12 percent will be closed to protect 622 acres having high recreation values and 2,509 acres encompassing recommended wilderness.

Intensive management of the 28,865 acres of available commercial forest land will enable the planning area to support its present sustained yield allowable cut of approximately 10.71 million board feet per decade.

Rationale: The Plan recognizes the local demand for timber while accommodating other high value resources requiring protection from the impacts of timber harvesting. This Plan designates the commercial forest lands available for intensive management (Issue 3a) and provides for the planning area to meet its present sustained yield allowable cut. The Plan further delineates areas of restricted management in response to important recreation, watershed, and wildlife values (Issue 3b).

Protection of certain high value resources includes the set-aside of 1,444 acres necessitated by the importance of maintaining the visual quality within the proposed Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area, Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and the Williams Creek Recreation Site. Less restrictive measures allowing the harvest of timber were found to be

inadequate in the proposed management of these resources under this alternative. All of the proposed set-asides in this plan are in conformance with current BLM forest land policy.

Selection of this plan provides an even supply of timber to local markets, yet mitigates the impacts of timber harvesting on other important resource values. Designations of set-asides and restrictions are consistent with current BLM forest land policy; they eliminate major impacts to conflicting resources while having negligible economic impact to the local community.

RANGE MANAGEMENT

The Plan is based on 459,481 acres of public land in 88 grazing allotments with the short-term grazing preference reduced from 63,898 AUMs to 43,602 AUMs. If 5,182 acres of public land are transferred to private ownership, this will leave 454,299 acres in 82 allotments with a short-term grazing preference of 42,842 AUMs. The long-term stocking level will be between 51,872 AUMs and 52,632 AUMs depending on the acres transferred.

The Plan recognizes the need to improve watershed condition, riparian areas, and livestock distribution while providing forage and habitat for wildlife and initiating a brush control program. Seeding will be done in areas where a native perennial seed source was not available. Additional range improvements--spring developments, pipelines, reservoirs, and fences--will also be provided.

Rationale: The Plan recognizes livestock grazing on public land as the third most important economic resource for this area. It maintains most of the current livestock operations with the exception of those allotments which will be transferred to private ownership through lands actions. The Plan will provide for multiple use by allowing livestock grazing, soil protection, wildlife habitat, and other resource uses. It addresses the major range management problems of repetitive early grazing of spring range and over-utilization of riparian zones and meadows, both wet and dry. It also provides the parameters for controlling the spread of noxious plants. It identifies small allotments which could be combined with other adjoining small allotments to improve management flexibility and opportunities.

Range improvements, designed to improve livestock distribution, will enhance or have minimal adverse impacts on the other resources.

There will not be significant long-term grazing reductions while increasing good ecological condition range from 61 to 66 percent of the planning area.

The Plan would address three issues: (4.a) managing the range resource to meet existing and future livestock demand, (4.b) designating forage for livestock and wildlife uses, and (4.c) using special management techniques for livestock grazing to improve sensitive areas.