PART II

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Medicine Lodge Resource Management Plan
and
Environmental Impact Statement

(X) Draft ( ) Final

Lead Agency

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

Type of Action

(X) Administrative ( ) Legislative

Abstract

This draft resource managment plan and environmental impact statement describes and analyzes five alternative plans for managing 648,719 acres of BLM-administered land and 140,415 acres within the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory in the Medicine Lodge Resoruce Area of the Idaho Falls District. In addition to the lands within the Medicine Lodge Resource Area, grazing will be analyzed on 72,053 acres of the Twin Buttes Allotment in the Big Butte Resource Area. Alternative A would continue present management. Alternative B would emphasize increases in commodity production, consumptive uses and more intensive development. Alternative C, the Preferred Alternative, would allow production and use of commodity resources while protecting natural systems for nonconsumptive resource uses. Alternative D recommends part of two WSAs for wilderness designation and is similar to Alternative C. Alternative D recommends wilderness designation for two WSAs, favors habitat management to increase wildlife populations, and increases protection of cultural resources and opportunities for general recreation.

For further information, contact:

O'dell A. Frandsen, District Manager
Bureau of Land Management
940 Lincoln Road
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401
Telephone (208) 529-1020

Comments should be submitted to the above address by DEC 27 1984

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
PART II		
Summary		v
Chapter 1.	Purpose and Need	1-1
Chapter 2.	Alternatives	2-1
	Alternative A	2-4
	Alternative B	2-7
	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	2-11
	Alternative D	2-16
	Alternative E	2-18
Chapter 3.	Affected Environment	3-1
	Lands	3-2
	Minerals	3-5
	Forestry	3-9
	Livestock Forage and Grazing	3-10
	Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat	3-12
	Water and Water Quality	3-18
	Watershed and Soils	3-19
	Recreation and ORV Management	3-20
	Visual Resources	3-23
	Wilderness Resources	3-24
	Natural History	3-26
	Cultural Resources	3-30
	Fire Management	3-30
	Economic Conditions	3-32
Chapter 4.	Environmental Consequences	4-1
	Alternative A	4-3
	Alternative B	4-12
	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)	4-18
	Alternative D	4-25
	Alternative E	4-29
Chapter 5.	Consultation and Coordination	5-1
	List of Preparers	5-6
	References	5-8
	Glossary	5-17
	Index	5-29

LIST OF TABLES

2-1	Summary of Alternatives
2-2	Comparative Analysis of Environmental Consequences
3-1	Riparian Habitat Condition
3-2	Recreation Management Areas
3-3	South Fork of the Snake River
3-4	Fire Occurances in the Medicine Lodge Resource Area
3-5	Distribution of Recreation Expenditures

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1	Location Map
Map 2	Management Areas
Map 3	Alternative A
Map 4	Alternative B
Map 5	Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)
Map 6	Alternative D
Map 7	Alternative E
Map 8	Land Status
Map 9	Wildlife Seasonal Occupancy Restrictions
Map 10	General Soils

Note: Maps 3-8 are in map packet at back of document.

SUMMARY

The Medicine Lodge Resource Management Plan (RMP) is being prepared to provide the Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Falls District Office, with a comprehensive framework for managing 648,700 acres of BLM-administered public land over the next 10 or more years. With increasing demands for various resources, prudent stewardship of the public lands can no longer be accomplished without comprehensive land use planning.

The RMP/EIS is divided into 3 parts.

Part I of this document is the draft plan for the Medicine Lodge Resource Area, Idaho Falls District (see map 1 for location.)

Part II of this document is the environmental impact statement portion that deals with the expected environmental impacts associated with several alternatives. Each alternative represents a possible plan for the Medicine Lodge Resource Area. Alternative C is the preferred alternative and is the same as the draft plan (Part I).

Part III, Appendix, consists of specific data on which Part I and Part II are based. More detailed information is available for inspection at the Idaho Falls District Office.

The Preferred Alternative reflects BLM's effort to resolve resource conflicts and ensure that the public lands are managed in accordance with principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

Issues

The following planning issues were identified through public participation for the Medicine Lodge Resource Area. The issues presented here are those that received major emphasis in the public responses and ones that need a land use decision in the resource management plan.

Public Land Transfer

1. What public lands should be transferred out of public ownership or consolidated with other public lands?
2. Which public lands have agricultural potential?
3. What should be done with isolated tracts and omitted lands?

Mineral and Energy Exploration and Development

1. Should some public lands be closed to mineral leasing?
2. Should any areas be withdrawn from mineral entry?
3. What special conditions should be placed on mineral exploration and development?

Timber Resource Utilization

1. Should any areas be closed to timber harvesting?
2. Should restrictions be placed on timber harvesting?

Livestock Use

1. How should the range resource be managed to meet existing and future livestock demand?
2. How much forage should be designated for livestock use?
3. What special conditions should be placed on livestock grazing?

Wildlife Use

1. How should the range resource be managed to meet existing and future wildlife demand?
2. How much forage should be designated for wildlife use?

Recreation and ORV Use

1. What areas should be designated as open, closed or limited to motorized vehicles?
2. What areas should be developed as recreation sites?
3. Should the South Fork of the Snake River receive special designation as a scenic or recreational river?

Wilderness Designation

1. Which areas should be recommended for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System?
2. If not recommended and designated as wilderness, how will the Wilderness Study Areas be managed?

Water and Water Quality

1. Which riparian areas need to be improved in the area and which maintained?
2. How should the public lands be managed to compliment the Willow Creek 208 Project?

Fire Management

1. What areas should be designated for full suppression, limited suppression, suppression with restrictions, and prescribed burns?
2. What restrictions are needed in fire suppression to protect sensitive resource values?

Alternatives

Five alternatives were considered in developing the Medicine Lodge RMP. These alternatives comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and at the same time address the issues identified in the area. Two alternatives considered but not developed for the RMP were the Maximum Grazing Alternative and the No Grazing Alternative. The alternatives, general guidelines for developing alternatives, key management actions and a brief discussion of alternatives are discussed below.

Alternative A

This alternative represents the existing situation and will serve as the baseline for analyzing other alternatives. The present level of management on the public lands would be continued while measures would be taken to prevent or correct deteriorating conditions. Any changes in management would be brought about through monitoring and the environmental analysis process. All actions would be handled on a case by case basis.

No wilderness study areas would be recommended for wilderness designation. Those areas not recommended for wilderness designation would be managed for their multiple use values.

As defined by BLM policy, Alternative A is the proposed action for livestock grazing.

Management Action Summary

Transfer acres are composed of 540 acres which would be transferred from public ownership by sale or exchange. An additional 1,475 acres of public land have Desert Land Entry applications filed on them which need to be examined and processed.

A total of 408,100 acres would be open to fluid mineral leasing with standard stipulations, 320,920 acres with seasonal occupancy restrictions and 65,630 acres under no surface occupancy restrictions. There would be 135,380 acres closed to soild and fluid mineral leasing. A total of 793,110 acres would be open to locatable mineral entry and 136,920 acres closed to protect other resource values. A total of 797,540 acres would be open to mineral material sales and 132,490 acres closed.

Approximately 14,410 acres of public forest land would be open to commercial harvest under existing regulations, restrictions and stipulations. Under this alternative, 12,773 acres of woodland would be available for selective management.

This alternative would provide 88,302 AUMs of livestock forage. Approximately 621,019 acres of public land and 125,026 acres within the INEL boundary would be included in grazing allotments.

The objective for Alternative A would be to maintain existing livestock use. No range improvements are proposed for this alternative.

A stocking level of 88,302 AUMs is being proposed for Alternative A even though the present active preference is 103,281 AUMs.

The Sands Habitat Management Plan includes 208,532 acres of public lands and would continue to be implemented and the objectives stated in the plan would be followed. In addition, the guidelines established by the Memorandum of Understanding for the South Fork of the Snake River and the Tex Creek Cooperative Agreement with the Idaho Fish and Game would be followed. There are 35,865 AUMs of wildlife forage being proposed under this alternative to satisfy existing demands.

Approximately 53 miles of stream would be managed to maintain existing fisheries, water quality and riparian habitat in current satisfactory condition. Public land within the SCS Willow Creek 208 project would be managed in accordance with that watershed protection plan.

Under this alternative, 1,120 acres would be closed to ORV use in the Menan Butte area and 21,580 acres in the Sand Mountain and Stinking Springs area would have seasonal closures to protect big game wintering areas. The National Natural Landmark designation would remain on the 1,120 acres of Menan Butte.

The wilderness recommendation is nonsuitable under this alternative for both WSAs. The areas would be managed under the Interim Management Policy until Congress acts.

All areas would be considered as full fire suppression. Prescribed burning would occur on approximately 15,760 acres, of which 50% would be burned.

Environmental Consequences Summary

In Alternative A there would be a minor decrease in the acres of land retained in public ownership. The acres of land available for minerals management would remain the same. There would be a minor decrease in the amount of forest land available for harvest. Ecological range condition would remain basically the same with a slight increase in livestock AUMs. There would be no change in wildlife habitat condition and forage would be available for existing numbers. Water quality would continue to decrease in areas currently in a downward trend. Recreation opportunities would remain the same.

Alternative B

This alternative would favor production and use of commodity resources and commercial use authorizations. Management direction would favor higher livestock stocking levels, more range improvements, land disposal for agricultural development, and transfer of isolated or difficult to manage parcels out of federal ownership. Restrictions on mining, mineral leasing, mineral material removal, and off-road-vehicle use would be minimized.

Management Action Summary

Approximately 25,400 acres would be available for transfer from federal ownership through sale, exchange or agricultural entry.

A total of 566,440 acres would be open to fluid mineral leasing with standard stipulations, 308,520 acres with seasonal occupancy restrictions, and 27,170 acres under no surface occupancy restrictions. Only 27,900 acres would be closed to mineral leasing. This alternative would include opening about 106,840 acres of the INEL to mineral leasing. Areas open to locatable mineral entry total 794,090 acres. Areas closed total 135,940 acres. A total of 915,510 acres would be open to sales of mineral materials and only 14,520 acres would be closed to protect other resource values.

Approximately 13,841 acres of public forest land would be open to commercial harvest under existing regulations, restricitons and stipulations under this alternative. Another 569 acres would be lost through transfer actions. Under this alternative, 12,638 acres of woodland would be available for selective management. One hundred thirty five acres of woodlands would be withdrawn from harvest around existing bald eagle nesting sites.

Livestock management would provide 108,835 AUMs of livestock forage. Approximately 621,019 acres of public land and 125,026 acres within the INEL boundary would be included in grazing allotments. The objective of Alternative B would be to maintain or improve existing perennial forage plants, maintain soil stability, stabilize areas currently in downward trend, and increase availability of perennial forage plants.

The Sands Habitat Management Plan would continue to be used and updated. A total of 24,601 AUMs of wildlife forage would be allowed under this alternative. An HMP would be developed for the Edie Creek Bench area covering 11,500 acres. The Tex Creek Cooperative Agreement and the South Fork MOU would continue to be followed.

Under Alternative B 23.9 miles of stream would be managed primarily for riparian, fisheries or water quality improvement and protection. Approximately 53 miles of stream would be managed to maintain existing fisheries, water quality and riparian habitat in current satisfactory condition. Public lands within the SCS Willow Creek 208 project would be managed in cooperation with other land owners to implement the watershed protection plan.

Under this alternative, 1,120 acres would be closed to ORV use in the Menan Butte area. An additional 21,580 acres in the Sand Mountain and Stinking Springs areas would have a seasonal closure to protect big game wintering areas.

The National Natural Landmark designation would be maintained on Menan Butte. In addition, Special Recreation Management Designations would be applied to the Sands, Juniper Mountain area and to the Snake River. The Cress Creek Trail has been nominated as a National Recreation Trail.

The two WSAs, totaling 21,870 acres, would be recommended as nonsuitable. These areas would be managed under the Interim Management Policy until Congress makes final determination.

Approximately 648,719 acres would be provided full fire suppression under Alternative B. In addition, 164,328 acres would be considered for prescribed burning.

Environmental Consequences

With the increase in lands available for transfer from federal ownership, the amount of lands retained would decrease. There would be a major increase in the amount of land available for leaseable energy and minerals. Commercial forest land available for management would decrease due to land transfer actions. Range condition would improve due to vegetation manipulation and improved management. Livestock AUMs would show a minor increase. Wildlife habitat would show a decrease in condition and forage available to wildlife would be less. There would be a decrease in water quality, fisheries and riparian condition. Developed recreation opportunities would increase. The social and economic conditions would show an increase for the area.

Alternative C

This is BLM's Preferred Alternative. A variety of resource uses would be allowed. Production and use of commodity resources and commercial use authorizations would occur, while protecting fragile resources and wildlife habitat, preserving natural systems and cultural values and allowing for non-consumptive resource uses. A balanced approach to multiple use would be pursued. Resource use levels would be within the range set by Alternatives B and E.

Management Actions

Approximately 8,100 acres of public land would be available for transfer from federal ownership by sale, exchange or agricultural entry.

A total of 515,040 acres would be open to fluid mineral leasing with standard stipulations, 341,820 acres with seasonal occupancy restrictions and 44,870 acres under no surface occupancy restrictions. Only 28,300 acres would be closed to mineral leasing and 857 acres closed to solid mineral leasing. This alternative would include opening about 106,840 acres of the INEL to mineral leasing. Areas open to locatable mineral entry total 786,673 acres and there would be 143,357 acres closed. A total of 869,960 acres would be open to sale of mineral materials and 60,070 acres would be closed to protect other resource values.

There would be 10,982 acres of public land open to commercial timber harvest under existing regulations, restrictions and stipulations under the preferred alternative. Deferred from harvest would be 1,966 acres which are uneconomical or not feasible to cut at this time. There would be 296 acres withdrawn from timber harvest because of slope, soils or inability of the site to reproduce timber. An additional 818 acres were withdrawn from harvest because of protection of other resource values or the acreage would be lost through transfer action. There would be 2,925 acres of woodland along the South Fork of the Snake River withdrawn from harvesting.

Alternative C would provide 100,449 AUMs of livestock forage. Approximately 621,000 acres of public land and 125,026 acres within the INEL boundary would be included in grazing allotments. The objective of this alternative would be to maintain or improve existing perennial forage plants, maintain soil stability, stabilize areas currently in downward trend, and increase availability of perennial forage plants.

The Sands Habitat Management Plan (HMP) would continue to be used and updated as needed. A total of 49,163 AUMs of forage would be allowed under this alternative. This would provide forage for expected herd numbers over the next 20 years. The Tex Creek Cooperative Agreement and the South Fork of the Snake River MOU with the Idaho Fish and Game would continue to be followed. A management plan for the South Fork of the Snake River will be developed. Wildlife values will be one of the key resources planned for in that area.

Under Alternative C, 30.5 miles of stream would be managed primarily for riparian, fisheries and/or water quality improvement and protection. This would require 13.6 miles of fence to be built to protect 6.8 miles of stream. Another 53 miles of stream would be managed to maintain existing fisheries, water quality and riparian habitat in current satisfactory condition. Public lands within the SCS Willow Creek 208 Watershed Project area would be managed in cooperation with other land owners and agencies to implement the watershed protection plan.

Off-road-vehicle closures would be imposed on 18,907 acres in Alternative C. An additional 69,400 acres would have seasonal closures to ORV use and 27,889 acres would have vehicle restrictions to existing roads and trails. The remaining 601,923 acres would be open to off-road-vehicle use. The National Natural Landmark designation would be maintained on 1,120 acres on Menan Butte. Three areas would be nominated for designation as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. A Special Recreation Management Area designation would be applied to the Sand Dunes complex and also the Snake River. Research Natural Area designations would be given to Menan Butte. The Cress Creek Trail would be nominated as a National Recreation Trail.

The 21,870 acres in the two Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) would be recommended as nonsuitable. These areas would be managed under the Interim Management Policy until Congress makes final determination.

Approximately 429,301 acres would be provided full fire suppression. The remaining 217,196 acres would be included in a limited suppression plan. Included are 51,505 acres that would be considered for prescribed burning over the next 20 years.

Environmental Consequences

There will be a modest increase in public lands made available for transfer which could cause a decrease in public land acres retained. The amount of land available for leasable and salable minerals would show major increase while lands available to locatable mineral entry will show a minor decrease. Commercial forest land available for harvest would be slightly less due to withdrawal for threatened and endangered species and critical wildlife habitat. Ecological range condition would improve and the amount of livestock AUMs would show a slight increase. Wildlife habitat condition and forage availability would show an overall increase under this alternative. Water quality, fisheries and riparian condition would improve due to proposed management. Recreation opportunities would increase over the existing situation. The social and economic conditions would improve over the existing situation.

Alternative D

The partial wilderness alternative considers part of the Sand Mountain and Snake River Islands WSAs as potential wilderness. All use levels except for Wilderness, Energy and Minerals and Lands would remain the same as for Alternative C, the preferred Alternative.

Management Actions

Transfer of 680 acres would be by exchange or sale. Another 1,475 acres have been applied for through Desert Land Entry.

A total of 515,040 acres would be open to fluid mineral leasing with standard stipulations, 330,860 acres would have seasonal restrictions and 49,131 acres would be open to leasing under no surface occupancy restrictions. A total of 34,999 acres would be closed to fluid mineral leasing, with 857 more acres closed to solid mineral leasing. This alternative would include opening the 106,040 acres of the INEL to mineral leasing. Areas open to locatable mineral entry would total 776,113 acres and 153,917 acres would be closed. A total of 858,600 acres would be open for the sale of mineral materials and 71,430 acres would be closed to mineral materials use to protect other resource values.

A total of 6,715 acres would be recommended as suitable for wilderness designation. The remaining 15,155 acres would be recommended as nonsuitable. These areas would be managed under the Interim Management Policy until Congress makes final determination.

All other management actions would be the same as Alternative C.

Environmental Consequences

The environmental consequences for Alternative D would be the same as for Alternative C except that less land would be transferred from public ownership. Wildlife habitat would be provided better protection. Additional acreage would be added to the Wilderness Preservation System. Social and economic conditions would show a slight improvement over the existing situation.

Alternative E

In this alternative, protection of fragile resources and wildlife habitat, preservation of natural systems and nonconsumptive resource uses would be favored. Management direction would favor habitat management to increase wildlife populations, protection of wilderness qualities and opportunities for general dispersed recreation.

Management Actions

There would be no lands identified for transfer from public ownership in this alternative. The 648,719 acres of public land would be retained.

A total of 389,400 acres would be open to fluid mineral leasing with standard stipulations. Another 319,720 acres would be open to leasing under seasonal occupancy restrictions and 62,770 acres with no surface occupancy. A total of 158,140 acres would be closed to fluid mineral leasing, with 857 acres more

closed to mineral leasing. This alternative would leave all of the INEL closed to leasing. Areas open to locatable mineral entry total 750,653 acres and there would 179,377 acres closed. A total of 759,740 acres would be open to the sale of mineral materials and 170,290 acres would be closed to salable minerals use to protect other resource values.

There would be 9,204 acres of public land open to commercial timber harvest under existing regulations, restrictions and stipulations in this alternative. Deferred from harvest because they are uneconomical to cut or are not feasible to cut at this time are 1,966 acres. There would be 296 acres withdrawn from timber harvest because of slope, soils or inability of the site to reproduce timber. An additional 1,981 acres were withdrawn from harvest because of the need to protect other resource values. A total of 1,259 acres of commercial timber would also receive special restrictions. Along the South Fork of the Snake River 2,925 acres of woodland would be withdrawn from woodland management. The remaining 9,848 acres of woodland would be open to selective management.

This alternative would provide 84,638 AUMs of livestock forage. Approximately 621,019 acres of public land and 125,026 acres within the INEL boundary would be included in grazing allotments. The objective of Alternative E would be to maintain existing perennial forage plants, maintain soil stability and stabilize areas currently in downward trend.

The Sands Habitat Management Plan (HMP) would continue to be used and updated as needed. A total of 55,000 AUMs of forage would be allowed for wildlife in the resource area. This would provide forage for the expected expansion of herd numbers over the next 20 years. An HMP would be developed for the Medicine Lodge area covering 168,678 acres. The Tex Creek Cooperative Agreement and South Fork MOU with Idaho Fish and Game would continue to be followed.

Under Alternative E, 32.3 miles of stream would be managed primarily for riparian, fisheries and/or water quality improvement and protection. This would require 28.3 miles of fence to be constructed to protect 13.5 miles of stream. Another 53 miles of stream would be managed to maintain existing fisheries, water quality and riparian habitat in current satisfactory condition.

Off-road-vehicle closures would be imposed on 43,007 acres. An additional 53,600 acres would have seasonal closures to ORV use and 12,479 acres would have vehicle restricitons to existing roads and trails. The remaining 593,233 acres would be open to off-road-vehicle use.

Under this alternative, all of both WSAs would be recommended suitable for wilderness designation. Management emphasis would favor protection of fragile resources, wildlife habitat and natural systems and encourage nonconsumptive resource uses.

Cultural resources would be managed to reduce vandalism and nonpermitted artifact removal and gradually encourage scientific archaeological research.

Approximately 648,719 acres would be provided full fire protection. There would be 25,720 acres considered for prescribed burning over the next 20 years.

Environmental Consequences

There would be no change in the acres retained in public ownership over the existing situation. Lands available for mineral leasing under standard stipulations would show a major decrease while lands closed to leasing would increase. Commercial forest land available for harvest would decrease. Ecological range condition would increase slightly while livestock AUMs would decrease. Wildlife habitat condition and available wildlife AUMs would increase. Water quality, fisheries and riparian habitat would improve in condition. Recreation opportunities would not change from the existing situation. Acreage would be added to the Wilderness Preservation System. Social and economic conditions in the area would decrease slightly over the existing situation.