SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Each alternative is a potential comprehensive plan for managing all of the public land and resources within the Medicine Lodge Planning Area. Each plan emphasizes a different management philosophy from continuing the present management to significant changes for future management. All of the alternatives meet the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The selection of the Preferred Alternative is based on issue resolution, public input, environmental impacts, economic considerations, and resource production.

A description of the rationale for selection of the Preferred Alternative (Alternative C) is summarized by issue below.

Lands - Retention and Transfer

A total of 8,289 acres would be evaluated through detailed studies for potential transfer out of public ownership. Of this total, 5,694 acres would be considered for transfer by means of state exchange, private exchange or through sale; 1,474 acres have Desert Land Entry applications filed on them for agricultural development; 1,120 acres have soils with potential for agricultural entry.

Rationale

The Preferred Alternative would recognize the expressed need to make land with agricultural potential available for future development. The lands available specifically for agricultural development under the Desert Land Act would be transferred only if determined suitable as a result of the required detailed studies. Otherwise, they would be retained in federal ownership. This would assure continued multiple use management if the lands are unsuitable for agricultural development.

The Preferred Alternative would maintain continuity in grazing allotments and retain tracts that have high wildlife and multiple use public values. Only parcels of relatively low multiple use value that are difficult to manage or present management problems would be available for transfer.

Access would be a key consideration in all land transfers. Parcels essential to assure public access to BLM-administered public lands would be retained.

Minerals

The Preferred Alternative would maintain 97 percent of the area open to solid and fluid mineral leasing, 85 percent open to locatable mineral entry and 94 percent open to salable mineral use. Nearly all of the area is in the Overthrust Belt and considered prospectively valuable for oil and gas. Most of the lands in the INEL would be made available for leasable and salable minerals development but would remain closed to locatable minerals. Lands along the Snake River would be recommended for withdrawal from locatable mineral entry. Approximately 30,200 acres would be closed or made unavailable for the development of leasable minerals.

Rationale

The majority of public lands would be made available for mineral leasing, location and for mineral materials disposals. Seasonal restrictions would protect other critical resource values and would not significantly impact mineral exploration or development opportunities. The withdrawals from mineral entry along the Snake River were recommended to protect the water, riparian, wildlife, and scenic values. This river system is unique in its resource values and needs to be protected. The closures to salable minerals would have no significant impact on the development of mineral materials.

Forestry

The Preferred Alternative would make available 77 percent of the commercial forest land to harvest with standard stipulations and restrictions. Fourteen percent of the commercial forest land would be deferred from harvest because the sites are uneconomical to harvest at this time. Withdrawal of commercial forest land from harvest would be imposed on 6 percent of the acres to protect critical wildlife and threatened and endangered species habitat. The remaining 3 percent would be withdrawn because of site limitations for harvesting and timber reproduction.

Along the South Fork of the Snake River, cottonwood stands were withdrawn from timber harvest to protect valuable threatened and endangered species habitat, wildlife habitat and important riparian zone along the river. The remaining woodlands in the resourc area would be available for select harvesting with stipulations and restrictions to protect and enhance other resource values.

Rationale

The commercial forest lands designated as available for harvest would meet the demand for forest products from the public land. The withdrawal from harvest of 1,114 acres would protect those sites which are fragile and need to be protected along with those forested acres which are critical to wildlife and threatened and endangered species.

Livestock Management

The Preferred Alternative would retain 625,273 acres of public land and 180,419 acres of land within the INEL in 269 allotments with grazing preference reduced from 103,281 AUMs to 100,449 AUMs. An additional 55,136 acres are closed, restricted or unleased for livestock grazing. The long term stocking level would be 107,249 AUMs. Livestock use adjustments in AUMs or season of use would be based on future monitoring and consistent with regulations and policy.

The Preferred Alternative recognizes the need for additional brush control. Seeding would be done in areas where a native perennial seed source is not available. Additional range improvements, wells, pipelines, fences, spring developments, and reservoirs would be provided.

Rationale

Livestock grazing on public land is an important economic resource for this

area. It maintains most of the current livestock operations. The Preferred Alternative would provide for multiple use while allowing grazing, soil protection, wildlife habitat and other resource uses. Range improvements would be designed to enhance or to have few adverse impacts on the other resource uses.

Wildlife

The Preferred Alternative would provide for existing wildlife populations that occur in the area and for projected expansion in the populations. The Sands Habitat Management Plan, Tex Creek Cooperative Agreement and Pacific States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan would continue to be followed. ACECs would be designated along the Snake River and in the Sand Mountain area to protect critical wildlife habitat. A multiple use resource activity plan would be developed for the Snake River system and wildlife habitat protection would be one of the key elements of the plan.

Rationale

The Preferred Alternative recognizes the importance of the wildlife habitat on public lands. It would provide for improvement of critical elk winter habitat, deer, antelope and moose winter range, and sage grouse habitat. There would be sufficient forage and habitat available to meet the goals of this alternative. Riparian areas would be considered of prime importance and be managed to maintain or improve them. Sensitive and threatened or endangered species habitat would be protected. Most wildlife numbers would be expected to increase because of management of habitat under this alternative.

Water/Water Quality

The Preferred Alternative would improve water quality, fisheries habitat and riparian habitat on 30.5 miles of stream in the area. Some fencing would be required to provide the protection needed. An additional 53 miles of stream would be managed to maintain existing fisheries, water quality and riparian habitat which is currently in satisfactory condition.

Rationale

The Preferred Alternative recognizes the water and water related resources in the area are of great importance to the public land and the private land.

Steps have been taken in the Preferred Alternative to improve these resources through management and fencing. Other resource water needs would be taken into consideration in all management actions considered.

Recreation

Recreation use within the planning area is steadily growing. Principal uses include hunting, fishing, ORV use, river running, and sightseeing. This alternative would designated two Special Recreation Management Areas: The Snake River system and the Sands. The Menan Butte National Natural Landmark would continue to be protected. Menan Butte would be designated as a Research Natural Area and protected.

The South Fork of the Snake River would be recommended for further study as a scenic and recreation river. The Cress Creek Trail would be nominated as a National Recreation Trail. Recreation sites would be developed at 8 locations in the planning area and a one mile interpretive trail would be developed on Menan Butte.

Rationale

The development of the recreation sites and trail would help meet the increasing demand for the recreation resource in the area. There has been an increasing demand for recreation opportunities along the Snake River and in the sand dunes complex west of St. Anthony. The Special Recreation Management Area designation would provide for more detailed planning for both areas so that all uses could be accomodated. This could also provide some funding for management. The Research Natural Areas would provide protection for three sites which are near natural condition and have had little human influence.

Off-Road-Vehicles

The Preferred Alternative would leave 90 percent of the area open to off-road-vehicle use . There would be 17,790 acres closed to ORV use and 98,089 acres would have limited use.

Rationale

The closure of areas to ORV use would protect areas where there is severe soil erosion and areas where there is a direct conflict with wildlife uses. ORV use in the area is continuing to grow and this would protect these resources and allow ORV use to continue in areas with less potential for resource damage.

Special Designations

The Preferred Alternative would result in the designation of two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs): The Snake River system; and the Sands. The total area involved would be 36,120 acres.

Rationale

The Snake River system contains a unique cottonwood ecosystem which supports and compliments other resource values. This system contains nesting,wintering and general habitat for the endangered bald eagle. In addition, numerous other wildlife use the river. The river provides high scenic qualities which are important to recreating public that use the system. This alternative would provide the protection the system needs to protect these unique qualities.

Menan Butte offers a unique geologic resource which is used for study by local groups, schools and colleges. ACEC designation would protect this resource from degredation and possible destruction.

The Sands area is the key crucial habitat for wintering elk, deer and moose. Approximately 2,000 head of elk migrate through this narrow corridor and winter just south of the sand dunes. The designation would protect this valuable resource and also provide a means of protecting the most significant dunes area of the sand dune complex.

Wilderness

The two wilderness study areas (WSAs) would be recommended as nonsuitable for designation as wilderness. These areas would be managed for other multiple use values.

Rationale

The Snake River Islands WSA would be recommended as nonsuitable because of the fluctuation of the river. The river flow is controlled at the Palisades Reservoir and the fluctuation causes a change in the size and useability of the islands.

The Sands WSA would be recommended nonsuitable due to the lack of manageability of the area. The area currently receives considerable use by ORVs and control of access to the area would be difficult.

Cultural Resources

The Preferred Alternative would protect and preserve documented prehistoric and historic sites. Activity plans would reduce vandalistm and nonpermitted artifact removal, and encourage scientific archaeological research and interpretation. Cultural resources would also be protected in the Snake River Multiple Use Resource Activity Plan. The Nez Perce National Historic Trail would be marked and interpreted.

Rationale

Medicine Lodge's cultural resources are fragile, nonrenewable resources. They have significant archaeological research potential. They also have high educational and visitor use potential. The Preferred Alternative recognizes the nature and significance of these resources, and would recommend protective and interpretive measures. Cultural resource protection and use would remain consistent and compatible with other public land resource uses and activities.

Fire Management

The Preferred Alternative would provide full suppression on 60 percent of the planning area. Limited suppression would be implemented on 40 percent of the area and prescribed fire would be used as a management tool on about one-fourth of the limited suppression area. Fire management plans would be developed which lay out fire prevention and suppression guidelines and fire prescriptions defining under what conditions burning would be allowed.

Rationale

Implementation of limited suppression areas reduce the cost of fire control in the area yet it would provide protection during the periods when conditions are such that control needs to take place. Prescribed fire provides an economical means of brush control in this area. Previous burns have proven very successful and economical. Because of resource values and high risk factors the remainder of the area would receive full suppression.

PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning criteria were prepared to guide development of the RMP. They indicate the factors and data considered in making decisions. Ten general criteria were considered:

1. Social and Economic Values;

2. Plans, programs and policies of other Federal agencies, state and local government, and Indian tribes;

3. Existing laws, regulations and BLM policy;

4. Future needs and demands for existing or potential resource commodities and values;

5. Public input;

6. Public welfare and safety;

7. Past and present use of public and adjacent lands;

8. Public benefits of providing goods and services in relation to costs;

9. Quantity and quality of noncommodity resource values; and

10. Environmental impacts.

More detailed planning criteria are described in Appendix A. The following indicates how the criteria were used in developing the draft plan.

Social values and economic values and considerations are closely related. Commodity values, contribution to local and regional economies and potential changes in employment and income were estimated in developing alternative plans. The economic impacts of implementing the alternative plans described in Chapter 2 of the EIS in Part II were estimated to allow decision makers to consider economics in the choice of a draft plan. Social values and those noncommodity values were also considered in developing alternative plans and the choice of a draft plan. Impacts on social values and systems were considered in the development of the Environmental Consequences (Chapter 4 of the EIS) and used in choosing a draft plan.

This proposed plan does not appear inconsistent with the officially adopted plans, programs or policies of other federal, state or local governments nor with Indian tribes. The public comments received to date have shown no inconsistencies. The High Country Resource Conservation and Development Plan, which includes all of the counties in the Medicine Lodge Resource Area, was reviewed by BLM along with comprehensive plans completed by Bonneville, Bingham, Fremont, Jefferson and Butte counties.

Review of these plans showed this draft plan to be consistent with the completed plans. The Shoshone-Bannock tribe has shown an interest in being consulted before any sales of public lands are made.

Each member of the interdisciplinary team who contributed to the development of this draft plan and the Idaho State Office staff specialist reviewed the plan for conformance with laws, regulations, policy, and agreements. The draft plan appears consistent with all.

The interdisciplinary team used the most current data available in considering future needs and demand for resource commodities and values. These sources are among those listed in the references near the end of Part II of this document.

Public comments and suggestions were used to identify those issues to be addressed in this draft plan. The alternatives described and analyzed in Part II considered public comments. This draft plan and environmental impact statement will be available for public review for a period of 90 days. The public comments received will be an important factor in selecting the resource management plan for the resource area.

Public welfare, in a general sense, was considered in all the alternatives and was a factor in choosing Alternative C as the draft plan for the resource area. There did not appear to be any existing safety hazards to the public in the resource area. However, public safety is always considered in all BLM actions, particularly project design and construction.

Past and present uses of the public lands are described in Chapter 3, Part II of this document. These uses were important in choosing a draft plan for the area and were used as a point of comparison for estimating environmental consequences as described in Chapter 4, Part II of this document. The past and present uses will also be important factors in monitoring the final resource management plan.

A cost/benefit type of analysis was not considered appropriate at this point in the planning process. However, all developments that are proposed in this draft plan are considered well within normal practices and should be cost effective. Before any expenditures of funds are committed for projects or developments, an economic analysis will be made as a matter of standard procedures. These projects or developments must be cost effective.

Noncommodity resource values such as wilderness, wildlife habitat, general outdoor recreation, visual resources, cultural resources, and others were considered in this draft plan. These noncommodity values were considered in forming alternatives to be analyzed in the RMP/EIS. They were also considered in choosing the preferred alternative and this draft plan and will be considered in choosing the final plan for the resource area.

Environmental impacts were estimated for all the alternatives, including this draft plan, and are documented in Part II, Chapter 4 of this document. Environmental impacts were one of the factors in choosing the preferred alternative and draft plan.

SELECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Selective management, as applied to the rangeland program, is the

categorization of grazing allotments into three management groups based upon similarities of resource characteristics, management needs, and economic and resource-based potential for rangeland improvement. All livestock grazing allotments have been categorized as "I" (Improvement Needed), "M" (Maintain), or "C" (Custodial Management) based upon the following criteria and additional criteria developed from issues specific to the Medicine Lodge Resource Area.

1. "I" Category

   Category "I" allotments presently include allotments with unsatisfactory condition, have the greatest potential for improvement, and/or may present serious resource use conflicts.

2. "M" Category

   Category "M" allotments are in satisfactory range condition, are producing near their identified potential, and have no known present or anticipated serious resource use conflicts.

3. "C" Category

   Category "C" allotments usually include only small acreages of public land or lands classified for transfer from Federal ownership. These allotments do not present management problems, regardless of condition. They present no significant potential for increasing production. Resource conflicts are either nonexistent or are outweighed by other considerations.

The order of these categories as discussed above represents the relative order of priority for the investment in range improvements and conduct of range monitoring studies, subject to user contributions and further consultation. Selective Management within the rangeland program will provide a framework from which prudent expenditure of rangeland investments can be made, consistent with an approved land use plan. See Appendix B for methodology used in categorizing allotments.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process described in the BLM Planning Regulations 43 CFR 1600 contains 9 steps.

1. Identification of Issues

Each BLM resource area has different problems, needs and resource uses. At the very beginning of the planning process, the BLM listens to citizens' suggestions regarding development and protection of the area's resources. These issues then become important to the planning effort and will be considered in each step of the process. At this step, the BLM needs the public to help determine the issues and their importance. The issues and conflicts are not resolved at this step, but it is important for the BLM to hear specific comments.

2. Development of Planning Criteria

Once the issues have been identified, the District Manager prepares criteria to guide development of the plan. These criteria are used to guide the gathering of information and, later, to evaluate alternatives. The criteria are published for public comment before they are adopted by the District Manager.

3. Inventory and Information Collection

The BLM planning team needs to know the present condition of the resources in the area and their past production levels. The District Manager arranges for the district staff to collect and assemble this information. BLM appreciates public contributions of information.

4. Analysis of the Management Situation

The planning team assesses the capability of the public land resources to respond to the needs, concerns and opportunities previously identified through public participation. The BLM policy and the policies, plans and programs of other federal agencies, state and local governments and Indian tribes also play a role in this analysis. The Analysis of the Mangement Situation for the Medicine Lodge Planning Area is located in the Idaho Falls District Office.

5. Formulation of the Alternatives

Several alternative plans are prepared that will range from emphasizing production of resources to favoring protection of resources, including continuation of present management. Each alternative must be a complete plan for managing the resources in the planning area. The public comments help identify conflicts among the alternatives.

6. Effects of the Alternatives

The BLM interdisciplinary team analyzes the physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing each alternative. The

environmental effects of the alternatives must be discussed and the relationship between short term uses of the environment and long term productivity analyzed during this step.

7. Selection of a Preferred Alternative

Alternatives and their effects are evaluated according to the planning criteria developed in Step 2. The District Manager then selects a preferred alternative based on information and analysis developed up to this point in the planning process. This alternative is included in the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement which are presented to the public. It is important for the public to participate in the review and comment period at this time. This draft RMP/EIS identifies BLM's preferred alternative.

8. Selection of the Resource Management Plan

After evaluation of comments received on the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement, the District Manager selects a proposed Resource Management Plan. If the proposed plan is not within the range of the alternatives in the draft plan, and the environmental effects are significantly different, a new draft plan must be prepared. After review and concurrence, including a review by the Governor for consistency with State or local plans, policies or programs, the State Director approves the final plan and environmental impact statement.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

Once the plan is approved by the State Director it is then time to begin carrying it out. The BLM requests funding to implement the plan and schedules a review of the plan every five years. The review determines whether mitigating measures are effective, whether environmental limits have been exceeded, whether other federal, state or local plans have changed, or whether there is new data of significance to the plan. Monitoring studies begin as soon as possible and are used, along with initial inventory data, to sustain or modify use adjustments. These studies will be conducted on a recurring basis. Monitoring and evaluation reports are available for public review.

10. Maintenance, Amendment and Revision

Resource Management Plans will be maintained to reflect minor changes in data and further refinement or documentation of the approved plan. Maintenance will not result in expansion of the scope of resource use or restrictions, or changes in the terms, conditions or decisions of the approved plan. Maintenance does not require formal public involvement, interagency coordination, or the preparation of NEPA documents.

When changes are required beyond maintenance, the RMP must be amended in accordance with the BLM planning regulations. Amendments will include the NEPA process to determine environmental impacts, public involvement, interagency coordination, and consistency determinations as required by the regulations.

When conditions change that affect the entire plan or major portions of the plan, then the plan will be revised, using the regulations required for the preparation of a new plan.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

The following management guidance is applicable to, and thus constitutes a part of, all alternatives considered in detail. This guidance will also provide the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) under which alternatives will operate. It is presented here to avoid repetition.

Air Quality

Under the Clean Air Act (as amended, 1977), BLM-administered lands were given Class II air quality classification, which allows moderate deterioration associated with moderate, well-controlled industrial and population growth. BLM will manage all public lands as Class II unless they are reclassified by the state as a result of the procedures prescribed in the Clean Air Act (as amended, 1977). Administrative actions on the public lands will comply with the air quality classification for that specific area.

Allowable Uses

The public lands will be managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield as required by FLPMA. Any valid use, occupancy and development of the public lands, including but not limited to those requiring rights-of-way, leases and licenses will be considered, subject to applicable environmental review procedures, unless specifically excluded in the plan. In some areas, however, environmental values, hazards or manageability considerations may require limitations on either the type or intensity of use, or both. Those limitations are identified in the plan's land use allocations and management objectives for specific areas within the public lands. BLM will include stipulations and special conditions as necessary in leases, license and permits to ensure the protection and preservation of resources.

Lands

Land Ownership Adjustments

The Idaho RMP Guidebook, published in September 1982, establishes general criteria for identifying transfer and retention areas and acquisitions of public lands. Objectives for acquiring public lands are discussed under activity needs within the alternatives. Site-specific decisions regarding land ownership adjustments in the resource area will be made based on whether the lands are needed for Bureau programs and are considered more valuable for other purposes. The following criteria will be applied to site-specific determinations for lands that are within transfer areas. The criteria to be used include:

- public resource values, including but not limited to:
  - T&E and sensitive species habitat,
  - riparian areas,
  - fisheries,
  - nesting/breeding habitat for game animals,
  - key big game seasonal habitat,
  - developed recreation and recreation access sites,
  - class A scenery,
  - municipal watersheds,

energy and mineral potential,
sites eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places,
wilderness and areas being studied for wilderness, and
other statutorily authorized designations,

-accessibility of the land for public uses;

-amount of public investments in facilities or improvements and the potential for recovering those investments;

-difficulty or cost of administration (manageability);

-suitability of the land for management by another federal agency;

-significance of the decision in stabilizing business, social and economic conditions, and/or lifestyles;

-encumbrances, including but not limited to:
R&PP and small tract leases,
withdrawals, or
other leases or permits

-consistency of the decision with cooperative agreements and plans or policies of other agencies; and

-suitability and need for change in land ownership or use for purposes including but not limited to: community expansion or economic development such as industrial, residential or agricultural (other than grazing) development.

The land ownership adjustment criteria identified above will be considered in land reports and environmental analyses prepared for specific adjustment proposals.

Public land within retention areas generally will remain in public ownership and be managed by the BLM. Transfers to other public agencies will be considered where improved management efficiency would result. Adjustments involving sales or exchanges or both may be permitted based on site-specific application of the land ownership adjustment criteria.

Public land within disposal areas generally will be made available for disposal through sales or exchanges or both. Some land may be retained in public ownership based on site-specific application of the land ownership adjustment criteria.

Land to be acquired by the BLM through exchanges generally should be located in the retention areas. In addition, acquisition of such land should:

-facilitate access to public lands and resources,

-maintain or enhance important public values and uses,

-maintain or enhance local social and economic values,

-improve management efficiency through the elimination of isolated tracts and the blocking up of public lands,and

-facilitate implementation of other aspects of the Medicine Lodge RMP.

Public land to be sold must meet the following criteria derived from the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976:

-the land must be difficult and uneconomic to manage as part of the public lands, and must not be suitable for management by another federal department or agency;

-the land must have been acquired for a specific purpose and must no longer be required for that or any other federal purpose; or

-disposal of the land will serve important public objectives that can only be achieved prudently or feasibly if the land is removed from public ownership, and if these objectives outweigh other public objectives and values that would be served by maintaining such land in federal ownership.

Sale will be the preferred method of disposal when:

-required by national policy;

-the level of interest in a specific tract indicates that competitive bidding is desirable for reasons of fairness; or

-disposal through exchange is not feasible.

The preferred method of selling public land will be by competitive bidding at public auction to qualifying purchasers. However, modified competitive bidding procedures may be used when there is not legal public access to a tract, when necessary to avoid jeopardizing an existing use on adjacent land, or to avoid dislocation of existing public land users.

Public land may be sold by direct sale at fair market value when:

-the land is needed by state or local governments;

-direct sale is needed to protect equities arising from authorized use;

-direct sale is needed to protect equities resulting from inadvertent, unauthorized use that was caused by surveying errors or title defects; or

-there is only one adjacent land owner and no legal public access.

Trespass Abatement

Existing unauthorized uses of public land will be resolved either through termination, temporary authorization by short term permit, Sike's Act agreements, sale, or exchange. Decisions will be based on consideration of the following criteria:

-the type and significance of improvements involved;

-conflicts with other resource values and uses, including potential values and uses; and

-whether the unauthorized use is intentional or unintentional.

New cases of unauthorized use generally will be terminated immediately. Temporary permits may be issued to provide short-term authorization, unless the situation warrants immediate cessation of the use and restoration of the land. Highest priority will be given to abatement of the following unauthorized uses:

-new unauthorized activities or uses where prompt action can minimize damage to public resources and associated costs;

-cases where delay may be detrimental to authorized users;

-cases involving special areas, sensitive ecosystems, and resources of national significance; and

-cases involving malicious or criminal activities.

Utility and Transportation Corridors

Utility and transportation corridor development may be permitted based on consideration of the following criteria:

-type of and need for facility proposed;

-conflicts with other resource values and uses, including potential values and uses; and

-availability of alternatives and/or mitigation measures.

Applicants will be encouraged to locate new facilities within existing corridors to the extent possible (See Appendix Table A-1).

Energy and Minerals Program

Oil and Gas Leasing

As a general rule, public land is available for oil and gas leasing. In many areas, oil and gas leases will be issued with only standard stipulations attached. In other areas, leases will have special stipulations attached to them at the time of issuance to protect seasonal wildlife habitat and/or other sensitive resource values. In highly sensitive areas, where special stipulations are not sufficient to protect important surface resource values, "no surface occupancy" stipulations will be attached to the lease. "This analysis assumes that for horizontal deviations of up to 1,500 feet, directional drilling exploration operations are feasible. However, because directional drilling is far more costly than conventional drilling, such operations would not take place unless there is very strong evidence that a discovery would be made." The general areas where standard, special and "no surface occupancy" stipulations will impact minerals are shown on all Alternative maps (Maps 3-7).

Geothermal Leasing

Lease applications will continue to be processed as received. Stipulations will be attached based on interdisciplinary review of each proposal. At the present time, the BLM is not processing lease applications for geothermal resources in the Island Park area. An environmental impact statement completed in 1980 by the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM assessess the impacts of geothermal leasing and development in that area. Based on this assessment, the USFS has recommended that leasing not be allowed unless it can be shown that a valuable geothermal resource exists and that its development would not adversely affect the thermal features of Yellowstone National Park. About 95 percent of the federal geothermal estate affected by this action involves national forest lands. Of the affected mineral estate acres administered by the BLM, about 3,000 are under geothermal lease applications. The future of geothermal leasing within the Island Park area will depend on Congressional legislation.

Locatable Minerals

Mineral exploration and development on public land will be regulated under 43 CFR 3800 to prevent unnecessary and undue degredation of the land. Validity examinations may be conducted under the following conditions:

-where a mineral patent application has been filed and a field examination is required to verify the validity of the claim(s);

-where there is a conflict with a disposal application, and it is deemed in the public interest to do so, or where the statute authorizing the disposal requires clearance of any encumbrance;

--where the land is needed for a federal program; or

where a mining claim is located under the guise of the mining law and flagrant unauthorized use of the land or mineral resource is occuring.

Public land will be opened to mineral entry where mineral withdrawals are revoked through the withdrawal review process.

Common Variety Mineral Materials

Applications for the removal of common variety mineral materials, including sand and gravel, will be processed using the standards developed in this RMP. Standards vary from alternative to alternative, where different levels of restrictions are imposed on mineral materials disposals to protect important surface values.

Forestry

General

Public lands within Intensive Forest Management Areas will be avaliable for a full range of forest management activities. Areas classified as woodland will also be available for limited forest management activities. Forest activity plans generally will be required prior to initiating forest management

activities in all areas. Exceptions will be allowed for small sawlog, post and pole and commercial thinning sales. Exceptions will also be made for emergency salvage sales of less than 250 MBF. These sales will be covered by an environmental assessment and a checklist of contract stipulations that conform with the guidelines developed in the Eastern Idaho Sustained Yield Unit (SYU) Environmental Assessment.

Public land within set aside or withdrawn areas will not be available for the harvest of forest products.

Firewood gathering by individuals for home use will be permitted in designated areas and in some cases undesignated areas by special request. Occasional firewood use may be authorized to accomodate government agencies, nonprofit groups and private individuals, but only when such disposal serves a management goal.

Silvicultural Guidelines and Harvesting Techniques

Merchantable timber or tracts identified as intensive management areas are to be systematically harvested using appropriate methods.

Silvicultural prescriptions will be consistent with accepted methods related to site, species, habitat types, and the individual requirements of the forest stand. Tractor logging will be limited to slopes with gradients of less than 40%, and the season of logging will be limited to avoid soil compaction and rutting.

Salvage operations will have priority when trees are destroyed by fire, disease, insects, or other forest pests. Salvage operations as well as other timber harvest activities will be coordinated with wildlife, archaeological and watershed personnel.

Road locations will be determined on the basis of topography, drainage, soils, and other natural features to minimize erosion. All roads and skid trails to be closed will be seeded to grass, legumes and shrubs. Species will be selected for the forest community and elevation to be seeded.

Slash disposal will be done in a manner conducive to revegetation and advantageous to the passage of big game. Slash will be lopped and scattered where possible with some accumulation in or near openings for escape cover. Slash will be burned when necessary. Such burning will be in conformance with state air pollution regulations.

Logging units will be laid out in a manner that will mitigate the risk of windthrow, and the selection of trees in shelterwoods will be made in a manner that will improve the genetic composition of the regenerated stand. Disturbed areas will be artificially revegetated when natural forest regeneration cannot be reasonably expected in five years.

These are general guidelines. More detailed discussions of measures that can be applied are found in the environmental assessments for the Eastern Idaho SYU-EA.

Additional guidelines for Management Areas 1, 3, 4, 5, 9 are listed below.

Old Growth - Is defined as 140 years old through to 240 years old mixed conifer stands. Minimum acreage managed for would be 10% (5% existing, 5% replacement) of the management area's timber base with a minimum of 100 acres. Acreage will be met out of CFL and harvest will be allowed after the stand goes past 240 years old. Harvest will include the first entry taking 50% of volume as a seed cut and overstory removal in stages thereafter.

Elk Summer Range - Will provide a 40-60% cover-forage ratio minimum. Cover will not be below the 40%.

Elk Calving/Nursery Range - 40% of the stand will be maintained with 45-60% canopy coverage and clear cuts will not be larger than 25 acres.

Snag Management - Existing and future management will provide for the following snags/acre.

2 15-20" DBH
4 10-15" DBH
8 5-10" DBH

More may be needed along riparian areas.

Thinning projects - will maintain a uniform distribution of 350 stems/acre at least 7' tall.

Raptor nests - Especially accipiters, a 5 acre buffer zone will be left around nesting area.

Clear cuts - Maximum size of 40 acres with a minimum of 600 feet leave strips between cuts.

Roads - Will not be constructed along riparian areas. Roads will be closed and rehabilitated at end of sale.

Range

Allotment Categorization

All grazing allotments in the resource area have been assigned to one of three management categories based on present resource conditions, the potential for improvement and management objectives. The M allotments generally will be managed to maintain current satisfactory resource conditions; I allotments generally will be managed to improve resource conditions; and C allotments will receive custodial management while protecting existing resource values.

Allotment-Specific Objectives for the Improvement Category

Multiple use management objectives have been developed for each allotment in the I category (see Appendix B, page B-32). Future mangement actions, including approval of allotment management plans, will be tailored to meet these objectives. However, the priorities assigned to achieving objectives for wildlife habitat, watershed, vegetation condtion, and livestock forage production differ between alternatives.