

BUTTE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (RMP) REVISION

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

The Butte Field Office is in the process of revising the Headwaters Resource Management Plan (RMP). Because the new RMP will apply only to the lands in the Butte Field Office area (instead of being split between the Butte and Lewistown field offices as the Headwaters RMP is), the new document will be called the Butte RMP. Land under the jurisdiction of the Lewistown Field Office will continue to be managed under the Headwaters RMP.

ISSUES:

The issues and management concerns are based on the preparation plan and public scoping results. Preparation of the RMP affords many opportunities for collaboration with local, state, federal and tribal governments and land management agencies, public interest groups, and public land users. Outreach to the public and other agencies has resulted in some modification of issues and concerns during this process.

Issues identified are: vegetation management; wildlife and special status and priority plant/animal species; travel management and access; recreation; and special designations (including areas of critical environmental concern, wild and scenic rivers and wilderness study areas). Other management concerns identified for the RMP revision include: air quality; abandoned mine lands; land ownership adjustments; mineral leasing/exploration/development (including oil and gas); soil resources; cultural and paleontological resources; water quality/quantity; and social/economic concerns.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

In December 2002 the Montana State Office approved a preparation plan; in August 2003 a contractor (Tetra Tech) was hired to assist in the preparation of the Butte RMP. Initial public scoping began December 19, 2003, with the publication of the notice of intent, and ended February 17, 2004. As a continuation of the scoping process, a proposed planning scenario was developed and mailed out to over 300 parties with a 30-day comment period in June 2005. Alternative development focused heavily on vegetation management, special area designations, and site-specific travel planning for five sub-areas within the field office.

Five public travel plan scoping meetings were held in November and December 2004. In summer 2005, community-based working groups were developed to assist with developing alternatives for three travel planning areas.

The state of Montana, eight counties, and four Native American tribes were invited to be cooperating agencies in this process, but no official agreements were signed. The Butte Field Office has worked with the counties, tribes, public, Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, and the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council throughout the RMP process. A coordination meeting was held in February 2005, with various federal, tribal, state, and local agencies to determine any further interest from agencies to be involved with the RMP process. Although agencies and tribes wanted to stay informed during the RMP process, none wished to be a formal cooperating agency, mostly due to budget and time constraints.

The BLM canceled the contract with Tetra Tech, closing out the contract in January 2007. The BLM will complete the remainder of the RMP revision.

The Draft Butte Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement were released for a 90-day public comment period on June 8, 2007. The county commissioners of the eight planning area counties were briefed early in the comment period. Six public meetings were held in Helena, Townsend, Butte, Boulder, Divide and Bozeman. The Butte Field Office received approximately 172 submissions for public comments during the public comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS, which was extended to October 9, 2007. Public release of the proposed RMP/final EIS is slated for September 2008.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

Public interest is moderate to high because the RMP will set the direction for how the field office will be managed over the next 10-15 years. There is growing concern (based on past and current projects) over the management of roads and trails, wildlife and vegetation, fuels, and special area designations.

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