

**UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

In December 2008, the Lewistown Field Office distributed the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan to a wide list of interested organizations and individuals. The appeal period for the ROD/approved plan ended February 9, 2009. We received two appeals and one request for stay. The BLM worked with the Regional Solicitor's office in responding to the request for stay and the appeals. The stay was denied and one appeal was withdrawn. The other appeal dealt with a road to private land that BLM showed as closed in the transportation plan. BLM committed during the planning process to leave roads accessing private land open; the final transportation plan will show the road in question as open.

In June and July of 2009, BLM received two lawsuits from environmental groups regarding the approved resource management plan/record of decision. These lawsuits claim BLM violated NEPA, The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, FLPMA, and the Presidential Proclamation establishing the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

In summary, both lawsuits claim similar deficiencies in the plan: our road density is too high; motorized boats should be removed year-round from a segment of the river; all remote backcountry airstrips should be closed; and that BLM did not address the impacts of grazing in sensitive areas and cottonwood galleries or develop a plan to protect and restore those areas, etc.

ISSUES:

On January 17, 2001, the president designated the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument with a presidential proclamation. The proclamation recognizes the spectacular array of biological, geological and historical resources found on the approximately 375,000 acres of public land in this monument. The BLM is preparing a management plan to establish guidance, objectives and management actions for these lands and resources.

After extensive public involvement through scoping and alternative formulation, the draft RMP/EIS was distributed to the public near the end of October 2005. The deadline for public comment was April 26, 2006.

The Lewistown Field Office received 67,454 letters/emails on the draft RMP/EIS, including 1,825 non-form letters, 17 different form-type letters, and one form-type questionnaire. These letters and emails contained about 7,600 specific comments. They covered every aspect of the draft RMP/EIS, but the most common topics included road and travel management (motorized vs. non-motorized), landing strips, economics, private property, lifestyles, oil and gas, and recreation.

In March 2008, the BLM received 44 protest letters on the proposed RMP/final EIS, which was published in January 2008. These protests have been resolved.

Agriculture groups and individuals along the river or in the uplands are concerned that monument management will impact their ability to use their private land and/or their BLM grazing permits within the monument. They are also concerned about the federal water reservations in Arrow Creek and the Judith River, and they want to retain the opportunity to use motorized watercraft on the river. The Montana Pilots Association supports the continued use of the landing strips in the monument. Wilderness advocates prefer fewer roads, no airstrips, no development on existing natural gas leases, and reduced motorized opportunities on the river. Those favoring motorized recreation are looking for extended opportunities for personal watercraft, seaplanes and other motorized watercraft. American Indian tribes are concerned about protecting cultural sites within the monument.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

Public participation was a vital element during the preparation of the proposed RMP, and will continue to play an important role during implementation of the approved plan.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

The BLM is working with our regional solicitor on responding to the two lawsuits.

CONTACT:

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