

MILES CITY FIELD OFFICE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

The Miles City Field Office is revising and combining the Big Dry and Powder River resource management plans (RMPs) into one: the Miles City Field Office RMP. Prior to 1998, the field office operated under two resource areas -- Big Dry and Powder River -- and the lands in each area are currently managed under their own RMPs.

The Big Dry RMP area consists of about 1.7 million acres of BLM-administered surface acres and 7.6 million acres of BLM-administered mineral resources. It encompasses public lands in 13 counties in eastern Montana: Carter, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, McCone, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan and Wibaux. The Powder River RMP area consists of about 1.1 million surface acres of land and 4.1 million acres of minerals. It includes portions of Custer, Carter, Rosebud and Big Horn counties, and all of Powder River and Treasure counties.

ISSUE:

The BLM published a *Federal Register* notice on February 4, 2005, announcing its intent to plan and conduct public scoping for the RMP. A draft EIS/RMP amendment will be issued for a 90-day public review, and the final EIS/proposed RMP amendment will be issued for a 30-day protest period. The BLM expects to issue the record of decision in the winter of 2010.

About 200 people attended nine public scoping meetings held throughout southeastern Montana. Issues identified include impacts to water and air from oil and gas exploration and development; making more public lands accessible for recreation opportunities; effects from noxious weeds spreading in open off-highway vehicle use areas; effects to aquatic habitat and riparian areas from livestock grazing; and effects to sage-grouse habitat from oil and gas development, other mineral development and livestock grazing.

The cooperating agencies and other collaborators met in April 2006 to develop alternative plans for addressing the issues identified during the scoping period. The group developed four alternative "themes" for grouping alternative management actions, including a "local economy" theme.

Cooperating agencies helping to prepare the plan include: Lower Brule Sioux and Fort Peck tribes; Big Horn, Carter, Custer, Daniels, McCone, Powder River, Richland, Rosebud, Sheridan, and Treasure counties; Carter, Garfield, McCone, Prairie, Richland, and Wibaux county conservation districts; Little Beaver Conservation District; Prairie County Cooperative State Grazing District; Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Environmental Protection Agency; and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

The changes that have taken place in the past 10 to 20 years have resulted in different users and uses of public lands. Issues have emerged relating to potential threatened and endangered species; increased demand for oil and gas; and changes in intensity of use of other resources. The public lands and resources need to be managed consistently throughout the Miles City Field Office area. The RMP will allow BLM to guide management actions based on current information (changes in policy and guidance), sound criteria and public input, and provide a comprehensive framework for managing and allocating use of the public lands and resources in the Miles City Field Office.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

Through the Miles City planning effort, the BLM aims to take a collaborative community-based approach in updating the existing management plan and resource allocations. The new RMP will consider new data, changing resource conditions, changes in the uses of public lands, and BLM planning instruction memoranda and bulletins. The BLM expects that numerous cooperating agencies and collaborators will continue to become involved in this process and will assist in providing a wide variety of data in support of this effort.

CONTACT:

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