

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Background

This proposed resource management plan and final environmental impact statement addresses options for the future management of federal land and federal mineral estate administered by the Big Dry Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management (BLM). When completed this document will provide a comprehensive framework for managing and allocating public land and resource uses.

The planning area encompasses BLM-administered public lands in 13 counties in eastern Montana: Carter, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, McCone, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan, and Wibaux. The public lands within the Big Dry Resource Area excluded from this resource management plan and environmental impact statement (see map 1 in chapter 1) are the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and the Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and the lands withdrawn for the Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Station managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Other lands excluded are the Fort Peck Indian Reservation managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Fort Peck Tribes in Valley County.

This document focuses primarily on two planning issues: (1) the suitability of areas for special management designations, and (2) opportunities for access and use of resources. These issues were generated through a process involving input from the public, other agencies, and BLM personnel.

PLANNING ISSUES

Special Management Designations

There are areas, values, or resources in the planning area that meet the criteria for protection and management under special management designations. Some areas contain unique resources or values that warrant special management and may be suitable for designation as areas of critical environmental concern.

Resource Accessibility and Availability

For a resource to have value or useability, it must be accessible and available for development or use.

The exploration, development, or use of oil and gas and other minerals, recreation opportunities, and other development activities on public lands should be managed in a manner that allows use while the integrity of nonrenewable fragile resources is protected. Too much accessibility and availability could degrade the value of visual resources, cultural resources, or wildlife habitat.

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

This document presents management common to all alternatives and management actions that are specific to each alternative. For a complete understanding of the management actions that would be implemented under a given alternative, management common to all alternatives must be considered in conjunction with table 9 in chapter 2.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A, the “no action” alternative, would continue present management direction. No special management areas would be designated, and accessibility and availability to resources would remain the same.

Alternative B, the “protection” alternative, presents management actions that designate special management areas with restrictive management actions, reducing resource accessibility and availability.

Alternative C, the “development” alternative, presents management actions designating special management areas while allowing more resource accessibility and availability.

Alternative D is the “preferred” alternative. This alternative presents management actions that designate special management areas. It allows accessibility and availability to resources when no significant impacts are anticipated.