

# LOW LEVEL MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

The Low Level Management Alternative refers to a lower level of BLM management and involvement than in the Continuation of Existing or High Level Management Alternatives. Depending on the specific issue, this alternative would mean fewer restrictions on development or a lesser degree of protection and enhancement of resource values. This alternative would result in greater resource exploitation and development.

## Grazing Management

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The resource condition objectives for this alternative are: (1) for the "I" allotments, stabilize or improve range condition by reducing the level of livestock use. The general objective is to manage the rangelands with the least possible costs in personnel and range improvements; (2) to maintain the current satisfactory conditions on "M" allotments; and (3) to manage the "C" allotments custodially.

Adjustments in the amount or seasonal use of livestock grazing are the means considered for meeting the objectives in this alternative. Based upon the 1981 inventory of range conditions and Soil Conservation Service guides for these range sites, this may require a short-term reduction in livestock grazing within the "I" allotments by an average of 20% or 2,621 AUMs.

### Proposed Allocation

Any reductions would be accomplished after monitoring confirms the estimated grazing capacity and would be implemented over a maximum of 5 years and in accordance with guidelines set forth in the grazing regulations (43 CFR 4110.3-2). The "M" and "C" allotments would continue with 49,217 animal unit months allocated. In the short term, 1,121 AUMs would be recovered from the initial reduction of 2,621 AUMs and would be made available to livestock. In the long term, an additional 2,221 AUMs would be recovered for livestock use. As such, by the end of the long term, only 400 AUMs currently available to livestock would not be recovered and reallocated to this use.

Monitoring would vary with management category as shown earlier in Table 2.2, while Table 2.1 provides the allotment-specific objectives and methods for this alternative.

### Grazing Treatments and Systems

No new AMPs would be implemented under this alternative, however, those allotments already operating under implemented AMPs would be maintained.

### Proposed Range Improvements

No additional BLM initiated improvements would be installed and the 45 acres of leafy spurge treated annually in the existing situation, would not be treated.

## Monitoring

No monitoring of range conditions, trend or utilization would be done in this alternative. Use supervision in the "I" allotments would ensure compliance with the reduced level of use.

## Wild Horse Management

This alternative minimizes man's influence over the wild horses.

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The BLM would allow the wild horse population to be regulated solely by the natural biological processes of the wild horses and their environment. As such, gathering and excessing wild horses would not continue.

The approximately 7,696 acres within the Mystic, Lost Water Canyon, Sorenson area and all other NPS lands and all state lands within the PMWHR would not be available for wild horse grazing. Uncontrolled wild horse populations would not be compatible with other agency and private landowner management objectives.

### Proposed Range Improvements

The maintenance of range improvements would be limited to the existing boundary fence, the two water catchments, the pipeline and tank at Layout (Hough) Creek and a tank at Sykes Springs.

Where the designated boundary of the range is not fenced, fences would be required to keep the wild horses within the designated PMWHR. This would require about 5 miles of fence.

The corrals at Britton and Sykes Springs would be removed and salvaged. All horse traps within the range would be removed.

## Monitoring

Monitoring studies would include only a low level sampling of wild horse population levels and habitat conditions.

## Wildlife Management

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 chartered BLM with the responsibility of maintaining or enhancing fish and wildlife habitats that occur on the public lands.

## Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The Billings Resource Area operates under a number of general wildlife habitat management objectives which are utilized Bureau-wide. Each objective is mandated and/or supported by specific Federal regulation or legislation. These wildlife program objectives are common to each alternative level discussed in this RMP/EIS. The BLM wildlife habitat management program places special emphasis on, but is not limited to the protection, maintenance and enhancement of:

- Crucial habitats for big game, upland game birds and waterfowl.
- Crucial habitats for nongame species of special interest and concern to state or other Federal agencies.
- Wetland and riparian habitats.
- Existing or potential fisheries habitat.
- Habitat for state or Federally listed threatened and/or endangered species.

These commitments to the wildlife resources vary by alternative only in the level of effort devoted to each element within the program. The level of effort undertaken annually is dependent upon national priorities, Washington Office direction and the availability of funding and manpower to effectively complete the workload.

The level and intensity of wildlife habitat management activities presented in this alternative have been selected based on feasibility, opportunity, need and associated impacts to other resource programs.

## Monitoring

To achieve this objective, 40,000 acres of terrestrial habitat would be monitored annually and all other proposed activities such as reservoir construction, fencing, water catchment installation, vegetative manipulation, spring development, water well construction, mineral development and energy development would be carefully evaluated and mitigated to protect the wildlife resources.

## Coordination

All major wildlife habitat enhancement projects would be coordinated with regional personnel of the MDFWP. As mandated in a joint memorandum of understanding with the MDFWP, all projects involving vegetative manipulation would be presented to the regional personnel for comments and recommendations in advance of project initiation.

Informal and formal consultation with USFWS would be initiated on all proposed actions in which BLM determines a may affect situation exists for any Federally listed threatened or endangered species. Consultation would be done in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as amended.

An interagency team of wildlife biologists has been established to review and make final recommendations on the application of the Federal coal program wildlife unsuitability criteria for the Bull Mountain area. This effort would be accomplished in consultation with USFWS and MDFWP.

## Implementation Costs

There are no costs associated with project developments to implement this alternative.



## Timber Management

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The resource area would make available all forest products upon request. Even though sales of up to 1 MMBF may occur in the Twin Coulee area, the anticipated average cut is 90 thousand board feet per year, on approximately 40 acres. Only a minimal acreage would be protected (217 acres of nonproductive forest lands in the Young's Point, Hamilton's Point, Acton and Shepherd Ah-Nei areas).

## Coal

For impact analysis purposes, a projection of possible coal development was prepared in which two mines (one surface, one underground) would be opened within the resource area during the life of the RMP. These scenarios are presented more fully in Appendix 2.3. It is difficult to speculate upon the actual location or size of a mining operation, or the mining method which might be employed. Therefore, the analysis in Chapter 4 will address potential impacts which might occur should all areas found acceptable for further consideration pending further study (9,360 acres) be leased and mined at the level projected below.

In the Bull Mountains, one surface mine (in this scenario) would be opened in the ninth year of the RMP implementation period (1992). During the first year and one-half, only construction of support facilities would occur. Sixty acres would be disturbed. Mining would not begin until 1994, when 150,000 tons of coal would be produced, disturbing 11 acres. The mine would reach full production level in 1995, producing 300,000 tons of coal per year from approximately 21 acres, throughout the life of the mine. Since only 21 acres would be disturbed per year, it would take over 400 years to completely mine out the acres found acceptable for further consideration pending further consideration.

Again, for analysis purposes, a small underground mine would be opened in the Joliet/Fromberg Field in 1985. It would take 2 years to construct the necessary surface facilities, during which up to 60 acres would be disturbed. The mine would have an initial production of 30,000 tons in 1987, and reach a full production level of 150,000 tons per year in 1988. This level would be maintained throughout the life of the mine.

The BLM recognizes that one or more large underground mine could also eventually be developed in the Bull Mountains. The environmental impacts from this type of mining would generally be fewer and less severe than those associated with surface mining, with the possible exception of social and economic disruptions associated with a large population influx. The worst case for these physical environmental impacts would be a possible large scale disruption of the groundwater aquifer caused by the coal seam being mined (if it is in fact an aquifer). Those aquifers above and below the coal seam would probably not be affected unless there is movement between aquifers. There would be some surface subsidence depending on the type of mining used, thickness of the seam mined, depth of mining and roof

composition. If such large underground mines were eventually developed, a large number of employees would probably be hired locally, with some population influx into Roundup, Billings, Klein and possibly Musselshell.

As stated in Chapter 1, the Bull Mountain Field is in the Powder River Coal Production Region. Before being offered for lease (except emergency leases), coal in the Bull Mountains would have to go through an Activity Planning phase. The coal in the Joliet-Fromberg (and other) fields in Carbon County lies outside the Powder River Coal Production Region, and may be leased upon application and completion of appropriate environmental assessment.

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The objective of this alternative is to make available for lease all Federal coal found acceptable for further leasing consideration pending further study. No areas would be deleted because of overriding multiple use concerns. All the lands to come through the screens would be considered for lease as the highest and best use for the resource.

In the Bull Mountains, 9,360 acres of Federal coal containing 114,850,000 tons, would be acceptable for leasing or exchange, pending further study (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

All coal to be mined by underground methods is acceptable for further consideration for leasing or exchange. The BLM would not apply coal unsuitability criteria to these areas until a site-specific mine plan is filed, detailing the proposed location of surface facilities.

Coal exchanges would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## Oil and Gas Leasing

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

Restrictions to oil and gas exploration and development would be minimized. All new leases would be issued directly by the Montana State Office with only standard stipulations attached (all lands would be classified as nonsensitive). This affects all of the 649,433 acres of Federal mineral estate in the resource area.

## Land Tenure Adjustment

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

For analysis purposes, this alternative would not propose changes in the existing public land pattern within the resource area, including the Land Tenure Adjustment Area. This would result in a decrease in disposal actions since no sales or exchanges would be processed in the short or long term.

## Classifications

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

Under the Classification and Multiple Use Act of 1964, three areas were classified for retention. These classifications would be reviewed and discussed in a separate lands report by the end of fiscal year 1983 (FY-83), to determine if they are still serving their original purpose. These classifications will be reviewed in accordance with Organic Act Directive No. 81-11 (see Appendix 1.7).

The objective of this alternative is to lift the segregative effect on approximately 28,586 acres by revoking the classifications. Surface protection would be provided under the 43 CFR 3809 regulations.

### Recreation Access

The BLM would make no effort to acquire additional access for recreational purposes.

## Off-Road Vehicle Use

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The BLM would resolve the conflict between ORV users and adjacent homeowners by permanently closing a 70 acre tract in the South Hills (see Figure 2.4). Approximately 1,200 acres in the South Hills would remain open to ORV use. In order to be more consistent with Custer National Forest policy, four roads/trails on the west flank of Red Pryor Mountain would be opened to ORV use (the Bear Spring Road #1, Timber Canyon #2, Water Canyon #3 and Inferno Canyon #4). To minimize restrictions upon ORV use in the Pryor Mountains, 13

miles of closed roads would be opened to ORV use (Burnt Timber Canyon Trap Road #5; a dead end road off the Burnt Timber Canyon/Tillett; the ridge road in Sections 18 and 19, T. 9 S., R. 28 E., Road #6; Sykes Ridge Water Catchment Road, Road #7; Cottonwood Spring Road along Big Coulee, Road #8; the Windrinker Site Road #9; and the Demi-John Flat Road #10) (see Figure 2.5). The remaining public land in the resource area would remain open-nonrestrictive.

## Environmental Education

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The Billings Resource Area would permit the use of public lands for environmental education without further development by BLM, and the facilities (signs, staging areas, etc.) would be removed from existing sites. Other multiple-use activities would be permitted in the 77 acre Shepherd Ah-Nei site.

## Wild Horse Interpretation

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

The objective of this alternative would be to maintain the existing level of wild horse interpretation through present roadside signing practices.

## Wilderness

### Resource Objectives and Recommendations

Under this alternative, four areas containing 32,302 acres would be recommended as non-suitable for designation as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). If Congress selects this no wilderness alternative, the objective would be multiple use management, utilizing the resources present (see Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9).

