

PROPOSED PLAN

The Proposed Action for each issue area was made after consideration of the cumulative impacts to other resources and social and economic benefits as displayed in the Continuation of Existing, Low and High Level of Management Alternatives. The Proposed Action is a selection of portions of other alternatives or a previously described alternative which presents the best mix of resource considerations and most favorable economic and social factors.

Minerals

Coal

Impacts to the coal resource would be the same as those described in the Low Level Management Alternative, though the area available for further consideration could be further constrained by locally important multiple use resource values which may be identified later in activity planning.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Designating approximately 70,000 acres as sensitive would result in a greater lapse time between lease expiration or termination and issuance of a new lease. It is probable that special protective stipulations would be applied to these areas. There is also the possibility that because of sensitive resource values, large areas within the Pryor Mountains may not be leased.

Land Tenure Adjustment

The disposal of small isolated public land tracts would have no direct effect upon mineral resource or development since minerals rights would not be disposed of or exchanged. The loss of surface control might constrain mineral access or development since the BLM or a mining company would have to obtain access into the tract. Disposal of surface parcels with valuable mineral interests would be carefully evaluated to determine if disposal would be feasible.

Classifications

Removing the C&MU classifications in the Pryor Mountains, with the exception of 980 acres, would have a minimal impact on mineral entry. The potential for discovery of mineral resources in these areas is considered low.

Recreation Access

Should additional legal access for recreational purposes be obtained, access for development of mineral resources would also be secured. This would increase BLM's latitude in developing saleable minerals (rock, sand or gravel).

Wilderness

Wilderness designation of the Pryor Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and segments of the Big Horn Tack-On and Burnt Timber Canyon Wilderness Study Unit (WSU) would prevent further exploration for mineral resources at the time of designation. Restrictions to mineral exploration and development would apply until Congress acts on the two areas recommended for inclusion in the wilderness system. At that point, only valid claims located prior to the passage of FLPMA could still be developed.

Conclusion

The designation of approximately 70,000 acres as sensitive to oil and gas leasing could constrain mineral exploration and development.

Obtaining legal access for recreational purposes would allow access for exploration and development of saleable minerals. The potential for saleable mineral deposits in the identified tracts is unknown.

The mineral segregation of 980 acres in three areas in the Pryor Mountains would have an insignificant effect on prospecting for locatable minerals.

There would be an irreversible and irretrievable loss of coal, oil, gas and other non-renewable resources to the extent that these resources are developed in this proposed action, however, the process could be halted at any time.

Soils/Watershed (Erosion and Runoff)

Grazing Management

Impacts from grazing and vegetative manipulation would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Wild Horse Management

Impacts from wild horse management on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range would be the same as those described in the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative.

Wildlife Management

Short-term negative impacts to water quality would result from the construction of waterfowl nesting islands.

Timber Management

During and immediately following timber harvesting, erosion and runoff hazards would be similar to those discussed in the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative. Average runoff would be increased by 0.6 acre-feet since approximately 30 acres would be harvested annually. Potential hazards such as increased runoff and erosion are minimized due to the small land areas being harvested.

Coal, Oil and Gas Leasing, Classifications, Recreation Access, Off-road Vehicle Use

The impacts would be the same as those described in the General Impact section.

Environmental Education

The impacts caused by developing an environmental education site near Acton would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative under the Soils and Watershed discussion.

Wilderness

Wilderness designation would benefit the soils and watershed resources by eliminating surface disturbing activities.

Soils/Watershed (Water Quality and Streambank Protection)

The impacts to water quality and streambanks would be similar to those described under the High Level Management Alternative.

Conclusion

Grazing management, under this proposed action, would improve watershed conditions significantly. There would be 28,383 acres of vegetative manipulation to improve erosion susceptibilities and runoff potentials. Wild horse management would insignificantly benefit watershed conditions since erosion and runoff would decrease slightly. Due to the small area proposed for timber harvesting, impacts to watershed would be insignificant. The average annual runoff would be increased by 0.6 acre-feet in the cutting areas.

Development of an environmental education site would cause localized increases in erosion and runoff, but are considered insignificant.

Water quality and streambanks would improve under this proposed action. Short-term negative impacts to reservoir water quality would result from waterfowl nesting island construction. These impacts would be insignificant in the long term. Physical access to rivers could cause small segments of increased streambank erosion. Off-road vehicle use could cause insignificant impacts to soils and watershed.

The loss of soil in this proposed action due to erosion would be irretrievable but not irreversible. There would be no irretrievable or irreversible loss of water resources.

Vegetation

Grazing Management

Impacts to vegetation would be identical to those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Wild Horse Management

The 1981 Ecological Site Inventory of the 38,213 acres of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR) in Montana indicated that 2,775 acres are in good condition, 12,498 acres in fair, 7,900 acres in poor and the remaining 15,040 acres are unsuitable for wild horse grazing. It is anticipated that controlling populations of horses at the initial stocking level (approximately 121) and improving grazing distribution by controlling their access to water sources would allow range conditions to be maintained with a slight improvement trend. The additional 6,083 acres of the PMWHR in Wyoming, estimated to be in fair and poor condition would be maintained. These acreage figures include BLM, Forest Service, National Park Service, state and private lands which are not part of the designated PMWHR.

Wildlife Management

Fencing of four reservoirs and planting 25 acres of dense nesting cover would have insignificant beneficial impacts to the vegetative resource.

Timber Management

An average of 70 thousand board feet of timber, which includes 30 acres of the Twin Coulee WSA, would be harvested annually under this proposed action. However, some sales may approach 1 million board feet (MMBF) and impacts to vegetation could be significant in the short term because of skidding and road construction. In the long term, impacts would be mitigated through stipulations limiting logging activity to slopes less than 30% and the reseedling of grasses and forbs on skid trails and roads (Programmatic EAR #MT-060-06-8-18).

Coal

Impacts would be the same as the Low Level Management Alternative though the area available for further consideration might be reduced due to additional multiple use trade-offs.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Oil and gas development and production would disturb approximately 30 surface acres per year. This would be insignificant to vegetation in the long term.

Classifications

Partial revocation of the classification and multiple use (C&MU) classifications on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range will result in minor surface disturbance and loss of vegetation due to locatable mineral activities. This would be of short-term duration and is considered insignificant.

Conclusion

A variety of methods, in addition to grazing management, are proposed to correct current unsatisfactory range condition under this proposed action. The highly significant impacts to vegetation for the "I" allotments are the same as those listed in the High Level Management Alternative.

For the "M" and "C" category allotments, the acres improved from fair and poor to good condition through vegetative manipulations: 4,440 acres.

Wild horse management under this proposed action would result in maintenance of current ecological conditions with a slow upward trend.

Timber management, coal development, oil and gas development and C&MU classifications proposals would have insignificant impacts on vegetation.

There would be no irreversible or irretrievable loss of vegetation resources in this proposed action.

Livestock

Grazing Management

Impacts under this proposed action would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

There would be no irretrievable or irreversible loss of livestock resources in this proposed action.

Wild Horses

Wild Horse Management

The maintenance of present watering facilities and constructing five new water catchments for the purpose of controlling available water and stimulating better grazing distribution would be a minor infringement on the wild and free roaming behavior of the wild horses.

The construction of 2 miles of fence for the purpose of improving the efficiency of capturing horses and 5 miles of fence for fencing the south boundary of the horse range would be a minor impact to the wild and free roaming behavior of the wild horses.

Maintaining current age class structures, colors and other genetic traits by excessing horses would result in a higher quality breeding herd. This would be a minor short-term disruption of normal wild horse habits and behavior.

Selection for conformation, color and genetic characteristics typical of the Pryor Mountain wild horses would produce good quality horses.

Under this proposed action the wild horse carrying capacity could increase due to improved distribution and moderate grazings. However, projected long-term improvement in range condition is minor (see Vegetation Impacts), so increases in horse population would also be minor.

Controlling the sex ratio favoring studs and maintaining the number of reproductive age mares at no more than 50% of the female population would yield a 10 to 15% annual reproduction rate. This would reduce the number of horses to be excessed annually since most would be retained to replace normal annual death loss. Balancing the number of horses in with the proper grazing capacity of each herd area would produce and maintain a healthy, viable breeding herd.

The loss of private land inholdings could have a significant impact on future management. The loss of these lands, which amounts to 2,240 acres, would reduce the range of the horses. This would require a similar reduction in numbers. It would also constrain future management options for the horses and the habitat.

Wildlife Management

In order to achieve wildlife objectives, it may be necessary to induce wild horse movement so that grazing on an area occurs during a prescribed season. This would have minimal effects on the wild horses but could increase maintenance and operational costs for wild horse management significantly.

Timber Management

In the short term, timber harvest activity to benefit other resources would cause the horses to move from the higher elevations. This would impact the lower elevation range because of the heavier grazing pressure and would result in a potential for increased loss of soil productivity due to wind and water erosion.

In the long term, selective timber harvest within the heavily timbered areas of the horse range would benefit wild horses and horse management.

Thinning existing stands would provide an opportunity for growing additional forage for the horses. More open stands reduce the ability of the horses to hide and escape during capture efforts and data collection processes.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Under this proposed action, lands within the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range may be leased with special stipulations for oil and gas exploration or development. However, based on site-specific analysis, there is also the possibility of large areas remaining unleased. Large areas may not be leased because access road construction and exploration operations could impair BLM's ability to monitor and gather wild horses, and may alter the horses' wild and free roaming behavior. The general public has the perception that the horse range is a preserve for wild horses in a wild setting. Oil and gas exploration is inconsistent with that belief.

Classifications

Partial revocation of the three Classification and Multiple Use classifications in the Pryor Mountains could result in potential mineral exploration. Mineral exploration and development has the potential to alter normal wild horse behavior. These activities may also interfere with the wild horse capture process if both are occurring simultaneously. This would be a short-term impact and not significant. However, the discovery, development and production of minerals would cause long-term significant impacts. The behavior patterns of the wild horses would change and capture operations would have to be altered. The intrusion of developments would degrade the open space, wild horse range atmosphere and natural environment.

Wilderness

There could be minor long-term effects on wild horse management. Restrictions on new water developments, depending upon location and visibility, could result in continued grazing distribution problems and slower rates of habitat improvement. Future fencing needs (now unforeseen) within the horse range could be foregone in order to preserve the natural setting.

Conclusion

Constructing watering facilities in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range would provide better grazing distribution, thus maintaining range conditions with a slight upward trend. Fencing would improve efficiency in capturing wild horses. Both actions would have insignificant impacts to the wild and free roaming behavior of the horses. Controlling populations, sex ratios, age class structures and other genetic traits would maintain a healthy, viable breeding herd of wild horses.

Acquisition of non-public lands in the horse range would facilitate future management by consolidating ownerships.

Achieving certain wildlife objectives may significantly increase maintenance and operational costs for wild horse management.

Protection from timber harvesting would significantly enhance the horses' wild and free roaming behavior.

Designating the area sensitive to oil and gas leasing would protect the wild horses from negative impacts associated with such activities and would be in keeping with public perceptions concerning management of the wild horse range.

Partial revocation of the C&MU classifications could result in potential locatable mineral exploration, development and production, except for the areas totaling 980 acres that would remain under the existing classification. Exploration or development could significantly alter wild horse behavior and also interfere with capture processes.

Designation of study areas recommended as suitable for wilderness could have minor impacts to wild horse management by reducing management options.

There would be no irreversible or irretrievable loss of wild horses in this proposed action.

Wildlife

Grazing Management

Impacts from grazing management would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Wild Horse Management

Impacts from wild horse management would be the same as those described in the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative.

Wildlife Management

Impacts from wildlife would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative with the exception that chukar partridge habitat could be impacted by 1,600 acres.

Timber Management

In the short term, timber sales up to 1 MMBF in the Twin Coulee area would result in significant negative impacts to wildlife. Species such as deer, elk and bear would be forced to relocate to other areas. In the long term, timber harvest would open canopy cover, create conditions more favorable to browse species, and improve habitat conditions for deer and elk. As a general rule, however, it's anticipated that an average of 70 MBF annually, on 30 acres, would be harvested.

Coal

Coal reserves identified in the Bull Mountain coal field underlays a total of approximately 5,700 acres of elk winter range and approximately 22,800 acres of mule deer and turkey yearlong range. However, only approximately 1,680 acres of elk winter range and 1,960 acres of mule deer and turkey yearlong range overlays the coal reserves which are being carried forward pending further study and final application of the Federal coal unsuitability criteria. Future development of these reserves could affect a long-term maximum of 6% of the elk winter range and 2% of the mule deer and turkey yearlong range assuming an anticipated disturbance of 21 acres annually beginning the 12th year of this plan. Maximum total disturbance during the life of this plan could potentially approach approximately 365 acres. This impact would have little significance to the total available habitat. However, there would be additional habitat disturbances occurring away from the mining site associated with development of access roads, movement of equipment and transportation of the coal.

Land Tenure Adjustment

Impacts from land tenure adjustment would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Classifications

Protecting 980 acres in the Pryor Mountain area from mineral entry would not have a significant impact on terrestrial habitat. However, since the portions of the classification which would remain in effect are associated with three springs on the horse range, it would provide some slight protection from potential surface disturbances that may degrade the aquatic habitat.

Recreation Access

Impacts would be similar to those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Off-road Vehicle Use

Off-road vehicle impacts would be similar to those discussed in the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative except that as new access is acquired, restrictions would be implemented to limit ORV use to specific roads and trails. These restrictions would benefit wildlife by reducing man-animal encounters and prevent indiscriminate loss of wildlife habitat from cross-country vehicle travel.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Oil and gas development and production would disturb approximately 30 surface acres per year. This would be an insignificant impact to wildlife in the long term, since these activities would be conducted in a manner which would minimize adverse impacts. Road construction would be held to a minimum and roads could be closed seasonally.

Wilderness

Designation of the Pryor Mountain WSA and a portion of the Burnt Timber Canyon and Big Horn Tack-On WSUs would provide security to some wildlife species, particularly bighorn sheep and mule deer in the Pryor Mountains. However, some opportunities for wildlife improvements in these areas may be foregone. Returning the Twin Coulee WSA and portions of Burnt Timber Canyon and the Big Horn Tack-On WSU to non-wilderness management would result in greater opportunities for wildlife improvements. Some species could be impacted by actions such as timber harvest, recreational access, mining or recreation use, however, this is not thought to be a significant impact to wildlife.

Conclusion

Burning 21,520 acres of sagebrush could adversely affect 18% of Federally managed winter antelope range and 25% of the known sage grouse dancing grounds. Eight percent of the total chukar partridge habitat might be affected. However, annual vegetation created by burning could benefit chukars.

Improving the woody floodplain zone through grazing management and livestock and wildlife water development would significantly improve wildlife habitat.

Maintaining proper stocking levels of wild horses in balance with available forage could improve range condition and wildlife habitat in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range.

Five water catchments would increase available chukar partridge range by 1,600 acres. Constructing 50 waterfowl nesting islands, fencing reservoirs and seeding dense nesting cover would result in a significant annual increase of 350 ducks.

Timber harvest could result in the loss of wildlife habitat in the short term. In the long term, increases in browse species and opening canopy cover would be beneficial to wildlife.

Potential coal leasing with development could result in insignificant adverse impacts to wildlife resources in the long term. Through application of the coal unsuitability criteria, mining plans and strict reclamation stipulations, long-term impacts would be mitigated. However, there would be additional habitat disturbances occurring away from the mining site associated with development of access roads and transportation of coal.

Land disposal could result in a loss of BLM administered terrestrial and aquatic habitat. However, land exchanges for equal or greater values could enhance management of wildlife habitat.

Some increased habitat destruction and harassment of wildlife would occur from ORV use. Restricted ORV use on newly acquired access areas would reduce impacts to wildlife.

Oil and gas exploration would disturb 750 acres in the long term. Human activity would increase. This would result in insignificant impacts to wildlife.

There would be no irretrievable or irreversible loss of wildlife resources in this proposed action.

Recreation

Grazing Management, Wildlife Management and Recreation Access

Impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Wild Horse Management

Impacts would be the same as those described in the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative.

Timber Management

Impacts to recreation under this proposed action would be insignificant.

Land Tenure Adjustment

Impacts would be the same as those described in the General Impact section.

Off-road Vehicle Use

Five new roads would be open for recreational use, therefore increasing off-road vehicle opportunities.

Wilderness

Certain forms of recreational use associated with vehicular use would be eliminated. Other forms of recreation such as backpacking would be enhanced by wilderness designation.

Conclusion

Range and wildlife habitat conditions would improve significantly, resulting in a probable increase in wildlife numbers and increased hunting opportunities. Reservoirs may be converted into fisheries as well as livestock watering sources.

Should BLM obtain access into the seven described sites, some of the local and regional demand for recreational access would be satisfied.

Off-road vehicle designations would have little effect upon overall recreational use of public lands since most activity is concentrated around Billings. However, leaving the majority of the South Hills area open would provide opportunities for use while significantly reducing the probability of conflicts between recreationists and adjacent landowners.

There would be no irreversible or irretrievable loss of recreation resources in this proposed action.

Visual Resources

Grazing Management

Impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Wild Horse Management

Impacts would be the same as those described for the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative.

Wildlife Management

Impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative, with the exception that there would be 15 fewer water catchments constructed.

Timber Management

Impacts to visual resources would be insignificant except in the Twin Coulee area where large sales could occur. Timber harvest would be incompatible with maintaining the present Class II visual rating. High negative impacts would result in the short term. In the long term, visual aspects would be mitigated with reforestation techniques.

Coal

Visual impacts would be the same as those described in the Low Level Management Alternative.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Major portions of the horse range may be withheld from oil and gas leasing, resulting in positive impacts to visual resources.

The majority of this activity would occur in Class III visual areas outside the horse range. Disturbances would be in compliance with VRM classification guidelines.

Classifications

The C&MU classifications in the Pryor Mountain area currently provide protection to the visual aspects of the horse range. Removal of this classification from major portions of the range could result in negative impacts if mining were to occur.

Recreation Access

Acquiring access into seven additional public land areas would have a moderate impact to the visual resources. Restricting motorized use to the primary roadways would eliminate some of the impacts.

Off-road Vehicle Use

Leaving the majority of the roads in the Pryor Mountain area closed would protect the high visual resources present. Opening 9 miles of roads previously closed to ORV useage would result in insignificant impacts.

Wild Horse Interpretation

The placement of six signs along the periphery of the horse range would insignificantly impact visual resources.

Wilderness

Recommending the Twin Coulee WSA, part of the Big Horn Tack-On WSU and part of the Burnt Timber Canyon WSU as non-suitable for wilderness would allow the development of other resources which could significantly impact visual resources over the long term. This is particularly true of Twin Coulee if timber is harvested. Recommending the Pryor Mountain WSA and part of Burnt Timber Canyon and Big Horn Tack-On WSUs as additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System would preserve the visual qualities of these areas over the short and long term.

Conclusion

Negative impacts resulting from proposals under the grazing management, wild horse, wildlife management, oil and gas leasing, classifications, off-road vehicle use and wild horse interpretation programs would be insignificant.

If timber harvest occurred in the Twin Coulee area, short-term negative impacts would occur.

New recreational access proposals would result in moderately negative impacts. Non-wilderness recommendations have the potential to negatively impact the visual qualities of those areas in the long term.

There would be no irreversible or irretrievable loss of visual resources in this proposed action.

Cultural Resources

Grazing Management

Discing, crested wheat seeding, spring developments and reservoir, water catchment, pipeline and well construction would disturb 1,842 acres. This total excludes 5,365 acres already planted in crested wheat and assumed to be presently disturbed. Nine cultural resource sites may be encountered. Seven sites would be avoided; two sites would be mitigated.

Wild Horse Management

Constructing water catchments would disturb 3 acres. There is less than 1% probability of encountering cultural resources.

Wildlife

Water catchment and fish pond construction would disturb 13 acres. There is a 2% probability of encountering cultural resources. Any site would be avoided.

Timber Management

Cutting 30 acres of timber a year would disturb 750 acres in the long term. One site may be encountered. The site would be avoided.

Coal

The impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Drilling 10 wells a year would disturb 500 acres in the long term. Two sites may be encountered and both would be avoided.

Land Tenure Adjustment

The disposal of or exchange of approximately 49,809 acres may impact 168 cultural sites. Based upon current inventory information and professional judgment, it's assumed that 5% of sites located within the current assessed disposal and exchange area would be highly significant or rare and best kept within Federal ownership for the public. Therefore, eight sites would be avoided through ownership retention. One hundred and seventy remaining sites may or may not qualify for the National Register of Historic Places. Those that do would be mitigated if the budget permits (see Appendix 1.10) or transferred out of Federal ownership after consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation per 36 CFR 800. Those that do not qualify would be transferred along with the acreage.

Recreation Access

The BLM is unable to quantify recreational access impacts. However, vandalism to acquired or existing sites may result from recreational use.

Off-road Vehicle Use

Designating the Bear Spring, Timber Canyon, Water Canyon, Inferno Canyon and Demi-John Flat roads as open may contribute to deterioration, vandalism and looting of 20 sites, 6 of which comprise a National Historic District.

Environmental Education

Development of the Acton area may disturb portions of 60 acres. There is a 9% probability of encountering a cultural site. The site would be avoided.

Conclusion

Anything less than 5% probability of encountering a cultural site has not been computed.

The proposals in this alternative would disturb or impact 12,184 acres. One hundred and eighty-two sites would be encountered. Nineteen sites would be avoided; 3 sites mitigated; and 160 sites mitigated or transferred out of Federal ownership. Because of mitigating practices, these impacts are considered insignificant. Designating certain areas under this alternative as open to ORV use may contribute to vandalism, looting, unwarranted excavation and unauthorized camping impacts to 20 additional sites. Any site inadvertently destroyed in this alternative would be irretrievably and irreversibly lost.



Wilderness

Grazing Management

Twin Coulee WSA—Impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Wild Horse Management

Pryor Mountain WSA—There would be little impact on wilderness values. One of the five water catchments proposed to be constructed is within the WSA boundary, as is 2 miles of fence. These projects could be constructed without any impact to apparent naturalness of the area. Management of the wild horse herd would maintain range condition and be in compliance with the BLM Wilderness Management Policy and ensure the continuation of a healthy herd which would be a benefit to wilderness values.

Big Horn Tack-On WSU—Burnt Timber Canyon WSU—There are no proposed projects so there would be no impact on wilderness values.

Timber Management

Twin Coulee WSA—Impacts would be the same as those described in the Low Level Management Alternative.

Pryor Mountain WSA, Burnt Timber Canyon WSU, Big Horn Tack-On WSU—There would be no significant impacts in the three units as portions of the acreage would be protected from commercial harvest under this proposed action.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Twin Coulee WSA—The potential impacts would be the same as those described in the Continuation of Existing Management Alternative.

Pryor Mountain WSA, portions of Burnt Timber Canyon, Big Horn Tack-On WSUs—Impacts would be the same as those described under the High Level Management Alternative.

Wilderness Management

Twin Coulee WSA—Under this proposed action, the entire WSA would be recommended as non-suitable for wilderness designation. The opportunity to include the area in the NWPS would be foregone, but as described in Chapter 3, Evaluation of Wilderness Qualities, this area does not offer the outstanding quality and diversity to be managed as part of the national wilderness system. The wilderness values do not offset the potential economic uses of this area including timber production and mineral development (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of wilderness, timber and mineral values).

Pryor Mountain WSA—Under this proposed action, 16,927 acres would be recommended as suitable for wilderness designation. The outstanding wilderness values described in Chapter 3 would exceed other resource potentials of the area. Designation would add

both quality and diversity to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). The WSA is manageable as wilderness as there are no valid existing rights or landownership conflicts which could impact long-term wilderness management. Closure of the Turkey Flat Road would enhance wilderness manageability.

Burnt Timber Canyon WSU—This proposed action recommends that 3,430 acres be designated as part of the NWPS while 525 acres be recommended non-suitable. As there are no valid existing rights or land ownership conflicts, the area recommended as suitable could be managed as wilderness. Manageability would be enhanced if the contiguous U.S. Forest Service Lost Water Canyon Study Area is designated as wilderness.

Big Horn Tack-On WSU—The 2,550 acre southern segment would be recommended as suitable and would be manageable as wilderness in conjunction with the contiguous National Park Service study area. This portion of the WSA is manageable as wilderness since no valid existing rights or land ownership conflicts exist which could affect long-term wilderness management.

The 2,000 acre northern segment would be recommended nonsuitable. This area has only a tenuous connection with the U.S. Park Service study area and does not contain the high quality wilderness values present in the south segment. Recommending this area nonsuitable for wilderness designation would not have a detrimental effect on the long-term wilderness management of the National Park Service wilderness study area to the south because of the tenuous boundary connection. It is not contiguous to the BLM study areas and a non-designation recommendation would not affect the Bureau areas proposed for wilderness designation.

Conclusion

This proposed action would allow multiple resource uses in the Twin Coulee WSA including timber harvest and mineral production. The economic value of the timber resource exceeds the marginal wilderness qualities of the area.

In the Pryor Mountain WSA, the outstanding wilderness values and lack of resource conflicts makes this area suitable as wilderness.

The lands recommended as suitable in the Burnt Timber Canyon WSU contain extremely high wilderness values and would add diversity to the NWPS, with limited resource uses foregone.

Big Horn Tack-On WSU—The lands recommended non-suitable under this alternative would not significantly enhance the NWPS. The segment recommended for wilderness designation would enhance management of the adjacent National Park Service wilderness study area.

There would be no irreversible or irretrievable loss of wilderness resources in this proposed action.

Social

Grazing Management

Impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Coal

Impacts would be the same as those described in the Low Level Management Alternative.

Attitudes Toward the Alternative

No specific information on attitudes toward this proposed action has been collected. This proposed action proposes a compromise between the Low, High and Continuation of Management Alternatives based on environmental, social and economic impacts.

Based on the attitudes toward specific issues (Chapter 3, Social and Economic Conditions) it's assumed that those individuals and groups concerned with environmental protection would support many aspects of this proposed action. These proposals include restrictions on oil and gas leasing and the inclusion of environmental, economic and social planning steps in determining the land to be made available for coal leasing, provisions for environmental education sites based on demand for these sites and the enhancement of wildlife habitat. They may favor the wilderness designation of the three WSAs/WSUs in the Pryor Mountains. They would probably favor land exchanges where high value recreation land or wildlife habitat was acquired but would be opposed to some land sales.

Individuals or groups concerned with resource development may have reservations about the proposal for inclusion of three areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and the inclusion of additional planning steps in determining the land to be made available for coal leasing and increased restrictions on oil and gas leasing. Some individuals may favor the proposal to drop three areas from wilderness designation, and the actions to bring coal lands forward for possible leasing pending further study. Some individuals may favor the increase in land tenure changes. Others may feel the increased changes could ultimately cause problems with resource development.

Ranchers would react positively toward this proposed action because it increases the number of AUMs available for livestock. Ranchers who are concerned about coal development would favor the inclusion of environmental, economic and social planning steps in determining the land to be made available for coal leasing. Individuals or organizations who wish to purchase public lands would favor land tenure changes proposed in this proposed action. Those ranchers who are not currently in a position to purchase land may be concerned about sales.

Recreationists and others would react positively to this proposed action because it includes increased hunting and fishing opportunities, increased access and the possible acquisition of high value recreation sites through land exchanges and wilderness designation of two areas.

Individuals who favor the development of the Windrinker Site as a wild horse interpretive overlook would be disappointed by this proposed action. Those individuals who favor no control of the wild horse population, might react negatively to this proposed action.

Conclusion

The social well-being of the families dependent upon the 43 affected ranches would improve in the long term. Moderate impacts to the social organization in Fromberg could occur due to the development of a subsurface coal mine. This proposed action would probably be viewed as an acceptable compromise by both those concerned with environmental protection and those concerned with resource development.

Economics

Grazing Management

Ranch Related Economic Impacts—Impacts would be the same as those described in the High Level Management Alternative.

Timber Management

Sales of up to 1 MMBF may occur in the resource area but the anticipated annual cut is 70 MBF. This would continue to meet local demand for BLM timber. The increase in the annual harvest (25 MBF) represents less than 1% of the total volume received by sawmills in the resource area for 1981.

This increase in annual cut would provide only enough lumber to build four 1,500 square foot, three bedroom, frame, ranch style homes. There would be little or no impact on timber related earnings and employment under this proposed action.

Coal

Economic impacts would be the same as those described in the Low Level Management Alternative.

Land Tenure Adjustment

An adjustment in the public landownership pattern could mean a decrease of payment in lieu of taxes to counties involved. Conversely, it could also mean an increase in the tax base. The PILT funds for the State of Montana have decreased 65% from 1979 to 1982. Those counties which contain Federal acreages would be in a somewhat better position in terms of property tax revenues if some public lands pass into private ownership and PILT payments are less than property tax payments.

Wilderness

Economic conditions would not change substantially as a result of wilderness designation for the three areas in the Pryor Mountains. There is currently no domestic livestock grazing in the areas and mineral potential is felt to be very low. There are some commercial timber values present in the Pryor Mountain WSA, but it would not be harvested because of the sensitive soil conditions and steep slopes in the area.

Conclusion

In the long term, 43 ranch operations would have increases in income due to increases in BLM AUMs. These increases range from an average of 13% on small operations to 4% on large operations.

The Proposed Action could potentially result in a minor impact to the economy of the area due to coal development. The community of Fromberg would experience some increase in economic activity while other areas would experience little or no impact. It is expected that the impact of a population influx on community services in Fromberg would be minimal. Other resource proposals would have little or no impact on employment and earnings in the resource area.

There would be no irreversible or irretrievable loss under this proposed action.

