

This draft West HiLine Resource Management Plan (RMP) addresses future management options for approximately 626,098 surface acres and 1,328,014 subsurface acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The majority of these acreages are managed through the Havre and Great Falls Resource Areas. The remainder are found in the the Judith and Phillips Resource Areas, and are related to one issue; recreation management on the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. All of these resource areas are included in the Lewistown BLM District in north central Montana.

## PLANNING ISSUES

Five issues were identified through public input, resource monitoring and policy mandates during the scoping process. These issues reflect concerns or conflicts which could be partially or totally resolved through this RMP.

### Land Tenure

The BLM manages a variety of public land in the West HiLine area, including land utilization lands (lands which left federal ownership and were later acquired under the Bankhead-Jones Act) public domain lands and mineral estate subsurface lands. Many of these lands are widely scattered and often pose multiple resource management problems. This RMP will identify which public lands should be retained, which may leave federal ownership and which lands are suitable for acquisition.

### Off-Road Vehicle Management

Off-road vehicle use is increasing throughout the planning area and access roads are extending into previously unroaded areas. Executive Order (EO) 11644 as amended by EO 11989, directs that all public lands be designated as open, limited or closed to off-road vehicles (ORV). This project will identify those designations.

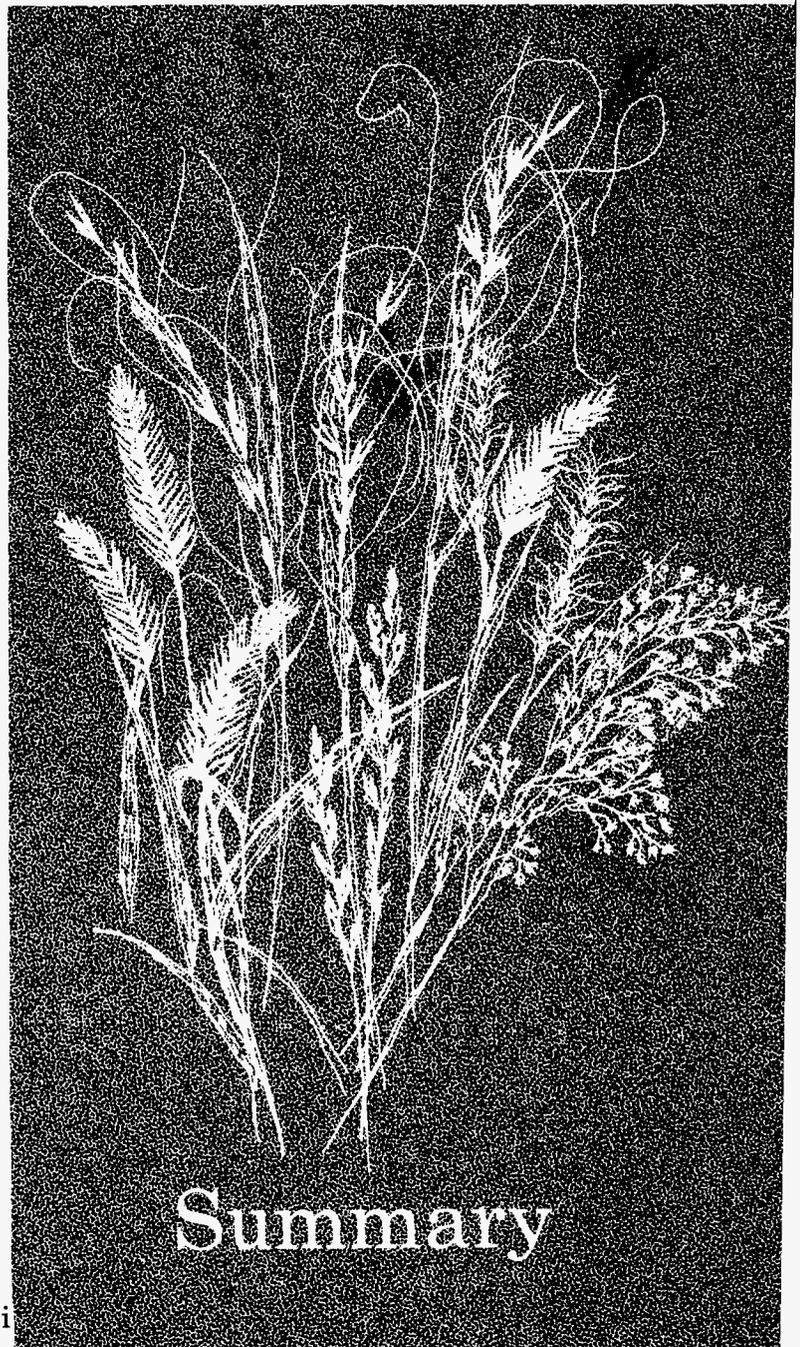
### Right-of-Way Location

The BLM needs to identify public lands which are not suitable for lineal rights-of-way (ROW) location for transmission facilities. These facilities, regardless of size, transport a commodity and will be identified. This RMP will also identify areas which are not suitable for communication site locations.

### Emphasis Areas

Three areas in the Great Falls and Havre Resource Areas may need management emphasis to preserve particular resources. The Kevin Rim area is a high use area for a variety of raptors and is a potential peregrine falcon reintroduction area. It also contains portions of Montana's oldest, active oil and gas field.

The Sweet Grass Hills are significant for their religious and cultural importance to Native Americans; for their high value recreational lands and for their diverse wildlife populations. They also form an historical hardrock mining area.



## THE ALTERNATIVES

The Cow Creek area contains portions of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, the Cow Island Trail, the Cow Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River (UMNWSR), and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

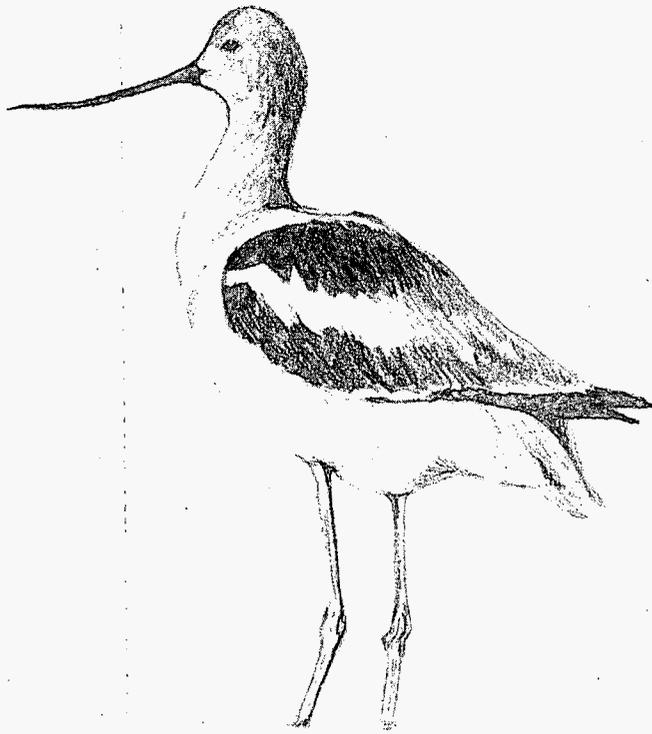
### Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management

The Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River was designated in 1976, because of its high value recreational, historical, cultural, wildlife, mineral, geologic, range and unique natural resources. This area is also considered a premier segment of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, which was designated in 1978. This plan will address future development of recreation resources on approximately 88,153 acres along the UMNWSR.

The formulation and analysis of alternatives is required by the Council of Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1500.2(e)) and BLM resource planning regulations (43 CFR 1610.4-5). The goal of each alternative is to resolve the issues. Each alternative, in conjunction with the Management Common to All Alternatives guidance presents a complete and reasonable guide to future management of public lands and resources. Current management of non-issue resources and programs will continue under each alternative considered and is described in the Management Common to All Alternatives portion of Chapter 2.

Several alternatives were considered during the formulation process but were dropped from detailed study because they were unreasonable or did not adequately address the planning issues.

Four alternatives were developed and analyzed in detail. The major management actions and environmental impacts of the four alternatives analyzed in detail are discussed below and in Tables 2.5 and 2.6.





## **Alternative A—No Action**

### **Land Tenure Adjustment**

A total of 44,143 acres of public land would be identified for exchange. Retention and acquisition tracts would generally be in areas of major federal holdings such as the UMNWSR Corridor, northern Blaine County, and the Sweet Grass Hills. If acquired lands are located in areas identified for more stringent surface constraints, such as WSAs, there would be a moderate negative impact to the minerals industry. A moderate negative impact could also occur with the potential loss of 6,164 acres of crucial big game and upland bird habitat. However, this loss could be offset with the possible acquisition of other crucial wildlife habitats. Management opportunities for grazing could be enhanced if public lands were consolidated. Public access and protection or enhancement of recreation values could significantly improve by consolidating public land.

### **Off-Road Vehicle Management**

ORV use would be limited on 148,335 acres of public land including areas of steep sedimentary breaks soil types with slopes greater than 30% and wilderness study areas. Soil erosion, and decreased water quality could be locally significant as a result of ORV use. A moderate, long-term impairment or loss of cultural sites and impairment of livestock management could also occur. Impacts are expected to be more pronounced on 477,763 acres designated open to ORV use.

### **Right-of-Way Location**

The entire planning area would be open to right-of-way location. Locally significant soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways could occur, especially in areas of steep sedimentary breaks soils types. A moderate positive benefit to the minerals industry would result by allowing companies to select the most effective ROW route.

### **Emphasis Areas**

All the emphasis areas (Kevin Rim, Sweet Grass Hills and Cow Creek) would continue to be managed for the multiple use of all resources. None would be designated as an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC).

Oil and gas activity in the Kevin Rim area would continue to be restricted by a 1/4-mile buffer zone around active raptor nests and/or breeding areas. This buffer zone is not adequate to prevent disturbance to breeding or nesting raptors. Such disturbance could result in nest or territory abandonment.

All but 40 acres of the Bureau of Reclamation (BR) withdrawal on East Butte of the Sweet Grass Hills would be returned to BLM administration and reopened to mineral entry. This would produce a significant positive impact for the minerals industry. However, the minerals industry could face increased legal and mitigation costs to offset significant impacts to raptors, big game habitat and Native American religious activities. This would be a moderate negative impact.

A management plan would be written in cooperation with the United States Forest Service, for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and allotment management plans may be modified to incorporate riparian objectives in the Cow Creek area.

### **Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management**

BLM would continue to provide recreational opportunities consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and as outlined in the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River Plan. Interpretive facilities and sites would be self guided and keyed to the Floaters Guide. Undeveloped and semi-developed recreation sites would be maintained. Developed sites would only be allowed at major launch/take out points. Concession services would be limited to outfitting and boat rental services. Local and state agencies would continue to provide law enforcement and search and rescue services.

A significant loss of federal oil and gas reserves could occur due to drainage by adjacent non-federal holdings. Increased visitor use of the UMNWSR, without accompanying mitigation measures could result in a locally significant impact to vegetation because of increased soil compaction, erosion and trampling.

## Alternative B

### Land Tenure Adjustment

A total of 50,092 acres of public land would be identified for disposal, with an emphasis on exchange. Retention and acquisition would be keyed toward blocking up BLM land patterns in the Sweet Grass Hills, Kevin Rim, Marias River, Missouri River, Cow Creek, and important wildlife areas and the Rocky Mountain Front. If acquired lands are located in areas identified for more stringent surface constraints, such as WSAs, there would be a moderate negative impact to the minerals industry. A moderate change in vegetation composition from native vegetation to farmland could occur in parcels leaving federal administration. Potentially, 9,885 acres of crucial wildlife habitat could be affected by land tenure adjustment. This impact could be offset by acquiring other crucial wildlife habitat. Management options for grazing would be enhanced if exchanges consolidate BLM administered lands, or could be reduced if parcels of public lands were sold rather than exchanged. Consolidation of public lands could improve recreation opportunities significantly with improved access and protection or enhancement of recreational values.

### Off-Road Vehicle Management

ORV use would be limited on a total of 32,000 acres within WSAs and an intensive ORV use area would be identified. Soil erosion and decreased water quality could be locally significant as a result of ORV use, especially on 285,190 acres of sedimentary breaks soils. A moderate, long-term impairment or loss of cultural sites could result from ORV use. Overall impacts might be more pronounced on the acreage designated "open" to ORV use.

### Right-of-Way Location

The entire planning area, except for the UMNWSR and any future areas nationally designated as special management areas, would remain open to ROW location. The UMNWSR Corridor, 88,153 acres, would be an avoidance area however, seven windows through this corridor would permit ROW location. Surface disturbance resulting from ROW location would cause locally significant soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways, especially in areas of sedimentary breaks soils.

### Emphasis Areas

All the emphasis areas (Kevin Rim, Sweet Grass Hills and Cow Creek) would continue to be managed for the multiple use of all resources. None would be designated as an area of critical environmental concern.

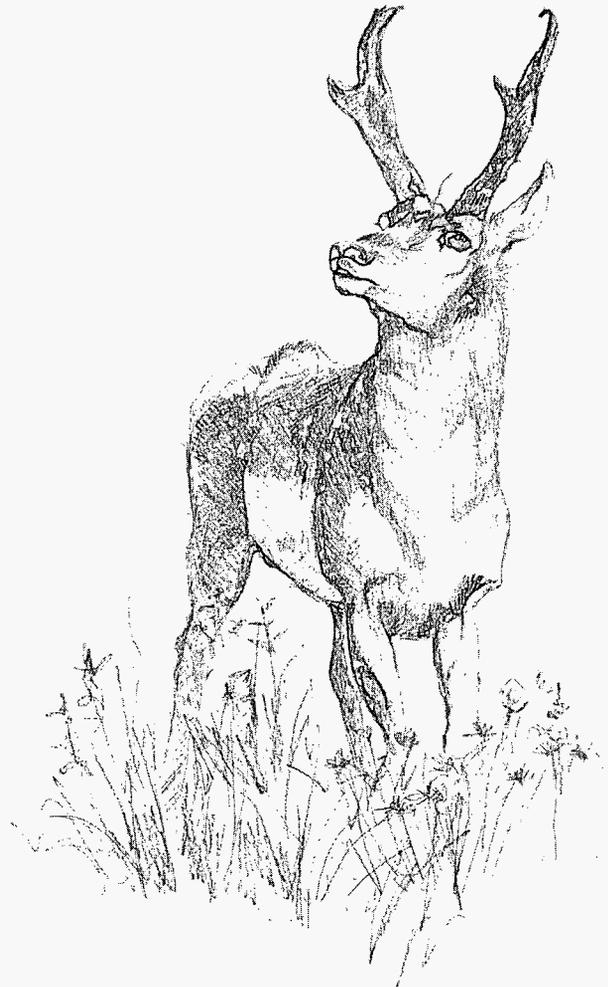
Oil and gas activity in the Kevin Rim area would continue to be restricted by a 1/4-mile buffer zone around active raptor nests and/or breeding areas. This buffer zone is not adequate to prevent disturbance to breeding or nesting raptors. Such disturbance could result in nest or territory abandonment.

All but 40 acres of the Bureau of Reclamation (BR) withdrawal on East Butte of the Sweet Grass Hills would be returned to BLM administration and reopened to mineral entry. This would produce a significant positive impact for the minerals industry. However, the minerals industry could face increased legal and mitigation costs to offset significant impacts to raptors, big game habitat and Native American religious activities. This would be a moderate negative impact to the minerals industry.

A management plan would be written in cooperation with the United States Forest Service, for the Nez Perce National Historic Trail and allotment management plans may be modified to incorporate riparian objectives in the Cow Creek area.

### Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management

BLM would maximize the full range of land and water based recreation opportunities in all segments of the corridor through an emphasis on private sector initiative. Interpretive trails and overlooks would be developed at significant points of interest. Undeveloped recreation sites would be upgraded to semi-developed sites and semi-developed sites would be maintained and additional sites developed. Developed sites would be allowed in recreational and scenic sections of the corridor and would be improved to the fullest extent allowed within the constraints of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. A full range of concession services would be encouraged. Other agencies and concessionaires would provide for public health and safety. A significant loss of federal oil and gas reserves could be lost due to drainage by adjacent non-federal holdings. A moderate decrease in streambank stability and increased soil compaction would occur along the Upper Missouri River as a result of increased traffic at recreation facilities.



## **Alternative C**

### **Land Tenure Adjustment**

A total of 15,664 acres of public land would be identified for disposal with an emphasis on exchange. Retention and acquisition would be keyed toward blocking up BLM land patterns in the Sweet Grass Hills, Marias River, Missouri River and Cow Creek areas. A moderate change in vegetative composition from native vegetation to farmland could occur in parcels leaving federal administration. The potential exists for 625 acres of crucial wildlife habitat to be affected by land tenure adjustment. However, this impact could be offset by acquiring other crucial wildlife habitat. Management options for grazing could be enhanced if exchanges consolidate BLM administered lands, or could be reduced if parcels of public land were sold rather than exchanged. Consolidation of public lands could significantly improve recreation opportunities with improved access and protection or enhancement of recreational values.

### **Off-Road Vehicle Management**

ORV use would be limited on a yearlong basis in the UMNWSR, WSAs, ACECs, riparian areas and in areas with sedimentary breaks soils; and on a seasonal basis in crucial wildlife areas. The total acreage limited to ORV use would be 428,636 acres. Five acres along the lower Gist Road would be closed to ORV use.

Soil erosion and sedimentation of water sources could be locally significant as a result of ORV use, primarily in areas open to ORV use. A moderate long-term loss of cultural sites could result from ORV use. Impacts on 197,462 acres designated open to ORV use would be minor. Limitations on ORV use would result in a moderate improvement in vegetative condition and wildlife habitat.

### **Right-of-Way Location**

Avoidance areas would total 112,629 acres and would include WSAs, the Cow Creek area, the Sweet Grass Hills, riparian areas and areas containing sedimentary breaks soils. ROWs would be excluded in 92,968 acres in the UMNWSR Corridor and Kevin Rim ACEC, except through specified windows which are provided. No permits would be issued for communication sites on the Middle and West Buttes of the Sweet Grass Hills.

Surface disturbance resulting from ROW location could cause locally significant soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways. A locally moderate negative impact to the minerals industry would result from increased costs associated with routing oil and/or gas pipelines around exclusion or avoidance areas. Vegetation would show a moderate improvement resulting from reduced ROW development.

### **Emphasis Areas**

Kevin Rim, all three buttes of the Sweet Grass Hills and the Cow Creek area would be designated ACECs. A management zone would be established around Kevin Rim and the Sweet Grass Hills to apply raptor guidelines and other surface stipulations to federal mineral developments in areas with private and state surface ownership.

The 1/4-mile buffer zone for active raptor nests in the Kevin Rim would be replaced with the Rocky Mountain Front guidelines for raptor protection (see Appendix 2.8). These guidelines would establish the necessary buffer zone and timing windows to protect nesting raptors and historic peregrine falcon habitat during mineral development. These stipulations would be attached to all new leases and new developments on existing leases. The BLM would not authorize new developments within 1/4-mile below the escarpment, unless impacts to cultural resources could be mitigated.

The BLM would prepare an activity plan for the Sweet Grass Hills to: preserve resource values important for Native American religious uses; pursue a protective withdrawal, maintain valid existing mineral rights; apply the raptor guidelines found in Appendix 2.8; maintain elk winter habitat; and to recommend revoking 529.67 acres of the Bureau of Reclamation withdrawal.

The BLM would prepare an activity plan for the Cow Creek area which would: preserve the scenic, interpretive, recreational and paleontological values associated with the Nez Perce National Historic Trail; revise visual management ratings; and place a strong emphasis on riparian habitat management in the corridor.

### **Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management**

BLM recreation management would emphasize the maximum preservation of the natural environment and cultural values of the UMNWSR by utilizing a mixture of BLM and private sector initiatives. Interpretive facilities would be restricted to launch/take out points and would be keyed to the Floater's Guide. Undeveloped recreation sites would be maintained. Semi-developed sites would be maintained, unless impacts to natural resources are unacceptable, at which time the sites would be closed. New semi-developed sites would be located only along major roads within recreational segments of the corridor. Developed sites would be restricted to launch/take out points in recreational and scenic segments of the corridor. Major concession services would not be allowed on public lands. Outfitting services would be limited to 30% of the daily user capacity. BLM would assume law enforcement responsibility.

Stringent surface protection measures would moderately impair oil and gas activity associated with existing, valid leases. A significant loss of federal oil and gas reserves could result due to drainage from adjacent non-federal holdings. A moderate benefit in increased public awareness of cultural values would result from development of interpretive sites.

## **Alternative D— The Preferred Alternative**

### **Land Tenure Adjustment**

A total of 15,664 acres of public land would be identified for disposal with an emphasis on exchange. An additional 34,428 acres of public land would be identified for exchange only. Retention and acquisition would be keyed to areas under special management such as WSAs, the UMNWSR and ACECs and in concentrated public land areas with high resource values.

If acquired lands are located in areas identified for more stringent surface constraints, such as WSAs, there would be a moderate negative impact to the minerals industry. A moderate change in vegetation composition from native vegetation to farmland could occur in parcels leaving federal administration. Potentially, 7,381 acres of crucial wildlife habitat could be affected by land tenure adjustment. However, this loss could be offset by acquiring other crucial wildlife habitat. Management options for grazing could be enhanced by consolidating BLM administered public lands through exchange, but could be reduced if parcels of public land were sold rather than exchanged. Consolidation of public lands could significantly improve recreation opportunities with improved access and protection or enhancement of recreational values.

### **Off-Road Vehicle Management**

ORV use would be limited on a yearlong basis in the UMNWSR, WSAs, ACECs and riparian areas; and on a seasonal basis in areas with sedimentary breaks soils and crucial wildlife areas. The total acreage limited to ORV use would be 427,951 acres. Five acres along the lower Gist road would be closed to ORV use.

Soil erosion and sedimentation of water sources could be locally significant as a result of ORV use. Some cultural sites could be destroyed by ORV use. Overall impacts are expected to be minor on 198,142 acres designated open to ORV use.

### **Right-of-Way Location**

Avoidance areas would total 141,560 acres and would include scenic and recreational portions of the UMNWSR Corridor; WSAs; the Kevin Rim, Cow Creek and Sweet Grass Hills ACECs; riparian areas; and areas of sedimentary breaks soils. ROWs would be excluded on 63,357 acres in wild portions of the UMNWSR except through specified windows.

Surface disturbance resulting from ROW location could cause significant soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways. Exclusion areas would total 63,537 acres. No permits would be issued for communication sites on the West Butte of the Sweet Grass Hills. A locally moderate negative impact to the minerals industry would result from increased costs associated with routing oil and/or gas pipelines around exclusion or avoidance areas.

### **Emphasis Areas**

Kevin Rim, East and West Buttes of the Sweet Grass Hills and the Cow Creek area would be designated ACECs. A management zone would be established around Kevin Rim and the Sweet Grass Hills to apply raptor guidelines and other surface stipulations to federal mineral developments in areas with private and state surface ownership. The 1/4-mile buffer zone for active raptor nests in the Kevin

Rim would be replaced with the Rocky Mountain Front guidelines for raptor protection (see Appendix 2.8). These guidelines would establish the necessary buffer zone and timing windows to protect nesting raptors and historic peregrine falcon habitat during surface developments. These stipulations would be attached to all new leases and new developments on existing leases. The BLM would not authorize new developments within 1/4-mile below the escarpment, unless impacts to cultural resources could be mitigated.

The BLM would prepare an activity plan for the Sweet Grass Hills which would: consult with Native Americans on proposed developments in the area; allow the area to remain open to mineral entry; apply the raptor guidelines given in Appendix 2.8; emphasize maintaining elk winter habitat; and recommend revoking 529.67 acres of the Bureau of Reclamation withdrawal.

The BLM would prepare an activity plan for the Cow Creek area which would: preserve the scenic, interpretive, recreational and paleontological values associated with the Nez Perce National Historic Trail; revise visual management ratings; and place a strong emphasis on riparian habitat in the corridor.

### **Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management**

BLM would provide recreational opportunities and visitor services consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act with an emphasis on mitigating impacts to natural and cultural resources. Areas would be developed for self-guided interpretive study. Undeveloped recreation sites would be maintained and could be upgraded to semi-developed sites. Sites would be signed in recreational and scenic segments of the corridor. Semi-developed sites would be maintained and facilities could be improved, if impacts could be mitigated. In wild segments of the corridor, only improvements capable of being serviced by an existing road or the river would be allowed. Developed sites would be restricted to recreational segments. Major concession developments on public lands would be allowed in recreational segments. Outfitters would be restricted to 30% of the daily user capacity. BLM would continue and may expand its role in public health and safety.

The potential loss of oil and gas reserves within the UMNWSR Corridor would continue, as the area would remain closed to leasing. Development of interpretive sites would moderately improve the public's awareness of cultural values.

## **CONCLUSION**

The impacts of the four alternatives tend to be similar in quality but different in the numbers of acres affected by given management actions. Alternative D is the preferred alternative because it presents a reasonable balance between commodity production and protection of amenity resources.

## ACRONYMS

ACEC—Area of Critical Environmental Concern  
AIFRA—American Indian Freedom of Religion Act  
AMP—Allotment Management Plan  
AUM—Animal Unit Month  
BLM—Bureau of Land Management  
BR—Bureau of Reclamation  
CEQ—Council on Environmental Quality  
CFR—Code of Federal Regulations  
CMR—Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge  
DSL—Montana Department of State Lands  
EA—Environmental Assessment  
EIS—Environmental Impact Statement  
EO—Executive Order  
EPA—Environmental Protection Agency  
FLPMA—Federal Land Policy and Management Act  
LU—Land Utilization  
MCF—Thousand Cubic Feet  
MDFWP—Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
MFP—Management Framework Plan  
MOU—Memorandum of Understanding  
NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act  
NRHP—National Register of Historic Places  
ORV—Off-Road Vehicle  
PILT—Payment in Lieu of Taxes  
PL—Public Law  
PPM—Parts Pollutant per Million Parts  
R&PP—Recreation and Public Purposes Act  
RA—Resource Area  
RMP—Resource Management Plan  
ROW—Right-of-Way  
SHPO—State Historic Preservation Office  
TDS—Total Dissolved Solids  
T&E—Threatened and Endangered  
UMNWSR—Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic  
River  
USDI—United States Department of Interior  
USFS—United States Forest Service  
USFWS—United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
VRM—Visual Resource Management  
VUD—Visitor User Day  
WSA—Wilderness Study Area