



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) to provide direction for managing public lands within the Dillon Field Office (DFO) and to analyze the environmental effects resulting from implementing the alternatives addressed in this Draft RMP.

The planning area considered in this document includes approximately 901,226 acres in southwestern Montana administered by the DFO in Beaverhead and Madison counties (**Map 1**, oversized). Approximately 1,339,296 acres of federal mineral estate are also covered by this document. Beaverhead and Madison counties also contain lands managed by other federal agencies, state land, and private land, but management measures outlined in the Draft RMP apply only to BLM-managed land in the planning area, or to federal mineral estate under BLM jurisdiction that may lie beneath other surface ownerships; no measures have been developed for private, state, or federal lands.

The RMP was prepared using BLM's planning regulations and guidance issued under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. An EIS is incorporated into this document to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508), and requirements of BLM's NEPA Handbook 1790-1.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The RMP is being prepared to provide the Dillon Field Office with a comprehensive framework for managing lands in the planning area under the jurisdiction of the BLM. The purpose of an RMP is to provide a public document that specifies overarching management policies and actions on these lands. Implementation level planning and site-specific projects are then completed in conformance with the broad provisions of the RMP. The RMP is needed to update the Management Framework Plan approved in 1979, and to provide a land use plan consistent with evolving law, regulation, and policy.

VISION

Comments received during scoping represented a broad range of desires expressed by both individuals and organizations. These same desires were expressed by the planning team during discussion of management of public lands in the planning area. As a result, the following vision state-

ments provide the underlying vision for management of BLM lands in the planning area.

Within the capability of the resources:

- Sustain and where necessary restore the health and diversity of forest, rangeland, aquatic, and riparian ecosystems,
- Support a sustainable flow of benefits in consideration of the social and economic systems of southwest Montana, and
- Provide diverse recreational and educational opportunities.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Land use plan decisions are made on a broad scale and guide subsequent site-specific implementation decisions. The RMP will make the following types of decisions to establish direction for the planning area:

- establish resource goals, objectives, and desired future conditions
- describe actions to achieve goals, objectives, and desired future conditions
- make land use allocations
- identify land adjustment categories

All management under any of the alternatives would comply with state and federal regulations, laws, standards, and policies. A list of legal authorities is provided in Appendix A, and authorities are listed by program area at the front of each section in Chapter 3. Additionally management actions under all alternatives would meet the *Standards for Rangeland Health*. Each alternative considered in the Draft RMP/EIS allows for some level of support of all resources present in the planning area. The alternatives are designed to provide general management guidance in most cases. Specific projects for any given area or resource will be detailed in future activity plans or site specific proposals and additional NEPA analysis and documentation would be conducted as needed.

After the comments on the Draft RMP/EIS are reviewed, the responsible officials can decide to:

- Select one of the alternatives analyzed
- Modify an alternative (for example combine parts of different alternatives) as long as the environmental consequences are analyzed in the Final EIS

The alternative selected for implementation will be presented in a Proposed Plan/Final EIS. Upon signature of a Record of Decision following a 30-day protest period and resolu-

tion of any protests, an Approved Plan, including an implementation plan, will be released.

ISSUES

A planning issue is a major controversy or dispute regarding management of resources or uses on the public lands that can be addressed in a variety of ways. During scoping, BLM suggested several broad categories were major issues that would drive the development of the planning alternatives. BLM asked the public to comment on these categories, and to provide other issues or concerns to be considered in development of the RMP. As a result, the Draft RMP/EIS primarily focuses on eight planning issues and the decisions needed to resolve them. The issues were identified through public scoping, concerns raised to BLM staff in interactions with public land users, and resource management concerns of the BLM and cooperating agencies. The eight issues are:

ISSUE 1

Riparian and Upland Vegetation Management

How will riparian and upland vegetation be managed to achieve healthy rangelands and provide for livestock grazing and fish and wildlife habitat?

ISSUE 2

Forest and Woodland Management

How will forest and woodland resources be managed for forest health and to manage fuel loads, as well as to provide fish and wildlife habitat and commercial wood products?

ISSUE 3

Noxious Weeds

How will noxious weeds be controlled on public lands, and what conditions will apply to permitted activities?

ISSUE 4

Sage Grouse and Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation

How will sage grouse and westslope cutthroat trout conservation strategies be applied in the planning area and how will they affect other public land uses?

ISSUE 5

Commercial Uses

What level of commercial or other authorized use should be allowed in the planning area, and what conditions will be applied to permitted activities?

ISSUE 6

ACECs

Which areas, if any, identified as potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) should be designated and managed as ACECs? How should they be managed to protect the relevant and important values?

ISSUE 7

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Should any eligible rivers be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system?

ISSUE 8

Travel Management

How should travel be managed to provide access for recreation, commercial uses, and general enjoyment of the public lands while protecting natural and cultural resources?

These issues drive the formulation of the plan alternatives and addressing them has resulted in the range of management options across the plan alternatives. Additional discussion on each issue can be found in Chapter 1.

ALTERNATIVES

The basic goal of developing alternatives was to prepare different combinations of management to address issues and to resolve conflicts among uses. Alternatives must meet the purpose and need; must be reasonable; must provide a mix of resource protection, use, and development; must be responsive to the issues; and must meet the established planning criteria. Each alternative is a complete land use plan that provides a framework for multiple use management of the full spectrum of resources, resource uses, and programs present in the planning area.

Under all alternatives the BLM will manage the public lands in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, and BLM policy and guidance, and to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health.

Four alternatives were developed and carried forward for detailed analysis in the Draft RMP/EIS. Alternative A, continuation of current management (also known as the No Action Alternative) was developed using available inventory data, existing planning and management documents, policies and decisions, and established land use allocations. Alternatives B, C, and D were developed with input from the public collected during scoping and focus question workshops, from the BLM interdisciplinary team, and with subgroup and formal recommendations from the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC). The alternatives were limited to those that span a reasonable and

implementable way of managing public lands and federal minerals, while still offering a broad range of management scenarios to be evaluated.

ALTERNATIVE A

Alternative A is the continuation of present management, also called No Action Alternative. This alternative would continue present management practices based on existing land use plans and other management decision documents. Valid decisions contained in the Dillon Management Framework Plan would be implemented if not already completed. Direction contained in existing laws, regulation and policy would also continue to be implemented, sometimes superseding provisions of the Dillon MFP. The current levels, methods and mix of multiple use management of public land in the planning area would continue, and resource values would receive attention at present levels. In general, most activities would be analyzed on a case-by-case basis and few uses would be limited or excluded as long as land health standards could be met.

ALTERNATIVE B

Alternative B emphasizes a moderate level of protection, use, restoration, and enhancement of resources and services. Constraints to protect resources would be implemented, but would be less restrictive than under Alternative C. Alternative B would accommodate a higher level of production of food, fiber, minerals and services through the use of public land than Alternative C, though to a lesser degree than Alternative D. Resource values and fish and wildlife habitats would be restored and enhanced using a variety of tools, but to a lesser extent than Alternative C. Certain geographic areas containing sensitive resources would receive focused management.

This alternative represents the mix and variety of actions that, in the opinion of BLM, best resolve the issues and management concerns in consideration of all values and programs, and is thus considered BLM's Preferred Alternative. This alternative includes recommendations made to the BLM by the Western Montana RAC, with some adjustments as necessary to meet policy and guidance.

ALTERNATIVE C

Alternative C emphasizes the most active measures to enhance fish and wildlife habitats. Production of products from vegetation management in all habitats would be secondary to restoring healthy forest, upland and riparian areas. Production of food, fiber, minerals and services would be more constrained than in Alternatives B or D and in some cases and in some areas, uses would be excluded to protect sensitive resources. Under this alternative, constraints would more

often be applied to broad habitats rather than focusing on specific sensitive resources in particular geographic areas. Management provisions under this alternative would accommodate undeveloped and non-motorized recreation activities to a greater degree than the other alternatives.

ALTERNATIVE D

Alternative D emphasizes active management to produce food, fiber, minerals and services, and includes the highest level of forest and woodland treatments. In this alternative, constraints to protect sensitive resources would tend to be implemented in specified geographic areas rather than across the planning area. This alternative maintains current levels of fish and wildlife habitats but does not seek to increase those habitats. Developed recreation activities would be emphasized in Alternative D. Land health restoration activities would focus on areas that would also provide tangible products.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Selection of Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, would maintain the current rate of progress in meeting land health standards and protecting resource values. It would allow for use levels to mostly continue at current levels in the same places in the planning area, with adjustments required in order to meet Standards for Rangeland Health or to mitigate resource concerns in compliance with existing laws and regulations.

Implementation of Alternative B would allow for many uses to continue but could constrain certain activities in order to maintain or improve land health conditions. This could result in short-term impacts to local economies and business, but long-term benefits as economies and businesses adjust to providing for services related to improved conditions.

Alternative C would have the least potential to impact physical and biological resources from BLM actions and would move most quickly toward restoration of riparian areas, but would wield the greatest potential for short-term impact to local economies and businesses that depend on public land for resource extraction. Implementation of Alternative C could result in economic benefits from non-motorized recreational activities and protection of fish and wildlife habitats. Less aggressive forest treatments under this alternative could result in increase fire risk in certain locations.

Along with Alternative A, Alternative D offers the greatest potential economic benefits on a local scale from resource extraction, but would result in greater impacts on the physi-

cal and biological environment than actions proposed under B and C. Uses would generally be least encumbered by management under this alternative, though legal constraints would still be applied.

See **Table 5** at the end of Chapter 2 for a summary of potential impacts by alternative. Detailed descriptions of impacts of the four alternatives are provided in Chapter 4, along with a discussion of the cumulative impacts, irretrievable and irreversible commitments of resources, and unavoidable adverse impacts of the alternatives.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative B was selected as the preferred alternative based on examination of the following factors:

- Balance of use and protection of resources
- Extent of the environmental impacts
- Incorporation of formal recommendations from the Western Montana RAC

This alternative was chosen because it best resolves the major issues while providing for common ground among conflicting opinions as well as multiple use of public lands in a sustainable fashion. In the opinion of BLM, it provides the best balance of resource protection and use within legal constraints.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement has been an integral part of BLM's RMP effort. In order to engage the public during the extended timeframes involved in development of an RMP, newsletters have been mailed throughout the process to update interested parties on the progress of the planning team and stages of the planning process. Five open houses were hosted by BLM during initial scoping in the fall of 2001, and an Information Fair was held in the spring of 2002 to familiarize the public with current data and information, especially GIS information, to be used in the plan. All resource specialists on the planning team were also available to visit with the public, answer questions, and discuss concerns at the Information Fair. Nine additional workshops were hosted by Beaverhead and Madison Counties and the Montana Consensus Council in February 2003 to hear from the public on alternative development suggestions. Reports were released during plan development on Wild and Scenic River eligibility (March and July 2002) and on ACEC findings of relevance and importance (November 2002).

In addition to public involvement opportunities, three subgroups were convened by the Western Montana RAC to engage in collaborative problem solving and consensus based decision-making to assist BLM with recommendations on three issue areas: ACECs, Travel Management, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. BLM also maintained a website and toll-free telephone recordings to disseminate information on the RMP and planning process to those interested.

The comment period on this Draft RMP/EIS will extend for 90 days following publication of the EPA's Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. After comments are received they will be evaluated. Substantive comments could lead to changes in one or more of the alternatives, or in the analysis of environmental consequences. A Proposed RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement will then be completed and released. If protests are received on the Proposed RMP/FEIS, they will be reviewed and addressed by the Director of the BLM before a Record of Decision and Approved Plan is released.