



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) 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 the Proposed 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 Proposed 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 statements 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 and special designations
- identify land adjustment categories

Review of the Draft RMP/EIS and consideration of the public comment received on the document has resulted in a modified Alternative B which is the Proposed Action presented in this Proposed RMP/Final EIS. All potential decisions in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are land use planning decisions subject to protest during the 30-day review period except for the open, limited, or closed route designations described in the *Travel Management and OHV Use* sections of this plan. Decisions on route designations may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals following the publication of the Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved RMP. The ROD will include information on the appeal process. It is anticipated that the ROD and Approved RMP will be published in September 2005, pending resolution of any protests of the land use plan level decisions. Details on how to protest the land use plan decisions are included in the cover letter of this document.

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 *Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health*. Each alternative considered in the Proposed RMP/Final 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.

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 Proposed RMP/Final 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 should 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 should 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 should noxious weeds be controlled on public lands, and what conditions should apply to permitted activities?

ISSUE 4

Sage Grouse and Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation

How should sage grouse and westslope cutthroat trout conservation strategies be applied in the planning area and how would 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 *Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health*.

Four alternatives are presented in the Proposed RMP/Final 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). Alternative B has been adjusted based on public comment and review of the Draft RMP/EIS and now represents BLM's Proposed Action. 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 still best resolve the issues and management concerns in consideration of all values and programs, even after the adjustments made as a result of public comment and review. Thus, Alternative B is considered BLM's Proposed Action. This alternative includes recommendations made to the BLM by the Western Montana RAC, with some adjustments as necessary to meet policy and guidance, and to accommodate public concerns and comment on the Draft RMP/EIS.

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.

CHANGES FROM THE DRAFT RMP TO THE PROPOSED RMP

As a result of public comment and internal review of the Draft RMP/EIS, Alternative B (the Preferred Alternative in the Draft) has been adjusted and now represents BLM's Proposed Action in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Changes regarding alternatives focused on adjustments to Alternative B in order to address public concerns while continuing to meet BLM's legal and regulatory mandates. Additional information and changes throughout Chapters 1 through 4 have been shaded in light gray. Changes are a result of:

- Adjustments to Alternative B
- Clarifications to better explain the management proposed in the Draft RMP/EIS
- Updates to information based on inventory updates after May 2003
- Updates to maps
- Minor corrections (such as typographical errors)

Some public comments suggested that alternatives to maximize particular uses or to maximize protection of certain resources should be analyzed in detail. While these types of alternatives were considered, they were not analyzed in detail because they did not meet BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mandate established in the FLPMA or the planning criteria set out in the Draft RMP/EIS. Other comments suggested consideration of items outside the scope of BLM's decision authority. These items were not considered in this plan. All other suggested modifications were within the range of alternatives analyzed by BLM.

ADJUSTMENTS TO ALTERNATIVE B

Alternative B has been adjusted as follows based on review of the Draft RMP/EIS and consideration of public comment:

- The option to exercise the right of eminent domain for access purposes in certain situations has been preserved as a last resort.
- The *Cultural Resources* section has been updated to provide for inventory of low probability areas during non-Section 106 inventory to address State Historic Preservation Office concerns.
- References to “strong upward trend” have been adjusted to read “upward trend” to be consistent with language in the *Western Montana Standards for Rangeland Health*. The “upward trend” language was added to the *Fish* section where it was inadvertently omitted in the Draft RMP/EIS.
- Certain elements of Alternative C have been incorporated into Alternative B, including coordination with others to identify critical barriers and potential passage locations in wildlife dispersal/migration corridors and part of the statement on authorization of sheep permits in wildlife dispersal/migration corridors. New or converted sheep permits would not be authorized (but transfers could continue to occur).
- Language in a statement regarding bighorn sheep management in the *Wildlife* section has been changed from “reduce or eliminate” to “minimize or avoid” to be consistent with BLM policy.
- Language has been added to the *Fish* section to place a priority on water leasing for arctic grayling as well as westslope cutthroat trout.
- The *Fish* and *Special Status Species—Fish* sections have been revised to place top priority for habitat improvement and restoration on habitats supporting 99-100 percent genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout or arctic grayling, followed by other westslope cutthroat trout streams, Class I streams (designated by the State) and other fisheries.
- The statement “Maintain habitat suitable for native westslope cutthroat trout in Sheep Creek tributaries for preservation of the genotype and their unique values as relict representatives of native fauna” has been removed from the *Fish* section. Objectives for that area will be developed during the revision of the Sheep Creek Aquatic Habitat Management Plan.
- The following areas have been closed to snowmobile use yearlong:
 - Farlin Creek WSA
 - Ruby Mountains WSA
 - North half of the Blacktail Mountains WSA
 - 640 acres near the East Creek Campground
 - Bachelor Mountain area
 Area designations under 43 CFR 8342 have also been updated.
- The oil and gas stipulation for fluvial and adfluvial grayling has been changed from a Controlled Surface Use stipulation to a No Surface Occupancy stipulation to be consistent with WCT and Class 1 fisheries and provide the same level of protection given fluvial arctic grayling is a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act.
- “Use designations” (e.g., low power non-broadcast) have been identified for all existing communication sites to avoid potential conflicts with current/senior users.
- The Sheep Creek Common Use Area (mineral material rip-rap site) located within the Hidden Pasture Wilderness Study Area would not be maintained as a materials site in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. If Congress were to release this WSA, BLM could reauthorize the Sheep Creek Common Use Area.
- Specific open, closed and limited route designations have been adjusted based on comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS. Seventy-five miles have been opened for yearlong motorized travel; nine miles have been closed; and seasonal restrictions have been placed on 35 miles that were previously open yearlong. As a result, approximately 1,342 miles are open (with 159 of these miles having seasonal travel restrictions), and approximately 760 miles are closed.
- The Lower Big Hole River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) has been added to the list of SRMAs to be designated in the Proposed Action, bringing the number from six to seven. A boundary correction has also been made to the Rocky Hills SRMA.

- Three tracts have been removed from Category 3 (Disposal) as they have been conveyed out of federal ownership since the Draft RMP/EIS was released.
- The watershed assessment schedule has been updated and some assessment area boundaries have been adjusted. The schedule for the assessments is found on **Map 82** rather than in **Appendix G** as stated in the Draft RMP/EIS.
- The sagebrush cover class descriptions from southeast Oregon have been removed from **Appendix D**. Information found in the Montana sage grouse conservation strategies is pertinent to the Dillon Field Office planning area.

CLARIFICATIONS AND DATA UPDATES

In addition to modifying Alternative B, the following major clarifications have been made:

- Language regarding the use of the *Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana* has been added to clarify that these provisions will not be used as standards, consistent with the intent of the originators.
- Clarified objectives for sagebrush steppe habitats presented in the *Wildlife* section.
- Clarified methods for implementing road density provisions and factors BLM would consider when constructing new permanent or temporary roads.

Inventory information and data was “frozen” in May 2003 to ensure consistent analysis in the Draft RMP/EIS. Since then, BLM and other agencies have continued to conduct inventory and update their databases. Information pertaining to the following resources has been updated for the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, and data was again frozen in September 2004:

- Arctic Grayling Streams
- Elk Winter/Yearlong Areas
- Grazing Allotments/Pastures
- Land Status
- Riparian and Wetland Areas and Condition
- Road and Trail Locations
- Sage Grouse Leaks (FWP information)
- Sage Grouse Winter Range
- Watershed Assessment Boundaries
- Westslope Cutthroat Trout Streams

Special Status Species descriptions in Chapter 3 (*Affected Environment*) have been updated in the Proposed RMP/Fi-

nal EIS to reflect the July 2004 updates to the sensitive species list approved by the Montana/Dakotas State Director. The list of designated noxious weeds for Montana (**Table 21**) was also updated. Minor updates to the land ownership base have also been made, and existing withdrawal information has been updated. Only those maps that have changed as either a result of data updates and/or changes to Alternative B, the Proposed Action in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, have been reprinted in this document.

Analysis figures and information contained in Chapter 3 (*Affected Environment*) and Chapter 4 (*Environmental Consequences*) have been modified slightly to reflect these updates. None of the changes dramatically affect the estimation of impacts or the comparison of alternatives.

Information must be considered dynamic and will continue to be updated as the plan is implemented as a result of the FLPMA requirement to continue to inventory the public lands.

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.

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. Less aggressive forest treatments under this alternative could result in increase fire risk in certain locations.

Alternative D offers the greatest potential economic benefits on a local scale from resource extraction, but would result in greater impacts on the physical 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 13** 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 and has become the Proposed Action in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS 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. It provides the best balance of resource protection and use within legal constraints. A consistency review conducted by cooperating agencies in the plan development (Beaverhead and Madison counties) identified Alternative B as striking the best balance between competing desires.

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 spe-

cialists 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 maintains a website and toll-free telephone recordings to disseminate information on the RMP and planning process to those interested.

The Draft RMP/EIS was released in March 2004, with publication of the Notice of Availability by EPA on April 9, 2004. This notice began the 90-day public comment period, which ended on July 12, 2004. BLM hosted five open houses in May 2004 to provide information to the public on content of the Draft RMP/EIS and how best to comment. Following these informational open houses, two comment meetings were convened at the end of May where formal oral comments were recorded. Additional coordination with the Western Montana RAC also occurred between April and June 2004.

In addition to the above described opportunities, other informal meetings, telephone conversations, and visits with agency representatives and members of the public occurred as requested. Formal consultation meetings were held with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes at Fort Hall, Idaho, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, and staff at the Environmental Protection Agency in Helena, Montana. Informal conversations with Fish and Wildlife Service staff also occurred throughout preparation of the Biological Assessment and as the Biological Opinion was being prepared. For additional information, see Chapter 5 on *Consultation and Coordination*.