

Reader's Guide and Summary

Reader's Guide

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft RMP/EIS) was prepared under the guidance of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Draft RMP/EIS is organized into five chapters and appendices. The five chapters detail the introduction, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences, and coordination. The appendices include supporting information for some of the topics discussed in Chapters 1 through 5, which would be too lengthy to include under a specific section.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter contains background information on the planning process and sets the stage for the information that is presented in the rest of the document. There are 15 main sections in Chapter 1, beginning on page 1. They include:

- Background
- Purpose and Need
- Planning Area
- Collaboration
- Planning Process
- Scoping
- Issues Addressed
- Issues Considered but Not Further Analyzed
- Planning Criteria
- Related Plans
- Relationship to BLM Policies, Plans, and Programs
- Vision and Management Goals
- Development of Alternatives
- Draft Resource Management Plan
- Final Resource Management Plan

Chapter 2: Alternatives

This chapter describes the management alternatives for the Monument and is presented in six sections:

- General Description of Each Alternative
- Decisions Common to All Alternatives
- Current Management and Action Alternatives
- Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail
- Comparison of Alternatives
- Comparison of Impacts

There are two main components of this chapter. One is the section on Decisions Common to All Alternatives, beginning on page 15, which includes existing decisions that will be carried forward into each alternative described further in the chapter.

The other main component is Current Management and Action Alternatives beginning on page 30, which provides a detailed description of the six alternatives. There are also two main tables associated with Chapter 2: a summary comparison of the alternatives (Table 2.38 on page 104) and a summary of the environmental consequences (Table 2.39 on page 126).

The information relating to issues, alternatives and impact analysis is organized into four broad categories throughout this document. This category format is introduced in Chapter 2 and used again primarily in Chapter 4. These categories are intended to group similar resource discussions and to provide another means of organizing the voluminous information in this document for the reader's convenience. The four categories are:

- The *Health of the Land and Fire* section includes management guidance that would apply to most resources and resource uses in the Monument and includes alternatives for fish and wildlife; vegetation; range improvements; visual resources; forest products; right-of-way corridors, avoidance areas and exclusion areas; land ownership adjustment; fire; and eligible wild and scenic rivers.
- The *Visitor Use, Services, and Infrastructure* section includes management guidance for recreation in the Monument. This section includes alternatives for recreation management areas; fees; gateway communities; research, collection, and special events; recreation in sensitive wildlife habitat; potential interpretive sites; special recreation use permits; opportunities for boaters; camping facilities; and motorized watercraft.
- The *Natural Gas Exploration and Development* section includes management guidance for the existing oil and gas leases in the Monument. This section includes alternatives for the West HiLine and non-West HiLine oil and gas leases which include timing, controlled surface use and no surface disturbance; and alternatives for seismic; drilling operations; production facilities and equipment; and reclamation.

- The *Access and Transportation* section includes management guidance for the transportation system in the Monument. This section includes alternatives for access; the BLM road system; and aviation.

Chapter 2 begins on page 13.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment

This chapter provides background information on the various resources administered by the BLM that could be affected by the alternatives described in Chapter 2. This chapter is organized by resource section and includes enough information to understand the effects of the alternatives.

Chapter 3 begins on page 139.

Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences

This chapter describes the environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the alternatives presented in Chapter 2. The impact-related information in this chapter is organized by resource, then by category and alternative. Some resource sections do not address all the categories or topics covered in Chapter 2 but only those that would have an effect on that specific resource.

Chapter 4 begins on page 197.

Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination

This chapter includes a description of the public involvement opportunities, coordination with other agencies including cooperating agencies, and consultation. This chapter also lists the agencies, organizations, and business receiving the document, and provides a brief introduction of the preparers of the Draft RMP/EIS.

Chapter 5 begins on page 343.

Appendices

The appendices are lettered and organized as they are referenced in the Draft RMP/EIS. Each appendix may contain several pieces of information related to the topic covered.

The appendices begin on page 375 and include:

- A Proclamation
- B Significant Objects
- C Scoping Issues
- D Issues Considered but Not Further Analyzed
- E Vision and Management Goals

- F Federal and Montana Ambient Air Quality Standards
- G Best Management Practices
- H Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- I Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Suitability Report
- J Standards and Indicators
- K Oil and Gas
- L Wildlife
- M Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO)
- N Vegetation Species Common in Riparian Areas
- O Noxious/Invasive Plant Species at Recreation Sites
- P Rights-of-Way
- Q Grazing Allotments

Maps

The Draft RMP/EIS includes ten 11x17 foldout maps at the conclusion of Chapters 2 and 3 along with three larger foldout maps located in the back pocket. There are also several other maps referenced in the Draft RMP/EIS, which can be found on the following website: http://www.blm.gov/nhp/spotlight/state_info/planning.htm.

Summary

Purpose and Need

The Proclamation states the BLM will remain the managing agency for this Monument. This Draft RMP/EIS sets forth the vision, goals and management guidance for the objects for which the Monument was designated.

The Proclamation provides the basic management direction for this Monument and governs how the provisions of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) will be applied to the Monument. FLPMA directs the BLM to manage public land on the basis of multiple use and “in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historic, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resources, and archaeological values.” The term multiple use, refers to the “harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment” (43 USC 1702). Multiple use involves managing an area for various benefits, recognizing that the establishment of land use priorities and exclusive uses in certain areas is necessary to ensure that multiple uses can occur harmoniously across a landscape.

This Draft RMP/EIS provides a comprehensive plan for managing the Monument and site-specific, detailed plans for managing transportation and natural gas leases in a

manner that protects the objects identified in the Proclamation, while recognizing valid existing rights. The Proclamation, FLPMA, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and other mandates provided the direction for preparing this Draft RMP/EIS.

The preliminary issues were identified in the Preparation Plan for the RMP. They were identified by the BLM and other agencies at meetings, and/or were suggested by individuals and groups by way of phone calls, emails, letters and past meetings concerning the proposed designation. They represented the BLM's expectations (prior to scoping) about what concerns or problems exist with current management. The preliminary issues were included in a June 2002 newsletter, and displayed during the scoping open houses in July and August 2002. They were then modified based on the scoping comments and expanded to include a new issue: economic and social conditions.

From data collection and analysis perspectives, some of these six issues overlap one another, and each contains a number of different sub-issues which address more specific uses and resources related to the topic.

How will human activities and uses be managed?

The Monument provides a variety of activities and uses. Recreational activities include motorized and non-motorized touring; upland game bird and big and small game hunting; backpacking; horseback riding; sightseeing; pleasure driving; river floating; motorized river boating; and the backcountry use of small fixed-wing aircraft on primitive landing strips. A subgroup of the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) addressed visitor use recommendations for the river portion of the Monument. The designation of the Bear Paw Battlefield National Park in 2005, may result in increased use along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. A new BLM interpretive center in Fort Benton, which is under construction and scheduled to open in 2006, will focus on Monument values and uses both on the Missouri River and in the uplands.

Commercial guides and outfitters, operating under special recreation permits from the BLM, provide services related to some recreational activities such as hunting and river floating. Increased visitation has led to increased demands for visitor services, requests for outfitter permits, requests for aerial tours of the Monument, and a higher demand for emergency services such as search and rescue.

A number of non-recreational uses also occur in the Monument, including rights-of-way for roads, utility lines and communication sites, livestock grazing, etc. All of these activities have an effect on the area environment and on local communities surrounding the Monument. Careful

management of these activities is crucial to protecting the Monument resources.

In some instances, such as oil and gas leasing within the Monument, valid existing rights are in effect and must be recognized in the RMP. In March 2000, the Montana Wilderness Association filed suit challenging BLM's issuance of three of these leases, alleging the BLM did not fully comply with NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. In March 2004, the Montana Federal District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered the BLM to prepare an EIS for the oil and gas leasing program that covers the three leases. The leases involved in the suit, as well as nine others in the Monument, were based on the BLM's 1988 West HiLine RMP. In light of the court's ruling, the BLM believes all 12 leases in the Monument and based on the West HiLine RMP should be analyzed in this Monument RMP. This RMP will consider the current stipulations that apply to the 12 leases issued under the West HiLine RMP, and the conditions of approval or mitigating measures that should be applied to surface occupancy and surface-disturbing activities associated with all 43 oil and gas leases in the Monument, which cover about 42,000 acres.

What facilities and infrastructure are appropriate to provide visitor interpretation and administration of the Monument?

The planning area is characterized as a predominantly natural environment with few facilities, other than along the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River (UMNWSR), for the comfort and convenience of visitors. Currently, the BLM has a visitor contact station and an office located in Fort Benton, and a variety of recreation sites along the UMNWSR. Additional facilities may be needed for visitor safety and information, and to address human sanitation, vehicle use and other resource uses and impacts.

How will the BLM manage resource uses and protect the biological, historical, cultural, and visual values of the Monument?

Various ways of protecting resources include enforcing existing laws and regulations, educating visitors, managing access, setting management and research priorities, suppressing wildfires and managing fuels, restoring degraded ecological conditions, or some combination of these approaches.

Some of the Monument's major resources for which management decisions must be made by the BLM include cultural, recreation, riparian communities, vegetation and water resources, as well as biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

How will Monument management be integrated with other agency and community plans?

The BLM has a strong commitment to work with other agencies and communities in managing the Monument. Coordination with state agencies that have jurisdiction over resources within the Monument is essential for effective management. These agencies include Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Monument objectives call for a significant portion of visitor services related to the Monument to be located in the surrounding communities rather than within the Monument. In order to do this, a good working relationship with local tourism and service providers must be developed and maintained. Agreements with the local counties and communities for coordinating activities and needs such as planning, transportation, emergency services (i.e., search and rescue), law enforcement, infrastructure and tourism need to be explored.

How will transportation and access be managed?

A network of local, collector and resource roads currently provides access to many areas of the Monument. County roads are routinely graded and maintained by Blaine, Chouteau, Fergus and Phillips Counties, while BLM-managed routes receive various levels of maintenance based on a BLM maintenance schedule.

How will Monument management affect economic and social conditions in the area?

The Monument can provide tourism, hunting, and other forms of recreation while bolstering the economy of Montana. Monument management must recognize the continuation of existing land ownership and the economic activities that are dependent on the land and its natural resources.

Vision and Management Goals

The BLM's vision is to manage the Monument in a manner that maintains and protects its biological, geological, visual and historic objects and preserves its remote and scenic character. The RMP will incorporate the Proclamation, multiple use and existing laws, while recognizing valid existing rights and authorizations, and providing diverse recreational opportunities.

A number of management goals guided the development of alternatives for this RMP. These goals are the result of information provided through public scoping, existing laws and regulations, the Proclamation, and the planning team. These goals include:

- Manage visitor use and services on these BLM lands in a manner that protects Monument values and resources.
- Manage these BLM lands in a multiple use manner consistent with the Proclamation and all current law and policy.
- Manage legal and physical access to and within the Monument to provide opportunities for diverse activities.
- Manage these BLM lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides a healthy ecosystem supporting plant and animal species and achieves a sustainable variation of native vegetation communities.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides current and future generations with the social and economic benefits compatible with the Proclamation.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that involves the public and collaborating agencies (local, state, federal and tribal) at every opportunity.

General Description of Each Alternative

The six alternatives provide a reasonable range of management options to resolve the issues identified for the Monument. The alternatives provide a range of more-intensive to less-intensive management. The following brief descriptions provide an overview of the alternatives developed and some of the unique aspects of each.

Alternative A (Current Management)

Alternative A emphasizes continuing the management activities that already occur in the Monument. These activities are now governed by the West HiLine RMP, Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP, Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Update and the State Director's Interim Guidance for Managing the Monument to the extent these plans are consistent with the Proclamation. This is the "no action" alternative which would create no change from the current management direction.

Under this alternative motorized use on the river would continue with the seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments of the UMNWSR. The number of boaters on the river would not be limited and no allocation system would

be developed. About 579 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel either yearlong or seasonally and 10 backcountry airstrips would remain open.

Current stipulations would apply to the 12 West HiLine oil and gas leases, and conditions of approval for applications to drill natural gas wells would be developed and considered on a case-by-case basis during the permitting process on all 43 oil and gas leases. Under this alternative, it is foreseeable that 35 wells could be drilled on these leases in the Monument.

Alternative B

Alternative B emphasizes more intensive recreation and transportation management. Resource management activities would allow camping facilities and interpretive sites at varying levels to enable visitors to experience both the natural and historic benefits of this Monument, while ensuring that resource protection is not compromised.

Under this alternative, motorized use on the river would be allowed yearlong on all segments. The number of boaters on the river would not be limited and no allocation system would be developed. About 538 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel either yearlong or seasonally and 10 backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Alternative B would be the least restrictive alternative concerning oil and gas activity. Under this alternative, existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing conditions of approval to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. Under this alternative, it is foreseeable that 44 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes providing visitors with opportunities to experience the Monument. This alternative is distinguished from Alternative B in that it would more readily identify and accommodate changing conditions over time through the application of management decisions responsive to these changing conditions. This alternative provides more flexibility to respond to increasing visitation and risks to resources that could occur over time.

Under this alternative, motorized use on the river would be allowed with seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments. Standards and indicators would be used to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources, and no allocation system would be developed. About 501 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel either yearlong or seasonally and seven backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Management of oil and gas operations would be more restrictive under this alternative, allowing less activity to occur than Alternatives A, B and F. Existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing conditions of approval to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. Under this alternative, it is foreseeable that 28 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

Alternative D

Alternative D also emphasizes providing visitors with opportunities to experience the Monument, but in a more self-directed fashion. This alternative differs from Alternative C in that it would limit certain activities now rather than applying management decisions responsive to changing conditions.

Under this alternative, motorized use on the river would be allowed with seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments. Standards and indicators would be used to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources and an allocation system would be developed when those standards and indicators are exceeded. About 330 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel either yearlong or seasonally and six backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Management of oil and gas operations would be more restrictive under this alternative, allowing less activity to occur than Alternatives A, B, C and F. Existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing conditions of approval to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. Under this alternative, it is foreseeable that 13 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

Alternative E

Alternative E emphasizes the natural condition and places the most limitations on visitors and other activities. Subtle forms of resource management and monitoring would minimize intervention into natural processes.

Under this alternative, motorized use would not be allowed on any segment of the river. An allocation system would be developed to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources. About 105 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel either yearlong or seasonally and no backcountry airstrips would be designated open.

Management of oil and gas operations would be most restrictive under this alternative, allowing no activity to occur on the existing leases within the Monument. Surface disturbance would not be allowed on the 12 West HiLine oil and gas leases (the entire leasehold) or the other 31 existing

oil and gas leases. Under this alternative, it is foreseeable that no natural gas wells would be drilled on these leases in the Monument.

Alternative F (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative F emphasizes providing visitors with opportunities to experience the Monument. This alternative provides more opportunities for adaptive management to respond to increasing visitation and risks to resources that could occur over time.

Under this alternative, motorized use on the river would be allowed with seasonal limitations on upstream travel and a seasonal no-wake speed restriction in the wild and scenic segments of the UMNWSR. In addition, the wild and scenic segment from Holmes Council Island to the Fred Robinson Bridge would be restricted to non-motorized watercraft from June 5 to September 15. Standards and indicators would be used to manage boaters on the river and impacts to resources and no allocation system would be developed. About 378 miles of roads would be open to motorized travel either yearlong or seasonally and six backcountry airstrips would be designated open yearlong or seasonally.

Management of oil and gas operations would be more restrictive under this alternative, allowing less surface-disturbing activity than Alternatives A or B. Existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing conditions of approval to protect the objects for which the Monument was designated. Under this alternative, it is foreseeable that 34 natural gas wells could be drilled on the existing leases in the Monument.

Preferred Alternative

The following section describes the preferred alternative (Alternative F) for the Monument. Please refer to Chapter 2 for Decisions Common to All Alternatives, a complete description of the six alternatives, and Tables 2.38 and 2.39 for a summary comparison of alternatives and summary comparison of environmental consequences.

Fish and Wildlife – Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

The BLM's goal is to manage, enhance and protect the fish and wildlife habitat and special status species.

Sage-grouse management would utilize the 2005 Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage-Grouse in Montana – Final for overall guidance and direction.

The BLM would consider mechanical treatment as the primary method and prescribed fire as a secondary method to remove conifers encroaching on sage-grouse habitat, except where forested habitat is limited.

The BLM would identify sage-grouse nesting habitat through field assessments. This alternative would require leaving adequate residual herbaceous cover beneath sagebrush within nesting areas at the end of the grazing season to allow adequate cover for the next year's nesting (sagebrush canopy cover of 15-20% and a perennial herbaceous cover greater than 7", or at the highest potential for existing ecological site present, as determined by NRCS soil survey).

This alternative would require grazing permittees to avoid the placement of salt or mineral supplements near leks during the breeding season (March 1 to June 15). The placement of salt or mineral supplements by other entities would not be allowed. Supplemental winter feeding would not be allowed on sage-grouse crucial winter habitat and around leks which have been occupied within the last 10 years.

This alternative would promote sage planting, where appropriate, on project areas (such as sites where sagebrush has been removed for crested wheat grass conversions) occurring with sage-grouse habitats and reclaim and/or reseed areas disturbed by treatments.

Concentrations of livestock near leks or crucial winter habitat can disturb or displace sage-grouse. Therefore, concentrations of livestock on leks or other key sage-grouse habitats would be avoided by using conservative stocking levels, locating salt or other supplements away from leks or crucial winter habitat, adjusting grazing seasons and locating water facilities where they would not jeopardize habitat.

Fish and Wildlife – Black-Tailed Prairie Dogs

The BLM's goal is to manage, enhance and protect the fish and wildlife habitat and special status species.

Prairie dog management would utilize the Conservation Plan for Black-Tailed and White-Tailed Prairie Dogs in Montana (Montana Prairie Dog Working Group 2002) for overall guidance and direction. Regional plans (based upon Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks administrative regions) would be utilized when they are completed.

Prairie dogs towns would be allowed to expand as long as they are not adversely impacting adjacent private or state land, other resources, or affecting Standards for Rangeland Health. Prairie dog towns would be adversely impacting

other resources, and controls could be considered, if prairie dog towns are: the source of or an exacerbation of invasive or noxious plants; substantially limiting forage and/or important habitat for wildlife species in the immediate area; substantially limiting forage for livestock in the immediate area; overriding the effectiveness of other management measures; or posing a substantial economic hardship or risk for other landowners, resulting from the need to control populations on private or state land because of prairie dogs on adjacent BLM land. Controls would not occur where mountain plover or burrowing owls have been documented using established habitat. Prairie dogs could be reestablished on historic towns which have been eradicated or which have died out due to bubonic plague. Specific actions to address adverse impacts to or from prairie dogs would be addressed through the watershed planning process and/or a site-specific environmental assessment.

Fish and Wildlife – Mitigation

The BLM's goal is to manage, enhance and protect the fish and wildlife habitat and special status species.

The following mitigating measures would be applied to surface-disturbing activities for identified/important wildlife habitat in the Monument. Mitigating measures would be applied during activity level planning, after an on-site evaluation indicates the presence of the specific resource. Exceptions to these mitigation measures may be granted by the authorized officer if an environmental review demonstrates there would be no adverse impacts, habitat for the species is not present in the area, or portions of the area can be occupied without affecting a particular species.

Greater Sage-grouse—The BLM would not authorize new surface disturbance within 1/4 mile of active leks, nor would it allow new surface disturbance within nesting areas (a 2-mile radius of an active lek) from March 1 to June 15. This alternative would not authorize any new surface disturbance in active sage-grouse crucial winter habitat from December 1 to March 31.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog—New surface disturbance would not be authorized within 1/4 mile of prairie dog towns, if that activity would adversely impact prairie dogs and/or associated species.

Designated Sensitive Species—The BLM may control or exclude any new surface-disturbing activity within 1/4 mile of the proposed site or delay the activity for 90 days within identified crucial habitat and active nests. Surface-disturbing activities may also be controlled or excluded within 1/2 mile of active ferruginous hawk nests from March 1 to August 1. This determination would be made at the time of authorization and would be based on whether the sensitive species is present in the area of disturbance.

Bald Eagle—New surface-disturbing activities would not be allowed within 1/2 mile of an eagle nest that has been active in the last 7 years, if the disturbance could cause nest abandonment or failure.

Big Game Winter Range—New surface-disturbing activities would not be allowed on crucial wildlife winter ranges from December 1 to March 31. This timeframe could be shortened depending upon weather conditions, animal health and forage availability.

Bighorn Sheep—New surface-disturbing activities would not be allowed within bighorn sheep distribution areas from December 1 to March 31 and within bighorn sheep lambing areas from April 1 to June 15, if such activities would adversely impact lamb survival.

Vegetation

The BLM's goal is to manage for healthy vegetation communities that provide for a wide variety of long-term benefits such as aesthetics, wildlife, recreation, livestock grazing, etc. This includes achieving, or making significant progress toward proper functioning condition in riparian areas.

Activity plan updates, such as watershed plans or allotment management plans, would emphasize sagebrush and riparian habitat restoration and protection. In riparian areas that have potential to support riparian vegetation, BLM would, at its discretion, restore or establish native riparian vegetation.

If the opportunity is available (through the cancellation or relinquishment of a grazing permit or acquisition of additional land) the BLM would establish resource reserve grazing allotments. The Hay Coulee allotment would be a resource reserve allotment. These allotments would be available to offset the impacts of drought or to implement a project such as a prescribed fire which could create a temporary loss of animal unit months (AUMs).

The Monument would be managed to achieve a natural range of native plant associations, including measures to promote conservation of sensitive plant species. Management activities would not be allowed to substantially shift the makeup of native plant communities and associations or disrupt normal succession. However, there would be some circumstances where vegetation communities and associations would be shifted to meet specific management goals or objectives. These circumstances could include prescribed burns to reduce hazardous fuel loads, restoration of some habitat components in the interest of wildlife, treatments to control invasive species, etc.

The BLM would determine which priority non-native vegetation sites should be restored to a native species community. Priority ranking would be based on an emphasis to control highly invasive non-native species. To achieve the vegetation goals outlined during site-specific planning, livestock grazing strategies (adjusting grazing or rest seasons, adjusting stocking rates or stocking densities and the location of supplements) could be used to manage vegetation communities.

Surface-disturbed areas would be rehabilitated with native grasses, forbs and shrubs to minimize the potential for soil erosion and to provide forage and cover for wildlife and livestock. Non-native plants may be used under special circumstances, such as emergency soil stabilization.

Reclamation efforts would follow standard operating procedures. In some areas, disturbed surfaces would be allowed to reclaim naturally. For all surface-disturbing activities, the intent of the reclamation standards would be to minimize erosion and establish native vegetation. If the reclamation effort would reduce the impacts created by development, the BLM would remove and rehabilitate non-functional reservoirs, pits and water developments in WSAs or in other areas where there is viewshed infringement.

Range Improvements

The BLM's goal is to manage for healthy vegetation communities that provide for a wide variety of long-term benefits such as aesthetics, wildlife, recreation, livestock grazing, etc.

The BLM fence specifications would be followed with allowances for certain classes or types of livestock. Four-wire fences could be authorized if the class or kind of livestock necessitate the need for a more substantial fence. The BLM would modify existing fences that are creating barriers to wildlife movement. In isolated cases, the BLM would relocate fences to better fit with topography and management needs.

Any new water developments would be considered on a site-specific basis and would consider the benefits/detriment to all resources. Decisions about installing water developments would be based on grazing practices and wildlife habitat needs (big game, migratory birds, sage-grouse, amphibians, etc.) within a specific use area. A site should only be developed if the development would improve resource values. Site-specific planning would be used to make these determinations.

Visual Resources

The BLM's goal is to protect the cultural landscape (viewshed) and the visual features in

the landscape that are identified in the Proclamation.

The wilderness study areas (WSAs), wild segments of the UMNWSR, and Bodmer landscapes would be designated as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I (111,480 acres). The remaining portions of the Monument would be designated as VRM Class II (161,560 acres), III (24,770 acres), or VRM Class IV (77,190 acres). If the WSAs are determined by Congress as not eligible, they would be managed consistent with adjacent BLM land.

In VRM Class I areas the BLM may prohibit surface-disturbing activities if such activities are not designed to meet the intent of the visual quality objectives.

In VRM Class II, Class III and Class IV areas the BLM would reduce the visual contrast on BLM land in the existing landscape by utilizing proper site selection; reducing soil and vegetative disturbance; choice of color; and over time, returning the disturbed area to a seamless, natural landscape.

Forest Products

The BLM's goal is to manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides a healthy ecosystem that achieves a sustainable natural variation of vegetation communities, which provides current and future generations with the social and economic benefits compatible with the Proclamation.

Where forest/woodland health is in jeopardy, minimal impact harvesting techniques which are appropriate for soil and topographical conditions may be pursued.

The Monument manager could designate incidental non-commercial or personal use areas for cutting Christmas trees and firewood. Under a permit, individuals could be allowed to utilize incidental material. The permit would address the specific type of material and conditions under which removal would occur.

Right-of-Way Corridors, Avoidance Areas, and Exclusion Areas

The BLM's goal is to provide reasonable access for the administrative needs and authorized uses of private landowners, industry and government agencies.

Eight utility and transportation systems that cross the Missouri River would be designated corridors. The utility and transportation corridors on BLM land would have defined boundaries within 1/2 mile of the centerline of the follow-

ing roads: U.S. Highway 191; State Secondary Highway #236; the Lloyd/Stafford Ferry road; DY Trail/Power Plant Ferry Road; and the Klabzuba pipeline. The corridors at Fort Benton, Loma and Virgelle would retain their current status.

Avoidance areas for rights-of-way (ROWs) would include the scenic sections of the UMNWSR, the Bodmer Landscapes, the Cow Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), cultural/historic sites, riparian and wetland areas, areas containing unique geologic formations, areas considered unsuitable due to erosion and slope, and sage-grouse seasonal habitat where impacts could not be mitigated or effectively controlled. If the WSAs are not designated by Congress as wilderness and released from WSA status, they would be managed as avoidance areas.

Exclusion areas would include the wild sections of the UMNWSR and the six WSAs, pending determinations by Congress. Exceptions to exclusion areas could be granted and would be handled in a site-specific environmental assessment on a case-by-case basis, based on the nature of the action and level of impact. This exception clause is considered necessary due to the potential installation of an oil and gas pipeline which would enter on state land south of the Missouri River and exit on private land north of the Missouri River, but would cross under the river and under the Stafford WSA.

Land Ownership Adjustment

The following BLM land is identified for disposal: T22N R16E, E2NE of sec. 15 (80 acres). The parcel is on the edge of the Monument, contains minimal Breaks topography, and contains no objects for which the Monument was designated. The BLM land would be exchanged for private land identified as T22N R15E, sec. 3, Lot 5 (24.60 acres) and sec. 4, Lot 8 (46.52 acres). This land exchange proposal was initiated by the private landowner in March 2002.

Fire

The BLM's goal is to control wildland fire safely, efficiently and with minimal impact to resource values while minimizing the risk of catastrophic fire within the Monument and communities adjacent to the Monument. This includes maintaining or reestablishing the natural influence of fire on vegetation communities and associations.

The Monument includes four fire management units (FMUs): Wild and Scenic River, Wilderness Study Areas, North Monument and South Monument.

The appropriate suppression response to all wildland fires would be based on firefighter and public safety, while considering the natural role of fire. Fires would be managed with less than full suppression efforts and, in most cases, allowed to burn to natural barriers or roads. The cost of suppression would also be considered. Resource values, such as sage-grouse habitat, would be protected during wildland fire suppression through the knowledge of resource advisors assigned to wildland fire incidents and/or information on the location of critical resource areas available to incident commanders; however, protection for resource values would be secondary to life safety and property values.

Prescribed fires could be used in three of the FMUs (Wilderness Study Areas, North Monument and South Monument) based on the flexibility to respond to changing conditions and the goal of returning fire to a more natural role on the Monument landscape. Prescribed fire in the Wild and Scenic River FMU would be based on public safety and resource issues.

Wild and Scenic Rivers (Cow Creek, Eagle Creek and Dog Creek)

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Pub. L. 90-542 as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1271-1287) established a method for providing federal protection for certain of our country's remaining free-flowing rivers, preserving them and their immediate environments for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Rivers are included in the system so that they may benefit from the protective management and control of development for which the Act provides.

The BLM inventoried 66 streams and found three streams eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system: Cow Creek, Eagle Creek, and Dog Creek.

The BLM would not recommend the three eligible stream segments as suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Management for each area would be provided by the guidance in the Monument RMP.

Visitor Use, Services and Infrastructure

Recreation

The BLM's goal is to preserve historic and cultural values and sites by enhancing public awareness or protection of the resources.

This section addresses management for the entire Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and would apply to all the recreation management areas.

Recreation Management Areas – The Monument would be included in two special recreation management areas (SRMAs): Upper Missouri River SRMA and Uplands SRMA. The Upper Missouri River SRMA includes BLM land from Fort Benton downstream to Arrow Creek and the entire UMNWSR. The Uplands SRMA includes BLM land both north and south of the UMNWSR downstream from Arrow Creek to the James Kipp Recreation Area.

Fees – The BLM would implement an expanded amenity fee for overnight camping in Level 1 recreation sites. The sites would provide at least a majority of the following: tent or trailer spaces, picnic tables, drinking water, access roads, collection by an employee or agent, reasonable visitor protection, refuse containers, toilet facilities and simple devices for containing a fire. Level 1 sites currently include Wood Bottom, Coal Banks Landing, Judith Landing, Lower Woodhawk and the James Kipp Recreation Area. This fee system would also apply to any additional Level 1 site that may be constructed. In addition, the BLM may charge fees for use of some existing structures in the Monument, including cabins and corrals, consistent with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). After the RMP is completed the BLM, with public input, would develop a business plan to determine the actual fee amounts charged.

A Special Recreation Permit would be required to boat on the Missouri River. It would be referred to as a Special Area Permit. The cost of the permit would be established by the State Director based on the cost of operating the permit system, special costs related to management of the area, comparability with other agencies and similar special areas, and fairness and equity among all users. Camping overnight at Level 1 expanded amenity fee sites would be included with the Special Area Permit fee.

Expanded amenity fees collected for camping would be returned to the Lewistown Field Office and used at Level 1 sites for expenditure on site maintenance and visitor services as established in FLREA.

Fees associated with the Special Area Permit to float the Missouri River would be returned to the Lewistown Field Office and used to cover management costs. In addition, fees could be used to support county emergency services and to purchase short-term campsite easements or leases from willing private landowners.

Gateway communities – The BLM would strive to encourage and sustain collaborative partnerships, volunteers and citizen-centered public service. The BLM would provide a staffed visitor information site in Chinook, Big Sandy and Winifred or partner with these gateway communities to provide visitor information.

The BLM would encourage private sector initiatives as a means of developing river visitor use opportunities. The Monument offers a wide range of visitor opportunities, only some of which can be provided by the BLM. To overcome these limitations, non-governmental entities, either individuals or institutions, could help accomplish initiatives compatible with the Monument. These initiatives would not result in permanent facilities in the Monument.

A wide variety of activities can be generated by private sector initiatives. Services for boats or horses, overnight or extended-stay lodging facilities, food/water and other provision sales and guiding are services traditionally offered in this way. Other opportunities may be created by using the Monument for touring and instructional purposes and for expanded regional promotional activities.

Research, collection and special events – The BLM would authorize archaeological and historical investigations. Prehistoric sites would be evaluated and then monitored, protected or excavated based on their scientific value and what they can add to knowledge and interpretation of the Monument. Historic sites would be evaluated and then monitored or maintained based on their historic value, the attraction they have for visitors and their use as safety shelters.

The BLM would allow and authorize paleontological research. All BLM land is closed to commercial collecting of paleontological resources under existing policy and regulation (BLM Manual 8270). Permits are issued to accredited institutions to conduct activity on BLM land to ensure that the resource is used for public display and education purposes only. Scientific use allows for survey/reconnaissance or limited excavation work with a minimum amount of surface disturbance, as long as such work is conducted under a paleontological permit and maintains the values for which the Monument was established.

The collection of common invertebrate fossils and petrified wood for personal use would be allowed in specific identified areas within the Monument, as limited by the regulations (43 CFR 3620 and 8365).

The personal collection of plant material (e.g., vegetation, seeds and berries) would be allowed. Wildcrafting or commercial collection of plant materials would not be allowed without a specific permit.

The use of metal detectors would be allowed by permit only. A permit for metal detector use may be authorized by the Monument manager when determined to be in the interest of the public and consistent with the goals of the Monument. Metal detectors, magnetometers or other remote sensing equipment may also be allowed for administrative purposes or public health and safety uses as determined by the Monument manager.

Special recreation permit applications for activities or events may be granted, if the activity would not impact the resources or values for which the Monument was designated. Large group events would be authorized subject to restrictions to protect resources. These restrictions may include, but would not be limited to, the designation of specific roads or trails for a particular event, limitations on parking, use of campfires, sanitation requirements and the number of people involved in the event.

Recreation in sensitive wildlife habitat – The BLM would allow the personal collection of shed antlers (horn hunting). However, the BLM could implement a seasonal restriction (December 1 to March 31) on the disturbance of shed antlers to protect wildlife during the winter, if harassment is a problem.

Camping would not be allowed on BLM islands from April 1 to July 31, to protect wildlife during sensitive periods (e.g., nesting, brooding periods).

Interpretive sites – Historic, archaeological, and geological opportunities on BLM land would be enhanced by developing the interpretive potential at selected sites. Small, low-key interpretive signs that blend in with the surroundings (and not visible from the Missouri River) would be established at specific sites. These low-key sites would be for dispersed recreation opportunities. Simple markers would be provided for some cultural sites. Portable interpretation (guidebooks and brochures) would be available.

Topics for interpretation would be selected based on setting, visitor benefits and the potential to provide the area's history or prehistory via interpretation. Some potential cultural sites for interpretation would include Decision Point; Eagle Creek; the Murray/PN dugout; Hagadone, Middleton, Ervin, Gist, Cable, and Nelson homesteads, Gilmore cabin; Nez Perce Trail; and sites associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Other possible interpretive sites and topics could include prehistoric sites and the steamboat era on the Missouri River.

Some potential geological interpretive sites would include the stratigraphic cross section of the Missouri River from Virgelle to the James Kipp Recreation Area showing the regional dip of beds starting in Colorado Shale and ending in Bearpaw Shale; the glacial geomorphology and paleo channel of the Missouri River at Little Sandy Creek; the igneous dike known as the Grand Natural Wall from the Lewis and Clark Journal entry; Hole-in-the-Wall; the Big Sag at Judith Landing; the Sugarloaf Rock fault plane vs. bedding plane at Stafford Ferry; the diatrema at Gist Bottom; and the invertebrate paleo site at Woodhawk.

Upper Missouri River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)

The BLM's goal is to manage these lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes. This goal would allow BLM to provide for dispersed and developed recreation opportunities and ensure visual quality characteristics reflect a predominantly primitive or natural landscape while providing for a diversity of visitor experiences.

This section addresses specific management for the Upper Missouri River SRMA, which primarily includes management for the UMNWSR.

Special recreation use permits – There would be a limit of 23 special recreation permits (SRPs) and a one-trip-per-season permit for non-permitted commercial users. An SRP, with a fee, would be required for commercial recreational use on the Missouri River and related land in the UMNWSR (43 CFR 2930) to prevent damage to BLM land or water resource values and to prevent social conflicts.

Opportunities for boaters – The BLM would monitor standards and indicators to manage visitor use of and impacts to resources. Once those standards and/or indicators are reached or exceeded, the BLM would take the necessary action to reduce impacts to resources without limiting the number of people boating the Missouri River. Management actions are discussed in Appendix J and include, but would not be limited to, a mandatory registration system, camping at designated sites, limiting the number of days camping at designated sites, resting and/or rotating campsites, and closing campsites.

From June 15 to August 1, the BLM would require groups larger than 20 people to launch at Coal Banks or Judith Landing on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. Groups of less than 20 people could launch from any site, any day. Groups larger than 30 people would require a special recreation permit, year round, for boating the Missouri River.

Camping facilities – The existing camping facilities would remain at the current campsites along the Missouri River. To provide dispersed recreation opportunities and benefits, additional Level 1 sites would be constructed only in the recreation segments of the UMNWSR. Improvements to existing Level 1 and 2 sites could occur to improve infrastructure or address visitor use issues. Additional Level 2 sites could be constructed between Fort Benton and Judith Landing as necessary to improve resource conditions, improve distribution of visitor use or resolve visitor use conflicts. Associated facilities and construction could not detract from the visual character and integrity of the UMNWSR. Additional Level 3 campsites could be added

as needed to accommodate increases in use. Dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities) would be allowed on all BLM land.

The BLM would maintain all developed sites. New capital improvements would be allowed if impacts to cultural and natural resources could be mitigated to an acceptable level. All improvements would comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, as amended.

The BLM would seek to purchase short-term (1-5 year) campsite easements or leases from willing private landowners for alternative or additional campsites to provide dispersed camping opportunities and benefits.

The BLM would implement a 2-night limit at Level 2 campsites from June 15 to August 1. The BLM would maintain the 14-night limit at Level 1 and 3 sites and for dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities).

The BLM would implement a Leave No Trace program and require the use of camp stoves, fire pans or fire mats for dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities).

Signing in Level 1 sites could be used to safely direct traffic, provide information, or provide interpretive messages. Signing should be commensurate with visual surroundings and level of development. Signing located along the Missouri River would identify campsites and would be of minimum size and only used at Level 1, 2 and 3 campsites. Signing within campsites and elsewhere within the UMNWSR would be limited to existing infrastructure and of sufficiently low profile to not be visible from the river.

Motorized watercraft – The BLM would revise the current seasonal boating restrictions on the Missouri River as shown below. The recreation segments of the UMNWSR would be open to motorized watercraft year round except personal watercraft and floatplanes would only be allowed on river miles 0 to 3 near Fort Benton.

The wild and scenic segment from Pilot Rock to Deadman Rapids would have a seasonal restriction from June 5 to September 15 with downstream travel only at a no-wake speed. Personal watercraft and floatplanes would not be allowed on this segment of the river yearlong.

The wild and scenic segment from Holmes Council Island to Fred Robinson Bridge would have a seasonal restriction from June 5 to September 15, where no motorized watercraft would be allowed. Personal watercraft and floatplanes would not be allowed on this segment of the river yearlong.

A cooperative effort among agencies operating on the river would be initiated. A Memorandum of Understanding would be developed with the goal of achieving uniform standard operating procedures designed to minimize im-

pacts to boaters from administrative use of motorized watercraft.

Livestock grazing permittees would be allowed upstream travel to administer their grazing permit with prior notification to the BLM. The BLM would authorize the travel verbally for unplanned situations or by a letter to the permittee for activities requested in advance.

There would be no restrictions for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement watercraft used for emergency purposes.

Uplands Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)

The BLM's goal is to manage these lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes. This goal would allow BLM to provide for dispersed and developed recreation opportunities and ensure visual quality characteristics reflect a predominantly primitive or natural landscape while providing for a diversity of visitor experiences.

This section addresses specific management for the Uplands SRMA, which primarily includes management for the BLM land outside of the UMNWSR.

Special recreation use permits – The BLM would limit the number of SRPs for commercial outfitting and guiding (hunting) to the current level of outfitters (14). Each of the 14 permits issued would be assigned to the existing use area/lease as of 2004.

It is the BLM's goal to provide recreational opportunities via authorized commercial operators for visitors lacking the skill or equipment necessary to otherwise participate. To meet this goal, an adaptive management strategy would be developed that is responsive to changing visitor use trends and resource conditions. While the current use levels for the upland SRPs appear to be adequate, visitor demand for commercial hunting and guiding services could increase in the future. Visitor use data would continue to be collected and analyzed with the results incorporated into future management decisions. Should visitor use levels increase or patterns of use change, it may be necessary to issue additional permits, adjust use areas, incorporate conditions limiting net hunter/client use days (visitor use days), or include other conditions necessary to best manage upland permits.

Adaptive management decisions would be based on BLM's 2930 Recreation Permit Administrative Handbook, BLM's Montana Outfitter Management Guidelines and the 1997 Memorandum of Understanding with the Montana Board of Outfitters (BLM MOU MT932-9111).

River Segment	Motorized Use
River Mile 0 to 52 Fort Benton – Pilot Rock (Recreation Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed yearlong. The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would only be allowed on river miles 1 to 3 yearlong.
River Mile 52 to 84.5 Pilot Rock – Deadman Rapids (Wild and Scenic Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel downstream at a no-wake speed would be allowed from June 5 to September 15. Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed the remainder of the year, from September 16 to June 4. The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would not be allowed yearlong.
River Mile 84.5 to 92.5 Deadman Rapids to Holmes Council Island (Recreation Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed yearlong. The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would not be allowed yearlong.
River Mile 92.5 to 149 Holmes Council Island to Fred Robinson Bridge (Wild and Scenic Segment)	Motorized watercraft travel would not be allowed from June 5 to September 15. Motorized watercraft travel both upstream and downstream would be allowed the remainder of the year, from September 16 to June 4. The operation of personal watercraft and landing of floatplanes would not be allowed yearlong.

The BLM would issue special recreation use permits for commercial motorized tours. Motorized tours would be restricted to two vehicles or less per day for each commercial permit on local, collector and some identified resource roads.

Camping facilities – The BLM would consider developing Level 1 campsites, but they would only be constructed at the beginning of public access roads into the Monument. These sites could include interpretive kiosks. The BLM would encourage private landowners outside the Monument to develop Level 1 sites and services. Level 2 campsites would be park and explore sites where people could walk from designated parking areas. Level 3 sites would be pullout sites adjacent to local and collector roads or on identified/signed (camping access only) closed resource

roads that are spurs (dead end within 300 feet) from a designated “open” local or collector road. Fire rings would be the only improvement at these sites. Level 3 sites would be shown on a map with information concerning the facilities and opportunities associated with the site.

The BLM would implement a Leave No Trace program and camp stoves, fire pans or fire mats would be required for dispersed camping (Level 4 opportunities).

Signing in the uplands would be limited to Level 1 sites commensurate with visual surroundings and level of development. Signing could be used as necessary at Level 2 sites, but only within new or existing infrastructure. No other signing would be used within the uplands except for required transportation system signs.

Natural Gas Exploration and Development

Oil and Gas

The BLM's goal is to provide reasonable oil and gas exploration and development on existing leased land without diminishing the objects of the Monument.

The Proclamation does not allow new oil and gas leases in the Monument. The 43 federal oil and gas leases in the Monument are considered to have valid existing rights based upon the Proclamation, wherein it states, "The establishment of this monument is subject to valid existing rights. The Secretary of Interior shall manage development on existing oil and gas leases within the monument, subject to valid existing rights, so as not to create any new impacts that would interfere with the proper care and management of the objects protected by this proclamation." The existing leases are also in compliance with their lease terms and conditions.

Leases issued for federal minerals include stipulations that apply to the exploration and development activity that might be proposed during the lease term. Existing resources should be taken into consideration before oil and gas lease activity is permitted. Over the last 36 years of issuing leases within the Monument, eight stipulation forms were used. Many of the early leases (May 1967 through September 1971) contained no stipulations beyond the standard terms of the lease; the majority of the leases issued after July 1972 included stipulations with provisions for wildlife, cultural resources, rough terrain and threatened and endangered species, should they be present on the lease. All oil and gas lease activities would be subject to existing laws (e.g., Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act) regardless of the age of the lease or the stipulations attached to the lease.

Oil and Gas Lease Conditions of Approval

The existing lease stipulations would be strengthened by implementing conditions of approval to protect the objects in the Monument. The conditions of approval would apply to all the oil and gas lease acreage (42,805 acres) in the Monument. The conditions of approval would be applied to the application for permit to drill (APD) after an onsite evaluation indicates the presence of the specific resource and after considering waivers, exceptions and modifications. The current stipulations (Form 3109-1) would apply to that portion of five of the 12 West HiLine oil and gas leases that are not entirely within the Monument (2,454 acres).

Seasonal or distance restrictions would be placed on oil and gas activities to protect sage-grouse nesting areas and winter habitat, active ferruginous hawk nests, big game winter range, and bighorn sheep distribution and bighorn sheep lambing areas.

Timing – Alternative F

Greater Sage-Grouse Nesting Zone – Surface disturbance would be prohibited from March 1 to June 15 in sage-grouse nesting habitat within 2 miles of a lek. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

Greater Sage-Grouse Crucial Winter Habitat – Surface disturbance would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31 within crucial winter habitat for sage-grouse. This condition would not apply to the operation and maintenance of production facilities. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

Ferruginous Hawk – Surface disturbance would be prohibited from March 1 to August 1 within 1/2 mile of active ferruginous hawk nest sites.

Big Game Winter Range – Surface disturbance would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31 within winter range for elk and deer and crucial antelope winter range. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

Bighorn Sheep Distribution – Surface disturbance would be prohibited from December 1 to March 31 within bighorn sheep distribution areas. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

Bighorn Sheep Lambing Areas – Surface disturbance would be prohibited from April 1 to June 15 within bighorn sheep lambing areas. Travel on identified designated roads may include these timing restrictions or limited site visits.

Controlled surface use conditions would be applied to protect black-tailed prairie dogs, designated sensitive species, most soils, visual resources in Class II, III and IV areas and cultural resources.

Controlled Surface Use – Alternative F

Black-tailed Prairie Dogs – Surface disturbance may be controlled or excluded within 1/4 mile of prairie dog towns, if an activity would adversely impact prairie dogs and/or associated species.

Designated Sensitive Species – Surface disturbance may be controlled or excluded within 1/4 mile of the proposed site or the activity delayed 90 days within identified crucial habitat or active nests.

Soils/Steep Slopes – Prior to surface disturbance on slopes 30% and greater or on slopes 20% and greater with severely erosive and/or slumping soils, a certified engineering and reclamation plan must be approved by the authorized officer. This plan must demonstrate how the following would be accomplished:

- Site productivity would be restored.
- Surface runoff would be adequately controlled.
- The site and adjacent areas would be protected from accelerated erosion, such as rilling, gullyng, piping, slope failure, and mass wasting.
- Nearby watercourses would be protected from sedimentation. Water quality and quantity would be in conformance with state and federal water quality laws.
- Surface-disturbing activities would not be conducted during extended wet periods.
- Construction or reclamation would not be allowed when soils are frozen.

The operator must also provide an evaluation of past practices on similar terrain and be able to demonstrate success under similar conditions.

Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes II, III and IV – All surface-disturbing activities, semi-permanent and permanent facilities in VRM Classes II, III and IV would utilize proper site selection; reduction of soil and vegetative disturbance; choice of color; and over time, return the disturbed area to a seamless, natural landscape.

Historic Properties and/or Cultural Resources – The affected area may be found to contain historic properties and/or resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, E.O. 13007, or other statutes and executive orders. The BLM would not approve any ground-disturbing activities that may affect any such properties or resources until it completes its obligations under applicable requirements of the NHPA and other authorities. The BLM may require modification to exploration or development proposals to protect such properties, or disapprove any activity that is likely to result in adverse effects that cannot be successfully avoided, minimized or mitigated.

Surface disturbance would not be allowed in order to protect sage-grouse leks, bald eagle nest sites and nesting habitat, streams and riparian/wetland areas, soils on slopes

40% and greater, visual resources in VRM Class I areas and developed recreation areas.

No Surface Disturbance – Alternative F

Greater Sage-Grouse Leks – Surface disturbance would be prohibited within 1/4 mile of sage-grouse leks.

Bald Eagle Nest Sites and Nesting Habitat – Surface disturbance would be prohibited within 1/2 mile of known bald eagle nest sites that have been active within the past 7 years, if disturbance could cause nest abandonment or failure.

Streams and Riparian/Wetland Areas – Surface disturbance would be prohibited within 500 feet of the channels of ephemeral, intermittent, and perennial streams, or within 500 feet of the outer margins of riparian and wetland areas.

Soils/Steep Slopes – Surface disturbance would be prohibited on slopes 40% and greater.

Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I – Surface disturbance would be prohibited in VRM Class I areas.

Recreation – Surface disturbance would be prohibited within the line of sight/sound or 300 feet (whichever is closer) of developed recreation areas (Level 1, 2, and 3 sites) and undeveloped recreation areas receiving concentrated public use. Work-over types of operations would be limited to weekdays, except for emergency situations when operations would be allowed.

Natural Gas Operations

Seismic – Vehicle activity would be restricted to designated roads. Exceptions would be authorized on a case-by-case basis dependent upon the degree of data needed to identify the resource and the operator's ability to mitigate surface disturbance.

Surface blasting would be allowed on a case-by-case basis, provided the blasts would not interfere with the proper care and management of the objects protected by the Monument Proclamation. Sensitive areas would require helicopter support.

Drilling Operations – Spacing would remain consistent with state spacing requirements and current Board Orders for the Leroy and Sawtooth Mountain Gas Fields. Proposals for increased well densities would be allowed up to one well site per quarter section, subject to siting criteria (i.e., visual resources, sensitive wildlife species and slope/soil concerns). Any more than one well per quarter section

would be directionally drilled from an existing active well location in the quarter section.

Drilling operations would follow current regulations, including 43 CFR 3164.1 Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 2 (Drilling operations), American Petroleum Institute (API) recommended practices and standard operating procedures including surface operating standards for natural gas exploration and development (referred to as the “Gold Book”).

Only the minimal amount of surface disturbance would be permitted for drilling and production phases. The disturbed area would be confined to an acceptable (safe) area/space based on the type of operation. The objectives would be to achieve a desired effect on the land with minimum disturbance by using low impact drilling technology, developing multiple wells from one location or staying away from trouble or problem areas. This would include the access to a drilling site. The objectives would be to reduce impacts, avoiding areas that could be subject to high impacts, and locating the operation away from sensitive areas.

Travel on identified designated roads would be restricted to the minimal vehicle size and type needed for the job. Due to resource issues, timing restrictions may be applied to site visits.

Production Facilities and Equipment – Production facilities and equipment would be required to follow standard operating procedures; 43 CFR 3164.1 Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 3 (Site security), No. 5 (Measurement of gas), and No. 7 (Disposal of produced water); and best management practices (BMPs).

Pipeline placement and construction would be restricted to existing disturbance or the least intrusive disturbance (existing roads).

The BLM would require operators to utilize wildlife mitigation and BMPs on all gas compressors for noise control. Large gas compressors or pumping units (long-term noise producers) should be located outside the Monument, but if they must be located within the Monument, BMPs would be followed.

Gas compressors, pumping units and production infrastructure would be located where they minimize noise and visual impacts and comply with VRM objectives established for the area. The VRM objectives provide standards for the design and development of projects.

Fencing, meter/well sheds, risers, well head equipment, water disposal pits and netting would be allowed.

Water disposal pits would be sized according to water production with berms into the pit. All containment systems would require wildlife escape ramps and/or netting

where necessary. For wells in the Monument, only two trips per month would be authorized to transport water off site. Exceptions would be considered on a case-by-case basis. The operator would have the option to dispose of the water via pipeline to an approved facility, disposal pits including tanks, or in an approved water disposal well if these other options are not viable.

Travel on identified designated roads would be restricted to the minimal vehicle size and type needed for the job. Due to resource issues, timing restrictions may be applied to site visits. For construction and heavy trucks related to production, this alternative would restrict equipment that exceeds 49db from being within 2 miles of sage-grouse leks between 4:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. between March 1 and June 15.

Reclamation – Reclamation efforts would follow BMPs and standard operating procedures. In some areas, disturbed surfaces (i.e., current wells with final abandonment notices with less than 100% reclamation) would be allowed to reclaim naturally. The intent of the reclamation standards would be to minimize erosion and establish native vegetation.

Access and Transportation

Access

The BLM’s goal is to manage legal and physical access to and within the Monument to provide opportunities for diverse activities.

The BLM would attempt to acquire public access easements with willing landowners where no legal public access exists to or within the Monument, or where additional public access is needed to meet management objectives, including dispersed recreation use. The BLM would consider building or rerouting roads as necessary for additional public access to large blocks of BLM land. The BLM would cooperate with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and private landowners to improve recreation access. This may involve participation in block management programs or developing access agreements with willing private landowners.

The BLM would coordinate with the Charles M. Russell (CMR) National Wildlife Refuge to improve recreation access to the east side of the Monument from the James Kipp Recreation Area. The BLM would also coordinate with Blaine County and the Fort Belknap Community Council to improve recreation access across the Cow Island and Timber Ridge roads in the northeast area of the Monument.

New resource roads to natural gas operations would be closed for public access, unless shown to meet management

objectives through a site-specific environmental assessment.

Individuals with disabilities could request a permit to travel on closed roads consistent with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Such access would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Monument manager. If the need arises, the BLM could identify specific designated closed roads as access for individuals with disabilities.

BLM Road System

The BLM's goal is to provide access to state and federal land and reasonable access for private landowners while protecting the features of the Monument. This includes access for administrative needs and authorized uses of industry and government agencies.

The BLM's goal is to manage legal and physical access to and within the Monument to provide

opportunities for diverse recreation activities (motorized and non-motorized) while considering the surrounding regional recreation opportunities in north-central Montana. The Monument is a relatively small but significant part of this region and cannot provide opportunities for all recreational activities on all BLM land while protecting the objects for which it was designated.

Public use of private roads that provide access to BLM land in the Monument must be negotiated with the individual landowners. Seven road segments which cross state land are currently open for public travel. All other road segments which cross state land, unless covered by a public access easement (there are five of these), are currently closed to motorized travel.

BLM roads are classified into three categories (collector, local and resource roads) and five maintenance levels. The transportation alternatives are based on these BLM classifications and maintenance levels as described below and on the following page.

BLM Road Classifications

Collector Roads	These Bureau roads normally provide primary access to large blocks of land, and connect with or are extensions of a public road system. Collector roads accommodate mixed traffic and serve many uses. They generally receive the highest volume of traffic of all the roads in the Bureau road system. User cost, safety, comfort, and travel time are primary road management considerations. Collector roads usually require application of the highest standards used by the Bureau. As a result, they have the potential for creating substantial environmental impacts and often require complex mitigation procedures.
Local Roads	These Bureau roads normally serve a smaller area than collectors, and connect to collectors or a public road system. Local roads receive lower volumes, carry fewer traffic types, and generally serve fewer uses. User cost, comfort, and travel time are secondary to construction and maintenance cost considerations. Low volume local roads in mountainous terrain, where operating speed is reduced by effect of terrain, may be single-lane roads with turnouts. Environmental impacts are reduced as steeper grades, sharper curves, and lower design speeds than would be permissible on collector roads are allowable.
Resource Roads	These Bureau roads normally are spur roads that provide point access and connect to local or collector roads. They carry very low volume and accommodate only one or two types of use. Use restrictions are applied to prevent conflicts between users needing the road and users attracted to the road. The location and design of these roads are governed by environmental compatibility and minimizing Bureau costs, with minimal consideration for user cost, comfort, or travel time.

BLM Road Maintenance Levels

Maintenance Level 1	This level is assigned to roads where minimum maintenance is required to protect adjacent lands and resource values. These roads are no longer needed and are closed to traffic. The objective is to remove these roads from the transportation system.
Maintenance Level 2	This level is assigned to roads where the management objectives require the road to be opened for limited administrative traffic. Typically, these roads are passable by high-clearance vehicles.
Maintenance Level 3	This level is assigned to roads where management objectives require the road to be open seasonally or year-round for commercial, recreation, or high volume administrative access. Typically, these roads are natural or aggregate surfaced, but may include low use bituminous surfaced roads. These roads have defined cross sections with drainage structures (e.g., rolling dips, culverts, or ditches). These roads may be negotiated by passenger cars traveling at prudent speeds. User comfort and convenience are not considered a high priority.
Maintenance Level 4	This level is assigned to roads where management objectives require the road to be open all year (except may be closed or have limited access due to snow conditions) and to connect major administrative features (recreation sites, local road systems, administrative sites, etc.) to county, state, or federal roads. Typically, these roads are single or double lane, aggregate or bituminous surface, with a higher volume of commercial and recreational traffic than administrative traffic.
Maintenance Level 5	This level is assigned to roads where management objectives require the road to be open all year and are the highest traffic volume roads of the transportation system.

All BLM roads providing motorized access to the boundary of private or state land would remain open for private landowner and administrative travel. These roads would also be open for public travel, if shown to meet Monument objectives.

The BLM’s objectives would be to retain roads to access recreation sites, gas well sites, major range improvement projects, backcountry airstrips and access to areas commonly used for dispersed recreation (geological areas and trailheads). The BLM would reduce the number of parallel and spur roads and roads in crucial wildlife habitat, in areas considered unsuitable due to erosion and slope, and if unique geologic formations, cultural sites or riparian areas are being degraded. The BLM reserves the option to build new roads if necessary to access blocks of BLM land.

Roads that are open year long or seasonally would be open to all forms of motorized and mechanized use consistent with management objectives. Some closed roads could be designated as mechanized (e.g., mountain bike) trails through site-specific planning and environmental review.

Road System Criteria – Along with the objectives discussed above, the factors used to identify the overall road system are listed on the following page.

These factors were used to determine which roads in the Monument would be open yearlong or seasonally. The road system could be modified if vehicle use patterns or resource conditions change. Modifications to the road system would be based on the management guidance under this alternative and changes would be addressed through a travel plan with public participation.

BLM Roads Open Yearlong, Seasonally, or Closed

<i>Designation</i>	<i>Road Miles</i>
Open Yearlong	207
Open Seasonally	171
Closed	216
Total	594

Road System Criteria

Vehicle Ways in WSAs – Vehicle ways that have reclaimed naturally would be closed.

Greater Sage-Grouse – For some resource roads that are 1/4 mile from an active lek, a seasonal closure would be implemented from March 1 to June 15. For some resource roads that are located within crucial winter habitat, a seasonal closure would be implemented from December 1 to March 31.

Bighorn Sheep Lambing Areas – For some resource roads that are located within bighorn sheep lambing areas, a seasonal closure would be implemented from April 1 to June 15.

Big Game Winter Range – For some resource roads that are located within big game winter range, a seasonal closure would be implemented from December 1 to March 31 on a case-by-case basis.

Wildlife Habitat Security and Game Retrieval – Some resource roads could be closed from September 1 to November 30 to provide wildlife habitat security during the fall hunting season. Game retrieval would be allowed from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Designated Sensitive Species – A seasonal closure would be implemented on some resource roads that are 1/4 mile from raptor nests that have been active for the last 5 nesting seasons. The season would be determined based on the species of raptor.

Bald Eagle – A seasonal closure would be implemented from February 1 to May 31 on some resource roads that are 1/2 mile from active bald eagle nests.

Invasive Weeds – Temporary resource road closures would be implemented in highly infested areas.

Road Classification and Maintenance – Each road segment would be assigned to one of three classifications and a maintenance level that reflects the appropriate management objectives. The classification or maintenance level could be changed if vehicle use patterns change or if resource damage occurs.

The Cow Island, Knox Ridge, Wood (Muir) Bottom and James Kipp Recreation Area roads would be classified as collector roads. The Timber Ridge, Bullwhacker, Middle Two Calf, Lower Two Calf, Woodhawk Bottom and Woodhawk Trail roads would be classified as local roads. All other roads would be classified as resource roads.

The Cow Island, James Kipp Recreation Area and Wood (Muir) Bottom roads would be assigned to a Level 4 maintenance category. The Knox Ridge, Timber Ridge, Bullwhacker, Middle Two Calf, Lower Two Calf, Spencer Cow Camp and Woodhawk Trail roads would be assigned to a Level 3 maintenance category. The remaining open roads would fall under the Level 2 maintenance category.

The BLM would install cattleguards as needed or where appropriate on roads that are designated open yearlong.

Most closed roads would be reclaimed naturally. On selected sections of closed roads, reclamation may include ripping, scarifying and seeding with a native seed mix or a mix approved by the Monument manager.

Road Classification and Maintenance Level

<i>Road Classification</i>	<i>Miles</i>	<i>Maintenance Level (miles)</i>				
		<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
Collector	21	0	0	8	13	0
Local	40	0	4	36	0	0
Resource	533	216	310	7	0	0
Total	594	216	314	51	13	0

Exceptions for Travel Off Road and on Closed Roads –

Travel off road and on closed roads would be allowed for any military, fire, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicle used for emergency purposes.

Administrative and emergency use would be allowed off road and on closed roads for BLM, other federal, state and county agencies, lessees and permittees. Administrative use would be limited to those activities necessary to administer the permit.

Big game retrieval by motorized vehicles would be allowed from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on specific designated closed roads (roads that are seasonally closed). Non-motorized/non-mechanized game carts would be allowed off road, except in the WSAs, to retrieve a tagged big game animal. Game carts would not be allowed off road in the WSAs.

Motorized or mechanized vehicles may pull off designated roads no more than 300 feet for camping and must use the most direct route to minimize resource damage. Site selection must be completed by non-motorized or non-mechanized means and camping would be encouraged at previously used sites to reduce the number of new campsites.

In the WSAs, motorized or mechanized vehicles would not be allowed to pull off designated roads for camping. However, parallel camping along roads would be allowed.

Signage – Existing traffic control and directional signs would be maintained. New signs would be added where monitoring indicates a need to enhance safety or prevent resource damage or visitor confusion. Roads open to motorized and mechanized travel would be signed (small road number signs). Closed roads would not be signed unless necessary to prevent resource damage.

Aviation

The BLM's goal is to provide access for diverse recreation opportunities while protecting the features in the Monument.

Six airstrips (selected to avoid clusters) would remain open. Four of these airstrips would be restricted seasonally, based on wildlife habitat requirements or values for which the Monument was established. The Cow Creek and Knox Ridge backcountry airstrips would be open yearlong. The Left Coulee, Bullwhacker and Black Butte North backcountry airstrips would be closed from December 1 to March 31. The Ervin Ridge backcountry airstrip would be closed from December 1 to June 15.

The BLM would allow minimal hand maintenance of airstrips without prior approval, but maintenance would be limited to the area previously disturbed. The emphasis would be to keep the airstrips as backcountry airstrips, only suitable for landing aircraft equipped to use primitive airstrips. Mechanized maintenance, improvements, facilities or infrastructure (tie downs, wind socks, airstrip delineators, etc.) would require prior approval by the authorized officer.

All commercial aircraft landing in the Monument (planes, helicopters, hot air balloons, or ultralights) would be required to utilize specific authorized backcountry airstrips. Seasonal restrictions may apply to the commercial use of these airstrips. Commercial use would require prior authorization.