

HiLine Resource Management Plan NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

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Introduction

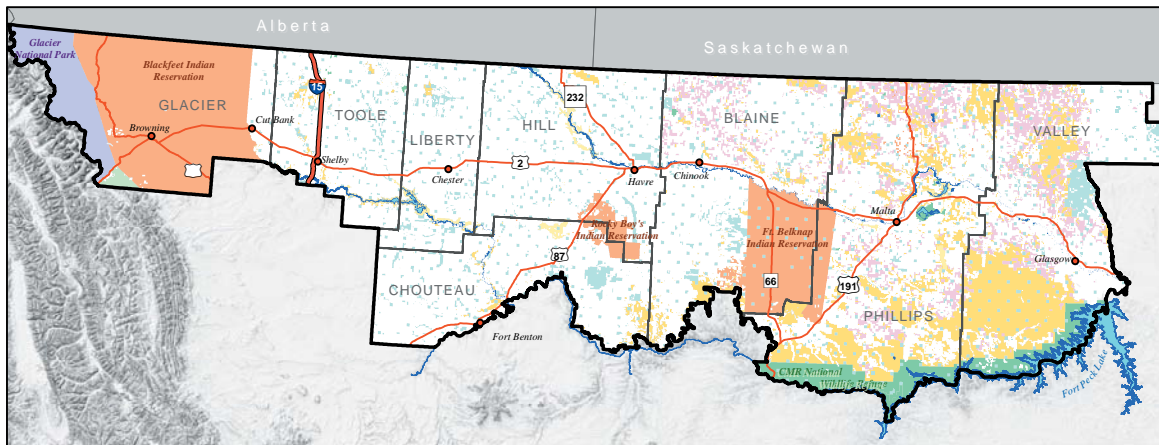
The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is putting the finishing touches on the Draft HiLine Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft RMP/EIS) and hopes to release it for public review and comment early this fall. The Draft RMP/EIS will provide direction for managing public lands (BLM lands) in northcentral Montana under the jurisdiction of the HiLine District.

The BLM administers approximately 2.4 million acres of public land and 3.5 million acres of federal minerals within the planning area in Blaine, Chouteau, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Phillips, Toole, and Valley counties. These lands and minerals are managed by three BLM Field Offices in Havre, Malta, and Glasgow along with the Great Falls Oil and Gas Field Office, which provides oil and gas program support in western, central, and north-central Montana. A map of the HiLine District is displayed below.

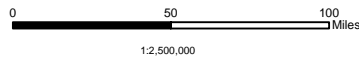
Cooperators

At the onset of the planning process, the BLM invited federal, tribal, state and county governments to collaborate in the development of the Draft RMP/EIS by becoming cooperating agencies. A cooperating agency is any federal, tribal, state, or local government agency that enters into an agreement with the lead federal agency to assist in the development of an environmental analysis. Cooperators meet throughout the planning process as a group to discuss issues, solutions, and ideas for revising the plan.

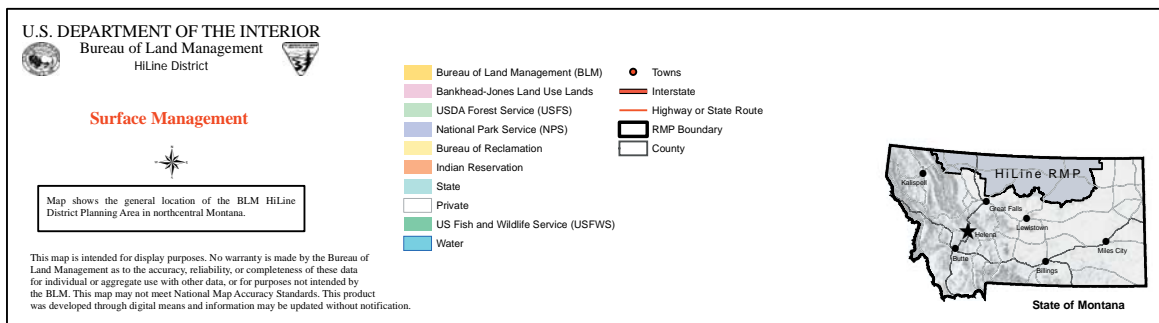
The HiLine RMP cooperating agencies include the Bureau of Indian Affairs; Bureau of Reclamation; Fish and Wildlife Service; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; Blaine, Phillips and Valley counties; and the Badlands, North Blaine, North Phillips, South Phillips, Wayne Creek, Willow Creek, Buggy Creek and North Valley Cooperative state grazing districts.



Created by the Malta Field Office in May 2010



Albers Equal Area, NAD83, Meters





Issues Identified

Planning issues are determined from demands, conflicts, or problems concerning use or management of public lands and resources. These issues may stem from new information or changed circumstances, the need to address environmental protection concerns, or a need to reassess the appropriate mix of allowable uses based on new information. The following planning issues were identified through public scoping and information gathered in analyzing the existing management situation in the planning area. Based on the input of the public, other government agencies, and the BLM and its cooperators, 10 key issues were identified.

Issue 1: How will the area be managed for the development of fluid minerals, solid minerals, and renewable energy?

Issue 2: Are there opportunities to enhance management through land ownership adjustment?

Issue 3: How will soils and vegetation be managed to achieve or maintain healthy ecosystems while providing for a broad range of multiple uses?

Issue 4: How will the area be managed for cultural resources and significant paleontological resources?

Issue 5: How should the BLM manage motorized travel to meet the needs for public access and resource uses while considering conflicts of use and effects on other resources? (See Travel Management section.)

Issue 6: How will access be managed to meet the needs of the public?

Issue 7: How will the BLM manage resource uses while protecting

important wildlife habitat and special status species, including greater sage-grouse?

Issue 8: Which areas, if any, should be managed as special designations, and how should they be managed to protect values that warrant special designation status?

Issue 9: How will the BLM manage for fire, including wildfire and prescribed fire?

Issue 10: How will the BLM consider social and economic conditions in the planning area when managing BLM lands?

Travel Management

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and travel management are addressed at two levels of planning. OHV area designations of open, limited, or closed are addressed in the alternatives. In addition, travel management areas are prioritized in the alternatives by high, moderate and low priority areas, but no site-specific route designations will be made in this RMP.

Travel management plans will be developed that define designated motorized and non-motorized transportation networks after the completion of this RMP.

Issues Considered but Not Addressed in the Draft RMP/EIS

Public scoping also identified issues, concerns, or questions that can be addressed by current management, BLM policy, administrative action, or that were beyond the scope of the HiLine RMP/EIS. One of these issues, bison management, is briefly discussed below.

Bison Management

The grazing regulations provide for authorizing grazing permits for privately owned indigenous animals, including bison. Any future proposals to change the class of livestock from cattle to bison would be considered within the parameters of as provided by the grazing regulations.

A distinction is made between bison that are privately owned and considered livestock and those that are considered wildlife (publicly owned). Bison that fall under the ownership and jurisdiction of the State of Montana, or some other governmental entity, are classified as wildlife.

No proposals or recommendations were made by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks or any other agency to manage any BLM lands in the planning area as wildlife ranges for bison use. Any such future proposal or application would require extensive planning

OHV Areas Designated in the RMP/EIS

Open: An area where all types of vehicle use is permitted at all times, anywhere in the area subject to the operating regulations and vehicle standards set forth in 43 CFR 8341 and 8342.

Limited: An area restricted at certain times, in certain areas, and/or to certain vehicular use. These restrictions may be of any type, but can generally be accommodated within the following type of categories: Numbers of vehicles; types of vehicles; time or season of vehicle use; permitted or licensed use only; use on existing roads and trails; use on designated roads and trails; and other restrictions.

Closed: An area where motorized vehicle use off-road is prohibited. Use of off-road vehicles in closed areas may be allowed for certain reasons; however, such use shall be made only with the approval of the authorized officer.

Travel Management Priority Areas Designated in the RMP/EIS

High Priority: Will normally have travel management planning completed within five years of the signing of the Record of Decision as funding and staffing allow.

Moderate and Low Priority: Will have travel management planning completed within the life of the plan as funding and staffing allow.

and analysis both at the state and federal levels and would likely require an RMP amendment.

Alternatives and Management Goals

Five alternatives will be presented and analyzed in the HiLine Draft RMP/EIS. The BLM's multiple-use mission to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations was the guiding principle used in developing management goals that were in turn used to formulate the alternatives for this RMP. The goals are the result of information provided through public scoping, existing laws and regulations, and the planning team. Management goals include:

- Protect, preserve and interpret the cultural and paleontological resources within the planning area and ensure they are available for appropriate uses by present and future generations.
- Manage air quality, soils, vegetation, and water resources to maintain a diversity of ecological conditions and enhance resource values while providing for a variety of multiple uses that are economically and biologically feasible.
- Ensure habitat for fish and wildlife species is of sufficient quantity and quality to enhance biological diversity and sustain ecological, economic and social values.
- Ensure dependable and environmentally responsible exploration and development of mineral resources and renewable energy consistent with other resource goals.
- Improve resource management efficiency and provide public benefits while protecting significant resources.
- Provide a diverse array of recreational opportunities and visitor experiences while maintaining healthy BLM land resources.
- Apply special management as needed to protect certain areas (e.g., ACECs, WSAs, National Trails, etc.) and resources.

John Carlson



Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) are BLM lands where special management attention is needed for important historical, cultural, and scenic values; fish or wildlife resources; or other natural systems or processes; or to protect human life and safety from natural hazards. To be designated as an ACEC, a nominated area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance as outlined in BLM planning guidance, and it must also require special management.

Currently, seven ACEC designations are within the planning area and apply only to BLM land. These existing ACECs are subject to reconsideration during development of the HiLine RMP: Azure Cave (140 acres); Big Bend of the Milk River (2,120 acres); Bitter Creek (60,701 acres); Kevin Rim (4,657 acres); Mountain Plover (24,730 acres); Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex (12,346 acres); and Sweet Grass Hills (7,952 acres).

The public may submit nominations or recommendations for areas to be considered for ACEC designation. Such nominations are preferred at the beginning of the planning effort, but may be made at any time. Nominations should include descriptive materials, maps and evidence of the relevance and importance of the resources or hazards in order to facilitate a timely evaluation. To date, 12 areas have been nominated. These nominations will be evaluated for relevance and importance, and those

that meet the criteria will be considered for ACEC designation in the Draft RMP/EIS.

Planning Timeline

The Draft RMP/EIS will be distributed to the public for a 90-day comment period in the fall of 2010. The BLM web site and press releases to various newspapers will notify the public when the Draft RMP/EIS is available for review and comment. During the public comment period, the BLM

will host public meetings across the HiLine. Each meeting will provide an opportunity to talk individually with various resource specialists. The BLM hopes these public meetings will provide the information and answers necessary to help the public submit written comments (either at the conclusion of each meeting or by mail/email).

During the winter of 2010/2011, the BLM will review public comments on the Draft RMP/EIS. These comments will help refine the alternatives and will be incorporated into the Proposed HiLine RMP/Final EIS (PRMP/FEIS). In the spring of 2011, the PRMP/FEIS will be distributed to the public. Following the Governor's consistency review and the protest period, the Record of Decision will be prepared and signed by the Montana State Director.

How to Stay Involved and Informed

Briefings regarding the RMP planning process can be requested at anytime, and BLM staff members are available to speak to organizations or groups about the HiLine RMP. Contact the BLM through any of the means listed below to schedule a presentation.

Since initial scoping, the BLM has maintained a mailing list of individuals, businesses, organizations, and federal, state, tribal, and local government representatives interested in development of the HiLine RMP. In an effort to reduce printing and mailing costs, we are requesting that you confirm your preference to remain on the mailing list. If you wish to remain on our mailing list, please let us

know whether you prefer to receive the Draft RMP/EIS on a compact disc (CD) or in printed format (2 volumes, approximately 700 pages). You can contact us by:

E-Mail: MT_HiLine_RMP@blm.gov

Telephone: (406) 538-1924

U.S. Mail: BLM – HiLine RMP
920 NE Main Street
Lewistown, MT 59457

If you would rather not receive either a CD or printed version of the Draft RMP/EIS, it will be available for viewing at BLM Field Offices and public libraries across the HiLine, or on the HiLine RMP web site (http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/malta_field_office/rmp.html).

Please note, in an effort to save printing costs we will remove your name from the mailing list if we do not hear from you.



Craig Miller

For additional information or clarification regarding the Draft HiLine RMP/EIS or the planning process, please contact Jerry Majerus, Project Manager, at (406) 538-1924 or Brian Hockett, Planning & Environmental Coordinator, at (406) 262-2837.

We appreciate your help in this planning effort and look forward to your continued interest and participation.

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