

United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Buffalo Field Office
Welch Management Area Plan
Environmental Assessment
(WY-070-05- 234)



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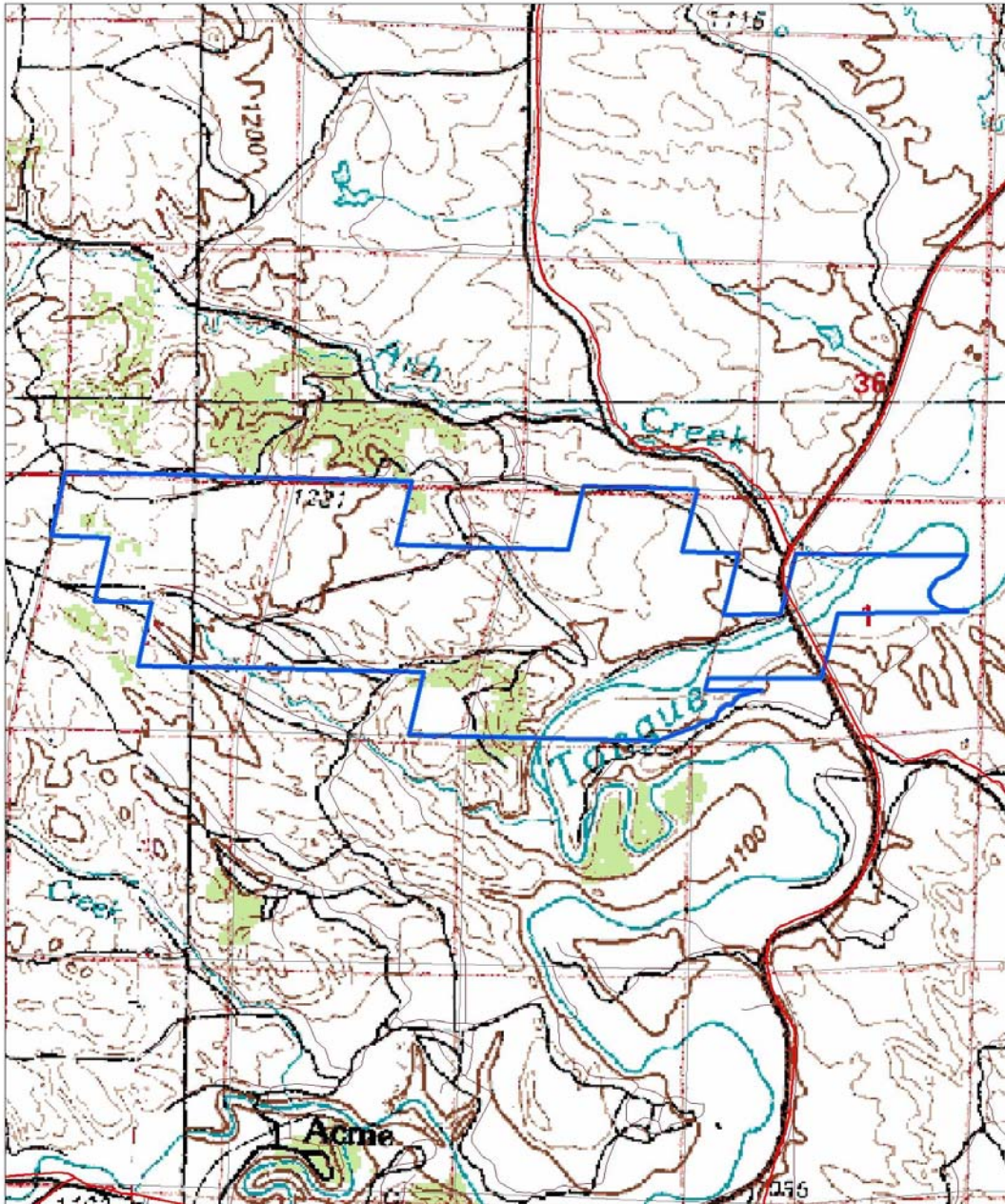
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WELCH RANCH AREA MAP

WELCH RANCH AREA

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This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes environmental consequences of the proposed Welch Management Area (WMA) Plan and alternative management options. The EA also identifies appropriate measures to mitigate environmental effects, and documents the decision-making process. Some of the proposed actions will require detailed project plans prior to implementation. Additional site-specific environmental analyses will be prepared for these project plans prior to implementation in order to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

In a land exchange completed in 2004, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Buffalo Field Office (BFO) acquired 1767 acres of land (see Figure 1.1) in exchange for Federal minerals (coal) north of Sheridan, Wyoming. The exchange process was addressed in an Environmental Impact Statement for land action WYW 148816. The acquired land is located in Sheridan County, north of Sheridan, Wyoming, and Highway 338 bisects the property at the Tongue River. The area is being termed the Welch Management Area (WMA). The WMA boundary as shown in Figure 1.1 applies only to BLM managed lands. The lands are presently used for livestock grazing and hay production and also provide wildlife habitat. The lands and realty management objective addressed in the BFO Resources Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2001) is to:

“Avoid the potential of inadvertent trespass by people accessing the public lands, and to improve access and manageability of the public lands.”

The BFO gives priority to acquire lands that can provide access to large blocks of public lands or to public land with unique resources. Lands with high scenic value, or those that include riparian habitat or provide important wildlife habitat are desirable. Blocked land and access is also desirable if accessible to communities such as Sheridan. The acquired lands meet all these criteria. As stated above, the exchange provides public access to a block of approximately 1740 acres.

The varied topography and diversity of vegetative communities is unique and provides habitat for numerous wildlife species including neo-tropical migratory birds, mule deer, white-tailed deer, turkeys and pronghorn antelope. The Tongue River is an important fisheries and supports a diverse riparian community. A few of the intermittent drainages support ecologically important cottonwood, green ash communities. Finally, the area is accessible to Sheridan, 10 miles to the south on Wyoming Highway 338.

To manage and protect these resources and fulfill the lands and realty management objective, a management plan needs be prepared for the acquired lands. This Environmental Assessment will identify the issues previously raised by the public, describe the proposed management plan, describe alternatives to the proposed management plan, describe the environmental resources affected, and disclose the effects of the proposed management to the environment.

