



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Rawlins Field Office

P.O. Box 2407 (1300 North Third Street)

Rawlins, Wyoming 82301-2407

In Reply Refer To:

1790

January 31, 2003

Re: Environmental Impact Statement and
Resource Management Plan for the
Rawlins Planning Area

Dear Reader:

We are inviting you to participate in the public scoping process for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Rawlins Resource Management Plan (RMP). We are requesting your input in identifying resource issues and concerns, management alternatives, or other ideas in determining future land use decisions for the Rawlins Field Office management area.

Further information on the Rawlins Field Office management area and the background of the planning process for the RMP is enclosed. The planning issues and planning criteria that will be used to guide the identification and development of land management alternatives are also enclosed. We invite your comments on both the planning issues and planning criteria.

The public scoping period for the Rawlins RMP will be 60 days, initiated with the availability of this Scoping Notice and the Management Situation Analysis (MSA) on our website (Monday, February 3, 2003), and ending on Monday, April 7, 2003. Written comments must be received by the close of the public scoping process. BLM will utilize the comments obtained during the public scoping period to develop a number of reasonable RMP alternatives.

A Rawlins RMP website has been developed at www.rawlinsrmp.com. This website is your source of information for participating in the planning process.

Comments on the preparation of the Rawlins RMP and EIS can be provided in a number of ways. The Rawlins RMP website at www.rawlinsrmp.com has been designed in such a way as to allow the user to type comments (categorized by resource subject area) directly onto the form page. Or, the user can upload an electronic version of their comment right onto the website. Alternately, comments can be submitted directly via email to comments@rawlinsrmp.com. Comments can also be provided during public scoping meetings (website access, voice recording, and hand written comments will be collected).

Finally, comments can be mailed directly to the BLM at:

Rawlins RMP/EIS
BLM Rawlins Field Office
1300 N. Third St.
P.O. Box 2407
Rawlins, WY, 82301-2407

In order to decrease the costs for entering written comments into the BLM tracking database, we strongly encourage the public to submit comments electronically via the website or email address above. In fulfillment of the public participation process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), we will host four scoping meetings to receive your input. These scoping meetings will be held in Rock Springs, Rawlins, Baggs, and Laramie, Wyoming, during the month of March. The meetings will be structured as open houses to allow the public to discuss issues and concerns and raise questions with resource specialists in an informal setting. Opportunities to make public comment during the open houses will also be available through a variety of media. Meeting locations and times are as follows:

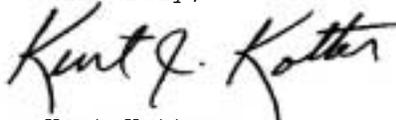
LOCATION	DATE	ADDRESS	TIME
Rock Springs	March 3, 2003	BLM Office 280 Highway 191 North	3 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Rawlins	March 4, 2003	BLM Office 1300 North Third Street	3 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Baggs	March 5, 2003	Baggs Senior Center 180 Whippoorwill Dr.	4 p.m. - 8 p.m.
Laramie	March 6, 2003	Howard Johnson Inn 1555 Snowy Range Rd.	4 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Written comments received during the public scoping process may be published as part of the environmental analysis process. After the close of the public scoping period, all comment letters received, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the BLM Rawlins Field Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday (except Federal holidays). Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals representing organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Please note, form letters expressing comments that are submitted from a number of individuals will be recorded only once in the scoping analysis process. All comments received during the scoping period are weighted equally.

The BLM encourages your participation in this scoping process. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact John Spehar, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, at the address shown above or phone (307) 328-4264.

Sincerely,



Kurt Kotter
Field Manager

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE

**PREPARATION OF AN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
and
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
for the
RAWLINS PLANNING AREA**

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
RAWLINS FIELD OFFICE**

INTRODUCTION

We are requesting your input in identifying resource issues and concerns, management alternatives, or other ideas in determining future land use decisions for the Rawlins Field Office management area.

The public scoping period for the Rawlins RMP will be 60 days, initiated with the availability of this Scoping Notice and the Management Situation Analysis (MSA) on our website (Monday, February 3, 2003), and ending on Monday, April 7, 2003. Written comments must be received by the close of the public scoping process. The BLM will utilize the comments obtained during the public scoping period to develop a number of reasonable RMP alternatives.

Another important function of the public scoping process is to reiterate the initial data call for resource information and the identification of issues for this planning effort. Originally made with the Notice of Intent (NOI), published February 25, 2002, in the *Federal Register* (enclosed), the purpose of this call for resource data, issues, and concerns is to help BLM identify specific problems, concerns, and issues pertaining to the various resource and land use values in the Rawlins planning area and to help identify any data gaps, data needs, and data sources pertaining to the planning area.

A Rawlins RMP website has been developed at www.rawlinsrmp.com. This website is your source of information for participating in the planning process. Here you will find the latest information on the development of the RMP and EIS, including background documents, maps, meeting announcements, published bulletins, and other documents.

To initiate the public scoping period for the EIS and RMP planning process, the BLM has made the Management Situation Analysis document available for public review on our website. The MSA describes pertinent physical and biological characteristics of the public lands in the planning area and evaluates the capability and condition of the resources in the planning area. Because it essentially describes the current BLM management practices, the MSA will become the "No Action – Continuation of Existing Management Alternative" in the draft and final EIS. A printed copy of the document is also available for review at the Rawlins Field Office.

The analysis of the management situation (the process that results in the MSA document), along with comments received during scoping will be used during future steps in the planning process to formulate alternatives and develop the draft EIS. The MSA document is an internal working document that is our initial effort to develop a comprehensive description of the existing environment, and a statement of existing decisions that drive the day-to-day management within the Rawlins Field Office planning area. The MSA is not a draft document, such as a draft EIS, and as such, scoping comments will not be used to correct the MSA or develop a final MSA. The MSA is, however, a work in progress and additional data, analysis, and supporting documentation will be incorporated throughout the planning process. The public is asked to utilize the information in the MSA for what it is intended, to assist you in developing substantive comments concerning alternative uses of the public land and resources, alternative levels of use of existing resources, new or existing resource uses that should be expanded or contracted, and/or additional mitigation measures or protections that should be incorporated into our management actions.

We strongly encourage public comment throughout the RMP process. We encourage you to review the resource issues that should be addressed in developing the plan, the planning criteria that will guide the planning effort, and consider alternative courses of management to those actions contained in the existing Great Divide RMP.

Comments on the preparation of the Rawlins RMP and EIS can be provided in a number of ways. The Rawlins RMP website at www.rawlinsrmp.com has been designed in such a way as to allow the user to type comments (categorized by resource subject area) directly onto the form page. Or, the user can upload an electronic version of their comment right onto the website. Alternately, comments can be submitted directly via email to comments@rawlinsrmp.com. Comments can also be provided during public scoping meetings (website access, voice recording, and hand written comments will be collected).

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Please note, form letters expressing comments that are submitted from a number of individuals will be recorded only once in the scoping analysis process. All comments received during the scoping period are weighted equally. Scoping is not a “voting” process, but rather a comprehensive method to capture the public’s opinion.

LOCATION, PURPOSE, AND NEED

The Rawlins Field Office of the Wyoming Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has determined that modification of the current Great Divide Resource Management Plan (RMP) is necessary. The plan will be renamed the Rawlins Resource Management Plan. Under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Rawlins Field Office is also developing an accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The overall objective of the Rawlins Field Office RMP planning effort is to provide a collaborative, community-based planning approach that assists BLM in updating the management and resource allocation decisions of the existing RMP. The existing plan, which was finalized in 1990, needs to be modified due to new data, changing resource conditions, revised policies, and changing demands and uses on BLM-administered public lands and resources.

The Rawlins RMP provides guidance and direction for management of approximately 3.5 million acres of BLM-administered public land surface and 4.5 million acres of BLM-administered Federal mineral estate in Albany, Carbon, Laramie, and Sweetwater Counties in southern Wyoming.



RESOURCE ISSUES

Through a collaborative process, the Rawlins RMP will seek to address the issues that were identified in the Rawlins Preparation Plan. Some basic issues were carried forward from the 1990 Rawlins RMP, while others were added following RMP evaluations. Issues include:

- ◆ **Development of Energy Resources and Minerals Related Issues** - Special attention is needed to address mineral development, specifically regarding oil and gas, coal, wind energy, and related transportation network conflicts with other land and resource uses and values.

- ◆ **Special Management Designations** - There are unique areas or sensitive lands and resources in the planning area that meet the criteria for protection and management under special management designations. There are four areas designated as areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC – Como Bluff, Sand Hills, Jep Canyon, and Shamrock Hills Raptor Concentration Area) that contain unique resources requiring special management attention. Three of these designated ACECs (Como Bluff, Jep Canyon, and Shamrock Hills) are within the railroad checkerboard land pattern. Effective management of these ACECs will be extremely difficult without full landowner cooperation, which presently does not exist. There are also three special recreation management areas (SRMA – Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, North Platte River, and Shirley Mountain Caves) containing recreation values that require special management attention. There are also four proposed or designated National Natural Landmarks (NNL – Gangplank, proposed; Big Hollow, designated; Sand Creek, designated, and Como Bluff, designated) containing unique landscape values that require special management attention.
- ◆ **Wildland/Urban Interface** - New demands are being placed on public lands due to accelerated growth in and around cities and towns in the planning area. Growth has changed the way communities relate to surrounding public lands and has changed the expectations of communities. Effective management of public lands must address issues of public health, safety, and fire suppression in areas of wildland/urban interface.
- ◆ **Special Status Species Management** - Management of special status species (threatened and endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive plant and animal species) and their interrelationships with other resource uses and activities is needed. Principal considerations include management of species habitat to ensure continued use by these species. Areas where other resource activities may conflict with special status species and their habitat requirements need to be identified and addressed.
- ◆ **Air and Water Quality** - There are concerns with maintaining or improving air and water quality, and complying with State and Federal requirements.
- ◆ **Vegetation Management** - There are conflicting demands for consumptive and nonconsumptive uses of the vegetation resources in the planning area. The basic problem is maintaining resource values and nonconsumptive uses while allowing for consumptive uses.
- ◆ **Recreation, Cultural Resources (including National Historic Trails), and Paleontological Resources Management** - There are certain resources and areas that need protection, while others need to be considered for more public and recreational uses. Off-highway vehicle use can conflict with other land and resource uses and can cause damage to resources, including wildlife and watershed values and other recreation values.
- ◆ **Resource Accessibility** - There are some areas in the Rawlins Resource Area that are isolated and difficult (legally or physically) to access and manage. Land disposals and acquisitions could provide improved access and manageability of public lands.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING CRITERIA

The preliminary planning criteria for the Rawlins RMP are the ground rules that guide the planning effort and how various alternatives are to be developed and considered prior to selecting the final RMP.

The planning criteria ensure that the planning effort complies with all legal requirements; addresses all issues affecting public land resources and land use activities in the planning area; and identifies the scope of the planning effort.

The Rawlins RMP will focus on the potential environmental consequences of reasonably foreseeable mineral development and reasonably foreseeable levels of other land use activities in the planning area. Types of development may include oil and gas and locatable mineral exploration and development; range, watershed and road improvements; and recreational and interpretive facilities. All impacts of mineral development and other activities must be assessed in accordance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), which requires the preparation of an EIS for this project. In addition, the RMP that is developed must comply with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which requires the BLM to use and observe the principles of multiple use, sustained yield, and environmental integrity in the planning for the management of the public lands.

1: Criteria for Specific Resource Programs

The following categories of planning criteria and guidelines, as delineated in the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook, will be applied in this planning effort:

- Criteria for Hydrocarbon Leasing and Development Potential
- Criteria for Locatable Minerals
- Criteria for Using Wyoming BLM Mitigation Guidelines
- Criteria for Healthy Rangelands
- Criteria for Coal Screening and Planning Process
- Criteria for Wilderness Study Areas and Identification of Potential New Wilderness Study Areas
- Criteria for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Criteria for Wild Horses
- Criteria for Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Criteria for Livestock Grazing
- Criteria for Withdrawals and Other Classifications
- Criteria for Multiple Use Considerations

2: Criteria for Using NEPA Environmental Analysis Procedure to Develop the RMP

The basic principles of NEPA state that the Federal Government shall:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations
- Assure for all Americans a safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings
- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences
- Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice
- Achieve a balance between population resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of nonrenewable resources.

A complete public involvement process is included in the development of the Rawlins RMP and accompanying EIS. The basic steps of this process include:

- Public Scoping Period
- Development of Alternatives
- Public Review of Alternatives
- Development of a Preferred Alternative

- Public review of the draft EIS
- Governor's Review and Public Protest Period
- Issuance of the Proposed Rawlins RMP and final EIS
- Resolution of Any Protests
- Record of Decision

The result of this process will be an approved Rawlins RMP that addresses all issues raised by the public within the context of the project.

3: Management Level Criteria and Considerations for the Formulation of Alternatives

The primary purpose of preparing the EIS is to guide the BLM in designing and implementing management strategies that affect resource and land use activities in the planning area. The following factors will be key considerations in the development of alternatives to be analyzed:

- Fire management
- Providing for unique cultural and historic resources, including archaeological sites, historic trails and sites, and Native American respected places
- Providing for vegetative quality and preservation of sensitive and rare plant species
- Watershed management and water quality protection
- Potential for mineral and energy resource exploration and development
- Identification of transportation needs as well as vehicular use area limitations
- Opportunities for land disposal or acquisition that could be useful in meeting BLM resource management goals
- Opportunities for acquisition of access rights to accommodate planned uses
- Identification of needed protective withdrawals to improve resource manageability
- Livestock grazing
- Recreational and interpretive opportunities
- Wildlife habitat management

4: Criteria for Selection of a Preferred Alternative

In developing a Preferred Alternative, the goal is to obtain a balance of allowable activities and management strategies that meet all legal mandates. Specifically, the approved Rawlins RMP should meet the following objectives:

- Identify levels of land use conditional requirements needed to protect natural and cultural resources for future generations while accommodating reasonable levels of current and sustainable multiple uses
- Produce guidelines for reduction of sedimentation and salinity, as required by the Water Quality Act
- Accommodate reasonable public access for land use and resource development and comply with the Americans with Disability Act for barrier-free access
- Comply with existing applicable land use plans, programs, and policies of state, local, and federal agencies and Native American tribes
- Comply with the objectives of the National Fire Plan and 10-year Comprehensive Fire Strategy
- Comply with existing legal conservation strategies and recovery plans for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species
- Acknowledge and strive to help meet the socioeconomic goals of local communities.