

Preliminary Planning Issues

Eastern Washington and San Juan Resource Management Plan

Planning issues are disputes or controversies about existing and potential land and resource allocations, levels of resource use, production, and related management practices.

- 1) How will shrub-steppe, and its associated riparian and wetland habitats be managed to maintain, improve, or restore healthy plant and wildlife communities?** Shrub-steppe habitats support a unique assemblage of plants and wildlife, and associated riparian wetland habitats, many of which are declining, causing its designation as a “priority habitat” for the state of Washington and triggering national initiatives to conserve and maintain shrub steppe communities. Additionally, the shrub steppe ecosystem supports the livelihood of the ranching community and provides important hunting and other outdoor recreation for the public. However, one-half of the area historically occupied by shrub steppe in Washington has been converted to agriculture with 40-percent of what remains being fragmented and/or degraded. Removal of sagebrush, introduction of non-native grasses, and historic overgrazing has resulted in altered fire regimes and proliferation of invasive weeds that threaten ecological processes and the societal values this ecosystem provides.

- 2) How should the BLM manage public lands with consideration of uses of adjacent lands given the mixed ownership pattern in the planning area?** BLM lands in the planning area consist of scattered tracts and isolated blocks, varying in size from a few acres to over 19,000 contiguous acres. These tracts and blocks are adjacent to, and intermixed with private lands, other state and federal public lands, and Tribal lands. Uses or activities on BLM or adjacent lands can affect or conflict with uses and activities on the other. It is usually not possible to accomplish landscape level management objectives without complementary management across ownerships. In many areas, BLM lands are the only public lands available; and thus, there is a high demand for multiple and sometimes conflicting uses within the limited area. Also, due to this limited availability of public lands, restrictions to protect resources can eliminate opportunities for other uses. Related concerns include:

 - Fuels Management – Accomplishing fire management and property protection goals must cross ownerships to be effective.
 - Fish, Wildlife, and Special Status Species – Single ownership does not generally contain enough area to provide habitats for wildlife requiring larger ranges. For special status wildlife and plant species, the high demand for multiple uses and limited amount of public land available make habitat protection crucial and problematic.

- Cultural Resources – Due to the limited amount of public lands in some areas, protection measures for cultural resources can greatly reduce opportunities for other uses.
- Livestock Grazing – Many BLM parcels are intermixed with private lands that are used for grazing livestock. Prohibiting grazing on BLM lands is impractical in such situations.
- Public Access and Trespass – Some BLM parcels are surrounded by private lands and lack public access. This may result in unauthorized use of public lands, trespass on private land, and interfere with authorized uses of public lands.
- Recreation – Due to the limited availability of public lands in some areas, it is difficult to meet the demands for recreational use. Differing types of recreational use in confined areas often conflict – i.e. motorized and non-motorized, target shooting and hiking, etc. Also, other uses and resource protection measures further limit available opportunities.
- Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species – management of noxious weeds and invasive species must occur across all ownerships to be effective. Ineffective management by one landowner can quickly lead to spread of such species to adjacent lands.
- Urban Growth – Development from a number of communities in the planning area has greatly expanded and continues to do so, moving communities closer to, or even engulfing BLM lands. BLM lands have become the only open space lands available in some of these communities. Retaining open space may conflict with other authorized uses of public lands.
- Special Management Areas – Resource values, which may warrant protection by designation of special management areas, often extend beyond the boundaries of the BLM.
- Visual Resource Management – Management of the visual landscape by the BLM is often ineffective without coordination with adjacent land owners.

3) How should the BLM manage multiple uses and resources that have changed, or that occur on lands that were either not administered by the BLM or were not within the planning area when the current RMP was developed? the BLM has acquired more than 130,000 acres of land in the planning area since 1987. Additionally, there is no RMP for public lands administered by the BLM in the San Juan Archipelago. Therefore, authorized uses sometimes conflict or result in unintended impacts to other resources (e.g. wildlife habitat and cultural resources). Furthermore, over the past 20 years the number of federally listed threatened and endangered species with habitat in the planning area has increased from 3 to 16, with seven candidate species. This is compounded by the increase in the number of other BLM and State special status species of concern. With the tremendous amount of urban growth in the planning area during the same 20-year period, and the increased interest in motorized recreation,

demands for recreational opportunities on BLM lands often exceed the capacity of these lands and resources.

- 4) How should the BLM facilitate energy development while still allowing for multiple uses and appropriate protection of public lands and resources?** If the BLM is to provide opportunities for energy (renewable and non-renewable) development, to include associated transmission lines and pipelines, it must also provide protection for other resources, such as visual, cultural, and habitat values. For example, a number of wind energy projects have been developed in Eastern Washington in recent years. Development of renewable energy is also a Department of Interior priority. However, the current RMP did not consider or identify areas open or closed to wind energy development, and did not identify constraints to protect other resources. Also, interest in development of natural gas in Eastern Washington has greatly increased recently and the existing RMP and Amendment do not afford appropriate protection of resources and uses such as wildlife habitat (including special status species and shrub-steppe communities) cultural resources, and recreation. In addition, the most current reasonable foreseeable development scenario, which the BLM prepared for a 1992 RMP Amendment, did not account for changes in oil and gas development technology that have occurred over the past 10 to 15 years. Furthermore, energy development on BLM lands may result in conflicts with uses - such as residential areas or open space for recreation and tourism - on adjacent lands.