



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

**Missouri Basin Resource Advisory Committee (MBRAC)**  
**Business Meeting Minutes**  
**September 11, 2024**  
**Glasgow City-County Library**  
**Glasgow, MT**

***Individuals Present:***

**MBRAC Members:** *(a quorum was present)*

***In Person:***

(Category 1) Kevin Wagner, Jeff Schafer, Perri Jacobs, Miles Hutton, Trisha Tonn

(Category 2) Greg Jergeson, Mark Good, Scott Heidebrink

(Category 3) Jody Mason, James Moore

***Online via Teams:*** Doug Krings (Category 2), William (Bill) Jensen (Category 2), Stacey Barta (Category 3).

**Public:**

***In Person:*** Wesly DeGuilo (Congressman Matthew Rosendale field rep), John Fahlgren (Valley County Commissioner)

***Online via Teams:*** Charlene Redding (Senator Steve Daines field rep), Garrett Titus, (Montana Wildlife Federation, conservation policy specialist)

**BLM Staff:**

***In Person:*** Wendy Warren (MBRAC Designated Federal Official and District Manager, Eastern Montana Dakotas District (EMDD), Ben Hileman (Acting District Manager North Central Montana District NCMD)), Kathleen Tribby (Field Manager Malta FO), Michael Borgreen (Field Manager Glasgow FO), Mark Jacobsen (EMDD Public Affairs), Gina Baltrusch (NCMD Public Affairs), Leah Dailey (Deputy State Director for Support Services, Eastern States), Jennifer Mannie (Administrative Assistant EMDD), Donna Bradley (Resource Assistant, Miles City FO), Matthew Comer (Project Manager Glasgow FO)

***Online via Teams:*** Eric Lepisto (Field Manager Miles City FO), Jason Snellman (Outdoor Recreation Planner, Malta FO), Thomas Valencia (Park Manager, Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument), Zane Fulbright (Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Manager, North Central Montana District), Nate Arave (Field Manager, Billings FO), Edward Kraft (Field Manager North Dakota FO), Adam Carr (Supervisory Land Use Specialist Realty, Land & Renewable Energy Branch Montana State Office), Scott Haight (Associate State Director Montana State Office)

## **Meeting began at Noon**

Mark Jacobsen welcomed members and the meeting was brought to order; site orientation, safety and housekeeping items were reviewed. The meeting was turned over to the MBRAC Chairperson Perri Jacobs. All members and BLM staff introduced themselves, as it was the first meeting for newly appointed members.

## **BLM Manager Briefings**

### **Ben Hileman - Acting District Manager, North Central Montana District**

Zane Fulbright was recently selected as District Manager NCMD. Start date is Sept. 22, 2024.

The American Prairie decision was issued July 2022. The plaintiff's appeal of the judge's denial of a petition for stay was denied in May 2024. The plaintiff's appeal of the grazing decision remains pending with the Department of Interior, Office of Hearings and Appeals.

Funding from the bi-partisan infrastructure bill has been applied to recreation improvements at Sullivan Bridge, East Butte of the Sweet Grass Hills; vault toilets at both sites and a small campground being developed at East Butte.

The boat ramp construction at Coal Banks Landing will begin the week of September 9, 2024. The current ramp is limited to use during high water. The new ramp will provide improved recreation use and will benefit search and rescue teams and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks projects. The NCMD's Fire Management Office has donated wildland fire engines to both Blaine and Petroleum counties. Both have been well used this season.

### **Wendy Warren-District Manager, Eastern Montana Dakotas District**

#### **South Dakota Field Office Update:**

The new South Dakota Field Manager has been selected; Jake Williams, and he will report October 2024.

The Fort Meade Recreation Area contracted project for potable water (near Sturgis) has been awarded and will begin work soon. The pipeline will provide water to various locations throughout the recreation area and is a considerable undertaking.

The Yellow Creek Shooting Area (Recreation and Public Purposes Act Project) is being completed to allow the county to take over management of that site. This project has been years in the making.

Powder House Pass Subdivision has isolated slivers of public lands as small as .01 acres throughout the area. The cumulative total acreage is 5.147 acres; and the intention is to sell and

transfer the acreage into private ownership. The SDFO has also been working on a bentonite mining reclamation project, which has been ongoing for a couple of years.

#### **Billings Field Office Update:**

A mineral withdrawal in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range should be completed within the coming months. A beaver dam-analog project (designed to replicate the actions on watercourses by beaver) is being completed at the Milton Ranch, and new shade structure at Sundance Recreation area is planned for construction in 2025.

#### **North Dakota Field Office Update:**

Quarterly meetings are scheduled with the Three Affiliated Tribes. The Tribes are very active in developing oil and gas on their area of jurisdiction/reservation. The Public Lands Rule has been released and public meetings have been held to share the information. Waste Management Rule and Sage grouse amendment are coming out in the near future.

#### **Miles City Field Office Update:**

The Snowy River CO2 Sequestration Project in Carter County has received comments which will be considered and addressed in the environmental assessment; no decision has been made at this time. A woven wire fence removal project has been ongoing for several years in coordination with individual permittees in multiple counties.

#### **Solar PEIS & Updated Western Solar Plan**

##### ***Adam Carr- Branch Chief Realty, Land & Renewable Energy Montana State Office***

Presentation slides were provided to members. The proposed plan was released last month and is currently in a protest period and the Governor's Consistency Review. The Governors review ends October 25, 2024. This plan does not include any land in North Dakota. Montana does not have any pending solar energy applications. It is hoped to have a signed record of decision by the end of the calendar year. Public scoping comments were considered and resulted in changes in the final document. Design features and mitigation will be site specific when applications are received. Questions and discussion followed the presentation.

#### **Malta FO Recreation Business Plan & Recreation Fees Update**

##### ***Kathy Tribby-Field Manager Malta FO & Jason Snellman- Outdoor Recreation Planner, Malta FO***

Presented a proposal for fee changes for recreation sites in the Malta FO area. Justification for the change is due to the lack of funding for additional recreation staff and increased contract costs for maintenance and management at the sites. Current fee schedule was established in 2014. Sites included in the plan are Camp Creek and Montana Gulch Campgrounds, Buffington Day Use Area, and Zortman Ranger Station. Questions and discussion followed the presentation. Requested members consider the plan handout, read the draft plan update posted on ePlanning, submit comments via e-planning to be considered in the final plan. At the next meeting in January 2025, MBRAC members should be ready to further discuss the plan and public input received, and make a formal recommendation (vote) on the Malta FO's plan

update/proposal. Jeff Schaffer would like to see parity of campgrounds that are located close together; specifically, James Kipp Recreation Area, which is managed under the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. A few other BLM field office managers expressed interest in bringing recreation business plan updates and fee-change proposals for consideration and discussion at future MBRAC meetings to occur during FY2025.

### **Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape Overview**

#### ***Matt Comer-Project Manager, Glasgow FO***

Provided a status update of restoration landscapes across Montana and locally showing a slideshow presentation of Sagebrush Restoration Landscape; handouts provided to members. Thirty organizations are partners working together to improve the landscape. The Inflation Reduction Act provided \$7M and \$2M received from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The restoration landscape covers 3M acres in south Phillips County and Valley County, about half is BLM land. A study north of Glasgow is using herbicides, soil amendments and a combination of the treatments to measure the effects on Crested Wheatgrass and other non-native species. BLM, Fort Belknap College, and operators are working together to implement projects and improve sites. Habitat improvements benefit Sage Grouse and Pronghorn populations and increase recreation opportunities. Conifer removal, prescribed burns and mechanical treatments are being considered for grass and forb growth. Questions and discussion followed the presentation.

### **Meeting Close-out, Requests and Future Meeting Topics**

Map of solar project areas that are available for Western Solar Plan development. Malta Field Office requested to be on the agenda for action regarding their Recreation Business Plan update. Miles City Field Office requested to be on the agenda to consider recreation fees. RAC members requested updates be sent two weeks prior to meetings. RAC members should forward any requests for the next meeting's agenda topics to Perri Jacobs or Trisha Tonn.

The next MBRAC meeting to be held on Thursday, January 16, 2025, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The meeting will be conducted as a virtual TEAMS meeting. Agenda to follow once topics have been determined.

### **Public Comment Period**

John Fahlgren, Valley County Commissioner, talked about commission work with state agencies and the BLM for Sage Grouse management. He expressed his personal opinion regarding effects of predators on the bird population.

### **Meeting adjourned at 5 p.m.**

Leah Dailey and Jennifer Mannie assisted members not staying for the next day's field tour with completing travel reimbursement vouchers.

### **Thursday, September 12, 8 a.m.**

Leah Dailey and Jennifer Mannie assisted members who stayed overnight with completing travel



reimbursement vouchers.

**8:30 a.m.** -- Members and staff met at the Glasgow Field Office for an educational field tour of key project areas within the BLM's Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape area. Tour led by Matt Comer and Mike Borgreen.

**12:30 p.m.** -- **Tour ended; members/staff departed.**

**Final Approval:**

*Respectively approved and submitted for the record,*

**Perri Jacobs**, Chairperson MBRAC



**Trish Tonn**, Vice Chairperson MBRAC



**Documents/Presentations provided to MBRAC members (attached):**

- Handout: NCMD District Update, September 2024
- Handout: EMDD District Update, September 2024
- Presentation: Malta Field Office Recreation Business Plan & Recreation Fees Update
- Presentation: Progress Update - Solar PEIS & Updated Western Solar Plan
- Presentation: Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape (HSARL)
- Fact Sheet: HSARL Project Overview, June 1, 2023
- Fact Sheet: HSARL Supplemental, updated Aug. 12, 2024
- Fact Sheet: South Phillips Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project, updated Aug. 12, 2024



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# North Central Montana District

## Recent & Upcoming Significant Land Management Planning Activities & Projects

as of September 2024

**Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape (IRA).** This project area encompasses about 3-million acres (including about 1.5 million BLM-administered acres managed by the Glasgow and Malta field offices) and showcases some of the largest intact grasslands left in North America that support numerous at-risk grassland bird species, holds priority habitat for greater sage-grouse and provide critical winter and migration habitat for elk, deer and pronghorn. The short-grass prairie of north central Montana is an extremely popular destination for hunting, fishing and bird watching. As drought continues, restoration investments will improve mesic and woody draw habitats, increase native plant diversity and remove encroaching conifers and man-made features that threaten sage-grouse survival. Nearly \$9 million in BLM funds will be invested through the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Partners typically provide a 5:1 partner match with projects. The Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape project management team is engaging more than a dozen local-, regional- and national-level partners. Since our last update to the MBRAC, two Good Neighbor Authority projects have been awarded with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (one with Rangelands and one with the Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program) for about \$2.75 million. Over the next five years these partnerships will improve upland and riparian habitats through grazing management, modify fencing to improve wildlife movements and bury up to 20 miles of powerline in priority sage grouse habitat. Three additional agreements are in the final stages of award and will total nearly \$2.5 million. Initial project targets proposed for the Restoration Landscape include removal and/or modification of about 100 miles of fencing to improve wildlife migration, restoration of about 2,500 acres of crested wheatgrass to native plant communities, burying about 10+ miles of powerline to reduce raptor predation of sage-grouse, about 50 miles of mesic (riparian) habitat projects to improve drought resiliency, treating about 250 acres of conifer invaded lands to improve wildland fire resilience, and assessing grazing management practices and potential adjustments to timing, intensity, duration and new technology to improve upland and riparian areas. Learn more --

[https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-06/BLM-MT-Hi-Line-Sagebrush-Anchor-Restoration-Landscape-Factsheet\\_06-01-2023.pdf](https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-06/BLM-MT-Hi-Line-Sagebrush-Anchor-Restoration-Landscape-Factsheet_06-01-2023.pdf).

### **MALTA FIELD OFFICE**

**Little Rockies Forest Health and Hazardous Fuels Reduction Programmatic NEPA.** The BLM proposes to conduct fuels-reduction treatments both within and outside of the wildland urban interface, as well as within and outside of the Zortman-Landusky CERCLA/Superfund site boundary. The proposed project will break up continuous fuel materials, reduce the amount and height of hazardous fuels and maintain previous treatments to reduce the risk and impacts of large fire events. Addressing increased fuel loading in proximity to values at risk will reduce the potential for public and private property loss and to reduce suppression costs. Internal scoping is in progress and likely to be completed by the end of 2023. Public scoping was conducted April 18-May 2, with a public scoping meeting held in Zortman on April 18. Learn more on ePlanning – <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2027358/510>. Planners anticipate having a proposed EA available for public review and comment by the end of Fall 2024. Implementation is likely to occur during fiscal year 2025.

**Dry Fork Road culvert replacement (GAOA).** The west end of Dry Fork Road begins at the intersection with State Highway 191. The Dry Fork Road is graveled for its entire length and is an all-weather surface. The BLM owns and maintains the first 23.8 miles of the road. Two existing corrugated metal pipe culverts are in poor overall condition and likely to soon fail. This project will remove and replace the metal culverts (two 48-inch diameter corrugated metal pipes by 140 feet long) with a new (single 72-inch diameter) precast reinforced concrete culvert of approximately the same

length. Principal items of work include structural excavation, corrugated metal pipe culvert removal, installation of bedding material, installation of a new precast reinforced concrete culvert, structural backfill (using onsite excavated material), and slope and site restoration. Replacing and maintaining this crossing will result in continued access across the north side of the Charles M Russell National Wildlife Refuge and Missouri River, allowing the Dry Fork Road to continue to be a major access route for numerous traffic types, including ranchers, recreationists, tourists, and county, state, and federal employees. DNRC is completing MEPA since the culverts and road diversion will be on State lands. Construction is anticipated to take place during summer 2025.

**Recreation Business Plan & Recreation Fees Update.** As part of updating its recreation program business plan, the Malta Field Office plans to reassess recreation fees at its campgrounds in the Little Rocky Mountains. These fees were last updated in January 2014 and need to be increased to meet fair market value to help with the increasing cost of maintenance and continue to provide for and receive fair value for use of recreation facilities as stated in the 2015 Hi-Line Resource Management Plan. These facilities include Camp Creek, Horse Corral and Montana Gulch. We are also considering establishing rental use fees for Buff's Day Use Picnic Area (for special events such as weddings and memorials) and fees for renting the historic Zortman Ranger Station for overnight use. While the Ranger Station still needs quite a bit of interior work before it will be ready for public rental, it will be included with this proposal. We will present an updated fee proposal for discussion during the MBRAC's Sept. 11 meeting.

**Little Rockies Travel Management Plan.** The Malta Field Office will apply the Travel and Transportation Management Process to develop a sustainable network of roads and trails for motorized, mechanized and non-motorized methods of travel in the Little Rocky Mountains (Little Rockies). Development of the Little Rockies TMP requires a collaborative effort of interested public individuals, groups, communities and cooperating agencies. The travel management area encompasses a 27,700-acre area and currently contains 262 routes and 124 miles of roads, primitive roads and trails. Although the area surrounds scattered private parcels and adjoins private, state and Fort Belknap lands, the decisions within the TMP will apply only to the public lands managed by the BLM. TMP decisions, however, will take into consideration potential effects on non-BLM lands. In addition, any travel restrictions within the TMP will not apply to emergency operations such as fire response, search and rescue, law enforcement and military actions. This TMP has been on-hold awaiting the findings of a Class III Cultural Inventory which was recently completed. We anticipate beginning the travel plan public outreach and NEPA during fiscal year 2025.

**Bar Island Dam Reconstruction (GAOA).** Bar Island Detention Dam, a low-hazard class dam, is located in South Phillips County, Montana, about 59 miles southwest of Malta, on Cottonwood Creek, a tributary of Rock Creek which is a minor tributary of the Missouri River. The compacted earth embankment dam was constructed in 1967 as a peak discharge control structure, and an erosion and sediment control structure. It also provides habitat for native fish, sage grouse, and many other wildlife species, and is a general recreation use area. Notably, the dam also consistently retains water that is available for wildland fire response operations. Reconstruction will address the deficiencies identified with the dam's principal spillway outlet works, the principal spillway inlet and outlet works, the auxiliary spillway, erosion on the dam embankment and more. Work will stay within the dam's original footprint to avoid disturbance to surrounding sage grouse habitat. Dewatering shall be accomplished in such a way as to fully preserve this habitat. Scheduled to be implemented in 2025.

**South Phillips Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project.** The BLM Malta Field Office proposes to improve greater sage-grouse habitat conditions and reduce fuel loadings in southern Phillips County. Mechanical, manual and prescribed fire treatments will be considered. Over ten years, mechanical and manual conifer removal treatments may occur on up to 20,000 acres to improve sage grouse habitat. Treatments include masticating, chipping, hand slashing, removing or hand piling juniper and Ponderosa pine in sage grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas. Prescribed fire is being considered on up to 12,000 acres in limited areas with high conifer canopy closure to reduce conifer fuel loadings and improve forest health. Sage grouse numbers across the west have declined for many different reasons. Over the last century the amount of ponderosa pine and juniper (together referred to as conifers) has increased. As conifers expand in sagebrush habitats, habitat quality for sage grouse and other wildlife that depend on sagebrush is reduced. Removing conifer trees increases grasses and forbs, and helps increase the availability of open sagebrush areas which are critical for the birds' nesting, brood-rearing and wintering habitats. This habitat restoration aims to improve sage grouse survival and reproductive success, contributing to overall population resilience. A more-detailed description of the proposed project and related maps are available on the BLM's ePlanning website -

<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2033606/510> Planning is still in the early stages and will include an environment assessment to analyze potential impacts.

**American Prairie July 2022 Grazing Decision.** On July 28th, 2022, BLM issued a final decision authorizing bison and/or cattle grazing on seven allotments in the Malta Field Office (Telegraph Creek, Box Elder, Garey Coulee, French Coulee, Dry Fork, Flat Creek, Whiterock Coulee). East Dry Fork – a common allotment grazed with one other operator – remains approved for cattle-only grazing. All seven allotments are managed by the BLM's Malta Field Office. Telegraph Creek and Box Elder were previously authorized for bison grazing in 2014. The Final Grazing Decision was appealed by 1) the Montana Stockgrowers Association (a joint appeal including North Phillips County Cooperative State Grazing District, South Phillips County Cooperative State Grazing District, and the MSGA), 2) the State of Montana by and through the Montana Attorney General, and 3) the State of Montana, by and through its Governor (a joint appeal including , Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana Department of Livestock, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks). The appeals are being adjudicated by the Department of the Interior, Office of Hearings and Appeals, Board of Land Appeals. The appeals were followed by petitions for stay from all three parties. On October 13, 2022, Administrative Law Judge Veronica Larvie, with the DOI's Office of Hearings and Appeals, Departmental Case Hearings Division, issued an order DENYING the petitions for stay. Within 30-days, all three appellants appealed the petition order and filed timely their Statements of Reason (SOR) on December 22, 2022. On May 29, 2024, the IBLA ruling against the plaintiffs' appeal of the administrative law judge's October 13, 2022, denial of petitions for stay. In April 2023, in keeping with standard administrative practices for BLM-authorized grazing leases, the Malta Field Office issued grazing permits to American Prairie (AP) for the allotments approved for both cattle and bison. The written arguments phase for adjudication of the appeals pertaining to the American Prairie July 2022 grazing decision was completed on November 13, 2023. The parties involved are now awaiting a decision from the DOI's Office of Hearings and Appeals, Departmental Cases Hearings Division. It's important to note that there is no required deadline for the appeals adjudication to conclude.

## **GLASGOW FIELD OFFICE**

**Finale Detention Dam Rehabilitation (GAOA).** Finale Detention Dam is a low-hazard dam built in 1965 in Valley County, Montana, that after nearly 60 years, requires rehabilitation. Undercutting of the dam's principal spillway outlet, severe scouring of the stilling basin, erosion of the embankment and damage to the concrete inlet pad require substantial restoration work to prevent complete dam failure. Finale Dam is critical to maintaining access to over 250,000 acres of BLM managed lands that are used by the public for hunting and wildlife watching. The dam is located on Triple Cross Access Road, which in addition to providing public access to BLM managed lands, provides collector road access to BLM employees for range and resource management purposes. Finale Dam was originally built to serve as a flood control structure in the Willow Creek drainage area to protect the town of Glasgow, Montana. Dam improvements will ensure that runoff can continue to be impounded to provide sustainable riparian habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Rehabilitation of the dam will also sustain wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities for the public. The project will include dewatering the reservoir and construction area, excavating a portion of the existing dam embankment and foundation to removal of the current outlet works, construction of new outlet works, replacing and compacting the foundation and embankment materials, constructing a new principal spillway and restoring the road surface across the dam. Contractors will also reclaim all disturbed areas, including staging areas and temporary roads, preparing the work site for reseeding. Original construction of this 700-foot-long, 34-foot-high, earthen-filled gravity dam was completed in 1965 for the primary purpose of flood-risk reduction in the Milk River Basin. The reservoir provides habitat for a variety of wildlife, including big game, waterfowl, and upland birds.

**Cactus Flat Road Reconstruction (GAOA).** Great American Outdoors Act funding will help repair and rehabilitate approximately 8 miles of the BLM's Cactus Flat Road, located in the Glasgow Field Office area in Valley County, Montana. This project is currently in the design phase, with ground-breaking anticipated to occur during late fiscal year 2024 or early FY25. Cactus Flat Road provides an important access route to an estimated 250,000 acres of land managed by the BLM. Most of this road is in poor condition with its culverts being deteriorated by galvanic coupling with the extremely reactive soils in the area, resulting in piping and erosion. Replacement of the culverts and restoration of the road's cross-sectional profile will restore a safe access route for local recreationists, grazing permit holders and BLM staff who rely year-round on using this road.

**Gutshot Dam Disposal (GAOA).** Gutshot Dam is a hazard class dam that has breached and been funded for disposal to mitigate serious safety deficiencies, provide public access and decrease the backlog of deferred maintenance. This dam is located in south Valley County. The primary spillway outlet works has failed, and the embankment is completely perforated. This embankment was part of an access trail that was built and maintained by the BLM and is also an important part of a primitive access road to an estimated 33,000 acres of BLM managed surface area.

Disposal will include the removal of the outlet pipe structure, removal of a portion of the embankment, as well as providing a safe and stable access route across Lone Tree Creek. The project will also improve the stream and watershed functionality of Lone Tree Creek by returning the channel to its original shape to produce a more normal flow regime. Disposal of Gutshot Dam would produce a cost savings by eliminating the cost of total reconstruction of this dam.

**Tomahawk Detention Dam Rehabilitation (GAOA):** Tomahawk Detention Dam is a hazard class dam in need of rehabilitation to mitigate safety deficiencies. The primary spillway outlet works is failing and in danger of washing out. The embankment is also an integral part of Beaver Branch Road, that was build and is maintained by the BLM for access to an estimated 250,000 acres of BLM lands. Rehabilitation will include removal and replacement of the outlet pipe structure, embankment repairs, and riprap placement for erosion control.

**Triple Crossing Access Road Culvert Replacement (GAOA):** The T.C. Access Road, which is located in southern Valley County, is classified as a collector road. Corrosive soils have damaged and weakened many of the corrugated metal pipe (CMP) culverts to the point of failure which causes a serious hazard to the traveling public. T. C. Access Road provides an important access route to an estimated 250,000 acres of BLM managed surface area. Without proper maintenance, required surveillance and access by BLM personnel would be extremely difficult. This project would consist of replacing 840 lineal feet of CMP culverts with 840 lineal feet of High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) culverts at 21 sites between the Willow Creek Road intersection and the Beaver Branch Road intersection that will not be susceptible to corrosion. This constitutes approximately 20% of the total culverts in this section of road.

## **HAVRE FIELD OFFICE**

**BR-43 Dam Emergency Response/Repair.** During April 2023, snowmelt and runoff poured into the reservoir of the Havre Field Office's BR-43 dam, filling it to maximum capacity. That high water level revealed a weakened area of the earthen-filled dam structure and water was rapidly seeping and piping through the dam, posing a high risk of evolving into a full-on dam breach. Havre Field Office employees immediately devised a plan to lower the water level of the reservoir to a safe elevation, relieving pressure from the dam and lessening the probability of failure. Havre staff worked with the BLM grazing permittee for the allotment, Frank Baldik, to keep a large water pump fueled up and pumping water out of the reservoir and down the spillway around the clock in a manner that ultimately bought the BLM time to employ a more permanent solution. Once the water level was lowered, Engineering Equipment Operator Scott Meneely from the Malta Field Office excavated a cut-off trench – 120-feet-long by 2-feet-wide and 4-feet deep – then filled and recompact the trench, effectively repairing the piping that had occurred. The fix was temporary, but thorough enough that Havre Engineer Ken Koncilya was confident catastrophic failure was no longer a risk. Permanent repairs were implemented via construction contract in October 2023. Quick actions, problem solving, teamwork and willingness to get things done by the Havre Field Office Staff, Scott Meneely and Frank Baldik turned this potential critical safety situation into a collaborative success story, earning the response team a 2023 State Director's Award for Safety.

**Marias River Recreation Site Improvements (BIL).** The Sullivan Bridge Recreation area will receive a new vault toilet, picnic tables and fire rings as part of a Resilient Recreation project for locations on the Marias River and Sweetgrass Hills. In addition, the earthen boat launch area will be rebuilt after flooding damage and gravel will be placed on roadways. This recreation area is located where the confluence of the Two Medicine River and Cut Bank Creek form the Marias River and is a popular day-use area and boat launch for non-motorized watercraft. Groundbreaking on this project is slated to occur during late-FY2024.

**Sweetgrass Hills Recreation Site Improvements (BIL).** The Sweet Grass Hills Recreation Site will receive a new vault toilet in the fall of 2024 as part of the initial development of this area. The location currently receives a good deal of dispersed primitive camping for those looking to access the sole public-access trail on East Butte of the Sweetgrass Hills. Design and NEPA for the development of this location was completed back in 2013 but funding was not



available. Popular with hunters, hikers and other recreationists this small camping area will provide approximately 8 campsites when complete. While consultation with local Tribes was also completed in 2013, the BLM has also reinitiated conversations about this site with interested Tribes. There will likely be interpretive signage incorporated into future development to educate the public on the cultural importance of this area to indigenous populations.

**BR-45 Dam Repair (GAOA).** The BR-45 Dam is a low-hazard, hazard class dam constructed in 1937 that has partially failed. The dam currently does not have a principal spillway. All the water is flowing through the earthen auxiliary spillway, which is severely eroding and subject to impending failure. Estimated reconstruction cost of the BR-45 Dam is \$912,000, provided by the GAOA. Ground-breaking on this project is slated to occur during summer 2025.

## **LEWISTOWN FIELD OFFICE**

**South Fork Dry Blood Creek Detention Dam Rehabilitation (GAOA).** Rehabilitation of this low-hazard dam in Petroleum County, Montana, was completed in November 2023. A \$1.45 million contract to perform the work was awarded Sept. 15, 2022, to Youderian Construction Inc., a registered small business based in Stanford, Montana. The project included dewatering the reservoir and construction area, excavating a portion of the existing dam embankment and foundation to remove the failing primary spillway, constructing the new primary spillway, replacing and compacting the foundation and embankment materials, constructing a new enlarged auxiliary spillway and restoring the road surface across the dam. Contractors also reclaimed all disturbed areas. Original construction of this 1,010-foot-long, 36-foot-high, earthen-filled gravity dam was completed in 1963 for the primary purpose of flood-risk reduction in the Musselshell River Basin. The reservoir created by this dam has a maximum surface area of about 16.5 acres and a storage capacity of 108 acre-feet. The reservoir also provides valuable recreation opportunities and habitat for a variety of wildlife, including big game, waterfowl, upland birds and fish.

**Elk Creek Outcome Based Grazing Authorization (OBGA) status/accomplishments.** The purpose of OBGA is to give greater flexibility to the livestock operators and the BLM to adjust grazing use for changing conditions to achieve specific vegetative, habitat and livestock operation sustainability objectives. In March 2018, the BLM national office selected the Lewistown Field Office's (LFO) Elk Creek project submission as one of the demonstration projects for this initiative. The Elk Creek OBGA project includes two individual grazing permittee's and two grazing authorizations that authorize 2,279 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of livestock grazing in four allotments in Petroleum County. BLM signed the final grazing decisions on June 3, 2022, and issued the flexible authorizations Sept. 15, 2022. The flexible authorizations allow permittees the opportunity to modify the season-of-use, pasture rotations and livestock numbers annually based on local environmental factors. The flexible use is contingent upon monitoring, which is completed by both BLM and permittees. Results from monitoring efforts are shared and discussed during the annual meeting, which also serves as a form of monitoring. In addition to flexible grazing use, range improvement projects including electrical fence construction, fence modification, livestock water pipeline installation, and mesic restoration projects are being implemented. To date, approximately 4 miles of fence have been modified and mesic restoration projects have been installed in 1/2 mile of stream. Electric fence construction, additional fence modification and stream restoration work are planned this year.

## **UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT**

**Left Coulee Access (Bullwhacker area).** The BLM signed a decision on April 16 for the Left Coulee Access EA authorizing legal motorized and mechanized public access in the Bullwhacker area of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. In 2023, the Square Butte Grazing Association and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks finalized a Public Access Land Agreement (PALA) through a private parcel along Cow Creek. In 2009 the only existing access road to this network, the Bullwhacker Road, was closed to the public through a court decision which determined that road through the Anchor Ranch is private. The BLM evaluated the proposed action and alternatives for opening a 0.6-mile road connecting the now publicly accessible road on private property with 51 miles of existing BLM roads in the Bullwhacker area. More than 150 individuals and organizations provided public comments on the Left Coulee access proposal. Those comments were used to strengthen the analysis leading to the decision to seasonally open the Left Coulee route. Learn more -- <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2030427/510>.

**James Kipp Recreation Area Hazard Tree Removal (GAOA).** During August 2023, Great American Outdoors Act-funded work helped address dead cottonwood trees and dead limbs that posed a safety risk to visitors at the James Kipp Recreation Area. Arborists trimmed more than 300 trees and felled 41 trees. Only trees with a potential to fall onto areas of maintained infrastructure were removed to maximize the availability of trees for wildlife habitat. Timing of the work also ensured young birds had fledged and left their nests. In August 2022, the BLM awarded a \$125,375 contract to Advanced Tree Service LLC, a small business based in Saint Anthony, Idaho, to perform the work at James Kipp Recreation Area. The James Kipp Recreation Area is located about 60 miles north of Lewistown, situated within a grove of cottonwood trees along the Upper Missouri River. It features a concrete boat launch, 34 camping sites for recreational vehicles/camper trailers, two tent camping areas, two day-use picnic areas, and eight concrete vault toilets. Yearly overnight visitation to the campground averages 5,500 people, with an additional average of 40,000 day-use visitors to the recreation area.

**Coal Banks Landing Recreation Area Boat Ramp Construction.** Plans to construct a new boat ramp at Coal Banks Landing will replace the existing launch site. Over the last 30 years, an attached bar upriver from the ramp has continued to grow, resulting in reduced flows and increased sediment deposition within the channel beyond the ramp. Currently, motorized boats are highly impacted once river flows fall below 7,500 cubic feet per second, which generally occurs in early summer. Because of the shallowing channel resulting in reduced motorized access at the launch site, motorboat operators have begun to drive to the nearby Virgelle Ferry, taking it to the opposite side of the river to launch motorized boats. Many of these recreationalists continue to use Coal Banks Landing for camping, parking trailers and trip preparation. The new boat ramp will be located at the upriver end of the campground and will have room for both jet boat and canoe launching. Construction is planned to begin during mid-September 2024.

**Monument Science Plan.** BLM Manual 6100 *National Landscape Conservation System Management* (section 1.6.F) identifies that the BLM will develop science strategies (plans) for NLCS units encompassing values of substantial scientific interest and will ensure that these strategies are compatible with relevant BLM science strategies. Science strategies will be developed for all National Monuments. This science plan along with the UMRBNM Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP) will be used as the basis for conducting science in the Monument. Scientific efforts within the Monument should support the conservation, protection, and restoration of the Objects identified in the designating language. We are also incorporating the research of a Rapid Climate Assessment summer graduate research assistant who is conducting a high-level climate vulnerability assessment for biological, geological, and historical objects of interest within the Monument. The Science Plan should be finalized by the end of 2024.

## **NCMD DIVISION OF OIL & GAS**

**Idled and Orphaned Wells.** Enforcement through current lessees and operating rights holders completed for eight orphaned wells during FY2023.

**Increased Engagement w/Tribes.** Assisting two Tribes with data requests regarding grants through BIA to fund the plugging of orphaned wells with tribal mineral ownership. Assisting another Tribe with an application for orphaned well funding.

## **NCMD FIRE MANAGEMENT OFFICE**

**Woodhawk Wildland Fire Module established.** The Woodhawk Wildland Fire Module (WFM) is a new addition to the district's fuels-management program. The WFM will not only help the district with the planning and implementation of fuels treatments, but will also provide assistance across the BLM-Montana/Dakotas area, especially with prescribed fire implementation. The WFM is also expected to assist with wildland fire suppression efforts, both within the BLM-Montana/Dakotas three-state area and nationally, when requested. These priorities align with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and is a great example of advancing department priorities that will directly benefit public lands. Seasonal employees onboarded March 25. There is only one other WFM in the BLM.

**FY24 Fire Suppression Program.** Hiring is completed. Onboarding of summer seasonal staff occurred during the week of May 6.

**FY24 Fuels Program.** Two large-landscape prescribed fires were conducted in the Upper Missouri River National Monument. Antelope Creek was an interagency prescribed fire with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 14,500 acres between the two agencies (3,000 acres of BLM involved). The Two Calf prescribed fire was 2,500 acres and partially BIL-funded. The total prescribed fire target for the year is 5,909 acres. Additionally, there are 16,000 acres of BIL-funded cultural inventories and 5,270 acres of mechanical treatments planned. There are 35 acres of Community Assistance program support planned.

**FY24 Mitigation Education Program.** Nine educational events were planned for this year at locations throughout the district. The most highly attended event was NCMD's Wildfire Education Day, held on April 30 in Lewistown, Montana, which also celebrated Smokey Bear's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**FY24 Rural Fire Readiness Program.** NCMD's fire program donated a Type 6 fire engine to the Petroleum County Fire District on Aug. 12 through the Rural Fire Readiness Program. Learn more -- <https://www.facebook.com/BLMMontana/posts/pfbid0w18Ta3ACqLttgKiVvHyGTixgQR2tRCAA26q8JhPyhyLZLWQAG2ipHLPNeDCfFPbl>. NCMD also donated an engine to Blaine County on April 18. Learn more -- <https://www.krtv.com/news/montana-and-regional-news/a-new-truck-for-the-blaine-county-rural-fire-department>.

**-BLM-**

*Updated Sept. 9, 2024*





U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Eastern Montana-Dakotas District

## Recent & Upcoming Significant Land Management Planning Activities & Projects

as of September 2024

### MILES CITY FIELD OFFICE

**Western Organization of Resource Councils - 2.** The 2015 MCFO ROD/Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) (BLM 2015a) was challenged by the Western Organization of Resource Councils in the US District Court of Montana in March 2016. The court issued an order on March 26, 2018, finding that the BLM violated NEPA in the Final EIS and required the BLM to complete a new coal screening and remedial NEPA analysis by November 29, 2019. Thereafter, the BLM signed the ROD on November 25, 2019.

As a result of the challenge by Western Organization of Resource Councils and others to the 2019 ROD/Approved RMPA, the District Court for the District of Montana issued an order on August 3, 2022 (the Order). Pursuant to the Order, the court found that the BLM violated NEPA; the court ordered the BLM to complete a new coal screening and remedial NEPA analysis that considers no-leasing and limited coal leasing alternatives and discloses the public health impacts from the planning area. The BLM published a notice of availability for the Draft SEIS/Potential RMPA in the Federal Register on May 5, 2023, which initiated a 90-day comment period.

*Update: On May 17, 2024, the BLM Montana/Dakotas State Office published a Notice of Availability (NOA) on the Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment and Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the 2015 Miles City Field Office Approved RMP. The publication of the NOA initiated the 30-day protest period and 60-day governor's consistency review. Protest of the Proposed RMP constitutes the final opportunity for administrative review of the proposed land use planning decisions prior to the BLM adopting an approved RMP. A protest resolution report will be completed and published on the BLM website at <https://www.blm.gov/programs/planning-and-nepa/public-participation/protest-resolution-reports>. The BLM Montana/Dakotas State Director received and responded to the governor's consistency letter.*

**North Plains Connector.** North Plains Connector, LLC (North Plains, a subsidiary of Grid United LLC) has submitted a right-of-way application to Miles City Field Office for a 525-KV DC transmission line to connect the eastern and western power grids. The application was found deficient, and a new application is expected in October of 2024 with a NOI being released sometime around November of 2024. The Department of Energy, Grid Deployment Office will be Lead Agency for the NEPA process and BLM will be a Cooperating Agency. A cooperating agency agreement has been signed between BLM and DOE.

The transmission line will begin in Colstrip, Montana and travel east into North Dakota where it will diverge into two separate lines with one 345-KV AC transmission line connecting to Center, North Dakota and another 345-KV AC transmission line to Solen, North Dakota. No additional connections or spurs are planned, as this line is solely intended to connect two separate power grids for improved reliability, redundancy, and emergency support. The total route is projected to be around 400 miles in length with around 9-miles being on BLM-managed lands in the Miles City Field Office. The line will cross multiple jurisdictions: BLM, U.S. Forest Service, USDA Agricultural Research Station, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers jurisdictional waters, Montana State Trust Lands, North Dakota State Trust Lands, and private lands. The project will be analyzed under an Environmental Impact Statement.

## **BILLINGS FIELD OFFICE**

### **Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Amendment to the Billings RMP and Horse Management Area Plan**

**(HMAP).** The BiFO hasn't gathered Wild Horses from the Pryor Mountain HMA since 2015 resulting in degradation of the range conditions from prolonged overpopulation. This EA proposes to Amend the RMP and the HMAP establishing the framework for management of wild horses on the range for the next 10 years which will promote the recovery of range conditions.

The purpose of an HMAP is to establish an appropriate management level (AML - which is the number of adult horses within an HMA) with the overall goal being to manage for healthy wild horses within healthy productive habitats or rangelands. The Pryor Mountain HMA includes lands managed by BLM, USFS, and NPS with BLM being the agency primarily responsible for horse management. While the HMA includes multiple jurisdictions the management of the Wild Horses is primarily the responsibility of the BLM. The USFS will issue a separate decision from the BLM prepared EA with their own objection process.

The current EA is being prepared to establish a new HMAP as well as amend the BiFO RMP to manage for desirable levels of genetic diversity (citing handbook direction and defining what that is). A preliminary EA was posted for public comment in March of 2023 and BiFO is currently working through the 13,500+ comments received and making needed changes to the document. Preparation of this EA has been prolonged due to vacancies in key positions, both in BiFO and the State Office. The HMA has also been included in the Grizzly Bear occupied habitat as of summer 2023 requiring BiFO to prepare a Biological Assessment under the Endangered Species Act for which BiFO received concurrence from the Fish and Wildlife Service in April of 2024.

This EA will need to meet the requirements for both BLM and USFS administrative remedy processes as well as the timeline requirements for RMP amendments to include Governor's consistency review in both Montana and Wyoming. The anticipated completion date for this project is January 2025.

## **NORTH DAKOTA FIELD OFFICE**

**North Dakota Field Office Resource Management Plan.** The BLM released its proposed resource management plan and final environmental impact statement for the North Dakota Field Office.

Under the final EIS, BLM identifies Alternative D as the proposed plan. BLM will close areas to oil and gas leasing if they have low development potential or are state-designated drinking water source protection areas. The proposed plan also allows federal coal to be leased within 4 miles of existing coal mine permit boundaries. In addition, Alternative D updates management strategies for potential National Scenic River sections, visual resource management, and land tenure issues and identifies one special recreation management area, two backcountry conservation areas, and one area of critical environmental concern.

During the plan's development, BLM worked closely with local communities, energy producers, and other stakeholders to determine areas appropriate for future development, including protections for private property owners near BLM lands. During the 90-day comment period on the draft plan, which included a 30-day extension granted at the request of the Governor's office, BLM received 535 public comments, which informed the selection of the proposed plan.

A [Notice of Availability](#) was published in the *Federal Register* on August 9<sup>th</sup>, initiating a 30-day protest period, which closes September 9<sup>th</sup>. For information on how to submit a protest and to view the documents for the Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement, please visit the [BLM National NEPA Register](#) at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/1505069/510>.

**-BLM-**

*Updated Sept. 6, 2024*



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Malta Field Office

Recreation Business Plan and Fee Proposal

**Update for the Missouri Basin  
Resource Advisory Council  
September 11, 2024**





# Proposal

NCMD-Malta Field Office is seeking the MBRAC's vote for "Recommendation" of increasing overnight fees at Camp Creek and Montana Gulch Campgrounds to levels consistent with other camping areas in the region and increasing fees for Buffington Day Use Area and the Zortman Ranger Station.



# Fee Proposals



Camp Creek: Increase fees from \$10/night to \$20/night.



Montana Gulch: Increase fees from \$8/night to \$ 16/night.



Buff's Day Use: Increase fees for a picnic shelter from \$30/day to \$50/day and from \$50/day to \$100/day for the entire site.



Zortman Historic Ranger Station Cabin: Increase fees from \$75/night to \$100/night (once renovations are complete).





# Fee Comparisons

Ownership	Recreation Site	Current Fees	Notes	Amenities
BLM	James Kipp Recreation Area	\$12/night		Fire rings, picnic tables, vault toilets.
APR	Antelope Creek	Cabin \$71/night Tent \$19/night  RV \$38/night		Electricity, water, showers, Wi-Fi, dumping station.
USFS	Crystal Lake	RV/tent \$20/night		Fire rings, picnic tables, potable water.
Private	Buckhorn Cabins	RV \$45/night RV \$400/month Cabin \$95 Cabin \$105 w/kitchen	-extra \$45/person	Full Hookups
Corps of Engineers	West End Tent and Trailer Campground (Fort Peck)	Tent \$15/night RV \$25/night		Fire rings, picnic tables, vault toilets.
Corps of Engineers	Downstream (Fort Peck)	Tent \$15/night  RV \$30/night		Picnic tables and shelters, fire rings. Electricity
Hill County	Beaver Creek Park	RV/tent \$15/day  Larger group \$140.40/day		Picnic table, fire ring, garbage, toilet. (similar to Buff's)
Private	Hell Creek Recreation Area	RV/tent \$35/night		Electric hookups, picnic table, fire ring, showers and flush toilets nearby.



# Justification

- Lack of funding for additional recreation staff has resulted in having to contract out cleaning, mowing, and maintenance of the fee sites.
- Contract costs for recreation maintenance is far outpacing revenue from RUP fees.

*Maintenance Contract Amount vs. RUP fees collected and percentages for 2014 vs. 2023.*

Maintenance Contract Year	Contract Amount	Collected RUP fees	Net difference	Percentage of contract covered by RUP fees
2014	\$ 13,900	\$ 4,904	(\$ 8,996)	35%
2023	\$ 19,728	\$ 5,705	(\$ 14,023)	29%
Increase	42%	\$ 801	\$ 5,027	



# Justification

- Nearly half of all users have “America the Beautiful” or other pass that entitles them to half price camping. Revenue from passes is not retained locally (unless the pass is purchased there), therefore fewer fees are collected and utilized locally to supplement flat or decreasing recreation budgets.





# Justification

*Recreation Use Permits (RUPs) and fees collected from **Camp Creek Campground** for the previous 10-year period (2014-2023) with visitor and payment information*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Visitors</i>	<i>Days</i>	<i>Use Days</i>	<i>RUPs</i>	<i>Avg. Days</i>	<i>Avg. in Group</i>	<i>Avg. fee per use day</i>	<i>Avg. fee per person</i>	<i>Avg. fee per Use Day</i>	<i>Total Fees Collected</i>
2014	642	625	1814	241	2.59	2.66	\$7.50	\$7.30	\$2.58	\$4,684.50
2015	721	496	1673	231	2.15	3.12	\$8.95	\$6.16	\$2.65	\$4,440.71
2016	658	617	1596	254	2.43	2.59	\$8.43	\$7.90	\$3.26	\$5,201.00
2017	615	475	1370	212	2.24	2.90	\$8.74	\$6.75	\$3.03	\$4,149.50
2018	448	354	980	167	2.12	2.68	\$8.68	\$6.86	\$3.13	\$3,072.00
2019	527	430	1111	210	2.05	2.51	\$8.61	\$7.02	\$3.33	\$3,702.00
2020	1085	769	2398	353	2.18	3.07	\$8.89	\$6.30	\$2.85	\$6,838.50
2021	649	572	1655	237	2.41	2.74	\$8.22	\$7.24	\$2.84	\$4,699.00
2022	608	657	1635	249	2.64	2.44	\$7.82	\$8.45	\$3.14	\$5,140.00
2023	584	591	1382	253	2.34	2.31	\$7.73	\$7.82	\$3.31	\$4,569.00
<b>Average</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>1561</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>2.31</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>\$8.36</b>	<b>\$7.18</b>	<b>\$3.01</b>	<b>\$4,649.62</b>



# Justification

*Recreation Use Permits (RUPs) and fees collected from **Montana Gulch Campground** for the previous 10-year period (2014-2023) with visitor and payment information*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Visitors</i>	<i>Days</i>	<i>Use Days</i>	<i>RUPs</i>	<i>Avg. Days</i>	<i>Avg. in Group</i>	<i>Avg. fee per use day</i>	<i>Avg. fee per person</i>	<i>Avg. fee per Use Day</i>	<i>Total Fees Collected</i>
2014	43	30	80	16	1.88	2.69	\$7.33	\$5.12	\$2.75	\$220.00
2015	281	183	736	85	2.15	3.31	\$8.64	\$5.63	\$2.15	\$1,580.88
2016	290	230	835	88	2.61	3.30	\$7.11	\$5.64	\$1.96	\$1,635.47
2017	209	143	452	68	2.10	3.07	\$7.24	\$4.95	\$2.29	\$1,035.00
2018	165	132	371	58	2.28	2.84	\$9.55	\$7.64	\$3.40	\$1,260.00
2019	212	196	553	87	2.25	2.44	\$7.32	\$6.76	\$2.59	\$1,434.00
2020	350	247	789	121	2.04	2.89	\$7.54	\$5.32	\$2.36	\$1,862.25
2021	207	165	534	74	2.23	2.80	\$7.01	\$5.58	\$2.16	\$1,155.90
2022	282	206	779	78	2.64	3.62	\$8.64	\$6.31	\$2.28	\$1,780.00
2023	191	148	490	74	2.00	2.58	\$7.68	\$5.95	\$2.32	\$1,136.00
<b>Average</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>2.22</b>	<b>2.95</b>	<b>\$7.80</b>	<b>\$5.89</b>	<b>\$2.43</b>	<b>\$1,309.95</b>



# Justification

- Inflation, Covid 19 Pandemic, and other factors have rapidly increased costs and shipping of campground amenity items, supplies, services, wages, and other items.

*Cost comparison and percentage increase in 2017 vs. 2024*

Item	2017 Cost	2024 Cost	Percent Increase
Vault Toilet	\$ 18,000	\$ 28,000+	55%
Aluminum Picnic Table (8 foot)	\$ 786	\$ 1,500	90%
Recycled Picnic Table (8 foot)	\$ 584	\$ 1,370	134%
Campfire Ring	\$ 156	\$ 344	120%
Pumping a Vault Toilet	\$ 200	\$ 625	212%
Gallon of gasoline	\$ 2.41	\$ 3.50	45%
GS-04 hourly salary	\$ 14.07	\$ 16.95	20%



# How is the MBRAC Involved?

- The 2004 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act directs Department of the Interior to “provide the public with opportunities to participate in the development of or changing of a recreation fee” and requires the consideration of input from an appropriate resource advisory committee (*References: 16 U.S.C. § 6802 & 6803*).
- The Missouri Basin RAC’s Charter also addresses the RAC’s role to make recommendations to the BLM when we propose to establish, eliminate or expand recreation fees. You can read more about that under the charter’s “Description of Duties” section.
- Ultimately, we need your input and collective recommendation (vote).



# Process

- Sept. 11 (Today) – Malta Field Office briefs the MBRAC on its proposal; fields questions.
- Sept. 18 – Post draft Business Plan to ePlanning and send news release to media outlets announcing 30-day comment period.
- Oct. 18 – Review public comments, summarize and submit to State Director with proposed Business Plan for review and approval.
- January MBRAC meeting (TBD) – MFO briefs the MBRAC on public input received, fields any questions and requests a formal recommendation (vote).



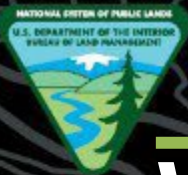


U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Questions or Comments?







U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Western Solar Plan

Utility-Scale Solar Energy Development Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

## Update for the Missouri Basin Resource Advisory Council

September 11, 2024





# CONTENT

- Key milestones leading to release of Final PEIS on August 29, and ROD NOA on December 20, 2024
- Key changes between Draft PEIS-Preferred Alternative (Alt 3) and Final PEIS-Proposed Plan
- Proposed Plan land allocation acreages
- Key process elements





# KEY MILESTONES

Publish NOA for Final PEIS; <i>response to comments on ePlanning</i>	August 29
30-day Protest Period	September
60-day Governors' Consistency Review	Ends October 25th
Publish NOA for ROD/RMP Amendments	Mid-December



# KEY CHANGES – DRAFT TO FINAL PEIS

Design features - 3 categories

Transmission proximity

Disturbed lands

T&E habitat exclusions

Big game

SRMAs

Pending applications (None in Montana)



## Draft:

- Organized by project stage and resource
  - General
  - Siting/Construction
  - Operation/Maintenance
  - Decommissioning
- Repetition of requirements for each project stage
- Prescriptive, primarily one size fits all

## Final PEIS:

- Organized by category and resource
  - Category 1:** mandatory, plan-wide
  - Category 2:** mandatory, resource-specific (required only if the resource is present)
  - Category 3:** Project Guidance
- Appendix B
- Outcome-based
- Designed for site flexibility



# TRANSMISSION PROXIMITY

## Draft:

- 10 miles from transmission lines and existing corridors [Preferred Alternative, Alternative 3]
- 100vk lines and larger

## Final PEIS:

- 15 miles from transmission lines and existing corridors
- 69kv lines and larger
- No distance limit from transmission for disturbed lands



## Draft:

- All 11-states treated the same
- USGS Landscape Intactness model
- 40% departure of herbaceous vegetation cover from naturally occurring condition using the USGS Rangeland Condition Monitoring Assessment Projection model (RCMAP)

## Final PEIS:

- Difference between arid and non-arid regions
- **Arid ecoregion:** USGS 2017 Landscape Intactness model only
- **Non-arid areas** (*sagebrush biome and/or not arid*):
  - USGS Landscape Intactness model
  - Five data components from the USGS Rangeland Condition Monitoring Assessment Projection model
    - Highest departure percentage 20%
- Requires field verification at project-scale



## Draft:

### **Excluded:**

- Designated and proposed critical habitat for species under USFWS jurisdiction (same as 2012 WSP)
- All known occupied habitat for ESA-listed species

## Final PEIS:

### **Excluded:**

- Designated and proposed critical habitat for species under USFWS jurisdiction
- Designated and proposed critical habitat for species under NMFS jurisdiction (anadromous salmonids)
- Mapped areas for 40 specified ESA-listed species (in addition to critical habitat)
- Design feature to avoid impacts; impacts no greater than minor, where not excluded
  - Category 2 – Mandatory Resource Specific



## Draft:

- RMP exclusions
- Areas of Special Consideration

## Final PEIS:

- RMP Exclusions
- **Excluded:**
  - “High-use” portions of migration corridors (*mapped*)
  - Crucial/severe winter range (*unmapped in FPEIS; to be mapped in ROD*)
  - Migration pinch-points/bottlenecks
  - Parturition areas
  - Stop-over areas
- **Avoidance Land Allocation** – Non-high use portions of migration corridors
- Dynamic allocations, can be updated based on new information
- Design feature to maintain functionality, where not excluded
  - Category 2 – Mandatory Resource Specific





## Draft:

- SRMAs in all 11-states are excluded

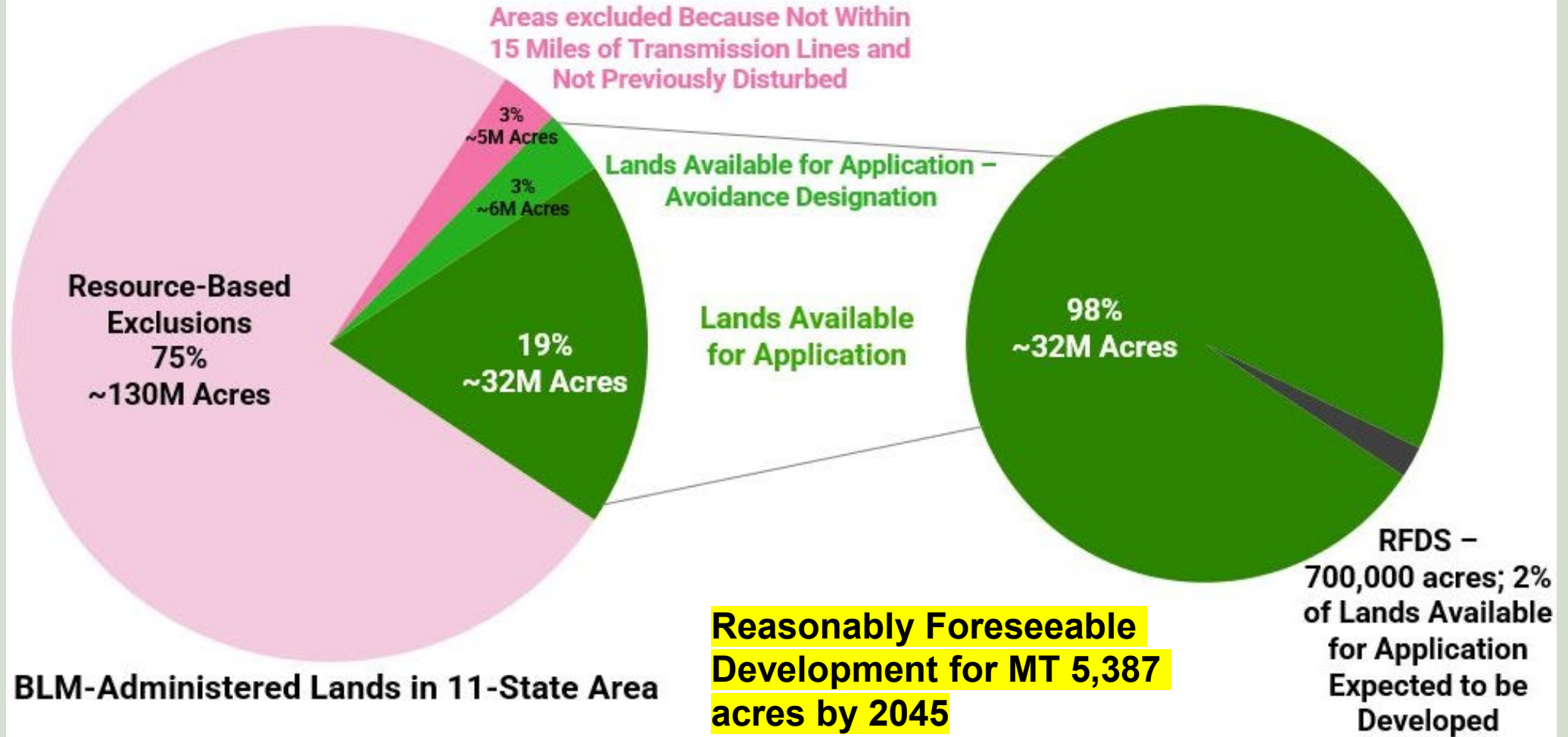
## Final PEIS:

- All SRMAs are **open** in:
  - ID, MT, NV, OR, WA, and WY
  - UT - Box Elder, Pony Express, House Range, and Warm Springs planning areas
- All SRMAs are **excluded** in:
  - AZ, CA, CO, and NM
  - UT - except Box Elder, Pony Express, House Range, and Warm Springs planning areas





# PROPOSED PLAN – BY THE NUMBERS





# PROPOSED PLAN - BY THE NUMBERS, cont

Planning Area State	BLM Planning Area	Lands Available for Application			Exclusion Areas		
		General	Designated Avoidance Lands	Total Lands Available for Application	Resource-Based	Additional Areas Not Meeting Transmission Proximity and Disturbed- Lands Criteria	Total Exclusion Areas
Montana	8,042,023	572,479	2,114	574,593	7,406,436	60,995	7,467,430



# Questions and Discussion

9/9/2024





U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape







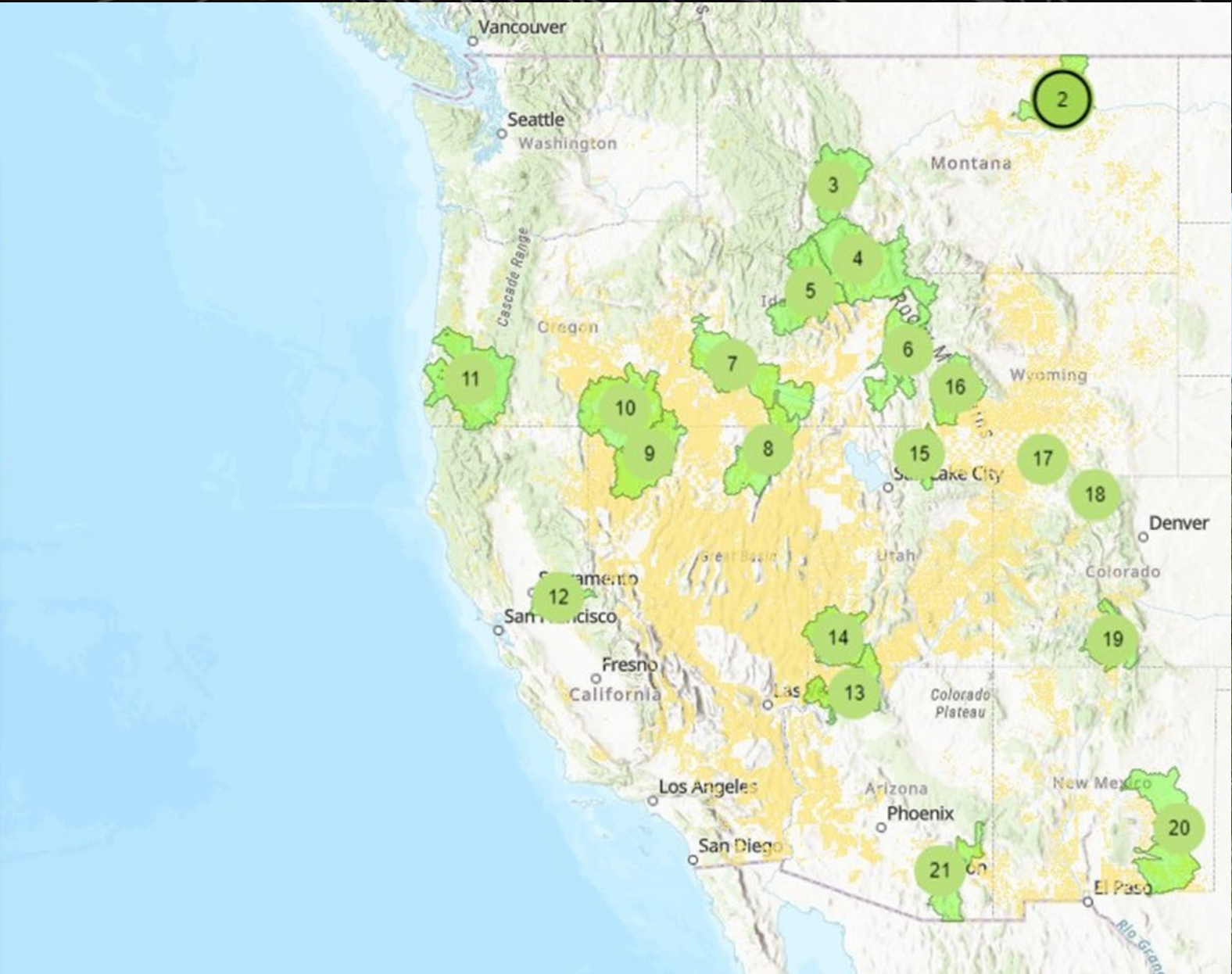
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

2



## MONTANA | The Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor, North Central Montana

Some of the largest intact grasslands left in  
North America







# Overview

- 3-million acres  
1.5 million BLM acres
- Malta & Glasgow Field Offices  
(Valley & Phillips counties)
- Some of the largest intact  
grasslands remaining in North  
America
  - Grassland birds
  - Sage-grouse
  - Pronghorn, deer and elk

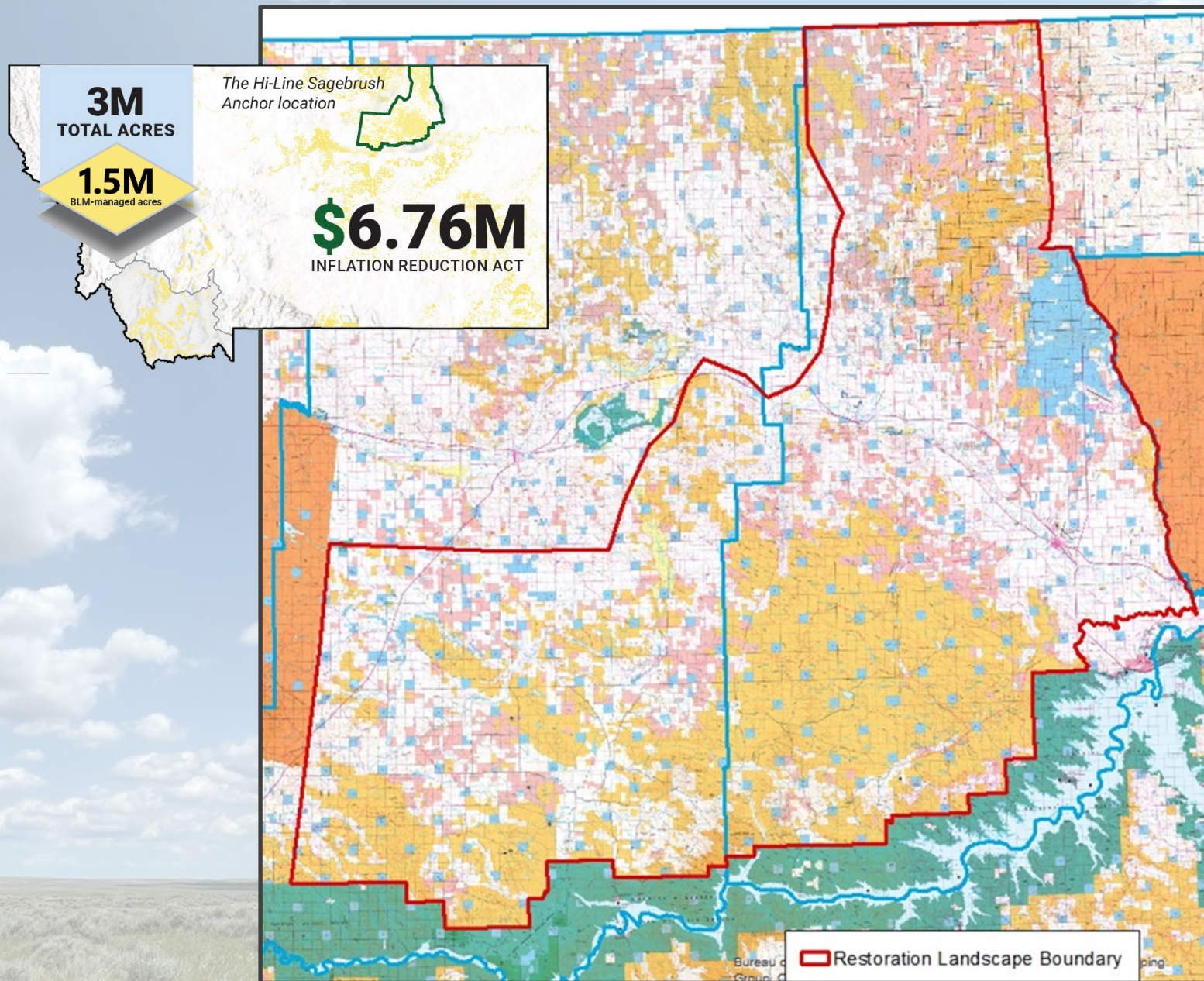




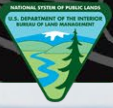


# Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor

North Central Montana







# Investment

- **\$6.76-million** invested through IRA
- **\$2-million** invested through BIL
- **5:1 partner match**





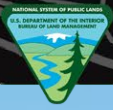


# Landscape Benefits

- More riparian & mesic habitat
- Increased native plant species
- Improved wildlife movement
- Better sage-grouse habitat
- Improved grazing management







# Benefits to communities

- Increased forage production for wildlife and livestock
- Enhanced recreation opportunities, such as hunting and bird watching
- Project-related jobs
- Drought resilience
- Invasive species reduction







# Projects



## Restoration Features



Create Climate Resilience



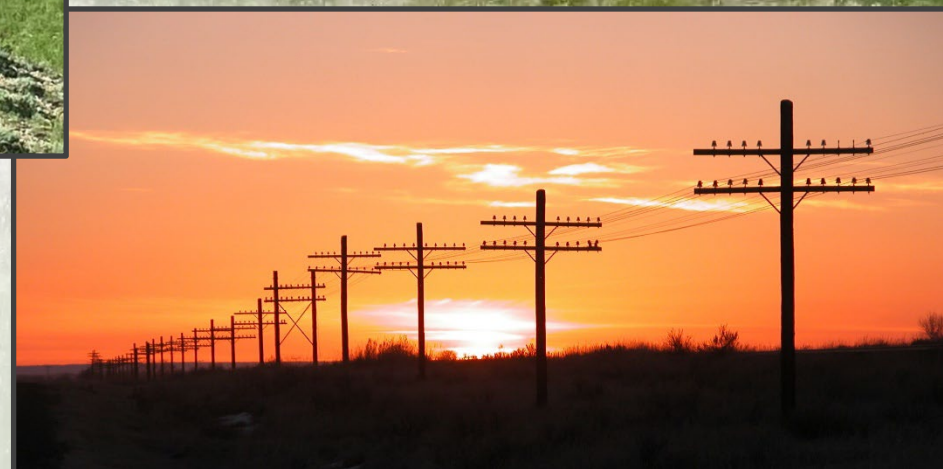
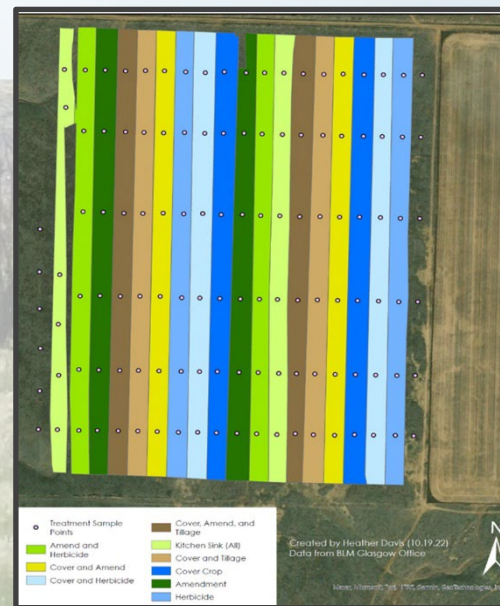
Protect native plants & remove invasive species



Restore Riparian/Wetland



Conduct Fire/Fuels Treatments







# Projects



## Restoration Features



Create Climate Resilience



Protect native plants & remove invasive species



Restore Riparian/Wetland



Conduct Fire/Fuels Treatments

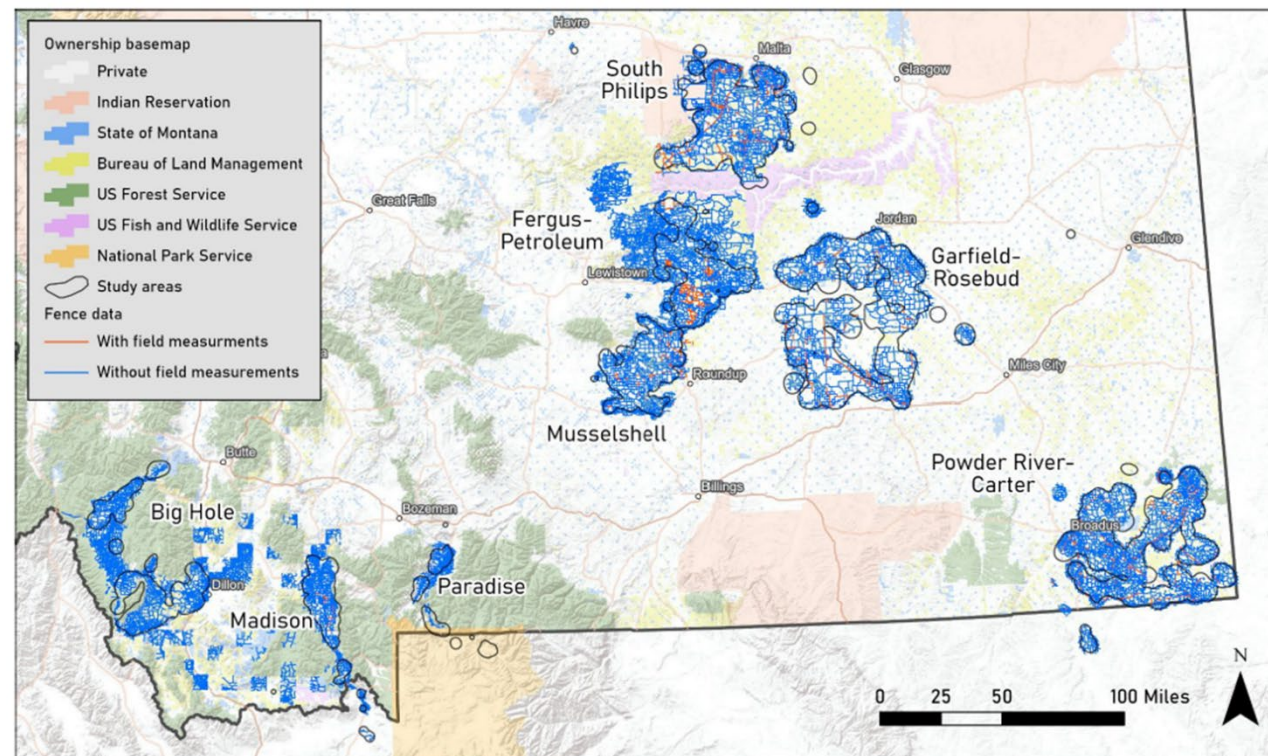


Figure 54. Fence spatial data collected as part of the Montana Pronghorn Movement and Population Ecology Project. Red and blue lines represent mapped fences with and without fence characteristics measured in the field, respectively. Black-bordered polygons represent the annual range of collared pronghorn in each study area.





# Progress

## Personnel

RSA Restoration Coordinator – Grace Hershberg

Project Manager – Matt Comer

PF Coordinating Biologist – Kelsey Stritmatter (9/30 start)

Realty Specialist – Selection expected any day

Wildlife Biologist – Announcement closes 9/19

Hydrologist – Announcement closes 9/23

Civil Engineer – Announcement upcoming





# Progress

## Agreements

Two Good Neighbor Authority Agreements in place with Montana DNRC

Three additional agreements expected by the Sept. 30

These agreements are good for 5 years to complete the work described in earlier slides.





# Progress

NEPA in progress for a large conifer treatment.

Decision expected spring 2025

20,000 acres treated for sage grouse

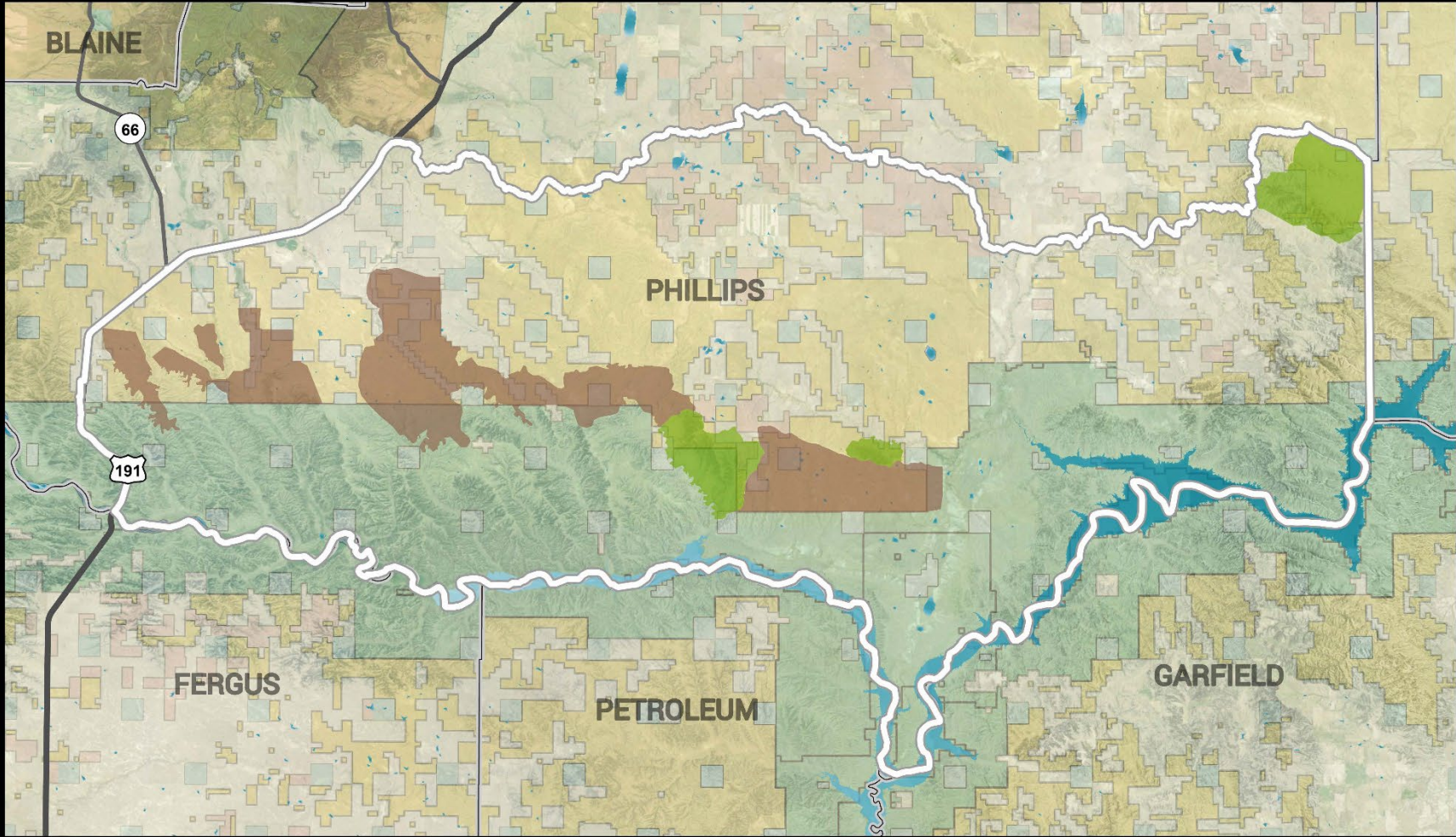
12,000 considered for prescribed burning



## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT Montana/Dakotas

### South Phillips Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project Area

Malta Field Office



Project Area	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Greater Sage Grouse Mechanical Treatment	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Prescribed Fire or Mechanical Treatment	Local Government
BLM	State Lands

The surface management status ("land ownership") should be used as a general guide only. Official land records, located at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other offices, should be checked for up-to-date information concerning any specific tract of land.







**Questions?**

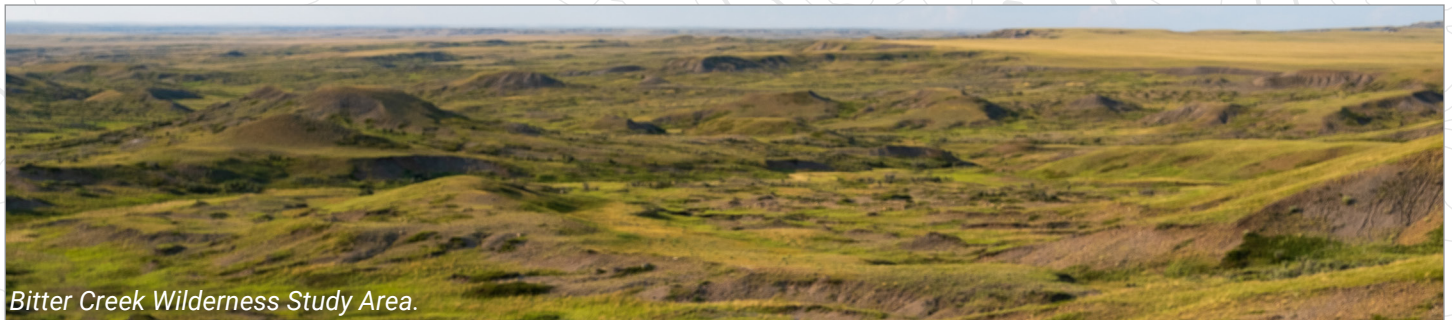




U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

## RESTORATION LANDSCAPE

# The Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor, North Central Montana



*Bitter Creek Wilderness Study Area.*

The Bureau of Land Management is infusing \$161 million for ecosystem restoration and resilience on the nation's public lands, as part of the Biden-Harris Administration's Investing in America agenda. The proposed work will focus on 21 "Restoration Landscapes" across 11 western states, restoring public lands, strengthening communities and local economies, advancing climate resilience and furthering our commitment to Tribal collaboration and partnership.

Some of the largest intact grasslands left in North America support numerous at-risk grassland bird species, hold priority habitat for greater sage-grouse and provide critical winter and migration habitat for elk, deer and pronghorn. The short grass prairie of north central Montana is an extremely popular destination for hunting, fishing and bird watching. As drought continues, restoration investments will improve mesic and woody draw habitats; increase native plant diversity and remove encroaching conifers and human-made features that threaten sage-grouse survival.

These restoration investments will advance the Department's broader sage brush strategy, by building ecological resilience in core habitats, reducing the threat of wildland fire and advancing the Sagebrush Conservation Design.

## Restoration Features



Create Climate Resilience



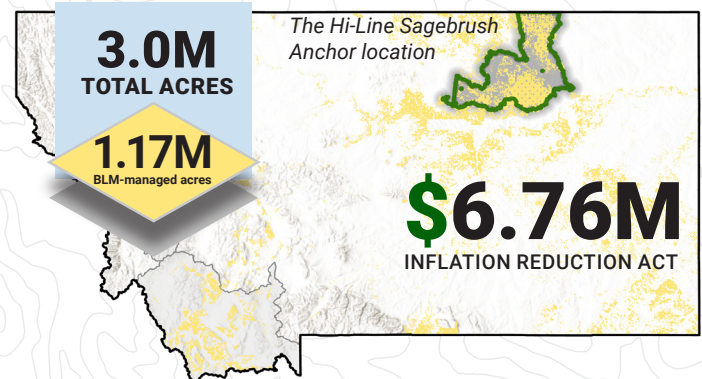
Protect native plants & remove invasive species



Restore Riparian/Wetland



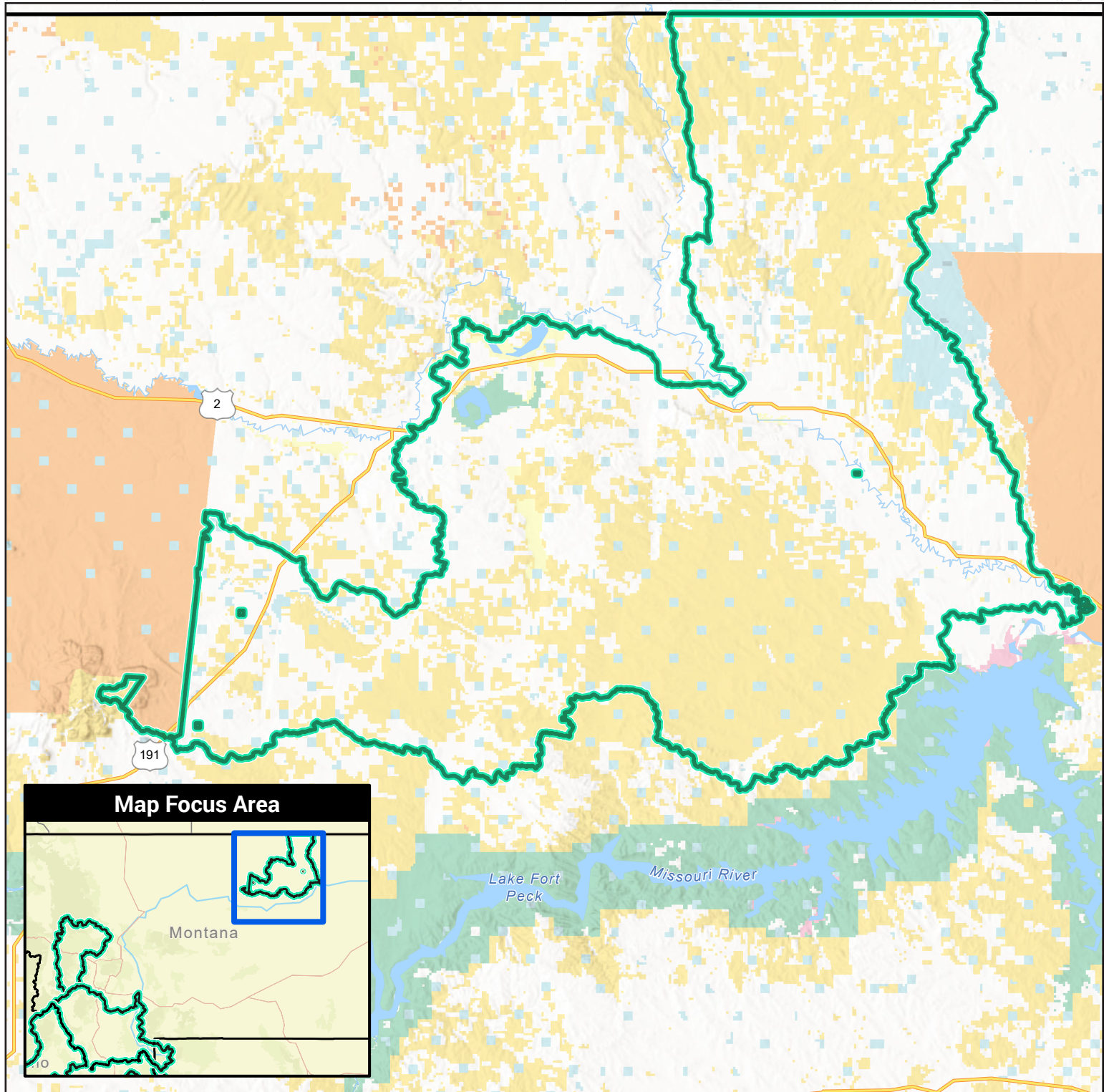
Conduct Fire/Fuels Treatments



*South Valley County, Montana.*

For more information, visit: [www.blm.gov/infrastructure](http://www.blm.gov/infrastructure)

# The Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor, North Central Montana Restoration Landscape



- |                             |                                 |                                |                    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Restoration Landscape       | Bureau of Land Management (BLM) | US Fish and Wildlife (USFW)    | State              |
| U.S. State Boundary         | National Park Service (NPS)     | Bureau of Reclamation (USBR)   | Local              |
| Department Of Defense (DOD) | US Forest Service (USFS)        | Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) | Private or Unknown |



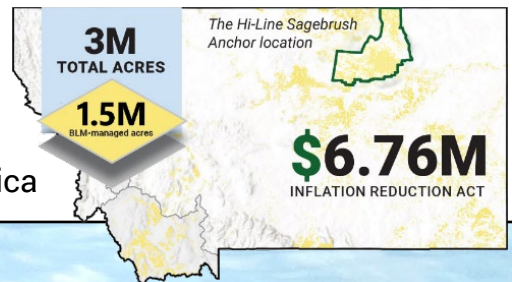


U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape Supplemental Information

## Overview

- Project area encompasses about 3-million acres (1.5 million BLM acres)
- Malta & Glasgow Field Offices (Phillips & Valley counties)
- Some of the largest intact grasslands remaining in North America



## Landscape Benefits

- Healthy riparian and mesic habitat
- Increased native plant species
- Improved wildlife movement
- Better sage-grouse habitat
- Improved grazing management

## Benefits to Communities

- Increased forage production for wildlife and livestock
- Project-related jobs
- Drought resilience
- Invasive species reduction
- Enhanced recreation opportunities, such as hunting and bird watching

## Restoration Features



Create Climate  
Resilience



Protect native plants  
& remove invasive  
species



Restore Riparian/  
Wetland



Conduct Fire/Fuels  
Treatments

## **Investment & Partnerships**

- \$6.76-million invested through the Inflation Reduction Act
- \$2 million invested through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
- 5:1 partner match
- Engaging more than a dozen local, regional and national-level potential partners

## **Proposed/Potential Projects**

- About 100 miles of fencing removal and/or modification to improve wildlife migration
- Restore 2,500 acres of crested wheatgrass to native plant communities
- Bury up to 20 miles of powerline to reduce raptor predation of sage grouse
- About 50 miles of mesic (riparian) habitat projects to improve drought resiliency
- Treat about 250 acres of conifer invaded lands to improve wildland fire resilience
- Assess grazing management practices and potential adjustments to timing, intensity, duration and new technology to improve upland and riparian areas

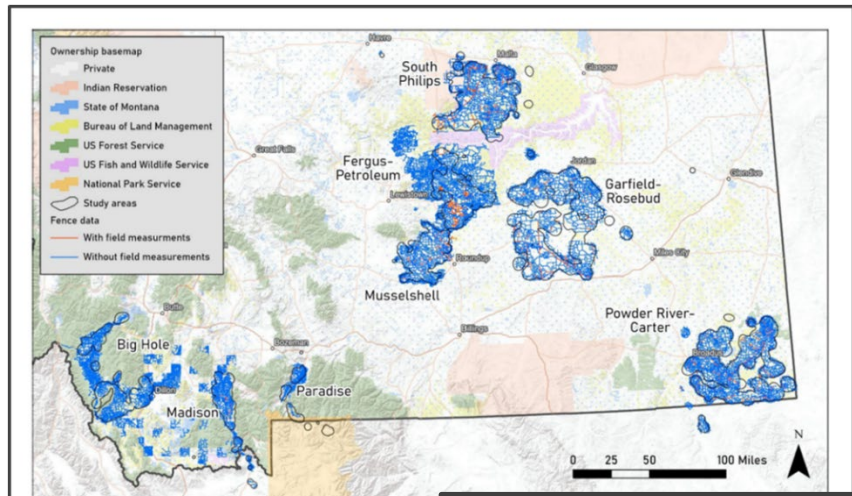
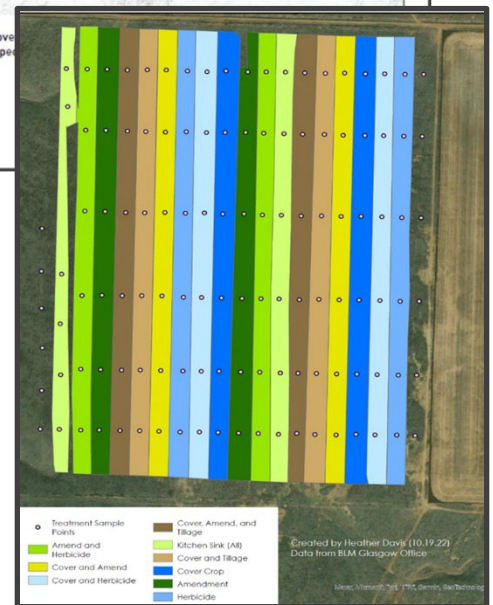


Figure 54. Fence spatial data collected as part of the Montana Pronghorn Movement Project. The map shows fences with and without fence characteristics measured in the field, respectively, in each study area.



For more information about the Hi-Line Sagebrush Anchor Restoration Landscape projects or potential partnership opportunities, contact Project Manager Matt Comer, [mcomer@blm.gov](mailto:mcomer@blm.gov), 406-538-1925.

**-BLM-**

Updated August 12, 2024





U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

## South Phillips Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction Project

The BLM Malta Field Office proposes to improve greater sage-grouse habitat conditions and reduce fuel loadings in southern Phillips County.

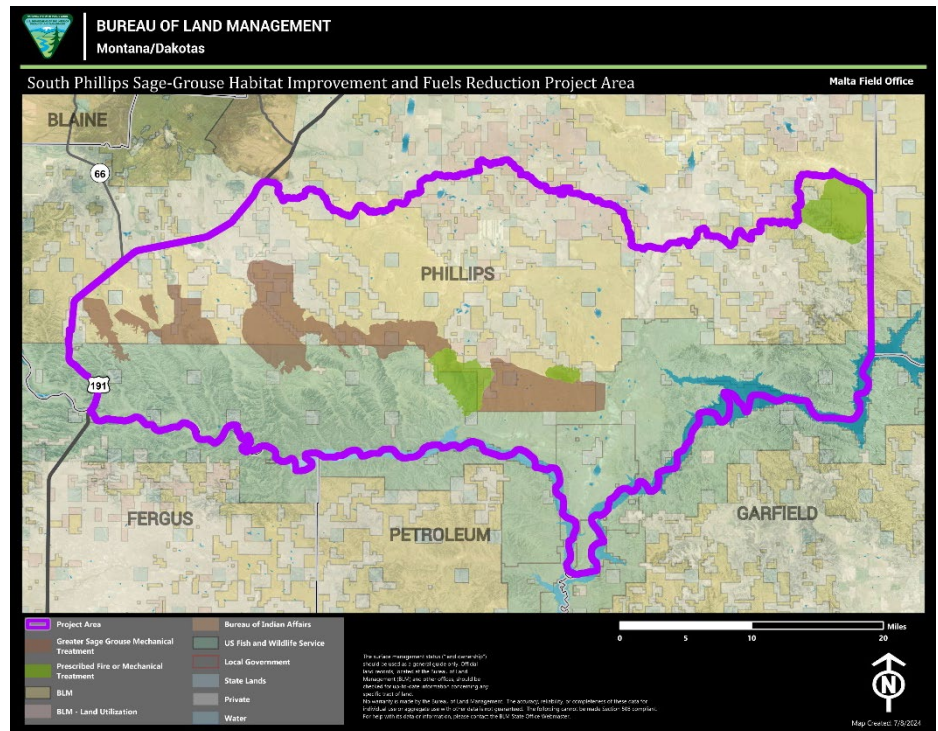
Mechanical, manual and prescribed fire treatments will be considered. Over ten years, mechanical and manual conifer removal treatments may occur on up to 20,000 acres to improve sage grouse habitat. Treatments include masticating, chipping, hand slashing, removing or hand piling juniper and Ponderosa pine in sage grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas.

Prescribed fire is being considered on up to 12,000 acres in limited areas with high conifer canopy closure to reduce conifer fuel loadings and improve forest health.

Sage grouse numbers across the west have declined for many different reasons.

Over the last century the amount of ponderosa pine and juniper (together referred to as conifers) has increased. As conifers expand in sagebrush habitats, habitat quality for sage grouse and other wildlife that depend on sagebrush is reduced. Removing conifer trees increases grasses and forbs, and helps increase the availability of open sagebrush areas which are critical for the birds' nesting, brood-rearing and wintering habitats. This habitat restoration aims to improve sage grouse survival and reproductive success, contributing to overall population resilience.

A more-detailed description of the proposed project and related maps are available on the BLM's ePlanning website - <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2033606/510> Planning is still in the early stages and will include an environment assessment to analyze impacts. A public scoping period is currently open through August.



-BLM-

updated Aug. 12, 2024