

Record of Decision

Florida Resource Management Plan

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Eastern States
Jackson District
Jackson, Mississippi

This document records the decisions reached by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for management of the BLM-administered lands and mineral ownership within the State of Florida. The decisions, which are summarized below, are more fully described in the Resource Management Plan (RMP) that follows.

Decision

The Florida Resource Management Plan (RMP) is approved. The plan is the same as the one set forth in the proposed RMP and final environmental impact statement (EIS) released in October 1994. Major decisions of the RMP are:

- The Federal mineral ownership (FMO) underlying State-owned lands is available for exchange to the State of Florida.

To facilitate the exchange, the Withlacoochee State Forest is temporarily closed to limestone sales.

- FMO is available for oil and gas leasing as follows:

175,149 acres subject to no surface occupancy stipulations.

123,011 acres subject to seasonal restrictions and/or controlled surface use stipulations.

25,476 acres subject solely to standard management.

- FMO is available for phosphate leasing as follows:

294,947 acres subject to development constraints.

91,885 acres subject solely to standard management.

- FMO is available for limestone sales as follows:

269,340 acres temporarily closed and/or subject to development constraints.

46,219 acres subject solely to standard management.

- The Walton Beach tracts will be managed for enhancement of dune system habitat. The tracts are available for a Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) lease, or for exchange to the State of Florida to accomplish Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) program objectives.
- The Lathrop Bayou and Peace River tracts will be managed to protect existing habitats.
- The Sugarloaf Key tracts, if not suitable for transfer to the Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge, are available for exchange to the State of Florida for accomplishment of CARL program objectives.
- Upon revocation of the Coast Guard withdrawal, the Jupiter Inlet tract is designated an

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to be managed for maintenance of a viable scrub plant community.

- Upon revocation of the Coast Guard withdrawal, the Cape San Blas tract is designated an ACEC, to be managed for protection of coastal dune and strand habitats.
- Upon revocation of the Coast Guard withdrawal, the Anclote Key tract is available for transfer to the State of Florida for management of the cultural resource values associated with the lighthouse structure.

Alternatives Considered

Four alternatives, including the no action alternative and the proposed RMP, were considered in the development of the plan.

Alternative 1 was the continuation of the current management situation, or the no action alternative. It allowed mineral development subject to Standard Management including constraints developed through case-by-case evaluation. It also allowed the transfer of surface tracts from Federal ownership subject to Standard Management and case-by-case analysis.

Alternative 2 emphasized constraints on mineral development to protect other natural resource values, and management of surface tracts to provide developed areas for recreation use while protecting significant natural and cultural resource values.

Alternative 3 closed the Withlacoochee State Forest to limestone mining and emphasized constraints on mineral development to protect other natural resource values. Surface tract management emphasized protection and enhancement natural and cultural resource values, while providing low to moderate recreation use.

The **Proposed Plan** emphasized constraints on mineral development to protect other natural resource values and made the FMO underlying State-owned lands, including the Withlacoochee State Forest, available for exchange to the State of

Florida. Surface tract management emphasized protection and enhancement natural and cultural resource values, while providing low to moderate recreation use.

The Proposed Plan and Alternative 3 were the environmentally preferred alternatives.

Management Considerations

In considering the alternatives for managing FMO, BLM sought to balance national policy to provide for mineral development with mandates for protection of surface resources. In the case of oil and gas leasing and phosphate leasing, stipulations and constraints were developed whereby environmental impacts were adequately mitigated, and major conflicts with surface management were avoided. These stipulations and constraints are incorporated into the RMP. In the alternatives to allow limestone mining in the Withlacoochee State Forest, neither all significant environmental impacts nor conflicts with surface management could be avoided. Prohibition of mining, however, could be considered virtual divestiture of a valuable asset without compensation to the owners, i.e. the American people. The transfer of mineral rights to the State via a land exchange, as provided for in the RMP, offers an opportunity to resolve both aspects of the issue.

The RMP management prescriptions developed for the surface tracts promote a balance between providing recreational use and protection of sensitive resources. A most important consideration is the fact that BLM does not have a presence in the State of Florida. For this reason the RMP allows the surface tracts to be transferred to or managed by other agencies through cooperative agreement, provided that use would follow the approved management prescriptions. The most difficult issue involved recreational use conflicts on the Walton Dunes tract. The RMP follows the recommendation of the State of Florida to close the Walton Beach tracts to motorized vehicle use, in order to be consistent with the Florida Coastal Zone Management Program.

Mitigation and Monitoring

Mitigation measures, in the form of oil and gas lease stipulations, mineral development constraints and management prescriptions for surface tracts, were incorporated into the alternatives considered, including the selected plan. These measures, and additional mitigation identified during site-specific analysis, will be enforced during plan implementation. Monitoring will determine the effectiveness of these mitigation measures in minimizing environmental impacts.

Public Involvement

The BLM made a diligent effort to involve the public in the development of the Florida RMP as directed by the National Environmental Policy Act in Title 40, Part 1506.6 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The views and opinions of the public were sought through publication of formal notices, public meetings, media releases and direct mailings. The mailing list of interested parties was initiated at the outset of the process and was maintained throughout the process.

The notice of intent (NOI) to prepare the RMP/EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on September 23, 1992. The NOI invited public participation through written comments during the public scoping period, which extended through November 30, 1992 and announced three public scoping meetings. Invitation to participate was also solicited through a newspaper publication of the NOI, a media release and a direct mailing. Three public scoping meetings were held in Bartow, Tallahassee, and Santa Rosa Beach. Several agency coordination meetings were also held during the public scoping period, including a state agency coordination meeting in Tallahassee.

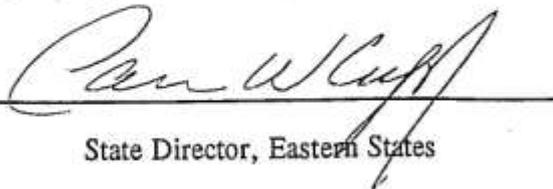
The Draft RMP/EIS was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during the week

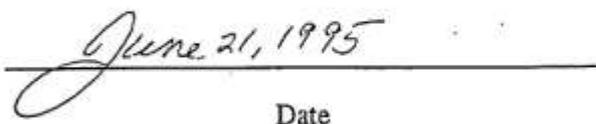
of February 7-11, 1994. During this same week, copies of the document were sent to the organizations and individuals on the mailing list, and the BLM published a notice of availability (NOA) in the *Federal Register* on February 9, 1994. The 90-day comment period was formally initiated with EPA's publication of a NOA on February 18, 1994. The release of the Draft RMP/EIS was announced through a media release, and copies of the document were sent to those on the mailing list. Public meetings to receive comments on the Draft RMP/EIS were held in Brooksville, Tallahassee, and De Funiak Springs.

A NOA of the Proposed RMP and Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on October 25, 1994. The 30-day protest period was initiated with EPA's publication of a NOA on October 28, 1994. The availability of the document was announced through a media release and copies were sent to those on the mailing list. The document sent to the Florida State Clearinghouse along with a request for a Governor's consistency review, and on December 12, 1994 the BLM received notification that the Proposed RMP was consistent with State policies plans and programs.

Nineteen individuals or organizations protested decisions of the proposed RMP/EIS. Three protests pertained to limestone mining in the Withlacoochee State Forest and the exchange of the mineral estate underlying the Forest to the State of Florida. Sixteen protests pertained to the closure of the Walton Beach tracts to motorized vehicle use, including boat launching. The BLM Director dismissed two protests due to lack of standing. The other seventeen protests were also dismissed, after the BLM Director concluded that the BLM State Director, Eastern States, and the Jackson District Manager followed the applicable planning procedures, laws, regulations, policies, and resource considerations in developing the Florida RMP.

Approved by:


State Director, Eastern States


Date

