

I. Summary

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the selected alternative and provides the rationale for the decision. The analysis for the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (standards and guidelines) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota has been completed. The standards and guidelines EIS scoping process was initiated with a Federal Register Notice in November, 1995. A scoping letter was also distributed to about 5,500 individuals in January, 1996. About 27 letters provided substantive suggestions on the EIS process. A draft EIS was issued and distributed to the public in October, 1996. A supplement to the draft was also issued to include lands west of the Continental Divide. The supplement was issued and distributed in February, 1997. There were a total of 19 public meetings held across the EIS study area to provide information and receive public comments. Thirty-seven letters were received on the draft EIS and 15 letters were received on the supplement to the draft EIS. The revisions made in the final EIS provide clarity, consistency and additional information in the analysis as a result of the public comments and internal review. The revisions did not alter the analysis of effects described in the draft or supplement to the draft EIS. The final EIS was distributed in June 1997. In making the decision, the State Director considered public comments and reviewed the analysis in the final EIS.

II. Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) selects and documents the rationale for selecting an alternative, as analyzed in the final EIS. The selected alternative would be incorporated into ten BLM land use plans that cover about 8.4 million acres of BLM-administered land in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. This action is proposed in accordance with revised regulations for livestock grazing on BLM-administered lands (43 CFR4100). The BLM administers livestock grazing on approximately 8.4 million acres in Montana and the Dakotas in accordance with the revised regulations for livestock grazing on BLM-administered lands (43 CFR 4100). This ROD will also apply to lands west of the Continental Divide in Montana, until a ROD is signed on the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). At that time, the ICBEMP record of decision will supersede the Montana/Dakotas Standards and Guidelines decision on lands west of the Continental Divide in Montana.

The ROD is supported by the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Final EIS for Montana and North and South Dakota. The final EIS describes the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of the three alternatives considered in the analysis. The changes that would occur with the selection of the Preferred Alternative are intended to improve ecological conditions while providing for sustainable development on the rangelands administered by BLM.

III. Decision. It is the decision of the Montana/Dakotas State Director to adopt the Preferred Alternative described in the final EIS. In making this decision, the BLM has reviewed the alternatives discussed in the final EIS, the predicted environmental, economic and social consequences, and the risks and safeguards associated with them. The decision is based on factors outlined in the section "Rationale for Selection."

A. Description of the Selected Alternative (the Preferred Alternative). The selected Preferred Alternative would implement the standards and guidelines developed in cooperation with the Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) and other public input. These standards and guidelines would be applied to all BLM-administered lands within the Butte, Lewistown, Miles City and Dakotas Districts, including lands acquired in the future. The standards and guidelines for each district are provided below.