



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Butte Field Office  
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Butte, Montana 59701-9701  
[www.blm.gov/mt](http://www.blm.gov/mt)

In Reply Refer To:

9200 (MTB070)

July 1, 2015

Dear Reader:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has completed the Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment (IM EA) (EA #: DOI-BLM-MT-B070-2013-0019-EA), which is available on the Butte Field Office website at: <http://blm.gov/11kd>. The IM EA analyzes three alternatives, including the No Action Alternative. A Decision Record (DR) selecting the Preferred Alternative from the EA and a Finding of No Significant Impact Statement (FONSI) are enclosed.

The Iron Mask Planning Area EA was prepared to consider a variety of management actions developed to: improve land health and enhance biodiversity; continue to provide for livestock grazing; address management needs in an area that was acquired in 2007, including travel management; and to establish a forage reserve allotment as required in the Butte Resource Management Plan (2009).

The public was involved during development of management actions for the Iron Mask Planning Area. Public participation started in December of 2012 with a public scoping notice mailed to 28 individuals and organizations; a press release was issued requesting public input to help identify management issues. Ten responses were received to the scoping letter providing comments on a variety of management issues. The comments were used to develop and refine the IM EA alternatives and design an agency preferred alternative responsive to public concerns.

The Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment was released for public review and comment on June 6, 2014. An open house was held June 25, 2014 in Townsend, Montana to collect comments on the EA, including the travel management plan. The BLM received comments from 12 persons or groups on the draft EA.

The IM EA was revised in response to public comments with the alternatives description and environmental impacts adjusted where appropriate. The BLM responses to substantive public comments are located in Appendix A of the IM EA.

If you have any questions regarding the environmental assessment or management actions in the Iron Mask planning area, please contact Scot Franklin at 406-533-7603.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//  
Scott Haight  
Field Manager

Enclosures

**DECISION RECORD (DR)**  
**Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment**  
DOI-BLM-MT-B070-2013-0019-EA

**Decision and Summary of the Selected Alternative**

It is my decision to implement Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) of the Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment, as described in the July 1, 2015, Environmental Assessment **DOI-BLM-MT-B070-2013-0019-EA**.

Included in Alternative B are upland vegetation and riparian land health improvement projects; range permit renewals, including improvement projects; creation of a forage reserve grazing allotment; travel planning and creation of trailheads and parking areas for the 5,566-acre area acquired in 2007, which all have separate decisions that include protest and/or appeal provisions.

**Rationale for the Decision**

My decision is based on Land Health Evaluation and Assessment Reports, impacts disclosed in the Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-MT-070-2013-0019-EA), site specific monitoring and assessments in the related allotment files, other detailed resource reports, first-hand knowledge of my staff, scientific literature, and review of public comments. I have reviewed the alternatives analyzed in detail to determine if they were responsive to the purpose and need for this proposal and the issues relevant to it. I also reviewed the alternatives that were considered, but not analyzed in detail, to help me decide if the analysis had considered a range of reasonable alternatives to address the key issues.

The action alternatives would be in conformance with RMP direction. RMP goals and objectives actions that will be met under the action alternatives include: maintain upland vegetation communities to move toward or remain in proper functioning condition; manage dry forest types to contain healthy, relatively open stands; the Indian Creek allotment will be expanded and managed as a forage reserve allotment; manage riparian and wetland communities to move toward or remain in Proper Functioning Condition; manage for a sustainable level of livestock grazing while meeting or progressing toward Land Health Standards; move toward restoring and maintaining desired ecological conditions consistent with appropriate fire regimes; manage to provide a variety of well-distributed plant communities to support a diversity of habitats; the Iron Mask acquisition area will be managed for travel under the 'limited area' designation; and non-motorized recreation will be promoted and emphasized in the Elkhorns ACEC.

Selecting Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) improves land health and enhances biodiversity, addresses visitor use needs, while continuing to provide opportunities for livestock grazing. The action outlined in this decision is in conformance with the Butte Field Office Resource Management Plan, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and BLM policies and Federal regulations.

The completed EA is available on the Butte Field Office website: <http://blm.gov/11kd>.

## Appeal Process

The protest and/or appeal processes for the range permit renewals, forage reserve allotment, upland and riparian treatment projects, and travel management plan are all described in detail within their representative decisions. Six individual range permit renewal decisions, a forage reserve allotment decision, a land health decision for vegetation and riparian treatments, and a decision for travel management will all be issued under this Environmental Assessment.

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//SIGNED//

Scott Haight  
Field Manager

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Date

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

### Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-MT-B070-2013-0019-EA

I have reviewed the Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment for any potentially unresolved significant environmental impacts, and reviewed and thoroughly considered all public comments regarding the EA. I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1508.27, which define *significance* as used in NEPA, and have found that the actions analyzed in the Iron Mask Planning Area Environmental Assessment (EA) (EA #: DOI-BLM-MT-B070-2013-0019-EA) would not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

I base my finding on the following:

Implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. Significance, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity. The disclosure of effects in the environmental assessment found the action is limited in context. Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

(1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and/or adverse.*

The analysis documented in EA #: DOI-BLM-MT-B070-0019-EA did not identify any individually significant short- or long-term impacts.

(2) *The degree to which the preferred alternative affects public health or safety.*

The environmental analysis documented no major effects on public health and safety.

(3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The environmental analysis documented no major effects on unique geographic features of the area, cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

(4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality or the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

Based on public comment, internal discussion and the analysis of the actions, the effects on the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial by professionals, specialists, and scientists. While some of the public comments received indicate the selected alternative may be controversial, I do not believe that there is significant controversy over the effects of this action.

(5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The environmental analysis did not identify any effects on the human environment which are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Grazing has occurred in this area prior to the Taylor Grazing Act, 1934, and is a compatible land use.

(6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The preferred alternative neither establishes a precedent for future BLM actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

*(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The environmental analysis documents the connected and cumulative impacts with the scope of the analysis area. The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions are considered and disclosed in the impacts section of the analysis. The cumulative effects are not significant.

*(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The preferred alternative has been considered and would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is the determination of BLM that known sites in the DA are not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The preferred alternative is also not considered to cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

*(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

No effects are anticipated to species listed as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Grizzly bears (Threatened) or Canada lynx (Threatened) may occasionally migrate or disperse through the area. However, favored habitat for these species does not occur and no Federally listed animal species are known to be permanent residents in the PA. There is no designated Critical Habitat in the planning area. No Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate plant species are known to occur in the action area. There would be no effects on Threatened or Endangered species.

*(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The environmental analysis documents that the preferred alternative is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

I have also considered, as required in Executive Order 13212, whether any adverse impacts to the production of energy will result from this Decision, and have determined no adverse impacts will occur.

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//SIGNED//

Scott Haight  
Field Manager

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Date