



In Reply To:

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Butte Field Office
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Butte, Montana 59701
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9200 (070)

September 24, 2013

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Butte Field Office is in the initial stages of developing proposed project work in the Missouri River Foothills Planning Area near Townsend, Montana, and is requesting scoping comments. The planning area consists of approximately 5,422 acres of public land as shown on the enclosed map.

The legal description of the planning area includes public lands in:

Avalanche Creek Allotment: T10N, R1E, Sections 14 and 17; Confederate Gulch Allotment: T10N, R2E, Sections 26, 27, 29, 33, 34 and 35 and T9N, R2E, Sections 3, 4, 5 and 9; Deep Creek/Townsend Allotment: T7N, R4E, Section 30; Duck Creek Allotment: T9N, R3E, Section 32 and T8N, R3E, Section 5; Hidden Hollow Allotment: T10N, R2E, Section 35 and T6N, R5E, Section 34; Hunter Creek Allotment: T9N, R2E, Section 16; Klondike Claim Allotment: T8N, R3E Sections 4 and 5; Little Hellgate Allotment: T10N, R1E, Sections 5 and 6; Lower Duck Creek: T8N, R3E, Section 6; Ming Bar Allotment: T13N, R3W, Section 14; Ray Creek: T7N, R3E, Section 6; Wickiup Creek Allotment: T13N, R1E, Section 6 and T13N, R1W, Section 12.

BLM intends to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the Missouri River Foothills Planning Area by the spring of 2014. The EA will evaluate a variety of resource issues and develop a range of management actions to address those issues. To date, the issues that have been identified include:

- Access and travel planning.
- Grazing permit renewals for-eight (8) different grazing allotments.
- Vegetation treatments to restore uplands to more historic conditions.
- Modify existing fences to promote wildlife passage.
- Treatment of nonnative and noxious plant infestations.

Travel Planning and Recreation. A travel management plan for the Missouri River Foothills Planning Area is needed to fulfill directives established by BLM policy using the criteria identified at 43 CFR 8340-8342 and the Butte Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Livestock Grazing. Grazing permit renewals are needed for the following eight (8) allotments: Avalanche Creek, Confederate Gulch, Hidden Hollow, Hunter Creek, Little Hellgate, Lower Duck Creek, Ray Creek, and Wickiup Creek. Some adjustments to grazing regimes in these allotments and range improvement projects, such as water developments and fencing may be considered to improve resource health.

Fence Modifications for Wildlife: Several fences were identified that need modifications to make them more wildlife friendly, such as adjusting the heights of the bottom and top wires and replacing bottom wires with smooth wire that will also allow effective livestock management.

Vegetation Restoration Treatments. Preliminary interdisciplinary team assessments within the planning area indicate that overall, upland vegetation communities in the project area are in good condition. The Butte RMP provides direction in several places to restore current altered vegetative conditions to more historic types. Portions of grassland and shrubland habitats in the project area have undergone colonization or encroachment by conifers due to the interruption of the natural disturbance regime by long-term fire suppression. In addition, conifer densities have increased within many of the forested stands within the Planning Area. The recent drought and increased densities have resulted in forest susceptibility to insect and/or disease infestations and subsequent mortality within forested habitats. As a result, these acres are outside the expected historic range of natural variability associated with the pre-settlement mid-severity fire regime. In their current condition, they are less stable and more susceptible to damage from disturbance events like severe or uncharacteristically large-scale wildland fire, insect infestations, and weed species establishment. Treatments to restore a more historic condition to the planning area could include prescribed burning, hand cutting, mastication, and timber sales.

Treatment of Noxious and Invasive Species. Noxious and invasive species such as spotted knapweed, Dalmation toadflax, yellow toadflax, Common mullein, Canada thistle, whitetop, houndstongue, leafy spurge, black henbane, and cheatgrass are common in some parts of the planning area, affecting native vegetation communities. Most infestations are found along roadways, corridors, and in disturbed sites in the planning area. Actions to reduce weed infestations and use preventive measures are a main focus in the planning area.

Commenting

At this time, we would like to hear your comments on any additional issues, concerns, or alternatives that should be evaluated by the BLM during this process. We will use your comments to prepare an EA which we plan to make available for public review in spring of 2014.

If you care to comment, please make your comments as specific as possible, including suggestions regarding resource issues, travel routes, data sources, or alternatives to be considered in the environmental analysis.

Please provide your comments to the Butte Field Office at 106 N. Parkmont, Butte, MT 59701 or by e-mail to Erik Broeder at ebroeder@blm.gov. Although comments will be accepted at any time throughout the process, comments submitted by **November 12, 2013** would be the most helpful in development of the proposed action and EA. To be considered, all comments must contain the name and address of the submitter. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment -- including your personal identifying information -- may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you have questions regarding this project or if you would like to have your name removed from the mailing list, please contact the Project Lead, Erik Broeder at the Butte Field Office at 406-533-7632 or e-mail at ebroeder@blm.gov.

Sincerely,

Signed by: Scott Haight
Field Manager

Enclosure: Map- Missouri River Foothills Planning Area