Reader's Guide and Executive Summary

Reader's Guide

The HiLine Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed RMP/Final EIS) was prepared under the guidance of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Proposed RMP/Final EIS is organized into five chapters and the appendices. The five chapters detail the introduction, alternatives, affected environment, environmental consequences, and coordination. In order to improve the readability of this document and to enable the reader to easily locate referenced tables/sections, the resource discussions are organized alphabetically in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The chapter numbers are noted in the document headers and resource sections are noted in the footers, along with the page numbers. The appendices include supporting information for some of the topics discussed in Chapters 1 through 5 which would be too lengthy to include under a specific section.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter contains background information on the planning process and sets the stage for the information that is presented in the rest of the document. Chapter 1 has 15 main sections, beginning on page 1. They include:

- Background
- Purpose and Need
- Planning Area
- Collaboration
- Planning Process
  - Scoping
    - Issues Addressed
    - Issues and Concerns Considered but Not Addressed Further
  - Planning Criteria
  - Vision and Management Goals
  - Development of Alternatives
    - Related Plans
    - Relationship to BLM Policies, Plans, and Programs
  - Draft Resource Management Plan
  - Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final EIS

Chapter 2: Alternatives

This chapter describes the management alternatives for the HiLine and is presented in seven sections:

- Introduction
  - Summary of Major Changes to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS
- Implementation and Monitoring
- Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management
- Current Management and Alternatives
- Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail
- Summary comparisons of Alternatives, Environmental Consequences, and Alleviated Threats to Greater Sage-Grouse

The Current Management and Alternatives section, beginning on page 49, provides a detailed description of the five alternatives for each resource presented, as well as Decisions Common to All Alternatives, which will be carried forward into each alternative described in the chapter.

The information relating to the alternatives, affected environment, and environmental consequences (impact analysis) is organized by the following resource areas:

- Air Resources and Climate Change
- Cultural Resources
- Fire Management and Ecology
- Fish
- Fluid Minerals
- Forests and Woodlands
- Lands and Realty
- Livestock Grazing
- Noxious Weeds and other Invasive Non-Native Species
- Off-Highway Vehicle Use and Travel and Transportation Management
- Paleontological Resources
- Public Safety
- Recreation
- Renewable Energy Resources
- Social
- Soil Resources
- Solid Minerals
- Special Designations
- Transportation and Facilities
- Vegetation – Rangeland
- Vegetation – Riparian and Wetland
- Vegetation – Special Status Plants
- Visual Resources
- Water Resources
- Wilderness Characteristics
- Wildlife

Chapter 2 begins on page 25.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment

This chapter provides background information on the various resources administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that could be affected by the alternatives described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 begins on page 277.

Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences

This chapter describes the environmental, economic and social consequences of implementing the alternatives presented in Chapter 2 and is presented in seven sections:

- Introduction
- Reasonable Foreseeable Future Actions
- Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenarios
- Acres of Surface Disturbance
- Impacts from the Alternatives
- Unavoidable Adverse Impacts
- Short-Term Use versus Long-Term Productivity
- Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The impact-related information in this chapter is organized by resource, then by effects to the resource from other resource sections/categories under each alternative. Some resource sections do not address all the categories or topics covered in Chapter 2, but only those that would affect the resource section being discussed.

Chapter 4 begins on page 449.

Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination

This chapter includes a description of the public participation opportunities, consultation and coordination with tribal governments; other agencies and state and local governments, including those with Cooperating Agency status, and the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council.

The agencies, organizations and businesses receiving the document are listed, along with a brief introduction of the preparers of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. This chapter also includes the public comments received from individuals, agencies, organizations, groups and businesses on the Draft RMP/EIS and the BLM's responses to the comments.

Chapter 5 begins on page 789.

Appendices

The appendices are lettered and organized in the order they are referenced in the Draft RMP/EIS. They include:

- A Implementation and Monitoring
- B HiLine District Air Resource Management Plan: Adaptive Management Strategy for Oil and Gas Resources
- C Best Management Practices
- D Fire and Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation
- E Fluid Minerals
  - E.1 Oil and Gas Operations
  - E.2 Oil and Gas Best Management Practices (General Conditions of Approval)
  - E.3 Bureau of Reclamation Lease Stipulations
  - E.4 Oil and Gas Stipulations and Exception, Modification, and Waiver Criteria
  - E.5 Requirements and/or Guidelines for Wildlife, Controlled Surface Use Stipulations
- F Land Ownership Adjustment
  - F.1 Land Ownership Adjustment Criteria
  - F.2 BLM Land Available for Disposal by Exchange or Sale (Category 3)
- G Livestock Allocations
- H Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management
- I Guidelines for the Use of Yearling Conversion Factors
- J Reclamation
- K Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Evaluations of Relevance and Importance Criteria for Existing and Potential ACECs
- L Wild and Scenic Rivers Report, Eligibility and Suitability Determinations
- M Greater Sage-Grouse
  - M.1 Mitigation Measures and Conservation Actions for Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat
  - M.2 Greater Sage-Grouse Monitoring Framework
  - M.3 Proposed RMP (Alternative E) Consistency with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Report Recommendations for Sage-Grouse
  - M.4 Greater Sage-Grouse Mitigation
  - M.5 Applying Lek Buffer Distances when Approving Actions
  - M.6 Required Design Features for Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat
  - M.7 Greater Sage-Grouse Effects Analysis Process
  - M.8 Greater Sage-Grouse Disturbance Caps
  - M.9 Cumulative Effects Analysis – Management Zone 1
- N Fish and Fisheries
- O Wind Energy Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario

P Locatable Mineral Resources Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario
Q Wildlife Species
R Economic Impact Analysis Methodology
S Recreation Sites and Management Areas

Each appendix may contain several pieces of information related to the topic covered. The appendices are located following the Index, which begins on page 1187.

Maps

The Proposed RMP/Final EIS includes 18 (11 x 17) foldout maps at the conclusion of Chapter 2. Several other maps are referenced in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS which can be found on the following website: http://blm.gov/8qkd.

Executive Summary

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the RMP is to provide a single, comprehensive land use plan to guide management of public lands and minerals administered by the HiLine District. The plan provides goals, objectives, land use allocations, and management direction to maintain, improve, or enhance resource conditions and to provide for long-term benefits to the public.

The need for the revision is the result of considerable changes within the planning area since completion of the Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP and the West HiLine RMP. Additional plan amendments and maintenance actions are not adequate to address these changes, which include increased oil and gas leasing, exploration and development activities, heightened public awareness and interest in BLM management actions and permitted uses, increased demand for recreational use of public lands, increased conflicts between land use and wildlife/wildlife habitat, changes in BLM policy, and expanded scientific knowledge and data.

In March 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published its listing decision for the Greater Sage-Grouse as "Warranted but Precluded." Inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms was identified as a major threat in the USFWS finding on the petition to list the Greater Sage-Grouse. The USFWS has identified the principal regulatory mechanism for the BLM as conservation measures in RMPs. Based on the identified threats to the Greater Sage-Grouse and the USFWS timeline for making a listing decision on this species, the BLM needs to incorporate objectives and adequate conservation measures into RMPs in order to conserve, enhance, and/or restore Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

This RMP revision incorporates specific management actions and conservation measures to conserve Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitats on BLM land.

Issues Addressed

Planning issues are determined from demands, concerns, conflicts, or problems concerning use or management of public lands and resources. These issues are usually expressed in terms of the potential adverse consequences or effects that a particular land or resource use may have on other lands or resources which are used or valued for other purposes. The following planning issues were identified through public scoping and information gathered in analyzing the existing management situation in the planning area. Based on the input of the public, other government agencies, and the BLM and its cooperators, eleven key issues or unresolved conflicts were identified.

Issue 1: How will the area be managed for the development of fluid minerals, solid minerals, and renewable energy?

Fluid Minerals

In March 2004, the United States District Court for the District of Montana determined that the West HiLine RMP, which was approved in 1988, did not analyze the impacts of leasing in the area such as to allow leasing to proceed without appropriate NEPA analysis. The BLM was ordered to prepare an environmental impact statement for the oil and

gas leasing program that covers the three leases. While this ruling only applied to the three leases, the BLM discontinued leasing in the West HiLine planning area until completion of a new resource management plan that would address the oil and gas leasing program.

Oil and gas leasing continues to occur in the remaining portion of the planning area on a very limited basis until completion of a new resource management plan. In 1988, the BLM suspended lease issuance on lands that require special stipulations to protect wildlife resources until a new resource management plan was completed. This was a result of a protest on the issuance of oil and gas leases by the BLM in Montana. In the early 1990s, the BLM prepared the Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP to address this protest along with other resource issues. However, a subsequent protest to the 1992 Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP warranted a supplement to address an alternative for oil and gas leasing that would avoid leasing valuable wildlife habitat. The supplement was never finalized and the HiLine RMP will address the deficiency.

The HiLine RMP will address the oil and gas leasing program for the entire planning area in compliance with FLPMA, NEPA, ESA, NHPA and all other applicable laws, regulations, and policies. Fluid mineral (oil and gas) development and the related transportation network may conflict with other land and resource uses or values in some areas. Principal management considerations include split estate ownership (private surface/federal minerals), activities and human presence in fish and wildlife habitats, and the potential effects of mineral development on recreation values, forage use, air resources, scenic quality, sensitive vegetation types, and water quality. Areas should be identified where surface-disturbing activities (e.g., mineral exploration and development) are suitable or not suitable.

Solid Minerals

Solid mineral development, which includes leasable, locatable, and salable minerals, requires the same management considerations discussed above for fluid minerals.

Leasable mineral resources are managed under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. Coal is a leasable solid mineral with occurrence potential in the planning area; however, no leases have been issued, no production is occurring, and the potential for development is considered to be low enough that no interest has been shown in obtaining leases.

Locatable minerals (e.g., gold and silver) are managed under the General Mining Law of 1872, as amended, which allows the location and maintenance of mining claims on those federal mineral estate lands open for mining claim location and patent. The BLM manages the Mining Law program on federal mineral estate as set forth in 43 CFR 3809. BLM management includes authorizing and permitting mineral exploration, mining, and reclamation actions. Areas should be recommended for closure to the mining laws for locatable exploration or development where surface-disturbing activities are not suitable. Any terms or conditions should also be considered when needed to protect other resource values while conducting activities under the operation of the mining laws.

Salable minerals were designated under the Materials Act (July 1947), which authorizes the disposal of petrified wood and common varieties of sand, gravel, stone, pumice, cinders and clay through a contract of sale or free use permit. Uncommon varieties of these same minerals are locatable under the Mining Law. Management actions for salable minerals determine areas open or closed to mineral material development and identify mitigation needed to protect other resource values.

Renewable Energy (Solar)

Opportunities for solar development will be provided consistent with the other goals, objectives, and requirements of this plan. Applications for solar energy projects would be processed and authorized as rights-of-way under Title V of FLPMA. Utility-scale concentrating solar power or photovoltaic electric generating facilities must comply with the BLM's planning, environmental, and right-of-way application requirements as established by BLM guidance (WO IM No. 2011-003) or additional Bureau guidance and/or policy. No BLM lands within the planning area have been identified as having potential for this type of energy source.

Renewable Energy (Wind)

The majority of high development potential areas for wind resources are located in the western third of the planning area (Glacier, Toole and Liberty Counties), which has the least amount of BLM land. At this time no existing or proposed

wind farms are located on BLM land; however, several wind farms are in varying stages of planning on lands not managed by the BLM. These wind farms have the potential to expand; therefore, future wind farms and/or associated facilities (e.g., transmission lines and utility corridors) could occur on BLM land. The increased need for energy and reducing American reliance on foreign energy resources will most likely increase the demand for wind energy development. Some areas may need to be closed to wind energy development or mitigation may need to be considered to protect other resource values.

Issue 2: Are there opportunities to enhance management through land ownership adjustment?

Opportunities may exist to consolidate land ownership patterns that would provide improved land management efficiencies as well as benefit private landowners, local communities, and the public. Identification of land parcels and/or establishment of criteria that would be used to identify lands for land ownership adjustments are necessary.

Issue 3: How will soils and vegetation be managed to achieve or maintain healthy ecosystems while providing for a broad range of multiple uses?

It is important to determine the appropriate mix of resources produced from the public lands. Vegetation resource values include native vegetative cover, important watersheds, properly functioning riparian areas, quality soils, healthy forests and fuel conditions, and important wildlife habitat (particularly big game crucial winter range and habitat for candidate, sensitive, proposed, or threatened and endangered wildlife and vegetative species). Consumptive uses of vegetation include livestock grazing, forest products, wildlife foraging, and vegetation removal by surface-disturbing activities.

Issue 4: How will the area be managed for cultural resources and significant paleontological resources?

Cultural and paleontological resources must be managed in a way that appropriately protects these unique resources consistent with laws, regulations, and policies. Certain resources and areas need protection. Of particular concern is the need for protection of historic/traditional use areas and significant paleontological sites. Other areas should be accessible for more public and recreational uses.

Issue 5: How should the BLM manage motorized travel to meet the needs for public access and resource uses while considering conflicts of use and effects on other resources?

Improperly managed motorized travel can conflict with other land and resource uses and values. Of concern are potential effects on resources, including soil, vegetation, wildlife habitat and disturbance, watersheds, visual values, cultural and paleontological resources, and other recreation values. Principal considerations include providing for suitable and sufficient recreation uses and facilities (both dispersed and commercial), visual resource management direction, and OHV use designations.

Issue 6: How will access be managed to meet the needs of the public?

Meeting the access needs of the public involves two management issues. One is the acquisition of legal public access to BLM lands for the use and enjoyment of the public and for resource uses (e.g., energy development, right-of-way authorizations, grazing, and other uses). The other involves designating motorized or non-motorized access routes over BLM land, which would be addressed in travel management planning after completion of the RMP.

Issue 7: How will the BLM manage resource uses while protecting important wildlife habitat and special status species, including Greater Sage-Grouse?

The principal issues concerning wildlife habitat are surface-disturbing or disruptive activities in big game winter range, migratory routes, and birthing areas (for elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and bighorn sheep) along with the habitats of other important fish and wildlife species (e.g., Greater Sage-Grouse, mountain plovers, and grassland birds). Alteration or elimination of wildlife habitats on private lands has increased the importance of maintaining functional habitats on BLM lands. Populations of Greater Sage-Grouse have declined throughout their range, and some intensively developed areas in the planning area no longer provide functioning sage-grouse habitats.

Several categories of species and their habitats within the planning area require special management or considerations. These species are federally listed threatened and endangered, proposed for listing, and candidate and state sensitive

species, and BLM special status species. Principal concerns associated with special status species are habitat identification, use, and quality; and the interrelationships between these species and other resource uses and human activities.

In March 2010, the USFWS determined that the Greater Sage-Grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but that listing the species was precluded by the need to address other, higher-priority species first (75 FR 13910, March 23, 2010). One reason for the USFWS decision was an identified need for "improved regulatory mechanisms" to ensure species conservation. The principal regulatory mechanisms for the BLM are Resource Management Plans (RMPs); therefore, the BLM is using this opportunity to develop long-term and effective management for the species on the BLM lands (WO IM No. 2012-044).

On October 27, 2014, the USFWS provided the BLM and Forest Service a memorandum titled "Greater Sage-Grouse: Additional Recommendations to Refine Land Use Allocations in Highly Important Landscapes." The memorandum and associated maps provided by the USFWS identify areas that represent recognized "strongholds" for Greater Sage-Grouse that have been noted and referenced as having the highest densities of Greater Sage-Grouse and other criteria important for the persistence of the species. The USFWS recognized areas within the HiLine planning area as "strongholds" for Greater Sage-Grouse. Habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse in the HiLine planning area is shown in Chapter 1, Figure 1.4.

On November 21, 2014, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) published "Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for Greater Sage-Grouse—A Review" (USGS 2014). The USGS review provided a compilation and summary of published scientific studies that evaluate the influence of anthropogenic activities and infrastructure on Greater Sage-Grouse populations. The BLM has reviewed this information and examined how lek buffer-distances were addressed through land use allocations and other management actions in the Draft HiLine RMP. Based on this review, in undertaking BLM management actions, and consistent with valid and existing rights and applicable law in authorizing third-party actions, the BLM will apply the lek buffer distances in the USGS Report "Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for Greater Sage Grouse-A Review (Open File Report 2014-1239)" in both General Habitat Management Areas and Priority Habitat Management Areas as detailed in Appendix M.5.

Issue 8: Which areas, if any, should be managed as special designations and how should they be managed to protect values that warrant special designation status?

Resources or features of the lands within the planning area must be evaluated to determine if and how those resources or features might be managed in the future using specific or special management practices. A total of 19 Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) existing designations and new nominations were considered during this planning process:

- Seven designated ACECs currently lie within the planning area: Azure Cave, Big Bend of the Milk River, Bitter Creek, Kevin Rim, Mountain Plover, Sweet Grass Hills, and prairie dog towns within the 7km Complex.
- The BLM also identified four ACEC nominations during scoping that will be considered in the planning process: Malta Geological Area, Woody Island, Frenchman Breaks, and Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation.
- The BLM received five ACEC nominations from the public that will be considered in the planning process: Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse, Greater Sage-Grouse, Five Watersheds, Mountain Plover, and Black-tailed Prairie Dog and Black-footed Ferret.
- Three other ACEC nominations received prior to the commencement of this planning process will also be considered: Old Scraggy; Saddle Butte; and Little Rocky Mountains.

Issue 9: How will the BLM manage for fire, including wildfire and prescribed fire?

The BLM prioritizes wildland fire management activities by assessing risk to life and property, commensurate with fire management costs and realized benefit. Mechanical, prescribed fire and other appropriate treatments can be used to restore and maintain fire regimes and land health, and reduce hazardous fuels accumulations. Areas should be identified where fire is desired to manage ecosystems and areas where current conditions create constraints on use, or where unplanned fire is likely to cause negative effects.

Issue 10: How will the BLM consider social and economic conditions in the planning area when managing BLM lands?

The planning area provides a variety of resources that contribute to the local economy (e.g., natural gas, livestock grazing, recreation, etc.). Potential social and economic effects associated with management include changes in employment, income, public revenues, economic dependency, economic stability, and quality of life. Management must recognize the economic activities that are dependent on the land and its natural resources.

Issue 11: Which areas, if any, should be managed for wilderness characteristics and how should they be managed to protect those values?

Section 201 of FLPMA requires the BLM to maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of all public lands and their resources and other values. This inventory requirement includes maintaining information regarding wilderness characteristics (BLM Manual 6310, Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on BLM Lands).

The existing inventory of BLM land in the HiLine planning area was updated and evaluated to determine whether additional lands other than the existing wilderness study areas (WSAs) have wilderness characteristics. Areas with wilderness characteristics must possess sufficient size, naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for either solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. Twenty-six areas within the HiLine District have wilderness characteristics. These areas include 386,462 acres of BLM land and vary in size from 4,118 to 49,564 acres. Section 202 of FLPMA requires the BLM to rely on resource inventories in the development and revision of land use plans, including inventory information regarding wilderness characteristics.

Vision and Management Goals

The vision of the HiLine District is to manage the planning area in a manner that provides for multiple use while sustaining a healthy and productive environment for present and future generations.

A number of management goals guided the development of alternatives for this RMP. The goals are the result of information provided through public scoping, existing laws and regulations, and the planning team. Management goals are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. These goals include:

- Protect, preserve and interpret the cultural and paleontological resources within the planning area and ensure they are available for appropriate uses by present and future generations.
- Manage air resources, soils, vegetation, and water resources to meet all state and federal standards, maintain a diversity of ecological conditions and enhance resource values while providing for a variety of multiple uses that are economically and biologically feasible.
- Ensure habitat for fish and wildlife species, including special status species, is of sufficient quantity and quality to enhance biological diversity and sustain ecological, economic and social values.
- Ensure dependable and environmentally responsible exploration and development of mineral resources and renewable energy consistent with other resource goals.
- Improve resource management efficiency and provide public benefits while protecting significant resources.
- Provide a diverse array of recreational opportunities and visitor experiences while maintaining healthy BLM land resources.
- Manage certain areas with significant values (e.g., ACECs, WSAs, National Historic Trails, etc.) through special management to protect those resources in need of a higher degree of management.

Summary of Changes to Alternative E to Develop the Proposed RMP/Final EIS

The Draft RMP/EIS was published in March 2013, and the public comment period closed in June 2013. The BLM identified 1,185 individual comments from the comment documents received, which touched on a wide range of issues.

While many of the comments supported the Preferred Alternative in the Draft RMP/EIS, commenters also identified areas where the document could be improved. The HiLine District carefully evaluated and responded to these comments (see Chapter 5). The Proposed RMP/Final EIS contains a number of changes made in response to comments. As a result of public comments, best science, cooperating agency coordination, and internal review of the Draft RMP/EIS, the BLM has developed the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for managing BLM-administered lands in north central Montana. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS focuses on addressing public comments, while continuing to meet the BLM's legal and regulatory mandates. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS is a variation of the Preferred Alternative (E) and is within the range of alternatives analyzed in the Draft RMP/EIS.

Changes made to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS from the Preferred Alternative (E) in Draft RMP/EIS are the following:

Air Resources and Climate Change: Additional background information was added to the Proposed RMP regarding emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and national actions to reduce GHGs. The goals were revised for air quality and air quality-related values, and objectives were added for reducing air pollutant and GHG emissions from BLM-authorized activities.

Fluid Minerals: Additional background information was added to the Proposed RMP regarding hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Guidance in the hydraulic fracturing rule published as final on March 26, 2015 (80 Fed. Reg. 16128) would be applied as appropriate. New oil and gas lease stipulations were added for Air Quality and VRM Class II areas. To provide consistency between Montana BLM land use plans, the oil and gas lease stipulation for general sage-grouse habitat was revised from a one-mile no surface occupancy (NSO) buffer around leks to a 6/10 mile lek buffer.

Livestock Grazing: Specific, measurable objectives for managing livestock grazing were added. Livestock grazing would be managed to promote proper functioning condition on upland, riparian and sensitive species habitats. Additional rationale was added for not analyzing a No Grazing or Reduced Grazing alternative.

National Historic Trails: The goal was revised and objectives were added for congressionally designated national historic trails. A 1/2 mile wide trail management corridor was identified for the Nez Perce and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails. Additional language was added clarifying the BLM would implement the Interagency National Historic Trail Plans for the Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails for BLM-managed lands within identified Trail Management Corridors and participate in the interagency planning update efforts as needed.

Renewable Energy Resources: Approximately 1,600 acres near Shelby, Montana were identified as Potential Wind Development Areas. Priority sage-grouse habitat was closed to development of commercial solar energy and geothermal resources. General sage-grouse habitat would be an avoidance area for wind and solar energy ROWs in the Preferred Alternative.

Vegetation: A new goal and objective was added guiding management of woody draws. Woody draws would be managed to achieve multi-aged stands that are healthy, structurally diverse, and reproductively successful. The goals and objectives for riparian areas and wetlands were modified to clarify that management strategies to promote proper functioning condition (PFC) would apply to wetland habitats as well as riparian areas.

Wilderness Characteristics: Based on the BLM's consideration of citizen-submitted information the acreage of lands with wilderness characteristics was adjusted from 386,462 acres to 399,482 acres. A total of 16,393 acres would be managed to protect wilderness characteristics in the Proposed RMP as compared to 10,714 acres in the Preferred Alternative in the Draft RMP. Map 2.8 was corrected to show that lands with wilderness characteristics "managed to emphasize other resource values and multiple uses while applying management restrictions to reduce impacts to wilderness characteristics," would be managed as semi-primitive motorized under the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS).

Wildlife: Additional language was added clarifying the State of Montana's role in managing native wildlife populations, including proposals to reestablish native species such as black-footed ferrets and wild bison. The BLM would work cooperatively with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), other agencies, partners, and cooperators in the development of wildlife restoration plans.

No new grazing permits authorizing sheep or goat allotments would be allowed within the MFWP Bighorn Sheep Management Zone.

Special Status Species- Greater Sage-Grouse: The HiLine District includes Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) habitat and the RMP reflects the following changes to decisions for the conservation of sage-grouse. The boundaries of the preliminary priority sage-grouse habitat were expanded in the Preferred Alternative to better match the core sage-grouse habitat delineated by MFWP. This increased the Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Area from approximately 930,000 BLM surface acres to 1,006,000 acres and increased the size of the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Area from 299,000 acres to 426,000 acres. In the Preferred Alternative of the Final EIS, the Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Area and the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Area are referred to as Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA). General sage-grouse habitat is referred to as General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA).

A 927,000 acre Sagebrush Focal Area (SFA) that represents a recognized "stronghold" for Greater Sage-Grouse was designated in south Phillips and Valley Counties. The SFA, as it relates to BLM land, approximates the Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Area ACEC that was proposed and analyzed in Alternative B of the Draft EIS. An assessment of the Proposed RMP consistency with USFWS Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Report was completed (see Appendix M.3), and a summary comparison of alleviated threats to Greater Sage-Grouse by alternative was also prepared (see Table 2.30). A new sage-grouse mitigation strategy was added (Appendix M.4). A complete summary of new proposed sage-grouse habitat management actions is provided below in the Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management section.

Allocations for PHMA and GHMA – Allocations in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provide more opportunities for uses in GHMA, while still maintaining conservation management by establishing screening criteria for project/activity review in GRSG habitat.

Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs) – These areas have been identified in the Proposed Plan based on recommendations in a USFWS memorandum, and, as to BLM land, are proposed to be managed as PHMA with the following additional management: recommended for withdrawal; NSO without waiver, exception, or modification for fluid mineral leasing; and prioritized for management and conservation actions including, but not limited to review of livestock grazing permits/leases. Alternative B identified recommendation for withdrawal; Alternative E identified NSO, and prioritization the review of grazing permits and leases, and analyzed the impacts of those decisions. As such, the management of these areas as SFAs and the impacts of the associated management decisions was addressed in the Draft RMP/EIS and is qualitatively within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed.

The BLM will manage these areas, totaling approximately927,000 acres of BLM land within the HiLine planning area, as SFAs because of their importance to the conservation of the species range-wide. Specifically, SFAs include characteristics such as existing high-quality sagebrush habitat; highest breeding densities; have been identified as essential to conservation and persistence of the species; represent a preponderance of current federal ownership and in some cases are adjacent to protected areas that serve to anchor the conservation importance of the landscape. In light of the landscape level approach to sage grouse conservation provided through this planning effort and as defined by the characteristics set forth above, as well as additional considerations, including potential for impacts from climate change, fire and invasives, these areas have been identified as SFAs.

As noted in the Draft RMP/EIS, one of the goals/objectives of this planning effort is to protect both the habitat *and* the species. The habitat in the SFAs exhibits areas of high-quality sagebrush habitat, areas with highest breeding densities, and areas identified as essential to conservation and persistence of the species.

USGS Buffer Study – Included a management action to incorporate the lek buffer-distances identified in the USGS report titled "Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for Greater Sage Grouse—A Review: USGS Open File Report 2014-1239" during NEPA analysis at the implementation stage. Although the buffer report was not available at the time of the Draft RMP/EIS release, applying these buffers was addressed in the Draft RMP/EIS and is qualitatively within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed. Specifically, Alternative B identified and analyzed allocation restrictions such as closure to fluid minerals, recommendation for withdrawal, and exclusion of wind energy ROWs. Accordingly, the management decision to require lek buffers for development within certain habitat types is within the range of alternatives analyzed.

Adaptive Management – Identification of hard and soft adaptive management triggers for population and habitat and identified appropriate management responses. Chapter 2 of the Draft RMP/EIS identified that the BLM would further develop the adaptive management approach by identifying hard and soft triggers and responses. All of the adaptive management hard trigger responses were analyzed within the range of alternatives.

Monitoring and Disturbance – The monitoring framework was further refined in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, and further clarification as to how disturbance cap calculations would be measured were developed for the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. During the public comment period, the BLM received comments on how monitoring and disturbance cap calculations would occur at implementation. The Draft RMP/EIS outlined the major components of the monitoring strategy, as well as provided a table portraying a list of anthropogenic disturbances that would count against the disturbance cap. A BLM Disturbance and Monitoring Sub-team further enhanced the two Appendices (M.2 and M.8) in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Mitigation Strategy; Net Conservation Gain –The net conservation gain strategy is in response to the overall landscape-scale goal which is to enhance, conserve, and restore GRSG and its habitat. All of the action alternatives provided management actions to meet the landscape-scale goal.

WAFWA Management Zone Cumulative Effects Analysis on GRSG – A quantitative cumulative effects analysis for GRSG was included in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. This analysis was completed to analyze the effects of management actions on GRSG at a biologically significant scale which was determined to be at the WAFWA Management Zone level. The Draft RMP/EIS, in Chapter 4, included a qualitative analysis and identified that a quantitative analysis would be completed for the Proposed RMP/Final EIS at the WAFWA Management Zone.

Public Comment on Draft RMP/EIS – Updated the Proposed RMP/Final EIS based on public comment received on the Draft RMP/EIS. Additional information on the public comments and the BLM's responses can be found in Chapter 5 of this Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

NEPA requires agencies to prepare a supplement to the draft EIS: 1) if the agency makes substantial changes in the proposed action that are relevant to environmental concerns; or 2) if there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts. A supplement is not necessary if a newly formulated alternative is a minor variation of one of the alternatives and is qualitatively within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIS.

The Proposed RMP includes components of the alternatives analyzed in the Draft EIS. Taken together, these components present a suite of management decisions that present a minor variation of the preferred alternative identified in the Draft RMP/Draft EIS and are qualitatively within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed.

As such, the BLM has determined that the Proposed RMP is a minor variation of the preferred alternative and that the impacts of the Proposed RMP would not affect the human environment in a substantial manner or to a significant extent not already considered in the Draft EIS. The impacts disclosed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are similar or identical to those described Draft RMP/EIS.

General Description of Each Alternative

The five alternatives provide a reasonable range of management options to resolve the issues identified for the HiLine District. Each alternative fits within the framework provided by the vision and management goals described above. Following is a brief description of the alternatives which highlights the key management decisions to be made in this RMP/EIS. A more complete overview of the alternatives, including decisions common to all alternatives, can be found in the text of Chapter 2; Table 2.28, Summary Comparison of Alternatives; Table 2.29, Summary Comparison of Environmental Consequences; and Table 2.30, Summary Comparison of Alleviated Threats to Greater Sage-Grouse. These summary tables are located at the end of Chapter 2.

Alternative A (Current Management)

Fluid Mineral Leasing: Approximately 282,062 acres (8%) of federal minerals would be open to leasing subject to major constraints (No Surface Occupancy (NSO)), 2,649,241 acres (76%) would be open to leasing subject to minor

constraints (Timing Limitation Stipulation (TLS) and Controlled Surface Use (CSU)), and 457,849 acres (13%) would be open to leasing subject to standard lease terms only. Approximately 102,298 acres (3%) of federal minerals would be closed to leasing.

Renewable Energy: About 92% of the planning area (2,248,366 acres) would be open to wind energy rights-of-way with minor constraints (standard terms/conditions and Best Management Practices (BMPs)). About 8% of the planning area would be exclusion areas for wind energy rights-of-way (189,138 acres).

Solid Minerals: A total of 76,477 acres would be closed to mineral leasing. Four existing mineral withdrawals would be continued (19,914 acres), including the Sweet Grass Hills Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) withdrawal, which would not be recommended for an extension. Two new withdrawals (1,991 acres) would be recommended. Areas closed to salable minerals would total 74,506 acres.

Special Designations: Seven existing ACECs would be continued. No potential ACECs would be designated. Several routes would be considered for back country byway status. No segments would be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM would continue to manage other multiple uses as a priority over protecting wilderness characteristics.

Wildlife – Greater Sage-Grouse: The national and Montana Greater Sage-Grouse conservation strategies would be used as the basis to address sage-grouse needs during the watershed planning process and project level analysis.

Alternative B

Fluid Mineral Leasing: Approximately 258,560 acres (7%) of federal minerals would be open to leasing subject to major constraints (NSO); 3,291 acres (<1%) would be open to leasing subject to minor constraints (TLS and CSU); and 55,962 acres (2%) would be open to leasing subject to standard lease terms only. Approximately 3,173,637 acres (91%) of federal minerals would be closed to leasing.

Renewable Energy: Less than 1% of the planning area (6,637 acres) would be open to wind energy rights-of-way with minor constraints (standard terms/conditions and BMPs), and about 10% of the planning area (239,014 acres) would be avoidance areas. About 90% of the planning area (2,191,823 acres) would be exclusion areas for wind energy rights-of-way.

Solid Minerals: A total of 1,667,506 acres would be closed to mineral leasing. Four existing mineral withdrawals would be continued (20,058 acres). The BLM would recommend a 20-year extension for the Sweet Grass Hills TCP withdrawal, and modifications to the Camp Creek and Montana Gulch campgrounds withdrawals. Nine new withdrawals would be recommended (1,674,298 acres). Areas closed to salable minerals would total 1,424,575 acres.

Special Designations: Six existing ACECs would be continued. Four potential ACECs would be designated. No back country byways would be designated. The 1/2 mile segment of the Marias River at the confluence of the Missouri River would be recommended as suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM would manage 26 areas to protect wilderness characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses (386,428 acres).

Wildlife

Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas: To minimize habitat fragmentation, four areas with BLM surface ownership would be managed as an ACEC to retain intact blocks of native vegetation. One of these areas is also a sage-grouse core area identified by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP). These four areas would include 461,220 acres of BLM surface.

Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Area: To minimize wildlife habitat fragmentation, an area with BLM surface ownership greater than 50% would be managed as an ACEC to retain intact blocks of native vegetation where contiguous acreage of greater than 10,000 acres is present. This would include 930,265 acres of BLM surface.

Alternative C

Fluid Mineral Leasing: Approximately 1,291,160 acres (37%) of federal minerals would be open to leasing subject to major constraints (NSO); 1,681,991 acres (48%) would be open to leasing subject to minor constraints (TLS and CSU); and 299,713 acres (9%) would be open to leasing subject to standard lease terms only. Approximately 218,586 acres (6%) of federal minerals would be closed to leasing.

Renewable Energy: About 4% of the planning area (106,182 acres) would be open to wind energy rights-of-way with minor constraints (standard terms/conditions and BMPs) and 34% of the planning area (821,335 acres) would be avoidance areas. About 62% of the planning area would be exclusion areas for wind energy rights-of-way (1,509,958 acres).

Solid Minerals: A total of 1,534,100 acres would be closed to mineral leasing. Four existing mineral withdrawals would be continued (20,058 acres). The BLM would recommend a 20-year extension for the Sweet Grass Hills TCP withdrawal, and modifications to the Camp Creek and Montana Gulch campgrounds withdrawals. Ten new withdrawals would be recommended (1,539,290 acres). Areas closed to salable minerals would total 1,480,316 acres.

Special Designations: Six existing ACECs would be continued. Four potential ACECs would be designated. No back country byways would be designated. The 1/2 mile segment of the Marias River at the confluence of the Missouri River would be recommended as nonsuitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM would manage 12 areas (228,419 acres) to protect wilderness characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses and would apply management restrictions to reduce impacts to wilderness characteristics on 75,327 acres.

Wildlife

Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas: To minimize habitat fragmentation, two areas with BLM surface ownership would be managed to retain intact blocks of native vegetation. One of these areas is also a sage-grouse core area identified by MFWP. These two areas would include 298,772 acres of BLM surface.

Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Area: To minimize wildlife habitat fragmentation, an area with BLM surface ownership greater than 50% would be managed to retain intact blocks of native vegetation where contiguous acreage of greater than 10,000 acres is present. This would include 930,265 acres of BLM surface.

Alternative D

Fluid Mineral Leasing: Approximately 357,456 acres (10%) of federal minerals would be open to leasing subject to major constraints (NSO); 2,461,652 acres (71%) would be open to leasing subject to minor constraints (TLS and CSU); and 597,668 acres (17%) would be open to leasing subject to standard lease terms only. Approximately 74,674 acres (2%) of federal minerals would be closed to leasing.

Renewable Energy: About 10% of the planning area (231,961acres) would be open to wind energy rights-of-way with minor constraints (standard terms/conditions and BMPs) and 78% of the planning area (1,912,095 acres) would be avoidance areas. About 12% of the planning area (293,418 acres) would be exclusion areas for wind energy rights-of-way.

Solid Minerals: A total of 243,635 acres would be closed to mineral leasing. Three existing mineral withdrawals would be continued (387 acres). The Sweet Grass Hills TCP and Zortman/Landusky mine reclamation withdrawals would be allowed to expire. The BLM would recommend modifications to the Camp Creek and Montana Gulch campgrounds withdrawals and revocation of three withdrawals. Eight new withdrawals would be recommended (184,458 acres). Areas closed to salable minerals would total 275,814 acres.

Special Designations: Six existing ACECs would be continued. Four potential ACECs would be designated. No back country byways would be designated. The 1/2 mile segment of the Marias River at the confluence of the Missouri River would be recommended as nonsuitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM would manage other multiple uses as a priority over protecting wilderness characteristics.

Wildlife – Greater Sage-Grouse: The BLM would use the national and Montana Greater Sage-Grouse conservation strategies as the basis to address Greater Sage-Grouse needs during the watershed planning process and project level analysis. Greater Sage-Grouse habitat suitability determinations would be based upon existing guidelines modified with data from recent habitat inventories and assessments in the planning area. Relevant range-wide research findings would also be included in habitat suitability determination.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Fluid Mineral Leasing: Approximately 1,711,378 acres (49%) of federal minerals would be open to leasing subject to major constraints (NSO); 1,460,096 acres (42%) would be open to leasing subject to minor constraints (TLS and CSU); and 167,273 acres (5%) would be open to leasing subject to standard lease terms only. Approximately 152,702 acres (4%) of federal minerals would be closed to leasing.

Renewable Energy: The Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas would be exclusion areas for solar and wind energy rights-of-way. General Habitat Management Areas would be an avoidance area for solar and wind energy rights-of-way.

About 1% of the planning area (33,119 acres) would be open to wind energy rights-of-way with minor constraints (standard terms/conditions and BMPs). Approximately 1,600 acres of open areas near Shelby, Montana would be designated Potential Wind Development Areas. The lands designated for potential wind development could be offered for competitive leasing at the discretion of the authorized officer. About 36% of the planning area (885,661 acres) would be avoidance areas. Avoidance areas may include mitigation for cultural resources, paleontological resources, visual resources, soils, riparian areas, and wildlife. Mitigation measures would be applied on a case-by-case basis during project level planning.

Exceptions to avoidance areas may be granted if an environmental review demonstrates that effects could be mitigated to an acceptable level.

About 62% of the planning area would be exclusion areas for wind energy rights-of-way (1,518,695 acres). In addition to the Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas, this includes the Bitter Creek and Burnt Lodge WSAs, Little Rocky Mountains and Sweet Grass Hills TCPs, ACECs, large reservoirs and waterfowl complexes, some wildlife habitat, recreation sites, lands managed for their wilderness characteristics, and National Historic Trails.

Solid Minerals: A total of 1,571,333 acres would be closed to mineral leasing. Four existing mineral withdrawals would be continued (20,058 acres). The BLM would recommend a 20-year extension for the Sweet Grass Hills TCP withdrawal, and modifications to the Camp Creek and Montana Gulch campgrounds withdrawals. Three withdrawals would be recommended for revocation. The BLM would consider the need for a new withdrawal or right-of-way for the Zortman/Landusky mine reclamation area. Three new withdrawals would be recommended (951,766 acres). Areas closed to salable minerals would total 1,666,720 acres.

Special Designations: Six existing ACECs would be continued. Four potential ACECs would be designated. No back country byways would be designated. The 1/2 mile segment of the Marias River at the confluence of the Missouri River would be recommended as nonsuitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM would manage 3 areas (16,393 acres) to protect wilderness characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses and would apply management restrictions to reduce impacts to wilderness characteristics on 290,865 acres.

Wildlife

Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Area: To minimize habitat fragmentation, the area with BLM surface ownership would be managed to retain intact blocks of native vegetation. This area includes the northern portion of the sage-grouse core area as identified by MFWP and includes the priority area of conservation (PAC) as identified by the USFWS. This area would include 426,355 acres of BLM surface.

Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Area: To minimize wildlife habitat fragmentation, an area with BLM surface ownership greater than 50% would be managed to retain intact blocks of native vegetation where contiguous acreage of greater than 10,000 acres is present. This area includes the southern portion of the sage-grouse core area as identified by MFWP and includes the Priority Area of Conservation as identified by the USFWS. This would include 1,006,312 acres of BLM surface.

Proposed RMP/Preferred Alternative

The Proposed RMP appears as Alternative E (Preferred Alternative), which is a modification of the Alternative E that appears in the Draft RMP/EIS. A more complete overview of Alternative E, including decisions common to all alternatives, can be found in the text of Chapter 2, Table 2.29, Summary Comparison of Alternatives, Table 2.30, Summary Comparison of Environmental Consequences, and Table 2.31, Summary Comparison of Alleviated Threats to Greater Sage-Grouse by Alternative. The tables are located at the end of Chapter 2. Management aspects of the Preferred Alternative include:

Air Resources and Climate Change

Actions would comply with the Clean Air Act requirements, including the State of Montana Air Quality Implementation Plan, through the use of BMPs and the Air Resource Management Plan. Prescribed burns would be managed to comply with Montana DEQ smoke management rules and regulations.

Cultural Resources

Protection for all cultural resources would occur according to federal laws and BLM regulations and agreements. The BLM must evaluate all proposed actions, initiated or authorized by the BLM, to determine potential effects to historic properties. This evaluation process occurs under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The BLM must determine, based on inventory and evaluation data, whether the proposed action could impact important cultural resources and, if necessary, take steps to avoid or mitigate possible impacts.

The BLM would consult with Indian tribes when its actions have the potential to affect areas of concern to the practitioners of traditional religions. The activities of concern are those that might degrade the visual or aesthetic nature of an area, or cause the loss of plant species or other resources important to traditional uses. The BLM is required to consult with traditional religious practitioners on policies and procedures to ensure they are considered when implementing agency actions. This includes consultations with federally recognized Indian tribes as sovereign nations in a government-to-government relationship with the United States.

Little Rocky Mountains Traditional Cultural Property

A portion of the TCP would be closed to oil and gas leasing (32,166 acres). The remaining area (5,936 acres) would be open to leasing with an NSO stipulation.

Through vegetation management or forest health treatments the BLM may restore natural meadows to enhance traditional uses and viewsheds.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way (30,648 acres).

The area would be an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way (30,648 acres).

A portion of the TCP would be closed to solid mineral leasing (e.g., coal) (32,058 acres). The remaining area would be open.

A portion of the TCP would be limited to those mineral material uses necessary for reclamation activities and maintenance of the existing road system (32,058 acres).

Sweet Grass Hills Traditional Cultural Property

The area would be closed to oil and gas leasing (21,275 acres).

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way (7,718 acres).

The area would be an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way (7,718 acres).

The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing (e.g., coal) (19,665 acres).

The area is currently withdrawn from locatable mineral entry under the Mining Law until 2017. The BLM would recommend a 20-year extension of the current withdrawal to protect the TCP (19,671 acres).

The area would be closed to solid mineral material sales (e.g., sand and gravel) (19,665 acres).

Fire Management and Ecology

The Bears Paw, Havre Prairie Potholes, Little Rockies, Sun Prairie, and Sweet Grass Hills FMUs would be managed as Category B, where unplanned fire is likely to cause negative effects but prescribed fire treatments may be used to reduce fuels, improve land health, and restore fire regimes. Prevention and education activities are emphasized in this category as well as fuels reduction treatments.

The Malta Breaks and Malta Prairie Potholes FMUs would be managed as Category C, where fire is desired to manage ecosystems but ecological, social, or political conditions create constraints on the use of wildfire for resource benefit. Suppression may be required in Category C areas. The emphasis in this category is to reduce hazardous fuels accumulations and to restore or maintain land health and fire regimes. Prevention and education activities target recreation areas and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas.

Wildfires would be suppressed in both Category B and C areas. If the conditions described above change in Category C areas, suppression strategies would be reevaluated to include use of wildfire for resource benefit. Changes would be developed and implemented through coordination with state, local, tribal, and other federal agencies.

Fish

New reservoirs would be analyzed for fish habitat potential. New and existing designated fishing reservoirs would be maintained and/or improved. All fishing reservoirs would be maintained as fisheries with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) concurrence. Fish stocking would be coordinated with MFWP.

An aquatic resource survey and monitoring plan would be developed to identify areas for special management to protect and/or improve aquatic habitats. Fish-bearing streams would be surveyed/monitored as conditions warrant. Fishing reservoirs would be surveyed/monitored to determine actions needed to sustain viable fishing reservoirs.

To the extent possible, roads would be located, designed and maintained to reduce sedimentation, identify and remove unnatural barriers, eliminate fish passage barriers, and maintain/restore riparian vegetation. Culverts and other stream crossings would be analyzed for fish passage and would be made passable as opportunities arise.

The BLM would encourage opportunities for fisheries through coordination with MFWP, public schools and/or the public through development of fishing opportunities and aquatic educational programs.

Fluid Minerals

Priority will be given to leasing and development of fluid mineral resources, including geothermal, outside of PHMAs and GHMAs. When analyzing leasing and authorizing development of fluid mineral resources, including geothermal, in PHMAs and GHMAs, and subject to applicable stipulations for the conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse, priority will be given to development in non-habitat areas first and then in the least suitable habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse. The implementation of these priorities will be subject to valid existing rights and any applicable law or regulation, including, but not limited to, 30 U.S.C. 226(p) and 43 C.F.R. 3162.3-1(h).

Where a proposed fluid mineral development project on an existing lease could adversely affect Greater Sage-Grouse populations or habitat, the BLM will work with the lessees, operators, or other project proponents to avoid, minimize and apply compensatory mitigation to the extent compatible with lessees' rights to drill and produce fluid mineral resources. The BLM will work with the lessee, operator, or project proponent in developing an APD for the lease to avoid and minimize impacts to sage-grouse or its habitat and will ensure that the best information about the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat informs and helps to guide development of such federal leases.

The existing oil and gas leases (803,656 acres) would continue according to the respective stipulations until they expire. As these leases expire, the areas would come under the management guidelines of the approved resource management plan. New surface use stipulations (including timing limitation stipulation (TLS), controlled surface use (CSU), and no surface occupancy (NSO)) cannot be applied to existing oil and gas leases or other existing valid use authorizations such as rights-of-way. Site-specific actions such as APDs and rights-of-way in areas with existing oil and gas leases would be allowed, subject to surface use conditions of approval and best management practices.

All lands would be open to geophysical exploration, subject to appropriate resource surveys, surface protection measures, adequate bonding, and adherence to State of Montana standards (ARM, 36.22.5) for geophysical operations.

Approximately 1,711,378 acres (49%) of federal minerals would be open to leasing subject to major constraints (NSO); 1,460,097 acres (42%) would be open to leasing subject to moderate constraints (TLS and CSU); and 167,274 acres (5%) would be open to leasing subject to standard lease terms only. Approximately 152,702 acres (4%) of federal minerals would be closed to leasing. This includes the Bitter Creek WSA, Burnt Lodge WSA, Sweet Grass Hills TCP, a portion of the Little Rocky Mountains TCP, and the Azure Cave ACEC.

Forests and Woodlands

The BLM would offer forest products as opportunities arise. The probable sale quantity (PSQ) of timber is 664 MBF per year along with 4,000 tons of biomass per year. The PSQ does not include quantities due to salvage timber activities from wildfire, insect, or weather events. Management of old growth stands would follow the Old-Growth Forest Types of the Northern Region (USFS 1992) for overall guidance and direction.

The Burnt Lodge and Bitter Creek WSAs would not be available for sale of wood products. This includes personal use wood products (e.g., Christmas trees, firewood, post and poles).

The BLM would allow for a full range of forest health treatments in the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC that may include the sale of wood products. Landscape-level projects that focus on forest health rather than product quantity allow for an array of silvicultural treatments that mimic ecological processes. The sale of wood products resulting from forest health treatments would be a secondary benefit and would not be a reason for undertaking the treatments. The ACEC would not be open for incidental personal use wood products.

As forest health treatments and/or natural disturbances take place that reduce the risk of dangerous and high severity fire events, suppression strategies may adjust to become more cost effective. Additionally, as forest treatments occur that result in conditions that approach their historical fire regimes, natural fire may be managed for the benefit of the forested resource.

Lands and Realty

Land Ownership Adjustment

All lands within special management areas (WSAs, ACECs, etc.) would be designated as Category 1 (retention) lands (297,559 acres).

Lands classified as priority habitat and general habitat (or habitat classification appropriate for the sub-region) for Greater Sage-Grouse will be retained in federal management unless: (1) the agency can demonstrate that disposal of the lands will provide a net conservation gain to the Greater Sage-Grouse or (2) the agency can demonstrate that the disposal of the lands will have no direct or indirect adverse impact on conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse.

Lands with wilderness characteristics would be identified for retention or very limited disposal (Category 2). The BLM land in these areas would not be disposed of other than by exchange and only when necessary to further protect or enhance the wilderness characteristics.

BLM land designated as Category 3 (disposal) includes 13,541 acres. The remaining BLM lands would be designated as Category 2 (retention/limited disposal) lands (2,126,465 acres).

Lands or interests in lands brought forward by willing landowners would be considered for acquisition provided they meet one or more of the acquisition criteria. The offered lands surrounded by or adjacent to BLM lands in Category 1 would be considered acquisition priorities over lands surrounded by or adjacent to BLM lands in Category 2. Newly acquired lands that meet retention criteria (Category 1) would be designated as retention lands; all other acquired lands would be designated as Category 2. No lands meeting Category 3 criteria would be considered for acquisition.

The need to protect newly acquired lands would be considered as part of the environmental review prior to acquisition and, if withdrawn, the lands would be managed under the terms and conditions of the withdrawal.

Federal minerals underlying non-federal surface would generally be retained in federal ownership. However, an exchange of this type of mineral estate may be considered on a case-by-case basis if found to be in the public interest. The sale of this type of mineral interest under section 209(b) of FLPMA could be considered only if the requirements of this same section were met. Conversely, the acquisition of patented mining claims would also be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Land tenure adjustments would follow DOI and BLM guidance and policies for acquisitions and disposals. It is not the intention of the BLM to have a net gain in federal ownership, but rather to provide exceptional national public lands that are accessible to the public.

Access

Legal public or administrative access would be pursued from willing landowners on a case-by-case basis as the need or opportunity arises. Acquisition efforts would be focused on Category 1 and 2 lands where no legal public access exists or where additional access is necessary to meet management objectives.

Rights-of-Way, Leases and Permits

New right-of-way facilities would be located within or adjacent to existing rights-of-way, or corridors, to the extent practical, in order to minimize adverse environmental impacts and the proliferation of separate rights-of-way. New rights-of-way would include appropriate BMPs and mitigation.

Corridors

Five utility and transportation corridors would be designated: U.S. Highway 2, U.S. Highway 87; U.S. Highway 191; and State Secondary Highway Nos. 24 and 325. The corridor for U.S. Highway 191 would exclude the Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC. The corridors would be available for all uses (e.g., powerlines, pipelines). The corridor width would be restricted to 1 mile, or 1/2 mile from the centerline. These corridors would include 19,884 acres of BLM land.

Applicants for new utility and transportation rights-of-way would be encouraged to locate their facility within one of these corridors.

Within the Bitter Creek WSA, management of the Northern Border Pipeline right-of-way would be subject to guidance that protects the resource values for which the WSA was designated. Within the Frenchman Breaks ACEC, management of the Northern Border Pipeline right-of-way would be subject to guidance that protects the resource values of the area.

Exclusion Areas

The Bitter Creek and Burnt Lodge WSAs would be exclusion areas, subject to the existing Northern Border Pipeline right-of-way within the Bitter Creek WSA. If the Bitter Creek WSA is not designated by Congress as wilderness, the area would remain an exclusion area. If the Burnt Lodge WSA is not designated by Congress as wilderness, the area would become an avoidance area.

Avoidance Areas

The BLM would designate 19 avoidance areas for the issuance of rights-of-way. In these areas, efforts would be made to reroute a proposal. A right-of-way may be allowed if no reasonable alternative is found; however, special mitigation measures may be required to protect sensitive resource values. Rights-of-way may also be allowed if they support or promote other management objectives for the area.

During site-specific planning, riparian areas with unique values (i.e.; where water quality habitat for special status species is an issue) would be treated as avoidance areas for rights-of-way (installation of infrastructure that requires surface disturbance and/or permanent surface occupancy).

Unauthorized Use

The HiLine District attempts to reduce trespass through prevention, detection, and resolution. The priority for resolving trespass in an area is accorded to newly discovered ongoing uses, developments, or occupancies where resource damage is occurring and/or where there is a significant loss of revenue to the United States. In such cases, resolution is needed to halt and prevent further environmental degradation or revenue loss. Historic trespass cases where little or no resources damage is occurring are resolved as workloads permit.

Withdrawals

New withdrawals would be pursued where other agency actions are inadequate to protect critical resource values or federal investments. Examples of such resource values include cultural or historic sites, crucial habitat for threatened and endangered species, or scenic values. Federal investments that may need the protection of a withdrawal could include administrative sites or extensively developed recreation areas. New withdrawals would include only the minimum area required to meet the purpose of the withdrawal.

New withdrawal proposals that result in a transfer of jurisdiction to another federal agency would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Other agency requests for new withdrawals, or modification, extension, or revocation of existing withdrawals would be considered.

Existing withdrawals would be reviewed prior to their expiration to determine if a need exists to extend and/or modify the withdrawal. Should the review indicate that the purpose for which the lands were withdrawn is no longer valid, the withdrawal would be allowed to expire. If the purpose remains valid for a portion of the withdrawn lands, the withdrawal would be modified and extended.

Existing and new proposed mineral withdrawals are addressed under the section Solid Minerals – Locatables in Chapter 2.

If lands are returned to BLM management through the withdrawal process, they would be managed consistent with adjacent public lands.

Livestock Grazing

Livestock would continue to be allocated approximately 386,600 animal unit months (AUMs) of forage each year from BLM land in the planning area. Approximately 2,390,000 acres would be open to livestock grazing and 47,000 acres would be closed to livestock grazing except as needed for resource management.

Actions consistent with achieving or maintaining the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota would continue to be incorporated into livestock grazing permits and leases and would apply to all livestock grazing activities. Under the grazing regulations if Standards are not met the authorized officer would take appropriate action as soon as practical but not later than the start of the next grazing season upon determining that grazing management needs to be modified to ensure progress toward conformance with the guidelines (43CFR 4180.2(c)(3)). A no grazing alternative would be considered in environmental assessments prepared as part of the grazing permit renewal process as outlined in IM No. MT-2012-042.

Developed recreation sites would not be allocated for livestock grazing.

Existing Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) would continue to be implemented including associated range improvement projects. AMPs would be updated and revised in response to monitoring and/or permit transfers. New AMPs would be developed and implemented to direct site-specific management of livestock grazing after completion of rangeland health assessments.

Livestock grazing would be managed through monitoring of AMPs or similar grazing plans and supervision of grazing use as provided under the grazing regulations. Adjustments to livestock management practices or livestock numbers including increases or decreases would be made based on results of monitoring studies, rangeland health assessments, allotment evaluations, and through an environmental review process. Cooperative efforts to utilize permittee/lessee monitoring would be emphasized.

If monitoring data demonstrate that livestock use on an allotment is adversely affecting Greater Sage-Grouse or their habitat, the terms and conditions of grazing permits may be modified (43 CFR 4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2), or changes in active use (43 CFR 4110.3-3) could be considered in order to meet the standards for rangeland health as described in 43 CFR 4180 and the Lewistown Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management or to otherwise manage, maintain, or improve sage-grouse habitat.

Appropriate indicators and measurements specific to habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse, or any other wildlife species of concern, would be evaluated as part of standards and guidelines assessment (43 CFR 4180) and any necessary and appropriate habitat objectives specific to meeting the wildlife health standard for the site would be identified and incorporated into AMPs or the terms and conditions (43 CFR 4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2) of livestock grazing permits.

Most unpermitted parcels would remain available for livestock grazing. The Little Rocky Mountains Allotment No. 05630 and Whitewater Lake Allotment No. 05068 would remain closed to livestock grazing except as needed for resource management. The Cree Crossing Allotment No. 05302 adjacent to the Milk River would remain closed to livestock grazing for recreation values. The 15 Mile Trailing Allotment No. 06237 would be closed to livestock grazing except as needed for livestock trailing purposes.

Yearling factors would be considered.

Processing Grazing Permits/Leases

The BLM will prioritize (1) the review of grazing permits/leases, in particular to determine if modification is necessary prior to renewal, and (2) the processing of grazing permits/leases in Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs) followed by PHMAs outside of the SFAs. In setting workload priorities, precedence will be given to existing permits/leases in these areas not meeting Land Health Standards, with focus on those containing riparian areas, including wet meadows. The BLM may use other criteria for prioritization to respond to urgent natural resource concerns (e.g., fire) and legal obligations.

The NEPA analysis for renewals and modifications of livestock grazing permits/leases that include lands within SFAs and PHMAs will include specific management thresholds based on the Desired Conditions for Greater Sage-Grouse

Habitat (habitat objectives) presented in Table 2.4 and Land Health Standards (43 CFR 4180.2) and ecological site potential, and one or more defined responses that will allow the authorizing officer to make adjustments to livestock grazing that have already been subjected to NEPA analysis. Adjustments to meet seasonal Sage-Grouse habitat requirements could include:

- season or timing of use;
- numbers of livestock (includes temporary non-use or livestock removal);
- distribution of livestock use;
- intensity of use; and
- type of livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, horses, llamas, alpacas and goats).

The BLM will develop criteria to prioritize the workload to process permits/leases (either fully processed or reauthorized based on the Appropriations rider, or issued under Section 402(c)(2) of FLPMA) and determine whether modification is necessary prior to renewal within PHMAs, beginning with those in SFAs. In setting priorities, those containing riparian areas and areas not meeting Land Health Standards (43 C.F.R. 4180) will take precedence. Potential criteria for prioritizing permit modifications could include:

- Are there riparian areas or wet meadows in the permit/lease area?
- Was current livestock grazing identified as a causal factor for not meeting Land Health Standards?
- Since the last allotment/watershed evaluation, is there current monitoring information to determine that the watershed/allotment is currently achieving or making significant progress towards achieving land health standards?
- Does the permit have terms and conditions adequate to ensure proper grazing practices to meet Greater Sage-Grouse habitat objectives found in the Special Status Species section of the land use plan?
- Is there data that indicates that the Greater Sage-Grouse habitat objectives, including the Habitat Objectives table found in the Special Status Species section of the land use plan are being met?
- Is there a request from the permittee to modify the terms and conditions of his/her permit?

Additionally, if an existing permit/lease within PHMAs requires modification because current grazing is a significant causal factor for not meeting the Land Health Standards, the BLM will prepare the appropriate NEPA analysis and issue the proposed/final grazing decision under 43 C.F.R. Subpart 4160, subject to administrative appeal and potential judicial challenge.

At the time a permittee or lessee voluntarily relinquishes a permit or lease, the BLM will consider whether the public lands where that permitted use was authorized should remain available for livestock grazing or be used for other resource management objectives, such as reserve common allotments or fire breaks.

Compliance Monitoring

Allotments within SFAs, followed by those in other PHMA, and focusing on those with riparian areas, will be prioritized for monitoring to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions in the permits. The BLM will collect, at a minimum, the following monitoring data:

- Vegetation Condition
- Actual Use
- Utilization
- Use Supervision

Noxious Weeds and Other Invasive Non-Native Species

Montana state and county-designated noxious weeds would be managed according to current federal, state, and local weed management plans.

The BLM would continue cooperative agreements with state and county entities and would coordinate with other federal, state, and county agencies, weed management areas, and private landowners and organizations.

Weed seed free forage would be used on BLM land. Forage subject to this rule includes hay, grains, cubes, pelletized feeds, straw, and mulch. Reclamation/stabilization and maintenance materials used would be from weed seed free sources to the extent practicable.

Other resource programs would assist in invasive species management through project planning and program implementation. This would include integrating prevention measures in program activities to reduce the spread of invasive species and mitigation measures. The BLM would coordinate with MFWP to address prevention of and potential infestations of Aquatic Nuisance Species.

Pest management including the use of pesticides would be conducted on a case-by-case basis consistent with NEPA analysis.

Off-Highway Vehicle Use and Travel and Transportation Management

Motorized travel in the Bitter Creek WSA (60,701 acres) and Burnt Lodge WSA (13,727 acres) would continue to be limited to identified primitive routes.

OHV Area Designations

The Glasgow OHV area (40 acres) would remain designated open to OHV use off roads and trails.

The Fresno OHV area (125 acres) would remain designated open to OHV use off roads, primitive roads and trails. The boundary of the OHV area would be increased from 84 acres to 125 acres to more closely follow topography of the area and incorporate the existing system of trails. Through travel management planning the BLM would address the need for seasonal restrictions, and/or the need to fence the boundary of the OHV area to address resource values and conflicts of use on surrounding lands. A paleontological inventory would be conducted to determine appropriate access points, fence placement, and need for parking areas.

The Sweet Grass Hills ACEC (7,419 acres) would be closed to motorized travel.

The remaining BLM land (2,429,889 acres) would be designated as "limited." In these areas travel can continue on existing roads, primitive roads, and trails; however, no new routes may be created without specific authorization. Upon the completion of a comprehensive travel management plan, an area would move from an interim OHV Area designation of "limited," to a designation of "limited to designated roads, primitive roads and trails."

Cross-country over-snow vehicle use in the planning area (including snowmobiles) would be allowed, except in crucial winter range areas (110,040 acres). Over-snow vehicles would be subject to the following management guidelines: avoid locations where wind or topographic conditions may have reduced snow depth and create situations where damage to vegetation or soils could occur, or where the majority of vegetation is taller than the protective snow cover. Sensitive areas could be closed to motorized snow vehicle travel if resource damage is found to be occurring in these areas. Additional management guidance regarding the use of over-snow vehicles, such as area closures, seasonal closures, or limiting their use to designated roads, primitive roads and trails may be considered and implemented in subsequent travel management plans.

The use of motorized vehicles, including OHVs, to retrieve game off road would not be allowed, regardless of individual possession of a Montana Disabled Hunting License, in limited or closed areas unless designated through travel management planning. Options for off-road game retrieval could include designating the types of vehicles that may be used, times of day, limited motorized off-road travel or motorized travel on closed roads and would apply to all individuals with a legally taken game animal.

Travel Management Areas

Site-specific travel planning within the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas and Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Habitat Management Area would be completed within a five (5) year period after the ROD is signed.

In PHMAs and GHMAs, temporary closures will be considered in accordance with 43 CFR subpart 8364 (Closures and Restrictions); 43 CFR subpart 8351 (Designated National Area); 43 CFR subpart 6302 (Use of Wilderness Areas, Prohibited Acts, and Penalties); 43 CFR subpart 8341 (Conditions of Use).

Temporary closure or restriction orders under these authorities are enacted at the discretion of the authorized officer to resolve management conflicts and protect persons, property, and public lands and resources. Where an authorized officer determines that off-highway vehicles are causing or will cause considerable adverse effects upon soil, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, historical resources, threatened or endangered species, wilderness suitability, other authorized uses, or other resources, the affected areas shall be immediately closed to the type(s) of vehicle causing the adverse effect until the adverse effects are eliminated and measures implemented to prevent recurrence (43 CFR 8341.2). A closure or restriction order should be considered only after other management strategies and alternatives have been explored. The duration of temporary closure or restriction orders should be limited to 24 months or less; however, certain situations may require longer closures and/or iterative temporary closures. This may include closure of routes or areas.

Nine travel management areas would be prioritized into the following categories for travel management planning:

High:

- Grassland Bird/Greater Sage Grouse Priority Habitat Management Area and Frenchman Breaks (415,875 acres)
- Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Area and Eastern Breaks and Badlands (997,338 acres)
- Little Rocky Mountains (27,688 acres)

Moderate:

- Fresno area (885 acres; includes the 125 acre OHV area plus additional BLM lands in the vicinity)
- Marias River area (19,032 acres)
- North Missouri Breaks (101,523 acres)

Low:

- Remaining BLM lands (875,133 acres)

Paleontological Resources

The BLM would identify and prioritize high probability paleontological locations for inventories and information attained would guide management decisions. Paleontological assessments would be completed for all projects proposed on federal lands to determine the need for further paleontological inventories.

The BLM would develop a resource awareness program to enhance the public appreciation of paleontological resource values. This includes coordination with permitted universities and museums. Paleontological research and education opportunities would be pursued for high priority areas.

Lands within the planning area exhibiting the highest site density and/or high Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) would be used to establish priorities for paleontological inventory.

The collection of petrified wood and invertebrate fossils for personal use would be allowed as limited by the regulations (43 CFR 3620 and 8365) in areas not specifically closed.

Public Safety

Abandoned Mine Lands

The closure of dangerous inactive and abandoned mine sites would be designed to reduce the risks to human health and safety, restore the environment, and protect geological and cultural resources. Reclamation would be implemented at the highest risk sites first. Where deemed appropriate, the BLM would restore severely impacted soils and watersheds as

close as possible to pre-disturbed conditions that support productive plant communities and ensure properly functioning watersheds.

Restoration and reclamation activities and repositories would be monitored to determine effectiveness of reclamation practices.

Hazard Class Dams

Construction and maintenance priorities for hazard class dams would be in conformance with applicable laws and regulations, and BLM policy. Condition assessments and Emergency Action Planning would be performed as required by the latest version of the 9177 (Dam Safety) manual section and associated handbooks. The results of the condition assessments would be reviewed to determine the need for reconstruction, maintenance or disposal.

Hazardous Materials

The BLM would comply with all federal environmental and safety laws and regulations governing storage, handling, and use of hazardous materials and governing disposal of hazardous waste. The BLM would also comply with state hazardous materials laws and regulations as required.

Disposal of hazardous materials on public lands would generally not be permitted. When the use or storage of hazardous materials is authorized (i.e., in mining operations, pesticide application or other types of commercial activities) special stipulations would be applied to comply with appropriate laws, regulations, and policies. In the event of hazardous materials incidents on public land, standard operating procedures would be used to respond. Cleanups and reclamation would be conducted in accordance with the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan and the NEPA or Removal Site Evaluation (RSE) / Engineering Evaluation Cost Analysis (EECA) decision.

The BLM would promote and support the appropriate use and recycling of hazardous materials in public facilities and on public land to prevent or minimize the generation and disposal of hazardous wastes.

Environmental site assessments would be conducted for land acquisitions, land disposals, and for rights-of-way if applicable. Land uses would be authorized and managed to reduce the occurrence and severity of hazardous materials incidences on public land.

The BLM would assess level of risk at hazard sites and conduct remediation at highest priority sites that are the greatest risks to the public and environment.

Recreation

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

Recreation users would be limited to 14-day camping stays at developed campgrounds. No variances to the 14-day camping limit would be allowed. Personal property of recreational users cannot be left unattended in developed campgrounds for more than 24 hours.

Recreation users would also be limited to 16-day camping stays on undeveloped lands (dispersed camping) (75 FR 30850-30852), or as determined by any supplementary rules published in the Federal Register. This does not apply to locations that contain structures or capital improvements (such as boat launch sites, picnic areas, and interpretive centers) and that are used primarily by the public for recreational purposes such as developed campgrounds, designated recreation areas, and special recreation management areas. The BLM regulates the use and occupancy at such developed locations in accordance with 43 CFR 8365.2–3.

The BLM would establish and maintain information kiosks with brochures, interpretive and educational information, site maps and regulations, and important contacts. All developed recreation sites (including trailheads, picnic areas, etc.) are closed to target shooting per 43 CFR 8365.2-5(a).

Periodic accessibility, safety, and condition assessments would be conducted in accordance with Bureau policy at developed recreation sites and prioritized available funds to resolve deferred and corrective maintenance needs.

The "Leave No Trace" and "Tread Lightly" practices would be promoted to enhance the sustainability of resource-based activities.

The BLM would work cooperatively with other agencies (e.g., MFWP) to identify and sign BLM lands to provide more recreational opportunities in areas with limited public access and/or confusing ownership boundaries. Signs must be placed according to current boundary marking standards (BLM Manual 9130).

The BLM would modify the existing Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification to accommodate the other proposed resource allocations under the range of alternatives.

The BLM would issue Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) as appropriate for commercial, competitive, and special events subject to guidelines in BLM Handbook 2930, resource capabilities, social conflict concerns, professional qualifications, public safety, and public needs. New permits would not be authorized that directly conflict with permitted uses and existing permits would be given preference. Through plan implementation, changes in demand for permits and resulting impacts would be monitored and thresholds identified that could lead to limits in the number of permits to minimize impacts to the resources, public safety, and overall visitor satisfaction. All SRP applications and renewals would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and site-specific analysis would be done for each proposed operating area.

Recreation sites and facilities would be maintained and managed to promote resource value protection, public safety and health, quality facilities, visitor experiences, management efficiency, and value-based returns. Expansion of existing sites and development of new sites would take into consideration public demand, resource constraints, and management capabilities through an environmental review process. Priority would be given to new sites that have partnership funding strategies and are consistent with established management guidelines.

Recreation Management Areas

The majority of public lands within the planning area would be managed as lands not designated as Recreation Management Areas (LND) for dispersed recreational experiences associated with hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, pleasure driving, camping and picnicking. The BLM would manage this area in a custodial manner to ensure quality of experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources.

The existing recreation facilities (fishing reservoirs and watchable wildlife areas) within the LND would be maintained in a custodial manner and enhanced only as needed to meet recreational demands that are associated with resource protection, and public health and safety requirements. New recreation facilities could be considered but should be a lower priority for implementation than those proposed for Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) and Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs) and should resolve specific conflicts of use.

The BLM would manage two SRMAs (Glasgow OHV and Little Rocky Mountains) and ten ERMAs (BR-12, Cottonwood Riparian Area, Faraasen Park, Fresno OHV, Marias River, Paulo Fishing Reservoir, South Phillips Recreation Complex, Sweet Grass Hills ACEC, Timber Creek Ridge, and Troika Fishing Reservoir). The remainder of the planning area would be managed as LND.

Due to its limited size (40 acres) and uniformity in recreational opportunities throughout, the Glasgow OHV Special Recreation Management Area would not be divided into management zones.

Recreation Management Zones

The BLM would allocate three Recreation Management Zones within the Little Rocky Mountains Special Recreation Management Area.

Zortman Recreation Management Zone (1,108 acres)

- Recreation Setting: Provides full service facility-based camping in a ponderosa pine rural setting near the small rural community of Zortman.

- Primary Activities: Overnight developed camping, day use picnicking, wildlife viewing, recreational gold panning, hiking, horseback riding, and OHV and ATV use.

- Recreation Management Objective: Maintain and enhance the facilities at the Camp Creek Campground, Horse Corral Campground, and Buffington Day Use Picnic Area as needed to meet recreational demands and comply with public health and safety requirements. Identify and develop new opportunities for facility-based recreation. For example, the Zortman Ranger Station could be fixed up and converted into a rental cabin. Specific areas within this zone could be set aside for recreational gold panning through coordination and/or partnership with the local community.

Landusky Recreation Management Zone (107 acres)

- Recreation Setting: Provides small facility-based camping in a ponderosa pine rural setting near the very small rural community of Landusky.

- Primary Activities: Overnight developed camping, wildlife viewing, hiking, and OHV and ATV use.

- Recreation Management Objective: Maintain and enhance the facilities at the Montana Gulch Campground as needed to meet recreational demands and comply with public health and safety requirements.

Little Rockies Recreation Management Zone (26,473 acres)

- Recreation Setting: Provides an excellent back country experience for dispersed camping, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, and OHV and ATV use opportunities in a ponderosa pine roaded natural setting.

- Primary Activities: Dispersed camping, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, OHV and ATV use.

- Recreation Management Objective: Provide for dispersed back country experiences for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational activities. Emphasize the "Leave No Trace" and "Tread Lightly" programs to aid in minimizing the conflicts of use between motorized and nonmotorized BLM land users.

Renewable Energy Resources

Solar and wind energy exploration and development authorization would be subject to the same laws, regulations, and guidelines as other commercial rights-of-way. Terms and conditions for authorizations including site testing, monitoring and development would incorporate applicable BMPs, current professional practice, and recent scientific findings.

Biomass

The BLM would explore opportunities to provide a reliable and sustainable supply of woody biomass that may be made available from BLM land in the planning area. Biomass can be used to produce bio-energy and/or bio-based products such as plastics, ethanol, and diesel. Biomass can also be used to produce the full range of wood products including lumber, composites, paper and pulp, furniture, housing components, and round wood.

Geothermal

BLM lands in the planning area would be available for geothermal leasing, unless located within the Burnt Lodge or Bitter Creek WSAs, in priority sage-grouse habitat, or in instances where it is determined that issuing the lease would cause unnecessary or undue degradation to BLM lands or resources. No Known Geothermal Resource Areas (KGRAs) are located in the planning area. (A region identified by the U.S. Geological Survey as containing geothermal resources. New leasing regulations no longer use KGRAs as a basis for the leasing process.)

Geothermal projects would be designed and developed in accordance with the Geothermal Leasing in the Western United States Programmatic EIS. A site-specific environmental analysis would be prepared for any proposed exploration

or development of geothermal resources. The analysis would address the application of stipulations and develop any additional mitigation measures over and above the lease stipulations required.

Solar

BLM land that is designated as an exclusion area (e.g., WSAs) would not be available for solar energy rights-of-way. As a result, these areas would be closed to commercial solar energy development. Opportunities for solar development would be provided consistent with the other goals, objectives, and requirements of this plan. Applications for solar energy projects would be processed and authorized as rights-of-way under Title V of FLPMA. Utility-scale concentrating solar power or photovoltaic electric generating facilities must comply with the BLM's planning, environmental, and right-of-way application requirements as established by BLM guidance (WO IM No. 2011-003) or additional Bureau guidance and/or policy.

Wind

BLM land that is designated as an exclusion area (e.g., WSAs) would not be available for wind energy rights-of-way. As a result, these areas would be closed to commercial wind energy development. This includes wind energy site monitoring and testing.

The use of wind turbines at the Zortman/Landusky mine reclamation area to lower the cost of electricity needed to operate the pumps and water treatment plants was approved under the Final Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA) for Water Management at the Zortman and Landusky Mines, and is not discussed or analyzed further in this document.

Wind energy projects would be designed and developed in accordance with the Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western United States Final Programmatic EIS and BLM wind energy development policy (WO IM No. 2009-043) and subsequent policy and guidance issued by BLM; and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines. Implementation of any proposed management action would ensure that potential adverse impacts to natural and cultural resources would be minimal to negligible through the use of BMPs. Areas available for wind energy development would include mitigation for surface-disturbing and disruptive activities. Areas with fluid minerals NSO, CSU, and Timing Limitation Stipulations will be treated as avoidance areas for wind energy. This mitigation may restrict wind energy development in some areas.

Prior to authorizing any wind energy projects, a site-specific environmental review would be conducted to determine project feasibility, and to address and mitigate impacts. This environmental review would include the appropriate level of public involvement.

The Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas would be exclusion areas for solar and wind energy rights-of-way. General Habitat Management Areas would be an avoidance area for solar and wind energy rights-of-way.

About 1% of the planning area (33,119 acres) would be open to wind energy rights-of-way with minor constraints (standard terms/conditions and BMPs). Approximately 1,600 acres of open areas near Shelby, Montana would be designated Potential Wind Development Areas. The lands designated for potential wind development could be offered for competitive leasing at the discretion of the authorized officer. About 36% of the planning area (885,661 acres) would be avoidance areas. Avoidance areas may include mitigation for cultural resources, paleontological resources, visual resources, soils, riparian areas, and wildlife. These are also consistent with stipulations for surface-disturbing and disruptive activities. If possible, mitigation measures would be applied on a case-by-case basis during project level planning.

Exceptions to avoidance areas may be granted if an environmental review demonstrates that effects could be mitigated to an acceptable level.

About 62% of the planning area would be exclusion areas for wind energy rights-of-way (1,518,695 acres). In addition to the Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas, this includes the Bitter Creek and Burnt Lodge WSAs,

Little Rocky Mountains and Sweet Grass Hills TCPs, ACECs, large reservoirs and waterfowl complexes, some wildlife habitat, developed recreation sites, lands managed for their wilderness characteristics, and National Historic Trails.

Soil Resources

The BLM would evaluate the effects of a proposed surface-disturbing activity to the soil resource using USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Survey data/interpretations and/or through an onsite investigation; and would apply mitigation measures/BMPs if necessary, relocate the activity to a more suitable soil type, or deny the authorization.

Authorized surface-disturbing activities would include plans for reclamation. Authorization could be denied in areas where erosion cannot be effectively controlled/mitigated and reclamation would likely be unsuccessful.

Solid Minerals

Leasable

The BLM would consider proposals for developing leasable minerals (coal, sulfur, and solid and semi-solid bituminous rock) on a case-by-case basis. Site-specific environmental review would be required to lease these minerals. No areas have been identified with economic reserves to support future leasing analysis.

For solid mineral leasing other than coal and oil shale, prospecting permits would be available for all land not closed to mineral leasing in conformance with 43 CFR 3500. Permits would be issued after appropriate environmental review to assess effects and develop mitigation measures. Terms and conditions would be applied to non-energy leasable projects to meet land health standards for uplands, riparian areas and wetlands, water quality, air quality, and native plant and animal species. Discovery of a valuable mineral deposit, within the terms of the prospecting permit, entitles the prospecting permit holder to a preference right lease for mine development and mining.

The BLM would protect sensitive areas by closing them to mineral leasing (1,571,333 acres). Sensitive areas include WSAs, rare and intact important archaeological sites, essential breeding and nesting areas for raptors, a critical bat hibernaculum, significant paleontological areas, and Priority Habitat Management Areas for Greater Sage-Grouse.

Locatable

Administration of locatable minerals (gold, copper, lead, zinc, silver, bentonite and diamond/kimberlite) on BLM lands would continue as required by law and regulation.

The BLM would coordinate with the Montana DEQ during the review, approval, inspection and reclamation of mining operations. Requirements of all state and federal laws would be met in the management of mining operations.

Terms and conditions would be applied to mining activities (within the constraints of the mining law) to meet land health standards for uplands, riparian areas and wetlands, water quality, air resources, and native plant and animal species.

In areas withdrawn from mineral entry, Plans of Operations would not be approved unless the Department of the Interior has determined that the mining claims covered by the Plan of Operations are valid under the Surface Management Regulations at 43 CFR 3809.100.

The BLM would protect sensitive areas by continuing four mineral withdrawals (20,058 acres) and recommending three new withdrawals (951,766 acres). Sensitive areas include a critical bat hibernaculum, developed recreation sites, rare and intact important archaeological sites, and essential breeding habitat for mountain plovers.

The BLM would continue the withdrawal for Azure Cave to protect a critical bat hibernaculum and recommend a 20-year extension for the Sweet Grass Hills withdrawal. Management of the Sweet Grass Hills withdrawal area would primarily focus on preserving areas of traditional importance to Native Americans and aquifers in the area that provide potable water to local residents.

Through the withdrawal review process, the BLM would consider the need for a new withdrawal or right-of-way to promote successful reclamation for the Zortman/Landusky mine reclamation. The area for the withdrawal or right-of-way would be based on the need to maintain and protect the infrastructure associated with the reclamation activities, and would likely not exceed the boundary of the Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation ACEC.

The withdrawals for the Camp Creek and Montana Gulch campgrounds would be modified to include the entire recreation sites.

The BLM would recommend revoking the withdrawals for the Landusky Town Site, Landusky Recreation Site, and Zortman Town Site on a case-by-case basis for the potential sale or exchange of the BLM parcels within the withdrawal boundaries.

The following new withdrawals would be proposed to segregate the areas from locatable mineral entry:

- A withdrawal of 24,672 acres in south Valley County (Mountain Plover ACEC) to protect essential breeding habitat for mountain plovers.
- A withdrawal of 20 acres to protect the Zortman Cemetery.
- A withdrawal of 927,074 acres to protect the Sagebrush Focal Area.

Within the limits of the Mining Laws, the BLM would apply conditions of approval to Plans of Operations to prevent undue and unnecessary degradation to Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

Salable (Mineral Material)

The BLM would issue sales contracts for mineral materials (sand, gravel, stone, limestone, and clay) where disposal is deemed to be in the public interest, while providing for reclamation of mined lands and preventing unnecessary or undue impact to other resources. All lands not withdrawn or discretionally closed are available for mineral material disposal. Mineral material permits are considered on a case-by-case basis and issued at the discretion of the authorized officer.

Free use permits may be issued to government agencies or subdivisions and to nonprofit organizations. Materials obtained by a free use permit may not be bartered or sold.

Mineral material sale contracts are valued according to the BLM statewide general appraisal schedule or through individual site-specific appraisals.

Common use areas or community pits would be designated if the level of localized activity warrants. New mineral material sites would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Mineral material sales would be processed on a case-by-case basis. Salable mineral sites would have an approved mining and reclamation plan and an environmental review prior to being opened. Where resource conflicts cannot be adequately mitigated, a permit would be denied. Operating stipulations to protect other resource values would be included in mineral material permits.

The collection of petrified wood and invertebrate fossils for personal use would be allowed as limited by the regulations (43 CFR 3620 and 8365) in areas not specifically closed.

The BLM would protect sensitive areas by closing them to mineral material sales (1,666,720 acres). Sensitive areas include WSAs; Azure Cave ACEC; a portion of the Little Rocky Mountains TCP; Sweet Grass Hills TCP and ACEC; Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC; Frenchman Breaks ACEC; Kevin Rim ACEC; Malta Geological ACEC; Mountain Plover ACEC; Woody Island ACEC; and Zortman Cemetery. The Priority Habitat Management Areas (1,432,667 acres) would be closed to commercial use permits, but open to free use permits (e.g., county gravel pits).

Special Designations

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

Existing ACECs

Azure Cave ACEC

The BLM would retain Azure Cave as an ACEC (141 acres) to protect cave resources and potentially the northernmost bat hibernaculum in the United States. The cave would be managed to protect bats during crucial hibernation periods and allow specific use on a limited basis. Any cave access would need to consider appropriate time periods, white nose syndrome, and management activities to protect the bats.

The area would remain closed to oil and gas leasing and the BLM would continue the withdrawal from mineral entry and location.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

To protect the cave and critical bat hibernaculum the area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales.

Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC

The BLM would retain the Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC (1,972 acres) to protect the diverse cultural resources and historic sites representing bison hunting and prehistoric ceremonial use of the Northwestern Plains. Two National Register eligible sites are located within the Big Bend of the Milk River ACEC: Henry Smith and Beaucoup.

The Henry Smith site (1,000 acres) has been allocated for Public Use. The site would be inventoried for cultural resources, and mapping and/or collecting data would be completed as necessary.

The Beaucoup site (1,120 acres) has been allocated for Scientific Use. The site would be inventoried for cultural resources. All resources would be mapped, collected and excavated as necessary for relevant archaeological data.

The area would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing and the area would remain closed to solid mineral leasing.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The BLM would not recommend a withdrawal from mineral entry and location. The area would be closed to solid mineral material sales.

Bitter Creek ACEC

The BLM would retain the Bitter Creek ACEC (60,701 acres) to protect the scenic diversity qualities found within the Bitter Creek watershed. If the Bitter Creek WSA is released by Congress, an ACEC management plan would be completed consistent with management direction. Until an ACEC management plan is completed the area would be managed consistent with BLM Manual 6330-Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas as appropriate.

The area would remain closed to oil and gas leasing until an ACEC management plan is completed that would address leasing (60,717 acres).

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way.

The area would be an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The area would be open to solid mineral entry and location.

The area would be closed to solid mineral material sales.

Kevin Rim ACEC

The BLM would retain the ACEC (4,557 acres) to protect the diverse archeological resources and significant raptor habitat.

The area includes an existing communication site. The ACEC would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way.

The area would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing.

New communication facilities should be located at the existing communication site, rather than a new location on Kevin Rim.

The area would be an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales.

The area would be open to mineral entry and location.

Mountain Plover ACEC

The BLM would retain the ACEC to protect the mountain plover habitat (24,762 acres). The ACEC includes two habitat areas for the mountain plover. The primary habitat is the hardpan area on the valley bottoms (12,000 acres). The secondary habitat areas are on the gentle rises on either side of the valleys.

The area would be closed to oil and gas leasing.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The BLM would recommend a withdrawal from solid mineral entry and location. The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales.

Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex ACEC

The BLM would not retain the Prairie Dog Towns within the 7km Complex ACEC. Management of prairie dog habitat would be consistent with the Wildlife section of this RMP.

Sweet Grass Hills ACEC

The BLM would retain the ACEC (7,419 acres) to protect the diverse archeological resources. Management of the area would primarily focus on preserving areas of traditional spiritual importance to Native Americans, aquifers in the area that provide potable water to local residents.

The area would be closed to oil and gas leasing.

The BLM would allow for a full range of forest health treatments in the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC that may include the sale of wood products. The ACEC would not be open for incidental personal use wood products.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The area would be closed to motorized travel. Off-road travel for administration of a federal lease or permit would be granted, unless specifically prohibited.

The BLM would recommend a 20-year extension to the withdrawal from solid mineral entry and location to preserve areas of traditional spiritual importance to Native Americans, aquifers in the area that provide potable water to local residents.

Part of a Bureau of Reclamation withdrawal (532 acres) was recommended for termination in a withdrawal review effort (May 1993) since the withdrawal is no longer serving the purpose for which it was withdrawn. The remaining 40 acres was recommended for a 20-year term modification (May 1993) since it is serving the purpose for which it was withdrawn by providing for a current and future riprap quarry for Tiber Reservoir. However, under this alternative the 40 acres would be recommended for withdrawal termination since the continued use of the riprap quarry would be incompatible with the resource values being protected by the ACEC.

The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales.

Potential ACECs

Frenchman Breaks ACEC

The area would be designated an ACEC (42,020 acres) to maintain the unique landscape and scenic characteristics and protect the fragile watershed and wildlife species from fragmentation.

The area would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing to protect the fragile watershed and crucial winter range.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales.

Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas ACEC

The areas would not be designated an ACEC.

Greater Sage-Grouse Protection Priority Area ACEC

The area would not be designated an ACEC.

Little Rocky Mountains ACEC

The area would not be designated an ACEC.

Malta Geological ACEC

The area would be designated an ACEC (6,153 acres) to preserve the significant paleontological values for scientific inquiry. Other uses would be constrained by measures needed to protect paleontological resources for scientific study. Personal collection of common fossils would not be allowed (Public Law 111-11, Section 6304(e)).

The area would include a CSU stipulation for oil and gas leasing.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way to preserve the shallow subsurface paleontological resources.

The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales. The BLM would not recommend a withdrawal from mineral entry and location.

Woody Island ACEC

The area would be designated an ACEC (32,869 acres) to maintain the unique landscape and scenic characteristics, and protect the fragile watershed and wildlife species from fragmentation.

The area would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The area would be closed to solid mineral leasing and mineral material sales. The BLM would not recommend a withdrawal from mineral entry and location.

Zortman/Landusky Mine Reclamation ACEC

The area would be designated an ACEC (2,682 acres) to promote successful reclamation, protect associated infrastructure, and ensure public safety on BLM lands affected by prior mining activities.

The area, which is within the higher elevations of the Little Rocky Mountains TCP, would be closed to oil and gas leasing to protect the prehistoric and historic archaeological resources in the area.

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way.

The area would be designated closed to off-road vehicles to maintain the reclamation and ensure public safety until such time as the reclamation efforts are completed (this includes travel off road and on roads used for reclamation activities). Travel for administrative purposes or for the administration of a federal lease or permit would be granted, unless specifically prohibited in the lease or permit. Travel on roads would also be allowed for access to private land. When the reclamation efforts are completed the area would be limited to designated roads as determined through the travel plan for the Little Rocky Mountains.

The area is within the existing withdrawal (3,530 acres) in support of the reclamation activities at the Zortman and Landusky mines, which expires in 2015. Through the withdrawal review process, the BLM would consider the need for a new withdrawal or right-of-way to promote successful reclamation. The area for the withdrawal or right-of-way would be based on the need to maintain and protect the infrastructure associated with the reclamation activities, but would not exceed the boundary of the ACEC.

The area would be open to solid mineral material sales associated with the need for reclamation materials and maintenance of the existing roads (5 to 6 miles).

Back Country Byways

No back country byways would be designated at this time. If a back country byway is identified in the future, the designation would be addressed through a land use plan amendment.

National Historic Trails

A portion of the Marias River exploration trail of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail crosses BLM land. The BLM would manage this segment of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail in a manner that is consistent with the nature and purposes and provisions of Public Law 90-543 (the National Trails System Act) as amended by Public Law 95-265. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan (NPS 1982) and Foundation Document (NPS 2012) outline management objectives, practices and responsibilities, and emphasize partnerships in trail administration. Scenic and cultural values would be protected on BLM-managed land along this historic trail.

A portion of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail crosses BLM land north of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and in the Bears Paw Mountains. The BLM would manage this segment of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail in a manner consistent with the purposes and provisions of Public Law 90-543, as amended by Public Law 99-445 and the comprehensive plan being prepared by the U.S. Forest Service.

National Historic Trails and associated Management Corridors would be classified as Category 1 (retention) lands.

The BLM would reclaim disturbances to the trails and associated settings, such as unauthorized routes and other legacy impacts as opportunities arise.

The BLM would implement the Interagency National Historic Trail Plans for the Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce National Historic Trails for BLM-managed lands within identified Trail Management Corridors and participate in the interagency planning update efforts as needed.

The BLM would support partnerships and cooperative agreements with other agencies, local and state authorities, and non-governmental organizations to implement stewardship and educational goals for the National Historic Trails and support the Montana site stewardship program for monitoring and evaluation of significant trail resources.

The BLM would support the development and management of National Trail Auto Tours in partnership with the administrating agency and other interested parties.

The BLM would work in partnership to provide high-quality heritage education, interpretation, and tourism opportunities in reference to National Historic Trails located within the HiLine planning area.

The BLM would identify and acquire lands or easements within the trail corridors from willing sellers to protect resources or provide public access.

National Trail Management Corridors

The BLM would designate a National Trail Management Corridor for both the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail based on the maps and/or GIS layer supplied to and as identified by the administrating agencies.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail identified corridor would reflect a 1/2 mile wide management zone (1/4 mile either side of the centerline) based on the line as generally depicted in the Vicinity Map, Proposed Lewis and Clark Trail. This corridor may be modified at a later date following the publication of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Comprehensive Plan by the National Park Service or when further research and/or inventory in relation to the trail indicate a change is needed. Supplemental NEPA analysis would be conducted at that time.

The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail identified corridor would reflect a 1/2 mile wide management zone (1/4 mile either side of the centerline) based on the line as generally depicted in the Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) Trail Study Report. This corridor may be modified at a later date following the publication of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail Comprehensive Plan by the U.S. Forest Service or when further research in relation and/or inventory to the trail indicates a change is needed. Supplemental NEPA analysis would be conducted at that time.

Lewis and Clark and Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trails

The area would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing within the established National Trail Management Corridors (1/4 mile either side of the centerline).

The area would be an avoidance area for rights-of-way, and an exclusion area for wind energy rights-of-way within 1 mile of the established trail centerline.

The trail would be considered a VRM Class II.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The BLM identified and evaluated various river segments to determine their potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System per Section 5 (d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The river study process is a three-step assessment of eligibility, tentative classification of rivers found to be eligible, and a determination of suitability. The BLM reviewed rivers/streams within the planning area and found a 1/2 mile segment of the Marias River at the confluence of the Missouri River to be eligible.

The 1/2 mile segment of the Marias River at the confluence of the Missouri River would be recommended as nonsuitable due to lack of BLM land ownership, the BLM land that is adjacent to the Marias River is included in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, and management of the area already provides protection for the values along this segment of the Marias River.

Wilderness Study Areas

The Bitter Creek WSA and Burnt Lodge WSA would be managed according to the BLM Manual 6330-Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas until such time as Congress acts upon the recommendations. Only Congress can designate or release these lands.

The BLM would prepare a wilderness management plan for any areas designated as wilderness by Congress. The WSAs not designated as wilderness by Congress would subsequently be managed in accordance with guidance for adjacent BLM land unless otherwise specified in this RMP. If released by Congress, the Burnt Lodge WSA would be managed consistent with surrounding BLM land. If released by Congress, the Bitter Creek WSA would be managed as an ACEC and a management plan would be developed to provide semi-primitive, motorized recreation opportunities.

BLM Manual 6330-Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas describes the policies under which the BLM would manage the two WSAs under wilderness review until Congress either designates these lands as wilderness or releases them for other purposes. Section 603(c) of FLPMA tells the BLM how to manage lands under wilderness review, in these words: "During the period of review of such areas and until Congress has determined otherwise, the Secretary shall continue to manage such lands according to his authority under this Act and other applicable law in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for preservation as wilderness..."

This language is referred to as the "nonimpairment" mandate. The BLM would review all proposals for uses and/or facilities within the WSAs to determine whether the proposal meets the nonimpairment standard. Uses and/or facilities found to be nonimpairing may be permitted on lands under wilderness review. Uses and/or facilities found to be impairing would be denied. The following criteria are referred to as the nonimpairment criteria.

Nonimpairment Criteria: The use, facility, or activity must be temporary. This means a temporary use that does not create surface disturbance or involve permanent placement of facilities may be allowed if such use can easily and immediately be terminated upon wilderness designation. "Temporary" means the use or facility may continue until the date of wilderness designation, at which time the use must cease and/or the facility must be removed. In the WSAs, "surface disturbance" is any new disruption of the soil or vegetation that would necessitate reclamation.

Decisions to allow or deny proposed actions based on the nonimpairment criteria would be included in appropriate decision documents.

When the use, activity, or facility is terminated, the wilderness values must not have been degraded so far as to significantly constrain the Congress's prerogative regarding suitability of the area for preservation as wilderness.

The only permitted exceptions to the above rules are:

- emergencies such as suppression activities associated with wildfire or search and rescue operations;
- reclamation activities designed to minimize impacts to wilderness values created by violations and emergencies;
- uses and facilities that are considered grandfathered or valid existing rights under FLPMA;
- ensure public safety as remediation for human-caused hazards in the WSA;
- protect or enhance wilderness characteristics or values; and
- other legal requirements.

Any of these activities should be carried out in the least impairing manner practicable.

Some lands under wilderness review may contain minor facilities that were found in the wilderness inventory process to be substantially unnoticeable. For example, these may include primitive vehicle routes ("ways") and livestock developments. BLM Manual 6330 does not require such facilities to be removed or discontinued. They may be used and maintained as before, as long as this does not cause new impacts that would impair the area's wilderness suitability.

The HiLine District would follow the guidance provided in BLM Manual 6330 for management actions within the WSAs including the following:

- WSAs would be managed as VRM Class I.

- Fire activities and projects in WSAs would adhere to standard agency fire management policies and techniques found in other BLM documents, such as the Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics would be used for all suppression efforts. A resource advisor would be assigned to all fires that occur within a WSA.

- Active restoration activities would be conducted to remove unnatural features and rehabilitate unauthorized human disturbances. Unauthorized range facilities would be removed, consistent with range regulations.

- Closed routes would be rehabilitated or converted into non-mechanized trails.

- Public access to WSAs would be provided through public access easements across private lands/roads.

- Lands within WSA boundaries would be acquired from willing sellers. Existing impacts on acquired lands would be rehabilitated.

- Competitive or commercial SRPs would not be authorized within WSAs, with the exception of outfitter and guide uses.

Vegetation - Rangeland

The BLM would ensure consistency with achieving or maintaining Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Any increase in vegetation allocation would be applied to watershed protection until soils are stabilized to a satisfactory condition as determined by an interdisciplinary team prior to increasing livestock or wildlife allocations.

The BLM would consult with MFWP and seek concurrence regarding the anticipated benefits and/or impacts of any vegetation treatments that may impact wildlife habitat including priority sage-grouse habitat.

Site-specific sage-grouse habitat and management objectives have been developed for BLM land within the Greater Sage-Grouse PHMA and the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse PHMA. These objectives would be incorporated into the respective allotment management plans or livestock grazing permits as appropriate.

Conifers encroaching into sagebrush habitats would be removed. Treatments would be prioritized closest to occupied sage-grouse habitats and near occupied leks, and where juniper encroachment is phase 1 or phase 2. Use of site-specific analysis and principles like those included in the FIAT report and other ongoing modeling efforts to address conifer encroachment would help refine the location for specific priority areas to be treated.

Rest periods from livestock grazing of less than two growing seasons in vegetation treatment areas may be desirable in some circumstances, and would be determined through site-specific interdisciplinary planning, monitoring, and environmental review. For example, it may be desirable to use grazing to control weedy or invasive species immediately following a vegetation treatment.

Selling of grass seed, hay, or other vegetative products may be authorized. Hay or seed cutting may be used as a land treatment to improve production of crested wheatgrass provided it is not in conflict with wildlife or wildlife habitat values.

Range improvements would be constructed to manage use of vegetation to support multiple use resource management.

Water developments would be installed and/or maintained to facilitate control of livestock use of vegetation, support other uses and protect resource values. In order to minimize surface disturbance, have reliable water of better quality and not alter normal surface flow of water, alternative water developments would be emphasized before constructing new pits and reservoirs. The BLM would manage water developments within Greater Sage-Grouse habitat to reduce the spread of West Nile virus.

The BLM would use land treatments to achieve and maintain fire regimes, watershed, grazing management, and wildlife objectives. Within the Greater Sage-Grouse PHMA and the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse PHMA, treatments that conserve, enhance or restore Greater Sage-Grouse habitat would be allowed as well as treatments that benefit other resources and do not adversely affect sage-grouse or their habitat.

Rangeland health monitoring and assessments would be conducted within current staffing capabilities. The allotments within the Greater Sage-Grouse PHMA and the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse PHMA would be high priority for reassessment of land health standards and processing grazing permits. Rangeland health monitoring plans would be developed and implemented at the field office level.

Increased production resulting from land treatments would be allocated toward accomplishing multiple use objectives. Additional forage resulting from land treatments could be temporarily allocated 75% to watershed and wildlife, and 25% to livestock. Conversely, where there is substantial contribution (at least 50% of the total cost as direct or in-kind contribution) by the livestock permittee and no conflicts with wildlife objectives, up to 50% of the additional vegetation may be temporarily allocated to livestock.

Existing crested wheatgrass seedings would be managed where feasible as spring use pastures to defer native rangeland grazing. Crested wheatgrass seedings would be maintained for maximum livestock forage production with up to 70% of the production allocated to livestock when soils are stabilized to a satisfactory condition. Mechanical treatments and fertilization are management practices which renovate old crested wheatgrass stands to benefit associated native rangeland. Additional crested wheatgrass seedings may be used to consolidate existing scattered stands of crested wheatgrass into manageable units. Where native restoration of old crested wheatgrass seedings is considered, farming and herbicide use could be authorized for up to three years in order to help destroy the old crested wheatgrass seed bank and improve the success of the native seeding.

The initiating party would be required to reclaim surface disturbances greater than one-tenth acre if necessary to protect other resources. Range improvement pits and reservoirs would be excluded until abandonment.

All surface disturbances would be reseeded/revegetated with native plant species common to the site's natural plant community. Site-specific environmental analysis may warrant the use, on a case-by-case basis, of introduced species where difficult site stabilization or wildlife concerns prevail.

Native species needed for reclamation and restoration activities, including the restoration of sage-grouse habitats in the planning area, would be identified and prioritized. Seed that is not available commercially should be collected following the procedures outline in the Seeds of Success Protocol from local sources. Locally collected seed should be used to create sources of native plant materials with willing farmers or through work with NRCS Plant Materials Programs or through both. Cleaning and storage of seed until sent for increase must be addressed so that viability is maintained.

The best available vegetation treatment would be considered for managing cheatgrass and annual bromes, including but not limited to early spring grazing, mid-summer prescribed fire, and herbicide use.

Vegetation – Riparian and Wetland

An implementation plan would be developed that contains an assessment and monitoring plan for riparian and wetland areas. User guides to assessing proper functioning condition and the supporting science for lotic areas (TR 1737-15) and lentic areas (TR 1737-16) would be adhered to by the BLM's interdisciplinary identification and assessment teams.

The BLM would enhance or restore riparian composition and structure beyond PFC in riparian areas where and when appropriate for other resource values. This may include, but is not limited to, establishing riparian pastures, stream corridor/ shoreline fencing, specialized grazing methods, winter grazing use, a different species of livestock, and rehabilitation protective measures.

The allowance for improvements of riparian/wetland areas has the potential to either benefit or degrade the resource, and improving the functionality of one aspect (i.e., hydro-period) could convert the riparian/wetland type. The BLM would conserve riparian/wetland habitat by intensifying cooperative efforts among federal, state and private interests and would minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands.

Wetlands would be protected in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order (EO) No. 11990, Protection of Wetlands. Under the provisions of this EO, the BLM must minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands when acquiring, managing and disposing of federal lands and facilities.

Riparian protection would be provided by the Montana Streamside Management Zone Law (77-5-301 through 77-5-307 MCA). Streamside Management Zones (SMZs) provide regulation for the protection of water quality.

Ephemeral drainages and some mapped intermittent streams would not be covered by the SMZs under the definitions in the state regulations. These areas, however, would be covered by management stipulations commonly known as BMPs.

Prescribed fire could be used as a management agent to support healthy functioning riparian conditions.

Riparian areas with unique values (i.e.; where water quality habitat for special status species is an issue) would be treated as avoidance areas for rights-of-way (installation of infrastructure that require surface disturbance and/or permanent surface occupancy).

Grazing techniques and practices would be implemented to reduce hot season (summer) grazing on riparian and meadow complexes within the Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Area and the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Area. Alternate water facilities would be installed to relieve grazing impacts on riparian areas inside of priority sage-grouse habitat.

Saline seeps that occur as a result of surface-disturbing activities would be prioritized and reclaimed. Surface-disturbing activities with the potential for producing seep areas would be designed with mitigation measures to minimize development of saline seeps.

Riparian exclosures would be maintained and monitored to compare differences between areas grazed and ungrazed by livestock.

No pits would be placed in natural wetlands and in some cases pits may be filled in to improve wildlife habitat in natural wetlands. Wetlands that have been drained for water consolidation may be restored by plugging drainage ditches, and alternative water developments may be developed in these areas.

Vegetation – Special Status Plants

The BLM would manage for the conservation of BLM special status plants and their associated habitats and to ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out do not contribute to the need to list any species as threatened or endangered. Site-specific prescriptions may include avoidance of special status plant habitat for ROWs, seasonal timing restrictions for grazing (e.g., limited to no grazing during flowering to seed set for a particular species), no salt or water placement within 1/4 mile of a known special status plant species population, seed collection or transplanting of special status plant species for mitigation.

The BLM would inventory lands to determine which BLM special status plant species occur on public lands, the condition of the plant populations and their habitats, and how discretionary BLM actions affect those plant species and their habitats.

The BLM would cooperatively participate in recovery plans, management plans and conservation strategies for special status species plants and would work with federal, tribal, and state agencies as well as private landowners to improve habitat for special status plants.

Through activity plans for other resources (e.g., watershed plans, fire management plans, allotment management plans, etc.) the BLM would design site-specific management prescriptions and projects to benefit individual species habitats and communities. Special status plants would be monitored to assess their condition and trend.

Visual Resources

Visual resource design techniques and BMPs would be used to minimize short and long-term visual impacts. Contrast ratings would be completed for all proposed projects in Class I and II areas, and for proposed projects in Class III and IV areas that are high-impact projects or located in highly sensitive areas.

The visual resource contrast rating system would be used during project level planning to determine whether or not proposed activities would meet VRM objectives.

In VRM Class I, II, III and IV areas the BLM may prohibit surface-disturbing activities if such activities are not designed to meet the intent of the VRM Class objectives.

The Burnt Lodge and Bitter Creek WSAs would be managed as VRM Class I areas (74,506 acres). The following areas would be managed as VRM Class II (841,087 acres):

- an area south of the Dry Fork Road in Phillips County and the area south of the Willow Creek Road in Valley County and north of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge;
- areas just north of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument;
- Nez Perce and Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail corridors;
- Bitter Creek area;
- Frenchman area including the Frenchman Breaks ACEC;
- Kevin Rim area;
- Marias River area;
- Sweet Grass Hills area;
- Woody Island area; and
- areas managed for wilderness characteristics.

The remaining BLM lands would be managed as VRM Class III (521,868 acres) and VRM Class IV (1,000,013 acres).

In VRM Class II areas the BLM would reduce the visual contrast on BLM land in the existing landscape by utilizing proper site selection, reducing soil and vegetative disturbance, choice of color, and over time, returning the disturbed areas to a seamless, natural landscape.

Water Resources

Surface and ground water quality would be maintained to state and federal water quality standards, including Standard for Rangeland Health #3 which requires that water quality meets Montana state standards. BMPs would be used to prevent nonpoint source water pollution, and mitigation measures would be applied on a case-by-case basis. Permits pertaining to projects affecting water quality, wetlands, or streams would be obtained, and outside applicants would be required to provide copies of permits (e.g., 310, 404) prior to BLM authorization.

Projects would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to minimize impacts to water quality. All proposed reservoirs would be designed with a minimum 15-year life expectancy, and the BLM would evaluate other types of improvements to determine the need for alternate site water facilities (e.g., wells, springs). The BLM would continue to comply with Montana water laws, obtain water rights for all projects, and participate in the water adjudication process.

Through an existing memorandum of understanding with the Montana DEQ, the BLM would participate in the development, implementation, and monitoring of water quality restoration plans (WQRPs) and total maximum daily load (TMDL) in watershed planning areas in which the BLM is a significant land manager or water user. The BLM would continue to produce, and provide to the DEQ, biennial reports that describe the successes achieved in protecting and improving water quality in Montana.

The BLM would use reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices to prevent harm to public health, recreation, safety, welfare, livestock, birds, fish, or other wildlife prior to the adoption of WQRPs and TMDLs. Human health would be protected by minimizing the potential contamination of public water systems. Source water is untreated water

from streams, rivers, lakes, or aquifers used to supply public water systems. The BLM would ensure that stipulations are in place to protect the State-designated Source Water Protection Areas that protect public water systems from potential contamination.

The BLM would manage federal lands with reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices in order to protect waterbodies that currently meet state water quality standards and improve water quality where beneficial uses are not fully supported. The BLM manages nonpoint source pollution by controlling the cause and source of pollutants through the use of pollution control measures such as BMPs and soil and water conservation practices. These measures are discussed in detail in the Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan. The BLM is responsible for monitoring progress and success once pollution control measures are implemented.

Disposal of produced water from any oil and gas fields would be in accordance with Onshore Order No. 7 and EPA guidelines. Produced water cannot be discharged to live surface water in Montana without treatment in conjunction with a Montana Pollution Discharge Elimination System (MPDES) permit. Effluent limits set by the DEQ for direct discharge ensure no degradation would occur. Discharge to impoundments within an ephemeral drainage would also require an MPDES permit and a non-degradation waiver for groundwater.

Watershed control structures would be maintained on a case-by-case basis to meet Standards for Rangeland Health or public safety concerns.

New reservoirs would be considered on a site-specific basis through activity planning and would consider livestock grazing practices, important wildlife habitat, alternate water sources, and the opportunity to replace or repair existing reservoirs.

Water supply sources (e.g., wells, springs, reservoirs, and stream and lake access) for BLM-authorized actions (e.g., grazing, wildlife, recreation, etc.) would comply with Montana water laws.

The BLM would avoid the discharge of produced water from point sources to BLM land, including stream channels and uplands, as a means of disposal. Any allowed discharge would be in compliance with DEQ requirements.

Wilderness Characteristics

The BLM would manage 3 areas (Areas 49B, 52L and 53) in the Eastern Breaks and Badlands (16,393 acres) to protect wilderness characteristics as a priority over other multiple uses.

Management proposed under the Preferred Alternative for these three areas includes:

- *Fluid Minerals:* NSO with no Waivers, Exceptions, or Modifications (WEMs).
- *Land Ownership Adjustment:* Category 2 -Retention/Limited Disposal (exchange only – no sale).
- *Rights-of-Way:* Avoidance Areas.
- *OHV Area Designations:* Limited.
- *Renewable Energy – Wind:* Exclusion.
- *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum:* Semi-Primitive Motorized.
- *Travel and Transportation Management:* Closed to development of new roads, primitive roads, and trails.
- *Visual Resource Management:* VRM Class II.

Any changes to livestock grazing would be consistent with achieving or maintaining the Standards for Rangeland Health. All agreements and provisions for maintenance and upkeep of existing range improvements would continue to remain in effect including access to and maintenance of range improvements. New range improvements and land treatments could be allowed provided they meet with the objective of enhancing or restoring those wilderness characteristics being managed for and meet the intent of the visual quality objectives of the VRM class.

The areas would be limited for OHV use and a high priority for travel management planning. In these areas travel would be limited to existing roads, primitive roads and trails until subsequent travel management plans designate a motorized and nonmotorized transportation network after completion of this RMP. A right-of-way may be allowed if no reasonable

alternative is found; however, special mitigation measures would be required to minimize impacts to wilderness characteristics.

Of the remaining lands with wilderness characteristics, 290,865 acres would be managed to emphasize other resource values and multiple uses while applying management restrictions to reduce impacts to wilderness characteristics. Most of these areas fall within PHMAs, Sagebrush Focal Areas, Frenchman Breaks ACEC, and Sweet Grass Hills ACEC. Management proposed for these areas is complementary to maintaining wilderness characteristics in these areas. Management proposed under this alternative for these areas includes:

- *Fluid Minerals:* Closed within the Sweet Grass Hills TCP; NSO with no WEMs within the Frenchman Breaks ACEC and Sagebrush Focal Areas; and NSO with limited exceptions and no waivers or modifications within the Greater Sage-Grouse PHMAs.
- *Land Ownership Adjustment:* Category 1 – Retention within the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC; Category 2 – Retention/Limited Disposal within all other areas.
- *Rights-of-Way:* Avoidance Areas.
- *OHV Area Designations:* Closed within the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC; Limited within all other geographic areas.
- *Renewable Energy – Wind:* Exclusion.
- *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum:* Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized within the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC; Semi-Primitive Motorized within the remainder of geographic area.
- *Visual Resource Management:* VRM Class I within the Sweet Grass Hills ACEC; VRM Class II within the remainder of the geographic area.

The other 92,190 acres would be managed to emphasize other resource values and multiple uses as a priority over protecting wilderness characteristics. In coordination with the interdisciplinary team and the BLM HiLine District Manager and Field Managers, it was determined that these areas either cannot be effectively managed to protect wilderness characteristics or the management or use of other resources takes precedence over wilderness characteristics. However, BLM-authorized activities associated with all resources and all resource use programs in these areas would be subject to mitigation and minimization guidelines and Best Management Practices.

Wildlife

General Wildlife

The BLM would provide ecological conditions that support wildlife species over the long term and promote maintenance and recovery of federally listed species and BLM sensitive species.

New fences would follow BLM specifications to allow for wildlife passage, except for fences built specifically to keep wildlife out of an area. Fences would also be placed and marked, or modified, to reduce wildlife collisions or entanglements.

Powerlines and substations constructed on BLM land would comply with the most current raptor protection standards (currently Reducing Avian Collisions with Power Lines: The State of the Art in 2012). Existing powerlines that have been identified as having problems with collision or electrocution of wildlife and do not meet APLIC standards would be corrected and modified to prevent future wildlife collision threats or electrocution. Powerlines that are in good working order would be maintained and upgraded as deemed necessary.

Wildlife mortality at water tanks on BLM land would be minimized, primarily through the use of functional wildlife escape ramps. All new tanks would have effective escape ramps built in and existing tanks would have effective escape ramps installed.

Mitigation for migratory birds would be considered during activity level planning because the number of species, variety of habitats, and variation in seasonal movements limit the ability to provide effective mitigation for all species at the resource management planning level.

Management activities would consider current adopted strategies including Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy and currently accepted science. The BLM would continue to implement, review, and update as necessary the Prairie Pothole Waterfowl and Fisheries Habitat Management Plan (HMP) of North Central Montana, Whitewater Lake Waterfowl Habitat Development Project HMP, and Milk River Hills Pronghorn Winter Range HMP.

Implementation and consistent and effective monitoring of outcomes for habitat and species would provide the impetus toward the desired conditions. Monitoring would provide necessary data to evaluate RMP management decisions and would help identify needs for changes in management practices. Monitoring to track changing conditions in key areas and for specific species is an important step in accomplishing objectives and achieving desired conditions.

Coordination and partnerships with state and federal agencies, tribal governments, commercial interests, interested organizations and individuals would serve as an important way to achieve desired conditions throughout the planning area, particularly for wildlife species and populations that span administrative and legal boundaries.

The BLM would work with local organizations, schools and other agencies to provide educational programs, information brochures, interpretive sites, etc. to promote public awareness, appreciation, and understanding of wildlife conservation, management, and ecology.

Fences identified as potential barriers to wildlife movement or representing significant hazards for wildlife on BLM land would be inventoried. Fences would be prioritized for replacement or modification to maintain resource values including wildlife movements.

Bighorn Sheep: No new grazing permits authorizing sheep or goat allotments would be allowed within the MFWP Bighorn Sheep Management Zone. Sheep and goat allotments in areas with risk of contact with bighorn sheep and domestic sheep and/or goats in the planning area would be reviewed and managed, or reclassified if necessary, to achieve effective separation (both temporal and/or spatial) between domestic sheep and/or goats and bighorn sheep. Domestic sheep/goats would not be allowed within bighorn sheep range unless mechanisms are in place to achieve effective separation from wild sheep.

Migratory Birds: The BLM would follow the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Implementation Plan (2005) to analyze site-specific proposed actions and determine whether BLM lands are meeting rangeland health standards. The BLM would integrate the goals of the PPJV into programmatic and site-specific management decisions through the following management actions:

- Emphasize maintenance and restoration of habitats that sustain sensitive species.
- Strive to enhance or restore migratory bird habitat composition and structure in riparian habitats, where and when appropriate.

Waterfowl: Upland and emergent vegetation in pastures surrounding reservoirs established or rebuilt for waterfowl values would be managed to provide adequate nesting and brood rearing cover for waterfowl.

Special Status Species

BLM Manual 6840 provides policy and guidance for the conservation of BLM special status species and the ecosystems upon which they depend on BLM-administered lands.

The BLM would initiate proactive conservation measures that reduce or eliminate threats to Bureau sensitive species to minimize the likelihood of and need for listing of these species under the ESA.

The BLM would ensure habitat is provided for special status species. Proposed actions would not jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species, or cause its habitat to be adversely modified or destroyed.

The BLM would continue cooperative participation in recovery plans, management plans and conservation strategies for special status species.

Fragmentation of large intact blocks of important wildlife habitat would be minimized, particularly in Greater Sage-Grouse and grassland bird priority areas.

The BLM would coordinate with MFWP or other interested parties to highlight special status species information and BLM management of habitats for special status species. The BLM would also provide outreach materials for the general public.

Mitigation

Mitigation measures for all resources are included in Appendices C and M. The BLM may add additional mitigation measures as deemed necessary by further environmental analysis and as developed through consultation with other federal, state, and local regulatory and resource agencies.

In all sage-grouse habitat, in undertaking BLM management actions, and, consistent with valid existing rights and applicable law, in authorizing third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation, the BLM will require and ensure mitigation that provides a net conservation gain to the species including accounting for any uncertainty associated with the effectiveness of such mitigation. This will be achieved by avoiding, minimizing, and compensating for impacts by applying beneficial mitigation actions.

Application of Lek Buffers

In undertaking BLM management actions, and consistent with valid and existing rights and applicable law in authorizing third-party actions, the BLM would apply the lek buffer-distances identified in the USGS Report Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for Greater Sage-Grouse – A Review (Open File Report 2014-1239) in accordance with Appendix M.

Development in Highly Important Landscapes

The BLM will designate Sagebrush Focal Areas (927,074 acres). All BLM-administered lands within the SFA boundary would be:

1) Recommended for withdrawal from the General Mining Act of 1872, subject to valid existing rights.
2) Managed as NSO, without waiver, exception, or modification, for fluid mineral leasing.
3) Prioritized for management and conservation actions in these areas, including, but not limited to review of livestock grazing permits/leases (see the Livestock Grazing section for additional actions).

Disturbance

The Montana/Dakotas BLM will use a 3% disturbance cap at the Biologically Significant Unit (BSU) and project scale, until the State strategy, similar to Wyoming's Core Strategy of 5% for all lands and all disturbances, is fully implemented. The density calculation (an average of 1 facility per 640 acres) applies to energy and mining facilities. The disturbance cap will not be applied to foreclose development of locatable minerals on unpatented claims located under the General Mining Act of 1872; the disturbance from locatable mining will be accounted for in determining the percent disturbance and whether the cap has been exceeded.

If the 3% anthropogenic disturbance cap is exceeded on lands (regardless of land ownership) or if anthropogenic disturbance and habitat loss associated with conversion to agricultural tillage or fire exceed 5% within a project analysis area, then no further discrete anthropogenic disturbances (subject to applicable laws and regulations, such as the General Mining Act of 1872, valid existing rights, etc.) will be permitted by the BLM within a project analysis area until the disturbance has been reduced to less than the cap. If the BLM determines that the State of Montana has adopted a Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Program that contains comparable components to those found in the State of Wyoming's Core Area Strategy including an all lands approach for calculating anthropogenic disturbances, a clear methodology for measuring the density of operations, and a fully operational density disturbance calculation tool

(DDCT), the 3% disturbance cap will be converted to a 5% cap for all sources of habitat alteration within a project analysis area.

Subject to applicable laws and regulations and valid existing rights, if the average density of one energy and mining facility per 640 acres (the density cap) is exceeded on all lands (regardless of land ownership) in the Priority Habitat Management Area within a proposed project analysis area, then no further disturbance from energy or mining facilities will be permitted by BLM: (1) until disturbance in the proposed project analysis area has been reduced to maintain the limit under the cap; or (2) unless the energy or mining facility is co-located into an existing disturbed area.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog: The BLM would adopt the MFWP Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives Plan and would contribute to achieving prairie dog objectives on BLM land as outlined in the plan.

The BLM would manage firearm discharge on BLM land before and after any future ferret reintroduction. Firearm discharge may temporarily be prohibited on prairie dog towns where black-footed ferret reintroduction is occurring. However, recreational shooting would be managed on these towns and towns subsequently occupied by the ferret, unless impacts from shooting are shown to be detrimental.

Greater Sage-Grouse: Quantifiable vegetation objectives have been identified for sage-grouse breeding (leks, pre-laying, nesting and early brood-rearing) habitat on public land. The desired conditions for sage-grouse habitat presented in Table 2.28 (located in Chapter 2) are based on recommendations in current literature and have been modified to more accurately reflect local conditions based on the vegetative potentials identified for ecological sites in Major Land Resource Areas 52C and 58A. Table 2.28, Desired Conditions for Sage-Grouse Habitat, is to be used as a minimum to meet the applicable Land Health Standard in sage-grouse habitats.

The assessment and evaluation of these objectives will follow the steps described in the Sage-Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework.

These habitat objectives in Table 2.28 summarize the characteristics that research has found represent the seasonal habitat needs for Greater Sage-Grouse. The specific seasonal components identified in the Table were adjusted based on local science and monitoring data to define the range of characteristics used in this subregion. Thus, the habitat objectives provide the broad vegetative conditions we strive to obtain across the landscape that indicate the seasonal habitats used by sage-grouse. These habitat indicators are consistent with the rangeland health indicators used by the BLM.

The habitat objectives will be part of the sage-grouse habitat assessment to be used during land health evaluations (see Monitoring Framework, Appendix M.2). These habitat objectives are not obtainable on every acre within the designated GRSG habitat management areas. Therefore, the determination on whether the objectives have been met will be based on the specific site's ecological ability to meet the desired condition identified in the table.

All BLM use authorizations will contain terms and conditions regarding the actions needed to meet or progress toward meeting the habitat objectives. If monitoring data show the habitat objectives have not been met nor progress being made towards meeting them, there will be an evaluation and a determination made as to the cause. If it is determined that the authorized use is a cause, the use will be adjusted by the response specified in the instrument that authorized the use.

Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Area: To minimize habitat fragmentation, the area with BLM surface ownership would be managed to retain intact blocks of native vegetation. This area includes the northern portion of the sage-grouse core area as identified by MFWP and includes the priority area of conservation (PAC) as identified by the USFWS. This area would include 426,355 acres of BLM surface (Map 2.18). The following management actions would apply to this area:

- The area would include a no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulation for oil and gas leasing, unless there is a more restrictive stipulation in place to protect other resource values (e.g., no lease in the Bitter Creek WSA). No waivers or modifications to a fluid mineral lease no-surface-occupancy stipulation will be granted. The authorized officer may grant an exception to a fluid mineral lease no-surface-occupancy stipulation only where the proposed action:

- would not have direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on Greater Sage-Grouse or its habitat; or,
- is proposed to be undertaken as an alternative to a similar action occurring on a nearby parcel, and would provide a clear conservation gain to Greater Sage-Grouse.

- Exploration and development activities for existing oil and gas leases would be managed according to BMPs (Appendix E.2), or other mitigation measures, through conditions of approval in authorizing APDs or plans of development. Consistent with surface use rights granted, the existing lease may be subject to "restrictions deriving from specific, nondiscretionary statutes; and such reasonable measures as may be required by the authorized officer to minimize adverse impacts to other resource values, land uses or users not addressed in the lease stipulations at the time operations are proposed" (43 CFR 3101.1-2).

  Overall consideration shall be given to minimizing the impact to sage-grouse through a project design that avoids, minimizes and applies compensatory mitigation for direct and indirect impacts to sage-grouse habitat or use and includes applicable and technically feasible conditions of approval (Appendix M). Selection and application of these measures shall be based on current science and research on the effects to important breeding, nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering areas.

- The area would be an avoidance area for the issuance of rights-of-way except within designated corridors. Rights-of-way and similar facilities would be located adjacent to other facilities in a corridor where practical. The BLM would consider opportunities to remove, bury, or modify existing powerlines (e.g., burying, anti-perching devices or line location).

- Where leases or rights-of-way have some level of development (e.g., road, fence, well, etc.) that are no longer in use, the site would be reclaimed by removing the features and restoring the habitat. Upon project completion or right-of-way expiration, roads built and maintained for commercial use across BLM land would be reclaimed, unless based on site-specific analysis, the route provides specific benefits to the public and the continued public use does not contribute to resource conflicts.

- The area would remain available for livestock grazing. Site-specific grassland bird and/or Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and management objectives would be developed for BLM land and incorporated into the respective AMPs or livestock grazing permits as appropriate. Third order (fine-scale) and fourth order (site-scale) habitat indicators and characteristics for sage-grouse habitat seasonal use areas as described in the Sage-Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework would be used to quantify habitat objectives.

- The NEPA analyses for renewals and modifications of livestock grazing permits/leases that include lands within the Priority Habitat Management Areas will include specific management thresholds based on the Desired Conditions for Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat (habitat objectives) presented in Table 2.27 and Land Health Standards (43 CFR 4180.2) and one or more defined responses that will allow the authorized officer to make adjustments to livestock grazing that have already been subjected to NEPA analysis.

- Existing range improvements, including the location of supplements, would be evaluated and if necessary modified to conserve, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat.

- If prescribed fire is to be used for vegetation treatments, the burn plan will clearly indicate how COT objectives will be addressed and met by its use, and why alternative techniques were not selected.

- A Fire Risk Assessment would be completed for implementation of prescribed fire in relation to sage-grouse goals and objectives.

- The area would be an exclusion area for solar and wind energy rights-of-way.

- Priority Habitat Management Areas are closed to new mineral material sales. However, these areas remain "open" to free use permits and the expansion of existing active pits, only if the following criteria are met:

  - the activity is within the Biologically Significant Unit (BSU) and project area disturbance cap;
  - the activity is subject to the provisions set forth in the mitigation framework (Appendix M.4);
  - all applicable required design features are applied (Appendix M.6).

- The area would be closed to solid leasable minerals, including non-energy leasable minerals.
- New road construction would be limited to realignments of existing roads, if that realignment has a minimal impact on Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, eliminates the need to construct a new road, or is necessary for public safety. New road construction would include appropriate BMPs and mitigation (Appendices C and M).
- Existing roads, or realignments, would be used to access valid existing rights. If valid existing rights cannot be accessed via existing roads, then any new road would be constructed to the absolute minimum standard necessary with appropriate BMPs and mitigation (Appendices C and M).

Greater Sage-Grouse General Habitat Areas: Sagebrush habitats would be managed so that mid-scale (i.e. landscape level) shrub cover should include a mix of height classes with herbaceous understory adequate for meeting Greater Sage-Grouse requirements as well as habitat requirements for other sage-associated species such as mule deer and pronghorn.

Consideration would be given to incorporating fine-scale and site-specific Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and management objectives as appropriate to the area into AMPs or livestock grazing permits.

General sage-grouse habitat would be an avoidance area for solar and wind energy rights-of-way.

Greater Sage-Grouse habitat suitability determinations would be based upon existing guidelines modified with data from recent habitat inventories and assessments in the planning area. Relevant range-wide research findings would also be included in habitat suitability determinations.

The BLM would emphasize restoration and rehabilitation of sagebrush in areas that are capable of, but no longer support sagebrush to contribute to the distribution and connectivity of habitat patches.

Greater Sage-Grouse habitats associated with silver sagebrush north of the Milk River would be enhanced to improve habitat conditions for nesting and brood rearing. Specific management actions would be derived from the results of ongoing research and best available science.

New distribution powerlines on BLM land within 1 mile of Greater Sage-Grouse leks would be buried.

Fragmentation of large intact blocks of habitat for special status species would be minimized, particularly in habitat protection areas for Greater Sage-Grouse and grassland birds.

Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Habitat Management Area: To minimize wildlife habitat fragmentation, an area with BLM surface ownership greater than 50% would be managed to retain intact blocks of native vegetation where contiguous acreage of greater than 10,000 acres is present. This area includes the southern portion of the sage-grouse core area as identified by MFWP and includes the PAC as identified by the USFWS. This area includes 1,006,312 acres of BLM surface (Map 2.18) on which the following management actions would apply:

- The area would include a no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulation for oil and gas leasing unless there is a more restrictive stipulation in place to protect other resource values (e.g., no lease in the Mountain Plover ACEC). No waivers or modifications to a fluid mineral lease no-surface-occupancy stipulation will be granted. The authorized officer may grant an exception to a fluid mineral lease no-surface-occupancy stipulation only where the proposed action:
  - would not have direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on Greater Sage-Grouse or its habitat; or,
  - is proposed to be undertaken as an alternative to a similar action occurring on a nearby parcel, and would provide a clear conservation gain to Greater Sage-Grouse.
- Exploration and development activities for existing oil and gas leases would be managed according to BMPs (Appendix E.2), or other mitigation measures, through conditions of approval in authorizing APDs or plans of development. Consistent with surface use rights granted, the existing lease may be subject to "restrictions deriving from specific, nondiscretionary statutes; and such reasonable measures as may be required by the authorized officer to minimize adverse impacts to other resource values, land uses or users not addressed in the

lease stipulations at the time operations are proposed" (43 CFR 3101.1-2). Overall consideration shall be given to minimizing the impact to sage-grouse through a project design that avoids, minimizes, and applies compensatory mitigation for direct and indirect impacts to sage-grouse habitat or use and includes applicable and technically feasible conditions of approval (Appendix M). Selection and application of these measures shall be based on current science and research on the effects to important breeding, nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering areas.

- The area would be an avoidance area for the issuance of rights-of-way except within designated corridors. Rights-of-way and similar facilities would be located adjacent to other facilities in a corridor where practical. The BLM would consider opportunities to remove, bury, or modify existing powerlines (e.g., burying, anti-perching devices or line location).

- Where leases or rights-of-way have some level of development (e.g., road, fence, well, etc.) that are no longer in use, the site would be reclaimed by removing the features and restoring the habitat. Upon project completion or right-of-way expiration, roads built and maintained for commercial use across BLM land would be reclaimed, unless based on site-specific analysis, the route provides specific benefits to the public and the continued public use does not contribute to resource conflicts.

- The area would remain available for livestock grazing. Site-specific Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and management objectives would be developed for BLM land and incorporated into the respective AMPs or livestock grazing permits as appropriate. Third order (fine-scale) and fourth order (site-scale) habitat indicators and characteristics for sage-grouse habitat seasonal use areas as described in the Sage-Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework would be used to quantify habitat objectives.

- The NEPA analyses for renewals and modifications of livestock grazing permits/leases that include lands within Priority Habitat Management Areas will include specific management thresholds based on the Desired Conditions for Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat (habitat objectives) presented in Table 2.27 and Land Health Standards (43 CFR 4180.2) and defined responses that will allow the authorized officer to make adjustments to livestock grazing without conducting additional NEPA.

- Existing range improvements, including the location of supplements, would be evaluated and if necessary modified to conserve, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat.

- If prescribed fire is to be used for vegetation treatments, the burn plan will clearly indicate how COT objectives will be addressed and met by its use, and why alternative techniques were not selected.

- A Fire Risk Assessment would be completed for implementation of prescribed fire in relation to sage-grouse goals and objectives.

- The area would be an exclusion area for solar and wind energy rights-of-way.

- The area would be closed to solid leasable minerals, including non-energy leasable minerals.

- Priority Habitat Management Areas are closed to new mineral material sales. However, these areas remain "open" to free use permits and the expansion of existing active pits, only if the following criteria are met:

  - the activity is within the Biologically Significant Unit (BSU) and project area disturbance cap;
  - the activity is subject to the provisions set forth in the mitigation framework (Appendix M.4);
  - all applicable required design features are applied (Appendix M.6).

- New road construction would be limited to realignments of existing roads, if that realignment has a minimal impact on Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, eliminates the need to construct a new road, or is necessary for public safety. New road construction would include appropriate BMPs and mitigation (Appendices C and M).

- Existing roads, or realignments, would be used to access valid existing rights. If valid existing rights cannot be accessed via existing roads, then any new road would be constructed to the absolute minimum standard necessary with appropriate BMPs and mitigation (Appendices C and M).

Greater Sage-Grouse Restoration Area: This is an area with ongoing or imminent impacts containing substantial and high quality sage-grouse habitat that historically supported sustainable sage-grouse populations. This area includes 46,786 acres of BLM surface. Management actions would emphasize restoration for the purpose of establishing or restoring sustainable sage-grouse populations.

Specific management for this area would be addressed through plan implementation, most likely a natural gas field development plan for the Bears Paw South Area (see Appendix E, Map E.1). Management actions addressed during implementation would be based on guidance contained in Instruction Memorandum MT-2010-017 and may include:

- Maximizing the area of interim reclamation on roads and well locations.
- Direct planting of seedlings of shrubs and forbs important for spring and summer food.
- Seeding of wild collected shrub seed to increase nesting habitat.
- Burying powerlines to prevent predator perch sites.

Mountain Plover: The following management actions would apply to protect mountain plover habitat and to maintain regional mountain plover populations:

- Mountain plover habitat would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing: surface occupancy and use would be prohibited within mountain plover habitat.

- A timing stipulation would also apply: surface occupancy and use would be prohibited within 1/4 mile of mountain plover habitat from April 1 through July 15.

- Activities for existing oil and gas leases would be managed according to BMPs.

- For surface-disturbing or disruptive activities other than oil and gas, mitigation would be applied where needed to minimize impacts of human activities on mountain plover habitat consistent with the oil and gas surface use restrictions. The BLM would avoid permanent above-ground structures that may provide perches for avian predators or deter plover from using preferred habitat. Mitigation measures would be applied on a case-by-case basis during activity level planning if an evaluation of the project area indicates the presence of mountain plovers. This would include surveys for mountain plovers in all suitable habitat, as well as avoidance of nesting areas from April 1 through July 15. Exceptions may be granted by the authorized officer if an environmental review demonstrates that effects could be mitigated to an acceptable level.

- Road maintenance in mountain plover habitat would not occur between April 1 and July 15 unless the road is surveyed prior to maintenance activities for plover presence and avoidance measures are implemented.

- The BLM would reduce or control non-native grasses to increase breeding habitat, and prescribed burning could be used to increase the availability of nesting habitat, particularly on lands where taller or non-native grasses occur.

- The BLM would promote integrated pest management practices that limit chemical applications in mountain plover habitat.

Piping Plover: The following management actions would apply to protect piping plover habitat and maintain regional piping plover populations:

- Piping plover habitat would include an NSO stipulation for oil and gas leasing: surface occupancy and use would be prohibited within 1/4 mile of essential and critical habitat.

- Road maintenance in piping plover habitat would not occur between April 1 and July 31 unless the road is surveyed prior to maintenance activities for plover presence and avoidance measures are implemented.

Sprague's Pipit: The following management actions would apply to protect Sprague's pipit habitat:

- Sprague's pipits would be protected through management actions for the Grassland Bird/Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas.
- A timing stipulation would apply to areas within Sprague's pipit habitat: Surface occupancy and use would be prohibited from April 15 through July 15.