

Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the information discussed throughout the remainder of the HiLine Resource Management Plan. This chapter discusses why the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepared this Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed RMP/Final EIS), how the public was involved in this planning process, how issues were defined, and a number of other topics. The information in this chapter is organized into the following headings and subheadings:

- 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

Background

The BLM prepared this Proposed RMP/Final EIS to provide direction for managing public lands (BLM lands) and federal minerals in northcentral Montana under the jurisdiction of the HiLine District under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), lands administered by the BLM are defined as public lands. However, the public generally refers to public lands as those for which title and control rests with a government (federal, state, regional, county, or municipal). For clarity throughout the document public lands administered by the BLM will be referred to as BLM lands.

The affected lands are currently managed under two RMPs: the Judith-Valley-Phillips Resource Management Plan (BLM 1994a) and the West HiLine Resource Management Plan (BLM 1988). Oil and gas leasing in Phillips and Valley Counties is currently managed under four Management Framework Plans (MFPs): the Phillips MFP (BLM 1977a), Valley MFP (BLM 1977b), Little Rocky Mountains MFP (BLM 1977c), and UL Bend/Zortman MFP (BLM 1977d).

The Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP was amended on five occasions and the West HiLine RMP was amended on seven occasions (Table 1.1). In addition, several new laws, regulations, and policies have affected management of public lands since approval of both plans.

The two previous RMPs and four MFPs are being revised according to guidance in FLPMA and the BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook, H-1601-1. An EIS is incorporated into this document as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA.

Public Lands

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the term “public lands” means any land and interest in land owned by the United States within the several States and administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management, without regard to how the United States acquired ownership.” (43 U.S.C. 1702, Sec. 103(e))

Land use plan decisions establish goals and objectives for resource management (desired outcomes) and the measures needed to achieve these goals and objectives (allowable uses and management actions) in coordination with federal, tribal, state, and local governments; land users; and interested public. This RMP incorporates new information and regulatory guidance, and provides management direction where it may be lacking or requires clarification. Current management direction that has proven effective and requires no change will be carried forward into the revised RMP.

Table 1.1 Resource Management Plan Amendments		
<i>Amendment</i>	<i>RMP Amended</i>	
	<i>Judith-Valley-Phillips</i>	<i>West HiLine</i>
Bitter Creek and Mountain Plover Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment (BLM 2001a)	✓	
Fire/Fuels Management Plan Environmental Assessment/Plan Amendment for Montana and the Dakotas (BLM 2004a)	✓	✓
Loma/Vimy Ridge Watershed Environmental Assessment and Plan Amendment (BLM 2002)		✓
Lonesome Lake Management Area Environmental Assessment and Resource Management Plan Amendment (BLM 1996a)		✓
Montana/Dakotas Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM 1997a)	✓	✓
Off-Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota (BLM 2001b)	✓	✓
Sweet Grass Hills Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (BLM 1996b)		✓
Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western United States, Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (BLM 2005)	✓	✓

The BLM’s multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Management is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology.

The BLM is responsible for resource protection, resource use, recreation, and serving the community on public lands and federal subsurface mineral estate. The resources managed include air resources, cultural, fish and wildlife habitat, minerals, rangelands, timber, visual, watersheds, and wilderness.

Multiple Use and Sustained Yield

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the term “multiple use” means “the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people; making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions; the use of some land for less than all of the resources; a combination of balanced and diverse resource uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and non-renewable resources, including, but not limited to, recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural scenic, scientific and historical values; and harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment with consideration being given to the relative values of the resources and not necessarily to the combination of uses that will give the greatest economic return or the greatest unit output.” (43 U.S.C. 1702, Sec. 103(c)) The term “sustained yield” means “the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high-level annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources of the public lands consistent with multiple use.” (43 U.S.C. 1702, Sec. 103(h))

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.

Planning Area

The BLM administers approximately 2,437,000 acres of public land and 4,240,000 acres of federal minerals within the planning area in Blaine, Chouteau, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Phillips, Toole, and Valley Counties (Table 1.2). These lands and minerals are managed by three BLM Field Offices in Havre, Malta, and Glasgow along with the Great Falls Oil and Gas Field Office, which provides oil and gas program support in western, central, and northcentral Montana. Figure 1.1 shows surface land ownership within the planning area, and Figure 1.2 shows the federal mineral estate.

<i>County</i>	<i>Total Area (Acres)</i>	<i>BLM Surface</i>		<i>BLM Subsurface</i>	
		<i>Acres</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>%</i>
Blaine	2,705,755	299,201	11	615,688	23
Chouteau	2,542,874	45,025	2	174,281	7
Glacier	1,916,621	1,040	<1	6,184	<1
Hill	1,853,670	14,448	1	156,967	8
Liberty	915,046	7,543	1	66,990	7
Phillips	3,289,325	1,029,362	31	1,744,612	53
Toole	1,223,008	27,646	2	123,203	10
Valley	3,149,440	1,013,209	32	1,351,730	43
Total	17,595,739	2,437,474	14	4,239,655	24

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census (total acres) and BLM 2012 (BLM surface and subsurface acres).

Figure 1.1 HiLine Planning Area – Surface Ownership

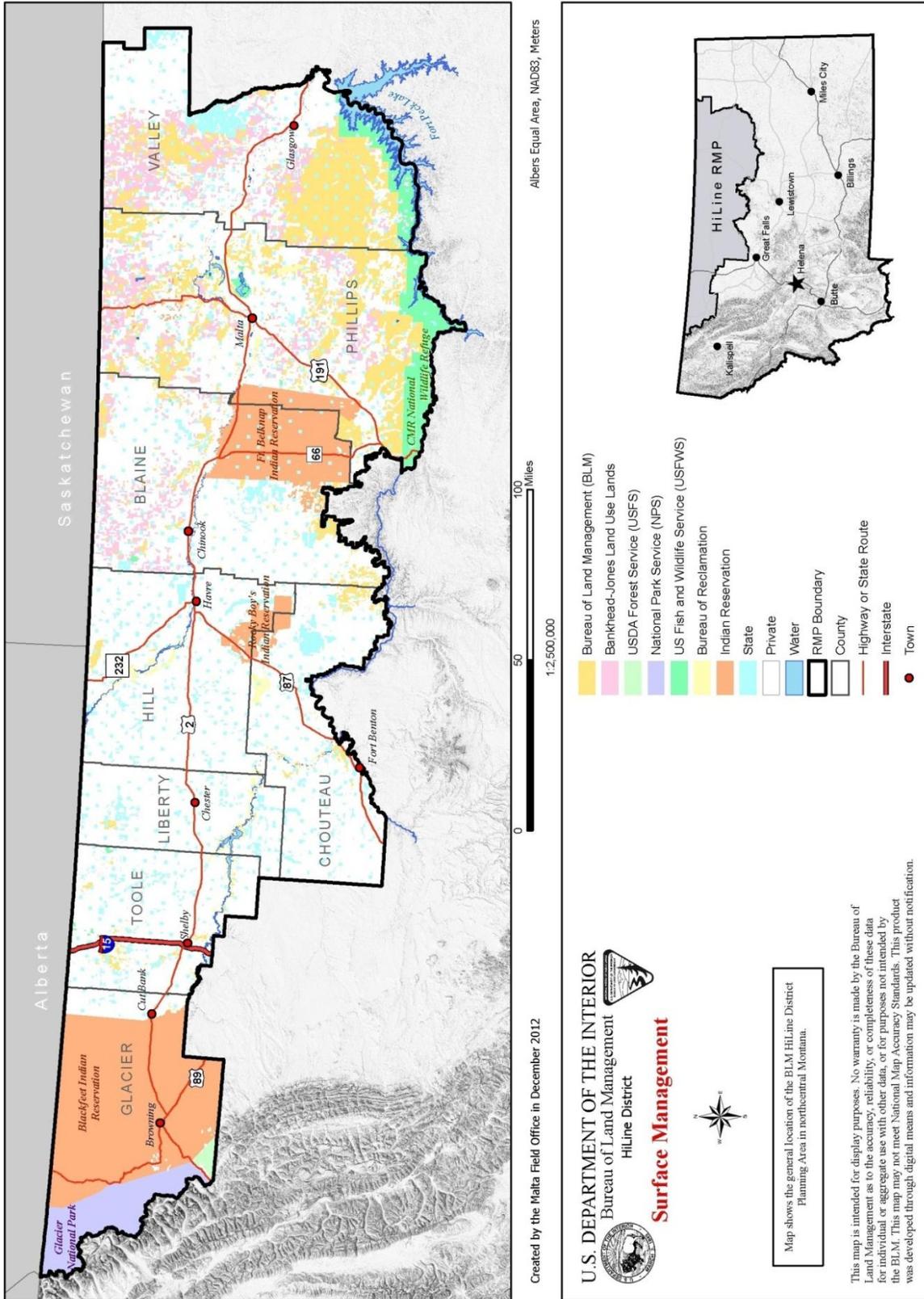
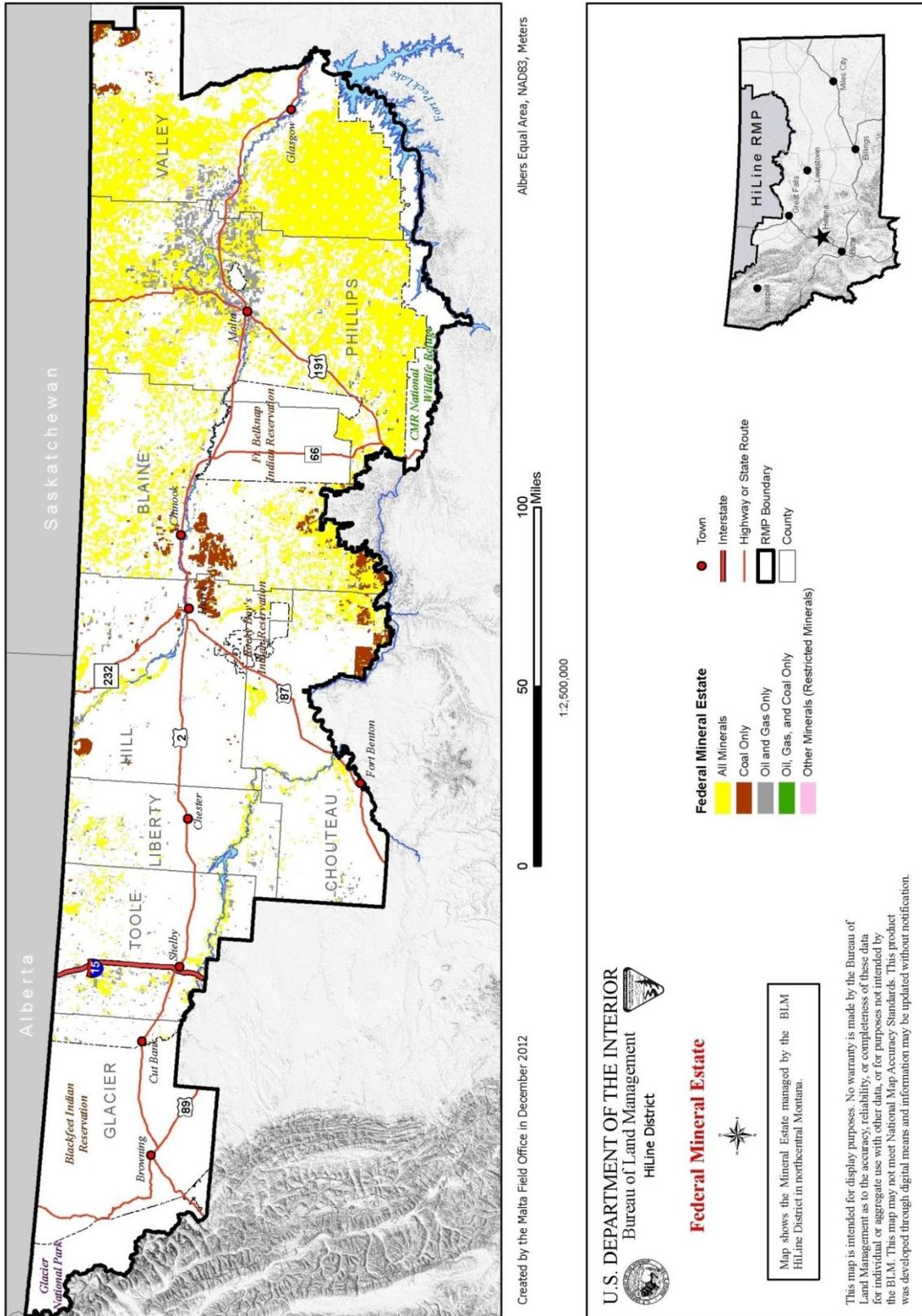


Figure 1.2 HiLine Planning Area – Federal Mineral Estate



Collaboration

Throughout preparation of the RMP/EIS consultation and coordination have been important components of the planning effort. Public meetings, information mailings and individual contacts with other governmental agencies, Native American tribes, interest groups and the general public were used to gather information for the RMP/EIS. Consultation and coordination will continue with preparation of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, Record of Decision, and implementation. A list of the public involvement opportunities can be found in Chapter 5.

At the onset of this planning process the BLM invited entities of federal, tribal, state and county governments to collaborate with the BLM on the development of this RMP/EIS by becoming cooperating agencies. The primary role of cooperating agencies (also called cooperators) is to provide special expertise and/or assistance to the lead agency throughout the planning process. Cooperator roles include participation in the scoping process; provision of staff, information, and assistance to the lead agency; performance of (or assistance with) independent preparation of analysis where cooperating staff has special expertise; and review of draft information. Cooperators meet throughout the planning process as a group to discuss issues, solutions, and ideas for revising the plan. Upon request of the lead agency, any other federal, state, local, or tribal government having jurisdiction by law or having special expertise with respect to an environmental issue may become a cooperating agency. An agency may also request the lead agency designate it a cooperating agency.

The following agencies with jurisdiction or special expertise are cooperating agencies for this resource management plan:

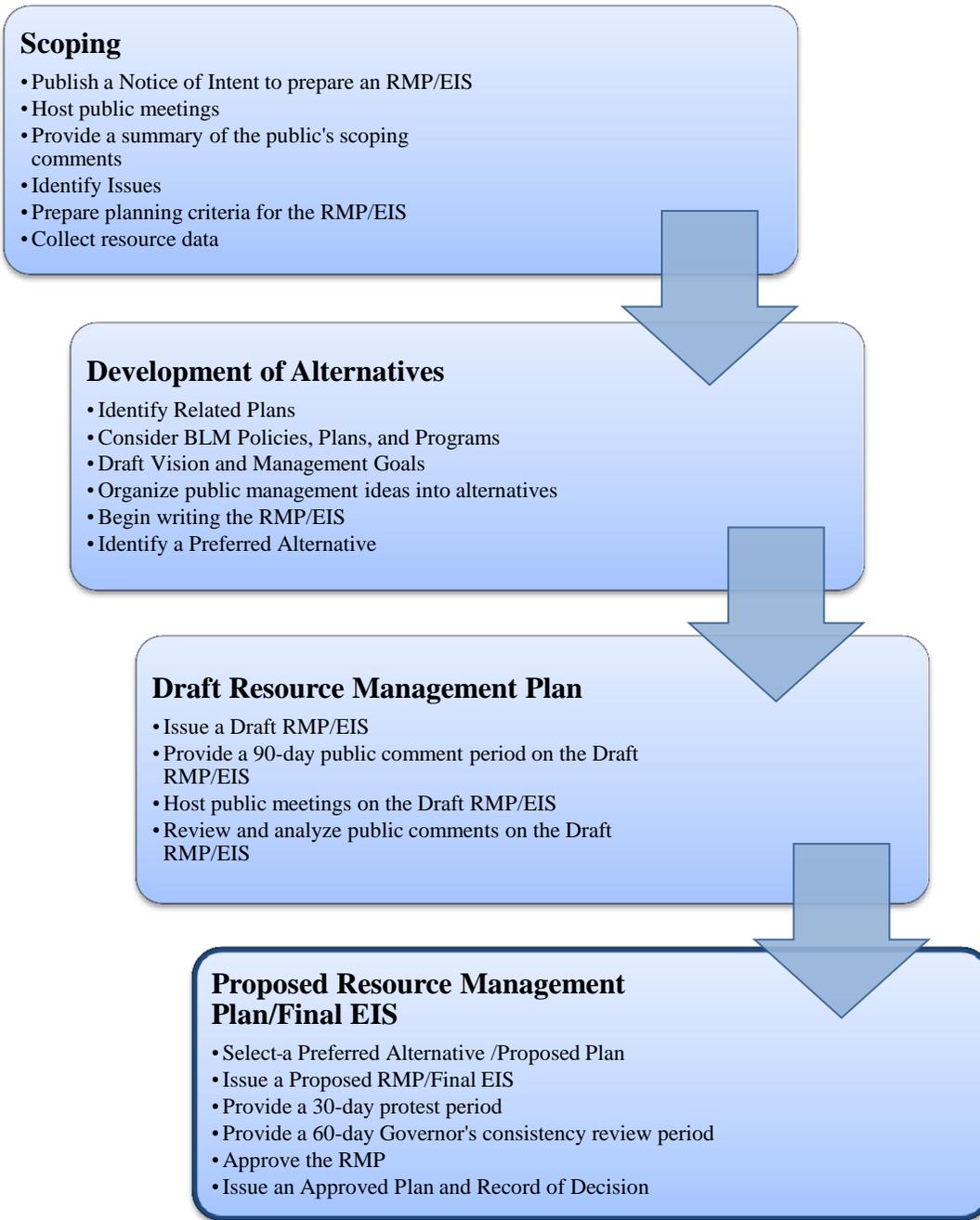
- U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Blaine County
- Phillips County
- Valley County
- Montana Cooperative State Grazing Districts
 - Badlands
 - Buggy Creek
 - North Blaine
 - North Phillips
 - North Valley
 - South Phillips
 - Wayne Creek
 - Willow Creek

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act and in recognition of the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the federal government, letters were sent to nine tribal governments and officials at the start of the planning process to inform them of the HiLine RMP and an opportunity to partner with the BLM as a cooperating agency. While no tribes became an official cooperating agency, coordination has continued through letters and updates. Additional meetings and briefings occurred during the public comment period for the Draft RMP/EIS. A summary of the meetings with tribal governments/officials on the HiLine RMP is presented in Table 5.3 in Chapter 5.

Planning Process

Figure 1.3 shows the major steps in the planning process that led to the publication of the Draft RMP/EIS and the steps for completing the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The major steps in Figure 1.3 are described in subsequent sections of this chapter.

**Figure 1.3
Steps in Preparing the Resource Management Plan**



Scoping

The scoping process identifies land use issues and conflicts. These issues stem from new information or changed circumstances, the need to address environmental concerns, or a need to reassess the appropriate mix of allowable uses based on new information. Scoping is the first step in the planning process and closely involves the public with identifying issues, providing resource or other information, and developing planning criteria to guide preparation of the RMP.

On September 9, 2006, a Notice of Intent to prepare the RMP was published in the Federal Register. This notice marked the beginning of a scoping effort that would invite extensive public involvement as a means of helping define the issues to be addressed in the RMP/EIS.

During scoping the BLM requested public input on identifying resource issues and concerns, management alternatives, or other ideas to help in determining future land use decisions for the planning area. In October 2006, eighteen scoping meetings were held across the planning area, including three outside of the planning area (Great Falls, Billings and Helena). Additional information on scoping and public participation is described in Chapter 5.

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 withdrawal from 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.

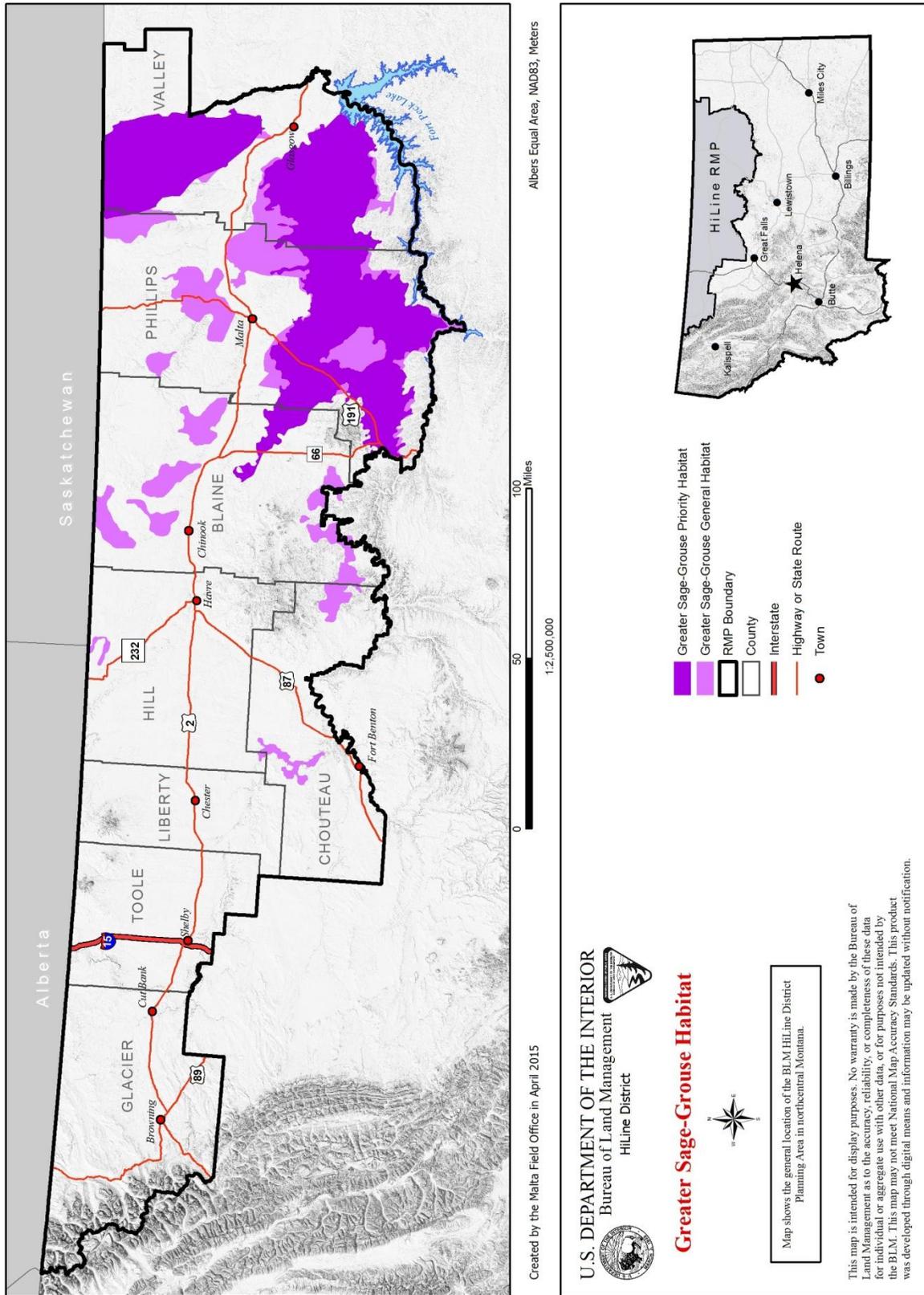
Several categories of species and their habitats within the planning area require special management or considerations. These species are federally listed threatened and endangered, proposed for listing, and candidate and state sensitive species, and BLM special status species. Principal concerns associated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

Figure 1.4 Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat



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.

Issues and Concerns Considered but Not Addressed Further

Scoping also identified issues, concerns, or questions that can be addressed by current management, BLM policy, administrative action, or that were beyond the scope of this RMP/EIS. Some of these scoping comments are summarized

below, while the Scoping Summary Report (BLM 2007a) provides a comprehensive list of issues and concerns that are outside the scope of the RMP or are addressed through administrative or policy action.

Issues Considered but Not Addressed Further

How will the BLM manage wildlife populations including elk and other big game, coyotes, and sage-grouse?

The BLM manages wildlife habitat on public lands, which is addressed in Chapter 2. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) is responsible for fish and wildlife population management.

How will bison be managed?

The grazing regulations provide for authorizing grazing permits for privately owned indigenous animals. The BLM has permitted two allotments in south Phillips County for bison. The BLM has also permitted bison on allotments in other areas of Montana, Colorado, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Any future proposals to change the class of livestock from cattle to bison would be considered as provided by the grazing regulations.

A distinction is made between bison that are privately owned and considered livestock and those that are considered wildlife (publicly owned) that fall under the jurisdiction of the State of Montana.

The Department of the Interior Bison Conservation Initiative (DOI 2008) provides guidance to address the health and genetic composition of the Department's bison herds in seven national wildlife refuges and five national parks, which are all outside of the planning area. While the initiative does mention that the "Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge is in the early stages of considering devoting part of the refuge to bison habitat with adjoining land owners, including the Bureau of Land Management," the USFWS has taken the position that it will not consider reintroducing wild bison on the refuge unless MFWP initiates an effort to restore wild bison on a large landscape (USFWS 2012a).

In May 2012, MFWP began the public scoping process for their Statewide Bison Management Plan EIS. The programmatic EIS will examine an array of possible alternatives from a no action alternative to a number of different bison restoration alternatives (MFWP 2012a). The BLM recognizes the State's role in managing native wildlife and would work cooperatively with MFWP, USFWS, other agencies, partners, and cooperators in the development of a wild bison restoration plan.

The BLM should make a determination on final designation of the wilderness study areas (Bitter Creek and Burnt Lodge) in the new RMP. It is time for the process to move forward.

The wilderness program is in the transitional stage between wilderness study and Congressional action. Final suitability studies and environmental impact statements completed by the BLM (BLM 1987 and 1989) recommended the Burnt Lodge Wilderness Study Area (WSA) as wilderness and the Bitter Creek WSA as non-wilderness. Only Congress can designate or release these lands from WSA status. The WSAs will continue to be managed under BLM Manual 6330-Management of BLM Wilderness Study Areas.

Concerns Considered but Not Addressed Further

Who will handle outfitting permits, the Central Montana District or the HiLine District?

Special recreation permits (SRPs) for outfitting on BLM land entirely within the planning area are administered out of the HiLine District. However, SRPs for lands that also include the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and/or the Lewistown Field Office are administered out of the Central Montana District.

How will the BLM manage wild horses and burros in the planning area?

No wild horse or burro herd management areas or managed populations of wild horses or wild burros are located in the planning area.

Where does the money go from the development of federal minerals? Does some of it go back to the county or BLM Field Office, or can it be used to improve firefighting capabilities?

Mineral revenues are collected from two types of lands administered by the BLM, public domain lands and Bankhead-Jones lands (LU lands). LU lands are further divided by the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 into Section 3 lands (grazing districts) and Section 15 lands (outside grazing districts; leased to private parties).

Mineral revenues on public domain lands are distributed as follows: the State of Montana receives 50%; the Reclamation Fund (managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation) receives 40%; and the remaining 10% goes to the General Fund in the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Starting in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, 25% of the disbursement to the State of Montana (or 12.5% of total royalty revenue) is distributed to the county of production.

Mineral revenues on LU lands (Section 3) are distributed as follows: the State of Montana and counties receive 12.5%; the BLM range improvement fund receives 50%; and the remaining 37.5% goes to the General Fund in the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Mineral revenues on LU lands (Section 15) are distributed as follows: the State of Montana and counties receive 50%; and the BLM range improvement fund receives 50%.

Questions about the RMP Process

The BLM should take full advantage of the stakeholder process as decisions are made regarding the management of these public lands, including discussions prior to developing alternatives. The BLM should also provide for public input into the management situation analysis, identification of planning issues, and on a preliminary range of alternatives prior to preparing the Draft RMP/EIS.

During scoping the BLM requested public input on identifying resource issues and concerns, management alternatives, or other ideas to help in determining future land use decisions for the planning area. Public involvement continued with a 90 day public comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS. Additional information on scoping and public participation is described in Chapter 5.

How does the BLM handle public comments? Are written comments treated as “one person equals one vote” and are the public comments weighted in any way (local and non-local)?

Our planning regulations require the BLM to consider each comment thoroughly and equally. When reading the public comments, we look for specific comments or information that help identify issues; develop a reasonable range of alternatives; supplement, improve or modify the analysis; and/or make factual corrections. All the comments received are read and specific comments are identified and coded into the appropriate subject category (e.g., wildlife, cultural resources, recreation, etc.). Duplicate comments from form-type letters and emails or “campaign-style” submissions are only coded once, but each submission is included in the public record.

BLM resource planning is not a voting process. The BLM is expected to make decisions on the merits of each case and not on counting the numbers of responses pro and con (HR Report 94-1163, page 7, May 15, 1976). Our planning regulations do not allow us to enlarge or diminish the value of any comment based on the commenter’s location, livelihood, ability to travel, economic status, philosophical disposition, or any other criterion.

What type and how much cooperation/coordination is there between the BLM and other agencies including tribal governments? At what point are cooperating agencies involved in the planning process and will the BLM identify those agencies that have been granted cooperating agency status?

Twelve cooperating agencies have signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the BLM and another three agencies are informal cooperators (i.e., no formal MOU). Cooperators meet throughout the planning process as a group to discuss issues, solutions, and ideas for revising the plan. The cooperating agencies are identified under the Collaboration section of this chapter.

Throughout the development of the RMP, the BLM coordinated and consulted with the tribal governments in the planning area. Additional information on tribal consultation is provided in Chapter 5.

How will the BLM prepare a “no action alternative” when there are existing parcels that were withheld from an oil and gas lease sale? Some lease parcels are on hold and you’ve already determined that they will eventually be leased.

Chapter 2, Alternative A is the no action alternative, or current management. Any parcels that were withheld from an oil and gas lease sale would be managed under the guidance of this RMP. A specific area may or may not be available for leasing based on the final decision in the Record of Decision.

Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives: How do Priority Areas for Conservation correlate with Priority and General Habitat Management Areas?

In 2012, the Director of the USFWS asked the Conservation Objectives Team (COT), consisting of state and USFWS representatives, to produce recommendations regarding the degree to which the threats need to be reduced or ameliorated to conserve Greater Sage-Grouse so that it would no longer be in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future. The COT Report (USFWS 2013a) provides objectives based upon the best scientific and commercial data available at the time of its release. The BLM planning decisions analyzed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are intended to ameliorate threats identified in the COT report and to reverse the trends in habitat condition. The COT Report can be viewed online at the following address:

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse/COT/COT-Report-with-Dear-Interested-Reader-Letter.pdf>

The highest level objective in the COT Report is identified as meeting the objectives of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) 2006 Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Strategy of “reversing negative population trends and achieving a neutral or positive population trend.”

The COT Report provides a WAFWA Management Zone and Population Risk Assessment. The report identifies localized threats from sagebrush elimination, fire, conifer encroachment, weed and annual grass invasion, mining, free-roaming wild horses and burros, urbanization, and widespread threats from energy development, infrastructure, grazing, and recreation (USFWS 2013a, p. 18).

Key areas across the landscape that are considered “necessary to maintain redundant, representative, and resilient populations” are identified within the COT Report. The USFWS in concert with the respective state wildlife management agencies identified these key areas as Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs).



Rock Creek Area, Northern Valley County

BLM Photo

Within the HiLine planning area, the PACs consist of approximately 2,358,000 acres across all ownerships. Under the Proposed Plan, the PACs are comprised of approximately 1,433,000 acres of Priority Habitat Management Area managed by the BLM. An additional 290,000 acres of General Habitat Management Area are managed by the BLM in the planning area.

Planning Criteria

The BLM planning regulations (43 CFR 1610.4-2) require planning criteria to guide preparation of the RMP. Planning criteria are the constraints or ground rules that guide and direct the preparation of the plan. They ensure the plan is tailored to the identified issues and that unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided.

The following criteria were developed based on applicable laws and regulations, agency guidance, and the result of public comment.

- The RMP will address public lands and federal minerals managed by the BLM. Decisions will not be made in the RMP relative to the management of lands not managed by BLM.
- The RMP will be in compliance with FLPMA and all other applicable laws, regulations and policies. Management is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology.
- Impacts from the management alternatives considered in the RMP will be analyzed in an EIS developed in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 1610 and 40 CFR 1500.
- Broad-based public participation will be an integral part of the planning and EIS process.
- Decisions in the plan will strive to be compatible with the existing plans and policies of adjacent local, state and federal agencies as long as the decisions are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal law, and regulations applicable to public lands.
- The RMP will recognize the State of Montana's responsibility and authority to manage wildlife. The BLM will consult with MFWP as necessary. The RMP will incorporate state or region-wide planning efforts for wildlife to the fullest extent possible.
- The National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (BLM 2004b) requires that impacts to sagebrush habitat and sagebrush-dependent wildlife species (including Greater Sage-Grouse) be analyzed and considered in BLM land use planning efforts for the public lands with sage-grouse/sagebrush habitats.
- The BLM will utilize the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats (Connelly, et al. 2004), and any other appropriate resources, to identify Greater Sage-Grouse habitat requirements and best management practices.
- The RMP will recognize valid existing rights.
- The RMP will incorporate management decisions brought forward from existing planning documents.
- Based on the assumptions of adequate funding, this plan will be periodically reviewed and would be amended if necessary. Plans would be evaluated every 5 years per 43 CFR 1610.4-9. Information gathered from the 5-year evaluation would be used to determine planning needs and priorities for plan revisions and/or amendments.
- The planning team will work cooperatively and collaboratively with the State of Montana, tribal governments, county and municipal governments, other federal agencies, the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC), and all other interested groups, agencies and individuals.

- The planning process will provide strategies for the protection of recognized traditional and cultural uses.
- The BLM and cooperating agencies/governments will jointly develop alternatives for resolution of resource management issues that are within the authority of the BLM.
- The planning process will incorporate Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM 1997a) developed in accordance with regulations in 43 CFR Subpart 4180 and approved by the Secretary of the Interior.
- The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) will be invited to participate throughout the planning process as per the State Protocol developed between the BLM and the Montana SHPO (BLM 1998a).
- Areas with special environmental qualities will be protected and, if necessary, designated as ACECs, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or other appropriate designations.
- The RMP will emphasize the protection and enhancement of the planning area’s biodiversity while, at the same time, providing the public with opportunities for compatible activities on public lands.
- The RMP will recognize local, statewide and national concerns and lifestyles.
- Lands acquired by the BLM will be managed in the manner the RMP prescribes for adjacent public land, subject to any constraints associated with the acquisition.
- The RMP will provide management direction for lands returned to BLM management through revocation of withdrawals. The plan will also address lands acquired through other means.
- Forest management strategies will be consistent with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Tribal Forest Protection Act where appropriate.
- All proposed management actions will be based upon best available scientific information, research and technology, as well as existing inventory and monitoring information.
- The BLM released Handbook H-8320-1, Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services, on August 22, 2014. The handbook assists BLM staff in the planning and management of recreation and visitor services on public land. The release of the handbook coincided with the final development of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Accordingly, not all recreation and visitor services decisions in this Proposed RMP/Final EIS follow the recommended format provided in the handbook. However, the Proposed RMP/Final EIS complies with the requirements for establishing desired conditions, allowable uses and actions related to the management of recreation and visitor services as discussed in Handbook H-8320-1.
- Fire management strategies will be consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Policy (NIFC 2001), National Fire Plan (2000), Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide with BLM supplemental guidance (NIFC 2008), Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Redbook) (NIFC, updated annually), and other BLM handbooks.
- GIS and metadata information will meet Federal Geographic Data Committee standards, as required by Executive Order 12906, signed April 11, 1994. Other applicable BLM data standards will be followed. The goal is to develop an RMP with spatial and temporal data that can be easily accessed for use in subsequent environmental review. At times, GIS analysis may result in acres that are different than other published data sources for BLM lands and minerals.

GIS Calculations

Acres displayed in this document should be considered approximations even when displayed to the nearest acre. Most acres were calculated from GIS datasets and as a result may not match acres provided in prior published documents that contained calculations from master title plats or other base data. For example, acres calculated for wilderness study areas and reported in the 1991 Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report vary from the GIS calculated acres for those same areas. The data used throughout this document is for land use planning purposes and not necessarily for actual on-the-ground implementation.

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.

Development of Alternatives

The scoping results, the issues to be addressed, and the planning criteria along with related plans, other BLM plans, and the vision and management goals all helped define the scope of possible alternatives that will be carried forward throughout the planning process. Management strategies are aimed at providing viable options for addressing the planning issues.

Public input received during the scoping process was considered to ensure that all the issues and concerns would be addressed, as appropriate, in developing the alternatives. Many comments addressed management of oil and gas development and other resources including travel planning, designating special management areas, consideration of lands with wilderness characteristics, and hunting and angling areas of interest. The scoping and public comment processes are summarized in Chapter 5.

This Proposed RMP/Final EIS describes and analyzes a reasonable range of management alternatives for the public lands and resources administered by the HiLine District. The analyses contained in the draft aided the BLM in formulating this Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Based on the analyses, the RMP will ensure the sustainability of important resources in the area (e.g., crucial winter range and other wildlife habitats, air and water quality, scenic views, healthy vegetative cover, and soil stability) while providing for resource uses (e.g., renewable energy, motorized and nonmotorized recreational activities, livestock grazing, range improvements, mineral exploration and development, and economic development opportunities) and resource protection (cultural and paleontological) in accordance with laws and regulations.

Related Plans

This section discusses other plans that are germane to the development of this RMP. The BLM planning regulations require that RMPs be "... consistent with officially approved or adopted resource-related plans, and the policies and

programs contained therein, of other Federal agencies, State and local governments and Indian tribes, so long as the guidance and resource management plans are also consistent with the purposes, policies and programs of Federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands” (43 CFR 1610.3-2(a)).

The BLM is aware that there are specific state laws and local plans relevant to aspects of public land management that are discrete from, and independent of, federal law. However, the BLM is bound by federal law. As a consequence, there may be inconsistencies that cannot be reconciled. The FLPMA and its implementing regulations require that the BLM's land use plans be consistent with officially-approved state and local plans only if those plans are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands. Where officially-approved state and local plans or policies and programs conflict with the purposes, policies, and programs of federal law applicable to public lands, there will be an inconsistency that cannot be resolved. With respect to officially-approved state and local policies and programs (as opposed to plans), this consistency provision only applies to the maximum extent practical. While county and federal planning processes, under FLPMA, are required to be as integrated and consistent as practical, the federal agency planning process is not bound by or subject to state or county plans, planning processes, policies, or planning stipulations.

Blaine County Master Plan

The Blaine County Master Plan (Blaine Co. 1996) was developed to guide the use of lands and resources in Blaine County, promote the lawful use of private property, protect the rights of all persons in the county, and secure the benefits of economic activities.

Blackfeet Comprehensive Plan

The Blackfeet Comprehensive Plan (Blackfeet Planning Dept. 1984) serves as a mechanism for planning, budgeting, development of new programs and services, strengthening of existing services, an evaluation tool, and guide not only for Tribal programs and Tribal government, but for all other programs and organizations providing services for the Blackfeet Reservation Community.

Black-footed Ferret Recovery Plan

The Black-footed Ferret Recovery Plan (USFWS 1988a) outlines steps for recovery of the black-footed ferret throughout its historical range. A six-step process is outlined beginning with ensuring success of captive breeding, locating reintroduction habitat, finding other populations of ferrets, devising release strategies, managing reintroduced and other populations, and building programs for public support of the recovery effort.

Chinook-Blaine County Comprehensive Plan

The Chinook-Blaine County Comprehensive Plan (Chinook-Blaine Co. 1979) provides information on population, projected land needs for residential growth, land use, public facilities, natural resources, and land use problems. The plan also provides land use policy recommendations for land use, public investments, and local governmental administrative policy changes.

Chouteau County Growth Policy Plan

The Chouteau County Growth Policy Plan (Chouteau Co. 2004) includes a framework of goals and policies, and an implementation program that outlines specific action steps that are derived from the goals and policies.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS 2012a) provides long-range guidance and management direction for the refuges' programs including habitat conservation and wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting and wildlife observation.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for North Central Montana Economic Development District Inc.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (North Central MT EDDI 2006) is a resource to accomplish the following goals for five counties (Cascade, Glacier, Pondera, Teton, and Toole) in northcentral Montana: create higher skills, higher wage jobs; raise income levels; diversify the economy; and improve the quality of life while protecting the environment.

Conservation Plan for Black-Tailed and White-Tailed Prairie Dogs in Montana, and the Final Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 6 Prairie Dog Abundance and Distribution Objectives

The goal of this Conservation Plan for the State of Montana (MPDWG 2002) and Abundance and Distribution Objectives (MFWP 2006a) is to provide for management of prairie dog populations and habitats to ensure long-term viability of prairie dogs and associated species.\

Hill County Growth Policy - Preliminary

The goals and objectives in the Hill County Growth Policy (Hill Co. 2009) serve to establish general guiding principles in matters concerning planning for the future of Hill County. This includes policy statements that provide a more specific reference or means of achieving what the county has adopted as a desirable path to guide the citizens in the long term.

Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan

This Comprehensive Management Plan (NPS 1982) outlines management objectives, practices, and responsibilities, and emphasizes partnerships in trail administration.

Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana – Final

The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage-Grouse in Montana (MSGWG 2005) is designed to provide biological information, identify information gaps, and facilitate data collection required for future resource management decisions. It establishes a process to achieve sage-grouse management objectives and provides a framework to guide local management efforts. Regional or local groups will adapt the statewide plan to develop and implement strategies in respective geographic areas that will improve or maintain the sagebrush steppe and reduce or mitigate factors that may further reduce habitats or populations.

Montana Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan

The goal of the Montana Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Management Plan (MANS 2002) is to minimize the harmful ecological, economic, and social impact of ANS through prevention and management of introduction, population growth, and dispersal into, within, and from Montana. The plan includes a system to classify all nonindigenous aquatic species in Montana, identifies the proper management for each class, details current authorities and programs, and sets objectives that will lead to the accomplishment of the goal.

Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan

The Bald Eagle Management Plan (MBEWG 1994) provides landowners and resource managers with information on the biology of bald eagles and management guidelines to allow informed decisions about land use to help conserve the species and its habitat.

Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program

The Governor of the State of Montana issued Executive Order 10-2014 which created the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) and the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program. The executive order outlines a number of conservation strategies for state agencies to follow for land uses and activities in sage-grouse habitat in addition to establishing the MSGOT and habitat conservation program. The State conservation efforts are complimentary to the conservation measures proposed in the BLM land use plans and when combined will provide conservation efforts across land ownership boundaries.

Montana Weed Management Plan

The purpose of the Montana Weed Management Plan (MWMP 2008) is to strengthen, support, and coordinate private, county, state, and federal weed management efforts in the state, and promote implementation of ecologically-based integrated weed management programs.

Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail Comprehensive Plan and Interpretive Strategy

In addition to items concerning objectives and practices to be observed in trail management and trail marking requirements given in Section 5(e) of the National Trails System Act, the Comprehensive Plan (USFS 1990a) and Interpretive Strategy (USFS 1990b) address:

- Identification of non-federal lands outside of the high potential route segments needed for access to the National Historic Trail, development of trailhead and trailside facilities, and protection, interpretation, and visitor use of historic sites.
- Designation by the Secretary of Agriculture of complementary state and local components found to qualify as parts of the National Historic Trail provided they are administered without expense to the United States.
- Recognition of the need for habitat and visitor use management with respect to endangered species.
- Where segments of the Nez Perce route have been designated by Congress and such segments are within existing wilderness and other more restrictive forms of management, the trail shall be administered with the requirements of wilderness management and/or other such management.
- Direction on how the national identity of the trail shall be preserved and made known to trail users, consistent with the nationally recognized signing system.
- Identification of the relationship and alternatives for interconnecting portions of the Oregon and Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails, and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Phillips County Growth Policy

The Phillips County Growth Policy (Phillips Co. 2006) addresses the land and resources, including characteristics and conditions and trends, the people and economy, public facilities, and infrastructure and services. The policy lists overall goals and objectives and covers a five year period from 2006 through 2011.

Phillips County Land Resource Use Plan

The Phillips County Land Resource Use Plan (Phillips Co. 2012) lists goals and objectives that serve to establish general guiding principles in matters concerning planning for resource and land uses in Phillips County.

Recovery Plan for the Pallid Sturgeon

The Recovery Plan (USFWS 1993) describes the distribution, status, life history, and habitat association information that is known about the pallid sturgeon. The plan provides the short- and long-term recovery objectives and actions needed to achieve recovery of the pallid sturgeon.

Valley County Resource Use Plan

The Valley County Resource Use Plan (Valley Co. 2006) provides a plan for the best uses of Valley County lands and resources.

Relationship to BLM Policies, Plans, and Programs

A number of BLM plans relate to or otherwise govern management in the planning area. These plans are considered by the BLM when specific management actions are implemented. However, specific management actions from these plans must be in conformance with the approved HiLine RMP and Record of Decision when completed (43 CFR 1601.0-5(b)).

All proposed actions in the future, including implementation of existing activity plans, must also be in conformance with the approved HiLine RMP Record of Decision when completed. Some of these plans are listed below and provide a perspective of the many management considerations pertinent to the planning area.

Bitter Creek Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement

This plan (BLM 1989) addressed the environmental consequences of managing the Bitter Creek WSA in the planning area.

BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy (BLM IM No. 2012-044)

This strategy (BLM 2011) provides direction to the BLM for considering Greater Sage-Grouse conservation measures identified in the Sage-Grouse National Technical Team's - *A Report on National Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures*.

Geothermal Leasing in the Western United States Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

This plan (BLM and USFS 2008) evaluates issues associated with geothermal leasing of federal mineral estate on western public lands administered by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service. The plan assesses the environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with geothermal leasing on public lands in 12 western states (including Alaska) and evaluates a number of alternatives to determine the best management approach to mitigating potential impacts and facilitating geothermal leasing of federal mineral estate.

Missouri Breaks Grazing Environmental Impact Statement

The Missouri Breaks Grazing EIS (BLM 1979) addresses the grazing management program in the Missouri Breaks area of central Montana, including lands available for livestock grazing and the allocation of animal unit months. This EIS involves nearly 2.2 million acres of BLM land, including some public land in the southern portion of the planning area.

Missouri Breaks Wilderness Suitability Study/Environmental Impact Statement

This plan (BLM 1987) addressed the environmental consequences of managing 12 wilderness study areas (WSAs) as wilderness or non-wilderness, including the Burnt Lodge WSA in the planning area.

Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report

This plan (BLM 1991) provides the wilderness recommendations for 36 WSAs in Montana, including the two WSAs in the planning area (Burnt Lodge and Bitter Creek).

National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan

This plan (40 CFR 300) is the federal government's blueprint for responding to both oil spills and hazardous substance releases.

National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy

This plan (BLM 2004b) serves as guidance on managing, restoring and enhancing sagebrush habitat on BLM lands. The guidance is designed to support and promote the range-wide conservation of sagebrush habitats for sage-grouse and other sagebrush-obligate wildlife species.

National Scenic and Historic Trails Strategy and Work Plan

This plan (BLM 2006a) provides a 10-year framework for the development of program guidance and direction for improved management of the BLM's National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHT) Program.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Reburial Policy on BLM Lands, BLM Handbook 8120-1, Ch. II, Paragraph C3

This policy (BLM 2006b) clarifies the position of the BLM that reburial of Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) items on public lands may be authorized on a case-by-case basis. Lands that may be considered for reburial activities include lands withdrawn from multiple uses and mineral entry.

Nongame Migratory Bird Habitat Conservation Plan

This plan (BLM 1992a) provides for managing nongame birds that migrate to the tropics or use neotropical habitats. The overall intent is to reverse the decline in some bird populations and to implement a proactive program for other migratory species.

Prairie Potholes Environmental Impact Statement

This plan (BLM 1982) addresses the grazing management program in the prairie potholes area of northern Montana, including lands available for livestock grazing and the allocation of animal unit months. This EIS involves about 1.75 million acres of BLM land, including most of the planning area.

Resource Management Plan Alternative Development for Livestock Grazing (BLM IM No. 2012-169)

This Instruction Memorandum (BLM 2012) communicates policy guidance regarding resource management plan/environmental impact statement (RMP/EIS) alternative development for livestock grazing.

Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management

This plan (BLM 1997a) documents the effects of adopting regional Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management on BLM land in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. Standards are physical or biological conditions or functions required for healthy, sustainable rangelands. Guidelines are management practices or methods which help ensure that standards can be met or significant progress can be made toward meeting standards.

Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

This plan (BLM 2007b) assesses the environmental consequences of implementing a vegetation treatment program to manage a variety of vegetation species on BLM land in the Western United States. The vegetation treatment program responds to many different control requirements, including suppressing plants that are toxic to humans and animals, enhancing visibility, maintaining passages for transportation, facilitating drainage, reducing fuel for wildland fires, and controlling the expansion of exotic species, which includes noxious weeds. The vegetation treatment methods include manual, mechanical, biological, prescribed burning, and chemical.

Wind Energy Development on BLM-Administered Lands in the Western United States Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

This plan (BLM 2005) evaluates issues associated with wind energy development on western public lands administered by the BLM. The plan assesses the environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with wind energy development on public lands in 11 western states (excluding Alaska) and evaluates a number of alternatives to determine the best management approach to mitigating potential impacts and facilitating wind energy development.

Draft Resource Management Plan

Five alternatives for managing public lands in the HiLine District, including a no action alternative (current management), were described in the Draft RMP/EIS. The alternatives described various ways the BLM could address the planning issues. Each alternative had a different emphasis, but all met the overall vision and management goals and the multiple use-sustained yield mandate of FLPMA.

The Draft RMP/EIS was released to the public in March 2013. The BLM provided a 90-day comment period and hosted a series of public meetings across the HiLine planning area. Additional information on the public participation process is provided in Chapter 5.

Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final EIS

Following the 90-day public comment period on this Draft RMP/EIS, the comments were analyzed and the BLM began preparing the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. A total of 2,438 letters and emails were 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.

A 30-day protest period and 60-day Governor's consistency review period will occur following publication of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. At the end of the protest period and Governor's consistency review, the BLM may issue a Record of Decision (ROD) approving implementation of any portion of the proposed RMP not under protest. Approval would be withheld on any portion of the plan under protest until the protest has been resolved. Proposed land use plan decisions are protestable to the BLM Director but are not reviewable by the Office of Hearings and Appeals. Where implementation decisions are made as part of the land use planning process, they are still subject to the appeals process or other administrative review as prescribed by specific resource program regulations after the BLM resolves the protests to land use plan decisions and makes a decision to adopt or amend the RMP.



Kevin Rim, Toole County

Photo by Brian Hockett