



Volume 1, Issue 2 August 2008

**Bureau of Land Management**

**Miles City Field Office: Resource Management Plan—Newsletter**

**BLM Updates Analysis Alternatives for Sage-grouse**

**Special points of interest:**

- RMP area encompasses portions of 17 counties in eastern Montana.
- The BLM administered estate is comprised of approximately 2,785,000 surface acres and 11,725,000 mineral acres.
- Population for the RMP area is approximately 80,000 as of the 2000 Census.

*Shared Lands  
~ Shared Plan*

**Inside this issue:**

RMP Alternatives	2
Revised Schedule	3
Milestone Schedule	3

Growing concern about the degradation and loss of sagebrush steppe due to urbanization, agriculture, livestock grazing, management tactics (e.g., prescribed fires, herbicides, mechanical treatments, etc.) and energy development has resulted in an ever increasing awareness of population trend declines being observed for the greater sage-grouse. No single factor can be identified as the cause of declines in sage-grouse populations but it is apparent that changes in land management could be made that would better protect the species habitat.

In 2005 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) completed a “status review” of the greater sage-grouse for listing and special protection as afforded under the Endangered Species Act. From this review process however, the USFWS determined under considerable controversy the greater sage-grouse did not warrant special protection under the Act because the overall natural distribution and population of the birds was not considered to be in significant jeopardy. In terms of oil and gas development, the industry has had a historical presence in the grouse’s range; although not until recently (mid-1990’s) has the area observed proportional increases in energy expansion and concentration. The greater sage-grouse is native to the Rocky Mountain region and has had a long and important history with hunters, ranchers, and land managers. As such, further consideration on this species habitat is warranted before the RMP alternatives could be finalized.

The surging concern and awareness for the greater sage-grouse has placed considerable strain on BLM, land managers and energy stakeholders to develop measures and conservation plans to protect critical resources for the grouse,

## Sage-grouse Update (continued)

Area Resources:

- Air quality
- Aquatics
- Cultural sites
- Geologic
- Paleontological
- Soils
- Special Status Species
- Vegetation
- Visual Resources
- Water
- Wildlife

*Shared Lands  
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Resource Uses:

- Forest Products
- Lands and Realty
- Livestock Grazing
- Minerals
- Off-Highway Vehicles
- Recreation
- Renewable Energy

Others:

- Fire Ecology
- Special Designation Areas
- Social and Economic Conditions

while ensuring domestic energy production remains. Federal lands make up about 72 percent of the total range of the species, as well as a large portion of remaining grouse habitat. It's this large percentage of land ownership that makes federal land management agencies primarily responsible for habitat management. BLM has the management responsibility for much of this land, which in recent years has led the BLM to initiate a priority effort. This effort has involved funding of scientific study by the academia community, sponsorship of meetings and workgroups and development of potentially new protective management approaches.

Considering the national importance of federal lands, it is critical to understand and address the greater sage-grouse since current conservation plans and strategies to protect this species may significantly impact land management. As such, the purpose of the revised RMP alternatives is to incorporate consistent habitat management procedures commensurate with the existing alternative themes: *Alternative A*—No Action, this alternative continues present management direction and activities, while abiding by all new laws and BLM policies implemented since the RMPs were completed, *Alternative B*—this alternative would enhance resource protection by minimizing resource development and land use, *Alternative C*—this alternative would enhance the general public's use of the land and resources in a long-term environmentally sustainable manner while emphasizing local economic interests, and *Alternative D*—this alternative would provide the least restrictive resource management that maximizes revenue and economic opportunities through natural resource development while meeting legal environmental and cultural requirements.

The analysis of the revised alternatives is on-going and will highlight current conservation plans from important stakeholders; discuss current and historical management approaches; and synthesize current energy related scientific evaluations that address sage-grouse population declines. It is anticipated that the revised internal RMP/EIS will be ready for review in late September facilitating a preferred alternative selection meeting with collaborators and cooperating agencies.

## RMP Update Schedule Revised

The schedule to complete the revision of the Miles City Field Office RMP has been revised to accommodate changes in the preparation of the EIS. The revised schedule as shown below in milestones indicates that the Draft EIS and proposed RMP will be published in January 2009. In the mean time the preliminary draft EIS will be revised based on the revised alternatives to address sage-grouse core habitat areas under each resource topic. Once reviewed a preferred alternative will be selected utilizing a collaborative process based on cooperating agency input. Following the analysis of the preferred alternative a Draft EIS will be released to the public in January 2009 for review and comment. The new schedule identifies the 90-day public comment period as February through April 2009. During this 90-day period the BLM will hold a series of meetings to discuss the proposed preferred alternative with the public. The public comments will serve as the impetus for revising the draft and preparing a Final EIS and RMP Revision.

### Website

The address for the RMP Project website is:

[www.blm.gov/rmp/mt/milescity/](http://www.blm.gov/rmp/mt/milescity/)

There is also a link from the Miles City Field Office Home Page

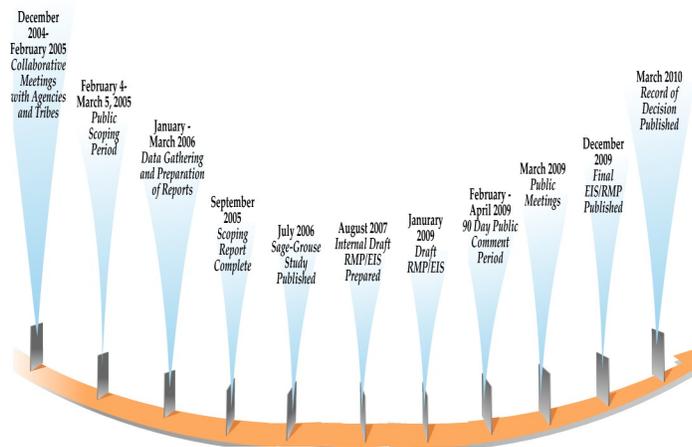
90-day Public Comment Period February-April 2009

Public Meetings March 2009

Potential Meeting Locations

- Ashland
- Baker
- Billings
- Broadus
- Ekalaka
- Forsyth
- Glendive
- Jordan
- Miles City
- Popular
- Sidney
- Terry

## The RMP Project Milestone Schedule



The schedule accommodates a 30-day public scoping period, 90-day public comment period, and a 30-day protest period.