



Volume 1, Issue 2

April 2009

## Bureau of Land Management

# Miles City Field Office: Resource Management Plan—Newsletter

### Special points of interest:

- RMP area encompasses portions of 17 counties in eastern Montana.
- The BLM administered estate is comprised of approximately 2.8 million surface acres and 11.7 million mineral acres.
- Population for the RMP area is approximately 80,000 as of the 2000 Census.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Miles City Field Office (MCFO) is preparing a plan that addresses resources and resource uses located on public BLM-managed lands and minerals, called the “Miles City Field Office Resource Management Plan” or RMP (see map on page 2.) The RMP presents a variety of management options, each resolving an issue of controversy or debate. Each of the alternative management schemes are analyzed in the RMP as part of an “Environmental Impact Statement” or EIS.

Beginning in February of 2005, BLM asked the public for help in identifying issues with resource/resource use management. From 2005, until today, BLM, with your help has identified the following issues in the MCFO area.,

### ISSUES

*Vegetation Communities: How will vegetation on BLM-administered lands be managed to achieve healthy ecosystems while providing for a broad range of multiple uses?*

This issue highlights concerns over management of vegetation resources and communities. There is considerable interest in insuring that vegetation management provides a range of commodity uses such as timber and forest products, mineral development and livestock grazing, while maintaining or restoring vegetative communities such as riparian and wetlands, to provide other resource values such as high quality wildlife and aquatic habitat.

Ecosystems within the MCFO have evolved over time in

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Area Resources:

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

response to periodic fire disturbance, and sustainable ecosystems are those that are in balance with the inherent frequency, size, and severity of the natural disturbance cycle.

Management of noxious weeds and other non-native invasive species is a critical part of public land management. Noxious weeds are one of the largest threats to maintaining and restoring ecosystem health because they usually spread aggressively and have a history of substantial negative impacts on soils, water, habitat, wildlife, and fire cycles. They can also affect local economies with regard to recreation, grazing, forestry and mining activities.

*Wildlife, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species: How will BLM-administered lands be managed to provide wildlife and fish habitat and to conserve and recover species status and priority species?*

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

There is a need to protect habitat for viable populations of all native species; manage habitat at scales large enough to accommodate natural disturbances such as fire, wind, and insect outbreaks; provide diversity of vegetative communities; and manage human uses in a manner that conserves and enhances ecological processes. What are the areas where restoration activities could restore or enhance terrestrial and aquatic habitat?

Special status species include species that are listed, proposed for listing, or are candidate species under the Endangered Species Act; and sensitive species identified by BLM. Sensitive species are those for which BLM must manage their habitat in a manner to minimize the risk of a future federal listing under the Endangered Species Act.

There is growing concern about the loss of sage-grouse habitat due to several factors including urbanization, agriculture, and energy development. How will BLM manage sage-grouse habitat to help ensure sage-grouse are not listed under the ESA?

*Access: How should the BLM manage motorized public travel to meet the needs for public access and resource uses while minimizing user conflicts and impacts to air, soil, watershed, vegetation, wildlife and other resource values?*

Travel and access considerations are of major importance to hunters, off-highway recreationists, livestock grazers, miners, wildlife advocates, non-motorized recreationists, and others.

Travel and access issues are driven by the need to manage for the use and enjoyment of the public lands while protecting resource values and providing user safety. Travel management also involves the need to adequately address increased conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized users, particularly at urban/rural interfaces.

*Recreation: How should recreation be managed to accommodate the full range of recreational uses enjoyed by the public on BLM-managed lands?*

This issue focuses on the need to set direction for recreation management in light of increased demands on developed recreations sites and the need for new strategies to improve management efficiency, appropriate services and facilities and public experiences; the need for management of Special Use Permits to better protect natural resources, minimize user conflicts, provide for needed opportunities and ensure fair value returns for both the permittee and BLM; and the need to modify existing Special Recreation Management Areas to provide a wide range of appropriate activities that foster beneficial experiences for the public.

*Special Designations including Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), National Trails, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs): Which areas, if any, should be managed under special designations? How should they be managed to protect values that warrant their special designation status?*

Special designations include Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), National Trails, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Wilderness.

Concerns with ACEC designation revolve around limitations that special management might place on current and future uses. Proponents of ACEC designation see it as a way of preventing loss of or impact to values of particular interest.

The MCFO has 16 ACECs already designated. Do the values that made those

places ACECs still exist? The public and BLM nominated additional areas for ACEC designation. Do the new nominated areas meet the criteria for designation as ACECs and require special management?

Protective strategies and appropriate uses for the management of **National Trails** is also needed to help protect their resource values and characteristics.

The RMP will evaluate/reevaluate rivers in the MCFO to determine their suitability as **Wild and Scenic** rivers. Wild and Scenic Rivers are those that represent vestiges of primitive America.

In 1991, the BLM sent Congress their recommendations for areas to designate and not designate **Wilderness** in the MCFO. These “Wilderness Study Areas” (WSAs) are roadless areas found to have wilderness characteristics and currently receive special management. If Congress designates an area Wilderness, it is managed per the Wilderness Act. If Congress releases a WSA from wilderness consideration, how should this area be managed?

#### *ADDITIONAL MANAGEMENT CONCERNS*

*Air Quality*—What actions within MCFO may affect air quality? Air quality concerns include public health impacts from wildland and prescribed fires.

*Soils*—There is a need to reduce accelerated soil erosion and compaction from BLM activities in the MCFO. What are the impacts on soil productivity ?

BLM has two areas designated open to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Open OHV use has created new roads and trails, causing accelerated soil erosion. In addition, has historic cattle grazing impacted soil and caused localized soil erosion and compaction? Are these and other potential effects from soil erosion causing noxious weeds to spread and conifer encroachment?

*Water Resources*—While authorizing actions, BLM needs to minimize water quality degradation and improve watershed function to help support beneficial uses. Also, water rights, including management of existing water rights and acquiring water with willing holders also is a concern. Over the next decade, plans for restoration of water quality impaired streams will be developed by the State of Montana. This will result in new water quality goals intended to improve water quality where beneficial uses are impaired.

*Cultural and Paleontological Resources*—How does the BLM comply with new laws, guidelines and directives to ensure that significant cultural and paleontological resources are identified and evaluated prior to surface disturbing activities? How does BLM provide education and public outreach programs,

mitigation of cultural sites, maintenance of historic buildings and mapping of fossil localities?

*Visual Resources—How are scenic areas being managed? What are the goals and objectives for managing such areas?*

*Social and Economic—*Management concerns focus on changes to recreation, forestry, mining, livestock grazing and other land-uses as a result of increased population, economic growth, continuing development and the protection of sensitive resources in the MCFO.

*Environmental Justice—*Environmental justice refers to the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures and incomes with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, programs and policies. Fair treatment means that no people or socioeconomic groups should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal and commercial operations or the execution of federal state, local and tribal programs and policies. BLM needs to evaluate and disclose whether actions would place a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequence on populations covered by Executive Order 12898.

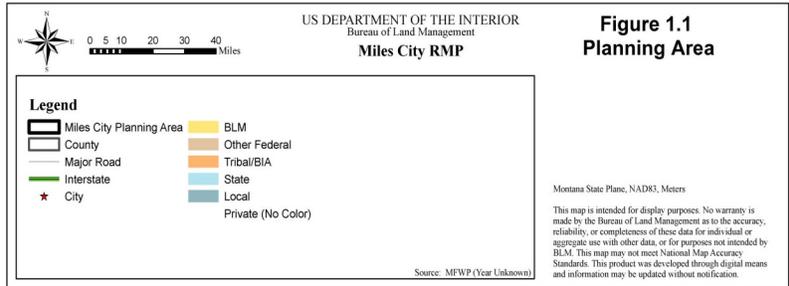
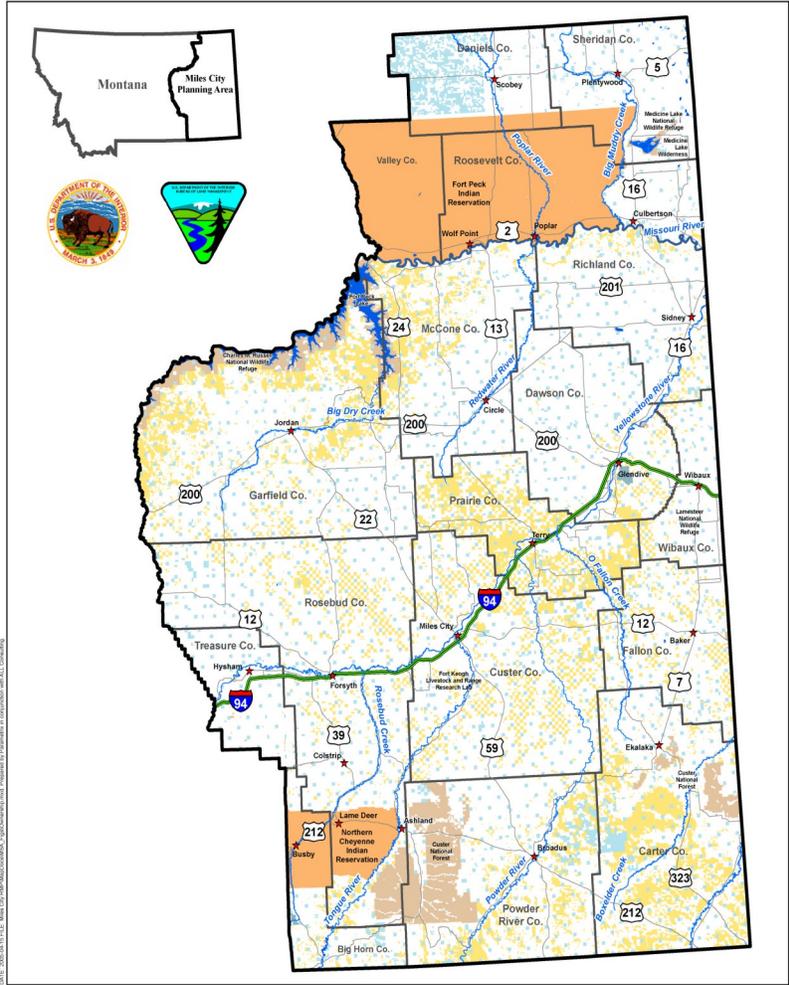
*Native American—*Concerns identified by tribes BLM coordinated with include protecting air quality, including visibility at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and wilderness study areas. Also, how BLM will protect critical resources identified by each of the tribes, such as Traditional Cultural Properties and plant gathering areas? BLM needs to consult with tribal governments to identify their religious or traditional lifeway values.

#### SUMMARY

BLM has identified several issues and other management concerns in the preparation of the RMP/EIS including concerns over air quality, cultural and paleontological resources, wildlife and aquatic habitat management, plant and animal special status species and vegetation in general, recreation, livestock grazing, forestry, water, soils, special designations, Native American concerns, access, noxious weed management, visual resources, social and economic. Are you aware of any other issues? If so, we'd like to hear from you. Send your new issues to:

BLM RMP/EIS

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## RMP Update Schedule Revised

The schedule to complete the RMP/EIS 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/milescty/](http://www.blm.gov/rmp/mt/milescty/)**

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

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