

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

### INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and environmental impact statement (EIS) to provide direction for managing public lands within the Price Field Office (PFO) and to analyze the environmental effects resulting from implementing the alternatives addressed in this Draft RMP.

The PFO is located in central-eastern Utah on the western portion of the Colorado Plateau and encompasses Carbon and Emery counties. The BLM PFO is bounded by the Carbon–Duchesne County line on the north, the Green River on the east, the Emery–Wayne County line on the south, and the Emery and Carbon County lines where they meet Sanpete and Sevier counties to the west. Lands managed by the PFO encompass approximately 2,500,000 acres of surface estate and 2,800,000 acres of federal mineral resources underlying lands managed by BLM, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the State of Utah, and private entities.

People from a number of communities rely on natural resources within the planning area for their livelihoods. Communities in the northern portion of the planning area are located adjacent to US-6. These include Helper, Price (Carbon County seat), Wellington, and East Carbon / Sunnyside off Highway U-123. Several communities are located to the south adjacent to Highway U-10. These include Huntington, Castle Dale (Emery County seat), Orangeville, Ferron, and Emery. Green River is located on the east side of Emery County along US-6 and I-70.

The RMP was prepared using BLM's planning regulations and guidance issued under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. An EIS is incorporated into this document to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508), and requirements of BLM's NEPA Handbook 1790-1.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

This RMP combines the 1983 Price River Management Framework Plan (MFP) and the 1991 San Rafael RMP into one plan called the Price Field Office RMP. This new RMP will provide planning guidance for public land and federal mineral estate managed by the PFO in Carbon and Emery counties in central-eastern Utah. The PFO will coordinate the management of public lands within the PFO with other land management agencies, including the State of Utah, the Ute Indian Tribe, the National Park Service, the USFS, Carbon and Emery counties, municipalities, and private entities. The PFO will also coordinate management with adjoining BLM offices.

## **ISSUES**

A planning issue is a major controversy or dispute regarding management of resources or uses on the public lands that can be addressed in a variety of ways. During scoping, BLM suggested several broad categories as major issues that would drive the development of the planning alternatives. BLM asked the public to comment on these categories and to provide other issues or concerns to be considered in development of the RMP. As a result, the Draft RMP and EIS focuses primarily on eight planning issues and the decisions needed to resolve them. The issues were identified through public scoping, concerns raised to BLM staff in interactions with public land users, and resource management concerns of the BLM and cooperating agencies. The eight issues are presented in the following subsections.

### **Air Quality**

Current air quality standards post-date many earlier planning decisions. BLM will ensure compliance with all applicable local, state, tribal, and federal air quality laws, statutes, regulations, standards, and implementation plans.

### **Soil, Water, Riparian, and Vegetation**

Current management direction is inconsistent or lacking in opportunities to enhance the management of watershed values, vegetation, and riparian resources in the PFO. The State of Utah has developed nonpoint source best management practices, and these are applied on a case-by-case basis.

### **Cultural and Paleontology**

New planning will seek to provide a forum for exploring opportunities to use cultural and paleontological resources consistent with their scientific, educational, recreational, and other values within the PFO.

### **Visual**

Management of scenic values and important landscape features has become a much more important aspect of natural resource management. Changes in visitor use patterns and frequency, visitor sensitivity to changes in the landscape, and development are all creating challenges for the management and maintenance of scenic quality.

### **Fish and Wildlife**

Updating the wildlife species and numbers and the habitat inventories will assist in identifying measurable objectives for important wildlife habitats, including—

- Defining desired future conditions

- Designating priority species and critical habitats (special status species)
- Identifying opportunities or restrictions needed to achieve desired future conditions
- Addressing conservation strategies.

## **Wild Horses and Burros**

Four Herd Management Areas exist in the planning area (Range Creek, Muddy Creek, Sinbad, and Robber's Roost). This RMP will address the management of wild horses, including initial and estimated herd sizes, while preserving or maintaining a thriving ecological balance and multiple use relationships.

## **Fire and Fuels Management**

This RMP will address appropriate fire management actions, including areas where fire is not desired, where fire can be used as a resource management tool for habitat restoration, and where fuel reductions are necessary as required by various wildland and prescribed fire management policies.

## **Forest and Woodlands**

The PFO needs to address requests to allow commercial harvest of timber and nontimber forest and woodland products and evaluate the need and opportunity for development, with emphasis on restoration and rehabilitation.

## **Livestock Grazing**

Resource concerns and potential conflicts have arisen regarding the allocation and season of use of forage within the PFO. BLM will evaluate forage allocations for livestock, wildlife, and wild horses and burros that incorporate needs for wildlife habitat and protection of riparian and watershed values.

## **Recreation**

Quality outdoor recreational resources are located within the planning area. Visitor use is exerting an impact on soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife. This RMP will review recreation uses and projected needs to determine appropriate management.

## **Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use**

OHV use has become a significant issue within the PFO. OHV use and management will be addressed in conformance with the BLM National OHV Strategy in an effort to resolve resource conflicts that pertain to other natural resources and provide for responsible OHV use. Existing OHV use categories and route designations will be reviewed and modified where needed to meet changing resource objectives. Within the limited category, BLM will designate specific roads and trails for OHV use. The 2003 San Rafael Motorized Route Designation Plan is incorporated by reference into this RMP.

## **Lands and Realty**

Community growth and development and changing use of public lands require that many goals and objectives of Lands and Realty Management be revisited. This RMP will ensure that the plan—

- Designates transportation and utility right-of-way corridors (including avoidance areas and exclusion areas)

- Determines specific land use authorization decisions to achieve specific resource goals and objectives
- Identifies access needs
- Evaluates proposals for land tenure adjustments in the context of facilitating resource management objectives
- Establishes criteria for land tenure adjustments
- Establishes management for acquired lands
- Reviews current withdrawals and recommends new withdrawals as applicable.

## **Minerals and Energy**

New projections of reasonable foreseeable development will be made and analyzed in the PFO DRAFT RMP and EIS. The RMP will ensure that mineral management issues, opportunities, and potential impacts will be addressed at an appropriate regional scale and will consider—

- Updated regional Reasonable Foreseeable Development scenarios for minerals development to be updated Son a regional scale
- The requirements of the energy Policy and Conservation Act Reauthorization of 2000 (EPCA)
- Changing resource conditions, technologies, and issues that reflect a need to review and possibly modify oil and gas leasing categories where appropriate
- Changing resource conditions and technologies that reflect a need to review development of coal resources in the PFO
- Mitigation and lease stipulations to ensure consistency throughout the planning area (i.e., surface use stipulations developed for oil and gas apply to all surface-disturbing activities)
- Increased demand for energy as balanced against the need for protection of other resources.

## **Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)**

Ten WSAs and one Instant Study Area (ISA) are designated and currently managed under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP). This RMP will determine how such lands would be managed should Congress release them from wilderness consideration and management under the IMP. The RMP will also set objectives for management of visual resources and OHVs in the WSAs and ISA.

## **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)**

BLM will review existing areas identified as ACECs, as well as other lands within the planning area that may meet specific criteria, and determine appropriate management prescriptions for these areas.

## **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

The Price River MFP did not make wild and scenic river considerations. The San Rafael RMP made eligibility and tentative classification determinations but did not consider suitability. All potentially

eligible rivers in both areas are being reviewed through this planning process to determine eligibility, tentative classification, and suitability.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

---

The basic goal of developing alternatives was to prepare different combinations of management to address issues and to resolve conflicts among uses. Alternatives must meet the purpose and need; be reasonable; provide a mix of resource protection, use, and development; be responsive to the issues; and meet the established planning criteria. Each alternative is a complete land use plan that provides a framework for multiple use management of the full spectrum of resources, resource uses, and programs present in the planning area.

Under all alternatives, the BLM will manage the public lands in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, and BLM policy and guidance, as well as the Standards for Rangeland Health.

### **NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

The No Action Alternative represents current management, as outlined in the 1983 Price River MFP and the 1991 San Rafael RMP, as altered through amendment and policy since adoption of the records of decision for those plans. This management includes a broad array of management methods of various resources, with different approaches applying in the former Price River and San Rafael areas.

### **ALTERNATIVE A**

Alternative A is designed to allow maximum access and development of mineral resources, including oil, gas, coal bed methane, and coal allowed by law, with mineral resource development given primacy over other uses and resource consideration. This is generally characterized through designation of the field office as Open to Leasing for oil and gas with standard terms and conditions, except in areas closed to leasing due to congressional or legislative actions (e.g., WSAs).

### **ALTERNATIVE B**

Alternative B is designed to balance uses in the field office. This balance is achieved by emphasizing different resources and uses in different areas of the field office. Such management includes application of Areas Open to Leasing, subject to minor constraints (timing limitations, controlled surface use, lease notices) management of minerals development and targeted recreation management within Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA), to provide for quality recreation settings, experiences, and benefits, and designation of ACEC.

### **ALTERNATIVE C**

Alternative C is designed to provide maximum conservation and protection for natural resources from minerals and energy development and motorized recreation use allowed by law. Such management includes application of Open to Leasing, subject to minor constraints (timing limitations, controlled surface use, lease notices), No Surface Occupancy, and Closed to Leasing policies for management of mineral resources, management of recreation for more primitive and semi primitive recreation activities within SRMA, designation of ACECs, and recommendation for suitability for inclusion in the national Wild and Scenic River system for all eligible rivers in the field office. Key management decisions are discussed below.

## **ALTERNATIVE D (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)**

Alternative D is designed to provide for a wide variety of resource needs throughout the field office. This alternative is similar to Alternative B in that it includes maximizing minerals development potential in areas with greatest potential for development, as well as targeting recreation management in areas with the highest potential for development, to provide for quality recreation settings, experiences, and benefits in an environmentally appropriate manner.

## COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES FOR KEY ISSUES

---

### GRAPHICS DISPLAYING ALTERNATIVE COMPARISONS

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

---

The BLM decision-making process is conducted in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality regulations, and Department of the Interior and BLM policies and procedures implementing NEPA. NEPA and the associated regulatory and policy framework requires that all federal agencies involve interested groups of the public in their decision-making, consider reasonable alternatives to proposed actions, and prepare environmental documents that disclose the potential impacts of proposed actions and alternatives.

BLM holds collaborative management as a priority. This includes what Interior Secretary Gale Norton refers to as “The Four Cs—Consultation, Cooperation, and Communication—all in the service of Conservation. The Four Cs are the basis for this Administration’s new environmentalism, one that looks to those closest to the land—rather than Washington, D.C., for answers to public land issues.” Public involvement, consultation, and coordination have been at the heart of the planning process leading to this Proposed RMP and Draft RMP/EIS. This was accomplished through public meetings, informal meetings, individual contacts, news releases, planning bulletins, a planning Web site, and *Federal Register* notices.

Public scoping meetings were held in five Utah communities and one Colorado community. During the six scoping meetings, more than 270 people registered their attendance. The meetings were structured in an open house format, with BLM specialists representing issues such as livestock grazing, minerals and energy development, and other resource areas. BLM specialists were available to provide information and responses to questions. Comments from the public were collected during the scoping meetings and throughout the scoping period through a variety of methods—mail, fax, email, and through the project Web site.

The 10,300 responses were received through the various methods, including 600 letters and 9,000 form letters. For the purpose of analysis, comments were separated into 12 topic areas or categories. The category receiving the most comments was “Recreation/OHV.” These comments identified many different types of recreation activities as important to individuals and organizations. Access for recreation activities, OHV use, and dispersed camping were central comment themes. In particular, one common theme related to recreation was the need for vehicle access for recreation use. A summary of all comments was compiled and made available as the *Price RMP Scoping Report*, May 2002, which can be viewed at <http://www.pricermp.com>.