

Chapter 2

Description and Comparison of Alternatives



CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION AND COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes four resource management plan alternatives:

- Current Management (No-Action) Alternative
- Resource Protection Alternative
- Commodity Production Alternative
- Balanced Use Alternative

These alternatives and the environmental consequences of each will be used by the BLM to determine future resource management for the Book Cliffs Resource Area. The decision makers *propose to select the Balanced Use Alternative as the final plan*. In addition to the four alternatives, other alternatives that were initially considered during the early planning stages, but were not analyzed in this EIS, are briefly discussed.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

No Grazing Alternative

The no grazing alternative would have eliminated all livestock grazing from public land. This alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed study for the following reasons:

1. An ecological condition inventory (BLM 1982) of the BCRA indicates that 6.5 percent of the public grazing lands are in excellent condition, 59.6 percent are in good condition, 32.6 percent are in fair condition, and 1.3 percent are in poor condition. These range conditions do not warrant a resource area wide elimination of livestock grazing.
2. An extensive program of fence construction would be required to exclude livestock from public land. Cost of exclusion fencing would be prohibitive. In addition, fencing would disrupt established wildlife movements and public access.
3. The elimination of livestock grazing on public lands would seriously affect the ability of current livestock permittees to maintain their operations and earn a livelihood from ranching.

Various management actions, including elimination of livestock grazing in critical problem areas to improve ecological conditions, are identified for each of the four alternatives. However, total elimination of livestock could not be justified as a means of improving ecological conditions on grazing lands.

Wilderness/ACEC Designation Alternatives

Two wilderness study areas (WSAs) are located within the BCRA: Bull Canyon WSA (UT-080-419/CO-010-001) and Winter Ridge WSA (UT-080-730) (Figure 1-4). Their suitability for wilderness designation and the impacts of designation or nondesignation will be given detailed analysis in separate documents and not in this statement. Both wilderness study areas would be managed as wilderness under the Current Management Alternative, following interim management guidelines (BLM 1979) or if legislatively approved by Congress, under a subsequent management plan as a designated wilderness area. In the event that Congress determines that the areas are not wilderness, the BLM would then implement one of the other three alternatives which include nonwilderness actions.

Another alternative would have evaluated resources within the BCRA for possible designation as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The "relevance and importance" criteria for ACEC designation were applied to four potential areas (BLM 1980). Crucial wildlife habitat for deer on Lower McCook Ridge and scenic values of the White River and Fantasy Canyon were determined to be relevant but were not considered to be of more than local importance. Habitat for the endangered Colorado squawfish in the Green and White Rivers met both the relevance and importance criteria. However, appropriation of water from the rivers and management of fish species are the responsibilities of the states of Utah and Colorado. BLM is required by Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 to protect floodplains and wetlands associated with the river habitat. Additionally, in 1982, BLM required several Colorado squawfish conservation measures as conditions of the right-of-way grant for White River Dam.

BLM does not have the authority to play a major role in the management and protection of these fish species, and therefore, ACEC designation would not afford greater protection (Evans 1983).

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED FOR DETAILED ANALYSIS

The four proposed alternatives are intended to provide realistic choices between development and non-development of the natural resources. The differences in management philosophy are described as part of the goal of each alternative.

The Current Management Alternative would be a continuation of the existing BLM management in the BCRA. Ongoing resource activities such as oil and gas leasing, livestock grazing, firewood cutting, watershed treatment, and off-road vehicle (ORV) use, would con-

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tinue at the present level. No additional oil shale or tar sand leasing would occur.

The Resource Protection Alternative would emphasize maintenance or improvement of environmental quality. While resource uses and developments would still occur, preference would be given to long-term maintenance of the natural environment. Resource trade-offs would favor protection of renewable natural resources through more restrictive stipulations and authorizations.

The Commodity Production Alternative would emphasize commercial utilization of resources and produce the greatest revenues from them. Maintenance of natural environments would continue where compatible with resource production and where mandated by law. Resource trade-offs would favor maximizing revenue and providing for human needs.

The Balanced Use Alternative would provide for the use of non-renewable resources while protecting critical renewable resource values. Resource trade-offs would provide a balance between commercial production and protection of resources. ***This alternative is BLM's proposed plan. It has been altered slightly from the preferred alternative that was presented in the Draft Environmental Statement (DEIS), based upon public comments that were received.***

FORMULATION CRITERIA

Formulation criteria were identified and applied to all of the alternatives and provided general guidance in formulating the plan. The formulation criteria also provided aid in developing alternatives that cover a range of possible management solutions to the issues.

All alternatives will assume a continuation of oil and gas leasing, however, leasing categories may be different.

All alternatives will provide levels of protection for cultural resources, habitat for endangered or threatened species, floodplains, riparian habitat and other resources as prescribed by law or executive order.

Each alternative will provide a reasonable set of answers to the issues. All solutions will be technologically feasible and achievable within anticipated BLM budgets.

All alternatives will reflect the sustained-use principle for renewable resources.

The alternatives will display a maximum range of management practices to provide an array of different management options.

No alternatives will contain contradictory management practices which are mutually exclusive, i.e. maximization of conflicting uses.

Alternatives that provide for additional oil shale leasing will identify priority use areas that have realistic potential for economic shale oil recovery while avoiding major adverse impacts to renewable resources.

As provided by law, tar sand development shall be limited to the Special Tar Sand Areas (STSA). Competitive leasing will be limited to lands that are unleased within the STSAs.

Rights-of-way corridors will be developed using existing corridors and planning corridors. Existing corridors may be occupied by one or more rights-of-way with capability of accommodating additional rights-of-way. Planning corridors are unoccupied corridors identified as critical for future access to energy resource locations and transmission between generation sites and load centers. ***The following criteria will be used to determine whether an area is to be designated as open, limited, or closed for off-road vehicle use:***

1. ***The impact of ORV use on the resource value.***
2. ***Public input and demand for ORV use.***
3. ***Consideration for public safety.***
4. ***"Designation Criteria" as described in CFR 8342.1.***
5. ***Present and expected ORV use in an area.***

Generally, the least restrictive designation to resolve a resource conflict will be employed.

DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES

The specific objectives and actions necessary for implementing each of the alternatives, by issue and resource, are shown in Table 2-1. The narrative following the table is intended to clarify the action statements. Where further clarification was not necessary, no narrative was prepared. The narrative also includes a discussion of appropriate mitigation which would be adopted as part of the actions.

BLM has identified the Balanced Use Alternative as its ***proposed plan***. This alternative would be selected and implemented unless additional significant impacts or other new factors are identified through the review process. BLM proposes to ***monitor*** livestock grazing for an interim period of at least five years in a manner as described under the ***proposed plan***. This would follow current BLM grazing policy to provide additional monitoring of forage conditions and trend prior to implementing increases or reductions in livestock use.