SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Book Cliffs Resource Management Plan (BCRA) is being prepared as required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act in accordance with the current planning regulations (43 CFR 1600). This plan will provide for the management of all resources on public lands within the Book Cliffs Resource Area of the Vernal District, Bureau of Land Management.

AREAS OF CONTROVERSY

A total of nine issues were identified for resolution of possible resource use conflicts: mineral development; right-of-way corridors; forage; wildlife and wild horse habitat; woodland management; recreation; fire management; watershed management; and land tenure adjustment. Although the public has expressed interest in all of these issues, a few hold the greatest potential for public controversy. The timing, procedure, and location of Federal oil shale and tar sand leasing is of particular concern to industry. The impact of any subsequent developments upon the existing natural resources, including wildlife and wild horses, is of particular concern to hunting and environmental groups. The impacts of livestock grazing upon forage and other natural resources are of particular concern to the Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. Any adjustments in livestock grazing use are of concern to livestock operators because their livelihood could be affected. Designation of public lands for off-road vehicular use is of concern to ORV users and nonusers.

ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED

Four alternatives have been developed to provide guidance and direction in resolving the issues in this environmental impact statement. They are the Current Management, Resource Protection, Commmodity Production, and the Balanced Use Alternatives. Each of the alternatives provides a series of solutions for each of the nine issues. The alternatives differ in their emphasis on resource uses, varying between development and nondevelopment. The Current Management Alternative would be a continuation of the existing BLM management in the BCRA, which is considered as a no action alternative. The Resource Protection Alternative would emphasize maintenance or improvement of environmental quality. Commodity Production would emphasize commercial utilization of resources and the revenues which could be produced from their use. The Balanced Use Alternative would provide for the use of nonrenewable resources while protecting critical renewable resources.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

Implementation of any of the four alternatives could result in significant environmental impacts. These impacts are summarized by alternative in the following discussion.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE

Development of additional oil shale and tar sand resources would not be allowed under this alternative. Oil and gas leasing categories would remain as currently designated.

Approximately 61,500 acres of land within designated corridors would be subject to disturbance by rights-of-way construction.

Forage authorizations would remain unchanged. Ecological condition would improve on 490,500 acres in 12 allotments, remain unchanged on 588,400 acres in 35 allotments, and decline on 36,400 acres in 7 allotments. No forage would be authorized for wild horses. Approximately 576 animal unit months (AUMs) would be lost to mineral development.

Due to overharvest, approximately 220 acres of woodlands would be eliminated annually.

Continuation of no off-road vehicle (ORV) designations could result in nonconformance with plans of the Ute Tribe for the Hill Creek Extension. Hunter use in the Book Cliffs Resource Area would increase by 400 visitor days.

Within a decade, fire management would improve forage and wildlife habitat on 5,000 to 10,000 acres.

Watershed treatments on 10,000 acres would reduce soil loss by 64,000 tons.

RESOURCE PROTECTION ALTERNATIVE

Development of oil shale would be considered on some 18,000 acres. Flexibility in locating up to two new oil shale tracts would be limited. In situ development would not be possible. Oil shale mining could inadvertently damage or destroy existing oil and gas facilities or gilsonite veins. Approximately 32 percent of STSAs would not be available for tar sand lease.

Approximately 46,000 acres of land within designated corridors would be subject to disturbance by rights-of-way construction.

Forage authorizations for livestock would be about 48 percent below active preference. Wildlife would be authorized a 27 percent increase. Wild horses would be authorized 2,940 AUMs above the current level of 0. Ecological condition would improve on 943,400 acres in 49 allotments and remain unchanged on 171,900 acres in 5 allotments. Approximately 1,181 AUMs would be

lost through mineral development and 1,708 AUMs would be gained from land treatments.

Habitat and forage improvements would result in increases of 503 antelope, 12,100 mule deer, 1,800 elk, and 39 wild horses. Water depletions from the White River could adversely affect two endangered fish species.

Mineral development, fire, and rights-of-way would destroy 1,700 acres of woodlands. Protection of other resource values would preclude harvest of 12,800 acres of woodlands.

Hunting would increase by ***4,060*** visitor days and other recreation use would increase by 2,700 visitor days. ORV restrictions would cause a loss of 575 visitor days annually. Construction within designated corridors could diminish the visual resources on 4,640 acres.

Fire management would improve forage and wildlife habitat on 15,000 acres in a decade.

Diversion of an additional 28,000 acre-feet of water from the White River would increase the total dissolved solids (TDS) concentrations at Imperial Dam by 1 milligram per liter. Watershed treatments would reduce soil loss by 711,000 tons in a decade. Mineral developments would increase soil loss by 9,900 to 19,700 tons in a decade. Floodplains would improve by an unquantifiable amount.

Acquisition of ***8,700*** acres of riparian and wildlife habitat would enhance the wildlife program.

Air quality standards for total suspended particulates (TSP) could be exceeded near mines and haul roads.

Due to mineral developments, the regional employment and income would increase by an unknown amount. Decreasing the authorized grazing use by 49,542 AUMs would decrease operator wealth by $2,972,520. Increased hunting activities would increase local revenue by $288,325. Demands on community infrastructure would increase.

COMMODITY PRODUCTION ALTERNATIVE

Development of oil shale would be considered on some 98,000 acres and up to four new leases issued, thus giving maximum flexibility to possible oil shale development.

Oil shale development could inadvertently damage or destroy existing oil and gas facilities, gilsonite veins and building stone areas.

All public land within STSAs would be available for tar sand lease.

Approximately 174,000 acres of land within designated corridors would be subject to disturbance by rights-of-way construction.

Forage authorizations for livestock would be about 6 percent above active preference. Wildlife would be authorized 60 percent below allocated use. Wild horses would be authorized 710 AUMs above the current allocated level of none. Ecological condition would improve on 642,300 acres in 30 allotments and remain unchanged on 472,900 acres in 24 allotments. Approximately 3,856 AUMs would be lost to mineral development and 2,700 AUMs would be gained from land treatments.

Reduced forage for wildlife would result in decreases of 309 antelope, 400 mule deer, and 146 wild horses. Water depletions from the White River would adversely affect two endangered fish species.

About 20,400 acres of woodlands would be destroyed by mineral development, rights-of-way, and wildfire. Protection of other resource values would preclude harvest of 20 acres of woodlands.

The ORV designations would result in nonconformance with plans of the Ute Tribe for the Hill Creek Extension. The ORV restrictions would cause an annual loss of 200 visitor days.

Hunting would increase by 1,560 visitor days and other recreation use would increase by 5,900 visitor days. The Musket Shot Springs developed overlook would be eliminated. Construction within designated corridors could diminish the visual resources on 13,400 acres. Water depletions from the White River would result in marginal canoeing opportunities.

Fire management would increase livestock forage and decrease wildlife habitat on 13,000 to 28,500 acres.

Diversion of an additional 56,000 acre-feet from the White River would increase the TDS concentrations at Imperial Dam by 2 milligrams per liter. Watershed treatments would reduce soil loss by 41,000 tons in a decade. In a decade, mineral developments would increase soil loss by 45,800 to 81,500 tons.

Acquisition of 10,000 acres of oil shale and tar sand lands would enhance mineral management.

Air quality standards for TSP would be exceeded. Visible discoloration would occur to the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation. Discoloration could also occur to the Dinosaur and Colorado National Monuments.

Due to mineral developments, the regional employment and income would increase by an unknown amount. Increasing the authorized grazing use by 7,406 AUMs would increase operator wealth by $444,360. Increased hunting activity would increase local revenues by $335,700. Demands on community infrastructure would increase. Traffic would increase by 16 percent and there would be an unknown increase in traffic accidents. An undetermined amount of traffic congestion and road deterioration would also occur.

BALANCED USE ALTERNATIVE (PROPOSED PLAN)

Development of oil shale would be considered on

48,000 acres and up to four new leases issued.

Oil shale development could inadvertently damage or destroy existing oil and gas facilities, gilsonite veins, and building stone. Approximately 12 percent of STSAs would not be available for tar sand lease. Approximately 93,000 acres of land within designated corridors would be subject to disturbance by rights-of-way construction.

Forage authorizations for livestock would be about ***21*** percent below active preference. Wildlife would be authorized 9 percent above allocated use. Wild horses would be authorized 2,340 AUMs above the current allocation level of zero. Ecological condition would improve on 846,900 acres in 38 allotments and remain unchanged on 268,500 acres in 16 allotments. Approximately 1,858 AUMs would be lost through mineral development and 2,034 AUMs would be gained from land treatments.

Habitat and forage improvements would result in an increase of 289 antelope, 9,600 mule deer, and 1,400 elk. Reduced forage for wild horses would result in a decrease of 11 horses. Water depletions from the White River could adversely affect two endangered fish species.

Mineral developments, rights-of-way, and wildfire would destroy 5,150 acres of woodlands. Protection of other resources would preclude harvest on 4,750 acres of woodlands.

For the Hill Creek Extension, off-road vehicle designations would be consistent with plans of the Ute Tribe. The ORV restrictions would cause a loss of 500 visitor days annually. Hunting use would increase by 3,350 visitor days and other recreation use would increase by ***4,200*** visitor days. The Musket Shot Springs developed overlook would be ***retained***. Construction within designated corridors could diminish visual resources on 6,400 acres. Water depletions from the White River would result in marginal canoeing.

Fire management would increase livestock forage and wildlife habitat on 17,000 to 27,900 acres.

Diversion of an additional 28,000 to 56,000 acre-feet of water from the White River would increase TDS concentrations at Imperial Dam by one to two milligrams per liter. Watershed treatments would reduce soil loss by 505,000 tons in a decade. Mineral developments would increase soil loss by 16,800 to 34,800 tons of soil in a decade.

Acquisition of up to ***18,700*** acres of ***land would enhance both renewable and nonrenewable resource programs.***

Air quality standards for TSP could be exceeded. Visible discoloration could occur to the Dinosaur National Monument and Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation.

The regional employment and income would increase by an unknown amount due to mineral developments. Decreasing the ***active grazing preference*** by ***21,599*** AUMs would decrease operator wealth by ***$1,295,940***. Increased hunting activity would increase local revenues by $450,450. Demands on community infrastructure would increase. Traffic would increase by 13 percent and accidents would increase by an unknown amount. An undetermined amount of traffic congestion and road deterioration could occur.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE *PROPOSED PLAN*

The Balanced Use Alternative has been identified as the ***proposed plan*** because it optimizes the use of energy and other natural resources while protecting critical resources such as wildlife habitat, cultural resources, endangered and threatened species, etc.

The Current Management Alternative presented in this document is the proposed action for livestock grazing as required by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). This alternative is also the "No Action" Alternative as required by BLM grazing policy (BLM Washington Office Instruction Memo 83-428).