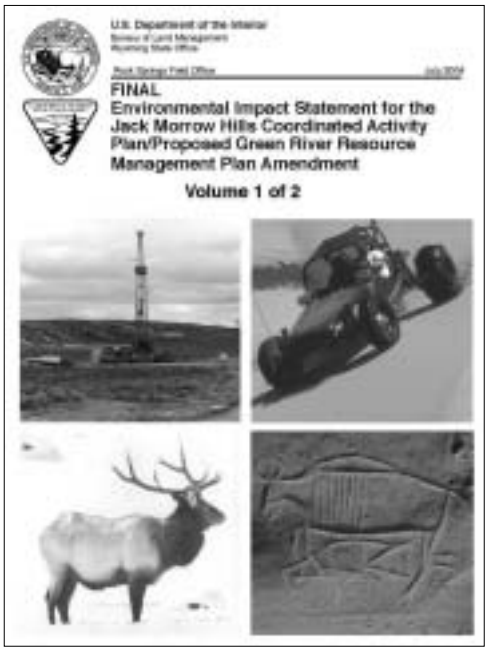
SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION



This final environmental impact statement (EIS) and coordinated activity plan (CAP) will provide more specific management direction to address potential conflicts among development of energy resources, recreational activities and facilities, and land uses in the Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan (JMH CAP) planning area (Map 1). The planning area encompasses about 622,430 acres of federal, state, and private land in southwest Wyoming. Approximately 574,800 acres of public land surface and federal mineral estate are administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through its Rock Springs Field Office (RSFO) in Rock Springs, Wyoming. The JMH CAP planning area includes the Steamboat Mountain, Greater Sand Dunes, White Mountain Petroglyphs, and Oregon Buttes Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); a portion of the South Pass Historic Landscape ACEC; the Oregon Buttes, Honeycomb Buttes, Greater Sand Dunes, Buffalo Hump, Whitehorse Creek, South Pinnacles, and Alkali Draw Wilderness Study Areas (WSA); and three special recreation management areas (Greater Sand Dunes; Continental Divide National Scenic Trail; and the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, Pony Express, and California National Historic Trails). Parts of Fremont, Sweetwater, and Sublette Counties in southwest Wyoming are within the planning area.

Special Management Areas	Approximate Acres*
Wilderness Study Areas	119,000
ACECs & SRMAs	147,000

*These areas may overlap and acreages do not total. See Table 3-1.

When completed, the JMH CAP will provide a framework for managing BLM-administered public lands and resources and for allocating uses in the planning area. Specifically, this CAP is focused on resolving four resource management issues: minerals resource management and related rights-of-way; resource uses affecting vegetation, soils, air, watershed, and wildlife values; recreation and heritage resources management; and special management areas. It is anticipated that the JMH CAP will be implemented over a 20-year planning period.

The JMH CAP will make land and resource management decisions for fluid mineral leasing and mineral location. Because of concerns raised by the public and BLM regarding these decisions during preparation of the Green River Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 1997, the decisions were deferred to the JMH CAP. Concerns in 1997 included the need for more site specific and detailed information and analysis. Thus, this effort will make the Green River RMP fluid minerals leasing decisions (and modify some existing decisions) and mineral location decisions for the JMH CAP planning area and will determine the appropriate levels and

timing of leasing and development of energy resources, while sustaining the other important land and resource uses in the area. The deferred Green River RMP decisions will result in amendment of the Green River RMP. Other management prescriptions resulting from this planning effort include some refinement of road use designations, grazing practices, recreational activities and facilities, identification of right-of-way windows and concentration areas, and prescriptions for managing wildlife habitat.

BACKGROUND

The BLM issued the original draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the JMH CAP in July 2000 and received more than 12,000 comment letters and postcards. About 96 percent of the comments were submitted as form letters and postcards advocating no commodity use and formal designation of the entire area as a National Monument.

During a November 15, 2000, visit to the area, then-Secretary of the Interior Babbitt announced that the BLM would prepare a supplemental draft EIS for the JMH CAP to include a new preferred alternative (a "conservation" alternative) that would focus on the protection of the area's outstanding wildlife, cultural and aesthetic resources. The BLM prepared the supplemental draft EIS and released it for public comment on February 23, 2003. The comment period closed on May 23, 2003. More than 69,000 comments were received.

ISSUES AND CONFLICTS

The identified issues are based upon the demands, concerns, conflicts, or problems involving the use or management of the public lands and resources in the JMH planning area. The planning issues were identified through the scoping process and other public outreach efforts. Planning issues and conflicts between various resources and activities include:

- Mineral development (i.e., oil/gas, coalbed methane, coal, diamonds, and gold) and big game (i.e., moose, elk, deer, antelope) crucial habitat (crucial winter range and birthing areas), and other important wildlife species (e.g., plovers, sage-grouse, raptors)

- Visitor health and safety and mineral development (i.e., ORV recreation area and oil/gas development)

- Recreation activities and big game crucial habitat

- Livestock grazing/range projects and big game habitat (especially in elk parturition areas)

- Linear rights-of-way and other land use authorizations and big game crucial habitat

- Surface disturbance, visual and noise intrusions, and cultural sites and Native American Respected Places.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PLAN

Key points of the Proposed Plan are listed below. Management of resources such as air quality are included in the Green River RMP and referenced in the CAP, but not specifically listed here.

Land and Water Resources

The Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands (standards) would apply to all resource uses on BLM-administered lands. These standards are the minimal acceptable conditions that address the health, productivity, and sustainability of the rangeland. The standards would direct the management of public lands and would focus the implementation of this activity plan toward the maintenance or attainment of healthy rangelands.

Vegetation treatments would be designed by interdisciplinary teams on a case-by-case basis. Appropriate rest for treated areas would be provided (up to one year prior to treatment, and 24 months after treatment unless an onsite analysis determines this time frame should be more or less). Native vegetation would be managed to allow native plant succession to continue.

A monitoring plan would be developed by an interdisciplinary team and adjustments made based upon monitoring information.

Wild Horses

The current appropriate management level (AML) and wild horse herd management area boundary would remain unchanged from the Green River RMP (1997).

Livestock Grazing

Current preference for livestock grazing AUMs would remain unchanged. Appropriate actions would be applied to meet rangeland health standards.

Wildlife Management

The proposed plan would require appropriate mitigation for protection of wildlife habitat such as seasonal restrictions, avoidance and no surface occupancy. Key habitats include crucial winter ranges, birthing areas, migratory corridors, sage grouse strutting grounds, nesting and winter concentration areas, and mountain plover nesting habitat. Management of T&E species would continue to be done in consultation with USFWS. A Biological Assessment (BA) is being developed for submission to the USFWS. The USFWS has participated in the development of the BA.

The Proposed Plan would implement recent BLM management direction regarding greater sage-grouse habitat. The CAP is consistent with the recent "Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan" which was developed by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department with a broad range of stakeholders. The JMH CAP proposes to maintain and enhance sage-grouse habitat through an implementation, monitoring, and evaluation approach.

Heritage Resources

Consultation would continue with tribal leaders for activities proposed around respected places. The BLM would conduct research and mapping of the Indian Gap Trail and develop an interpretation strategy in consultation with the tribes.

The Paleosol Deposition area would be designated as the West Sand Dunes Archaeological District Management Area. The proposed management strategy would provide for multiple-use activities with appropriate inventory, testing, and evaluation to define impacts and site-specific mitigation.

National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) sites would be protected from surface disturbing activities. Other historic properties would be protected through mitigation, including distance and site restrictions.

Travel Management, Access, and Realty

A transportation plan specific to the JMH area would be developed with interested parties. Emphasis would be placed on providing access while ensuring watershed health and protection of crucial wildlife habitats and sensitive resources.

OHV designations for open and closed areas and areas limited to existing or designated roads and trails are identified. Seasonal closures would continue. Rights-of-way placement would coincide with transportation planning.

Recreation Resources

Recreation resources would be managed to provide for a wide diversity of recreation opportunities. Project plans would be developed for backcountry byways, Sand Dunes ORV recreation site, Crookston Ranch Historic Site, Boars Tusk, Oregon Buttes, Honeycomb Buttes, Steamboat Mountain, National Historic Trails, White Mountain Petroglyphs, and Native American sites including Indian Gap.

Minerals and Oil and Gas Leasing

Valid existing lease rights would be recognized. Lease suspensions on existing oil and gas leases would be lifted 3 years from the signing of the ROD or upon approval of a plan of operation, whichever occurs first. The planning area would be divided into three areas (see attached map). Area One would be open to oil and gas leasing. Area Two would be open to leasing, but BLM may require potential lessees to share data (such as reservoir data or geologic data) or plans related to the development of the potential oil and gas resource prior to leasing. Permits (e.g., APDs) within this area would be considered on a case-by-case basis, with appropriate NEPA analysis and conditions of approval. However, additional conditions of approval designed to protect sensitive resources would be likely within this area. Area Three would have limited areas open to leasing with NSO stipulations; the remaining areas would be administratively closed to new leasing. Applications for activities on existing leases (e.g., APDs) within Area Three would be considered on a case-by-case basis with appropriate NEPA analysis and conditions of approval. However, additional mitigation to protect sensitive resources would be likely within this area. To the extent that laws and regulations allow, those portions of Area 3 that are closed to oil and gas leasing will remain closed to leasing of oil and gas unless BLM determines that an NSO lease is appropriate and meets

management objectives. For example, an NSO lease may be offered if production on adjacent private or state lands results in a loss of federal minerals through drainage or is necessary to protect correlative rights. At this time it is not anticipated that an NSO lease for these lands would extend further than one-half mile from the boundary of the involved private or state lease. However, this may change as new information and technological advances become available.

Salable Minerals

Sensitive resources would be protected through avoidance or mitigation. Mineral materials activity would occur in conjunction with development activity, if needed.

Locatable Minerals

Two elk calving areas and a part of the Steamboat Mountain ACEC would be withdrawn from locatable mineral entry, in addition to the withdrawals identified in the GRRMP.

VRM

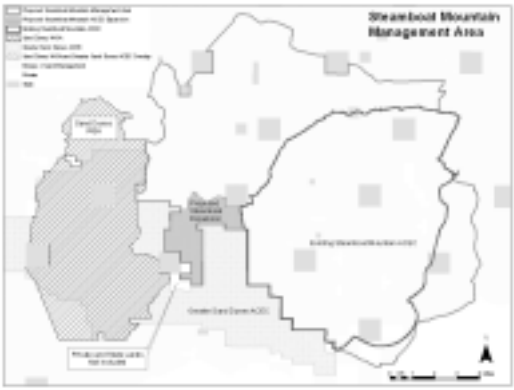
Visual Resource Management would maintain or improve scenic value by managing impacts and intrusions through mitigation.

Special Management Areas

Four of the existing five ACEC designations would remain unchanged. The fifth, Steamboat Mountain ACEC, would be expanded to include the Indian Gap historic trail and key habitats with the rare sagebrush/scurfpea vegetation type. The combined resource values in the expanded area contain relevant and important values consistent with those in the existing ACEC area.

The West Sand Dunes Archaeological District would be established as a new management area to protect important scientific values involving the earliest stages of human occupation of North America (7,000 to 12,000 years ago). Management objectives would include education and interpretation opportunities while still allowing development of natural gas and other resources that occur in the area.

The Steamboat Mountain Management area would be established to improve management of important Native American cultural values, important watershed values, unique wildlife habitat features and crucial and overlapping big game habitat. The management area would include the existing Steamboat Mountain ACEC and the proposed ACEC expansion area. This management area proposal is based on concerns and recommendations expressed by the public and Governor of Wyoming during the 90-day comment period; new information from the ongoing elk study in the JMH CAP area; input from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department; and increased awareness and involvement of the Native American community and the significance of their concerns for Native American respected places in the area. Management objectives include: 1) Enhancing and maintaining the water quality, vegetation, soil, and wildlife resources to ensure biological diversity and a healthy ecosystem; 2) Maintaining the unique diverse habitats (big sagebrush, aspen, limber pine, and mountain shrub communities) in the Steamboat Mountain area, especially on stabilized sand dunes along Steamboat Rim, Indian Gap, and in the Johnson, Lafonte, and Box Canyon areas; 3) Providing suitable habitat to maintain the continued existence of the Steamboat elk herd and other big game populations; and 4) Protecting important heritage resources (cultural, historic, archaeological, and unique geological features) while allowing for educational research and appropriate interpretive uses.



Wilderness

Updates on wilderness information are provided in the final EIS in conformance with the Department's policy on wilderness and recent Bureau guidance. Two alternatives in the supplemental draft EIS that addressed WSAs were modified in the final EIS to reflect the new guidance. The final EIS incorporates a discussion regarding the removal of the WSA reference in those two alternatives. The planning area includes 7 existing WSAs (about 119,000 acres). These WSAs would continue to be managed in accordance with the "Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review" until Congress acts on designation.

Implementation Strategy Management

The final proposed Bureau of Land Management (BLM) management direction is based on the review of public comments and incorporation of new information. The reformulated implementation strategy for the JMH CAP planning area includes many of the same principles of adaptive management contained in the draft document, but applies a more traditional monitoring and adjustment approach. The approach to timing and sequencing of all activities in the JMH CAP has been modified to recognize valid existing rights of existing oil and gas leases. The BLM maintains its commitment to monitoring, adjusting to changes, and participation and communication including establishment of a JMH CAP working group.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FINAL EIS ALTERNATIVES

Five alternatives are analyzed in detail, all of them multiple-use oriented. Each alternative provides for resource production and environmental protection. The management prescriptions of the five alternatives are described in Chapter 2 and are summarized and compared in Table 2-1, Summary Comparison of Alternatives (found at the end of Chapter 2).

Alternatives developed for this analysis were formulated to address the full range of management actions that could be implemented for the planning area, including: a No Action Alternative; the Proposed JMH CAP; and, three additional alternatives. The previous planning actions and the alternatives developed for the Green River RMP and the original draft EIS for the JMH CAP were reviewed along with consideration of management and resource issues identified by BLM technical staff in the RSFO. New information regarding the resources in the planning area obtained since the preparation of the original draft EIS was considered in the development of alternatives, along with public comments and input from cooperating agencies and users of the lands and resources in the JMH CAP planning area.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative is defined as the continuation of present management. Ongoing programs initiated under existing legislation and regulations and the Green River RMP would continue, even as new plans are developed or new planning efforts are conducted within the RMP area. Thus, this alternative describes the current resource and land management direction for the JMH CAP planning area, represented by the decisions set forth in the Green River RMP (October 1997) which provides for multiple-use management of public lands and resources to meet foreseeable needs. The No Action Alternative recognizes valid existing rights. No additional lands would be considered for leasing for fluid minerals in what is known as the "core" area, and there would not be any changes proposed for ACECs. The No Action Alternative is the baseline to which the other alternatives are compared. Suspended leases in the planning area would be reinstated. Existing leases could be developed consistent with lease rights and a case-by-case review with appropriate mitigation as needed.

Alternative 1 (Development)

Alternative 1 provides for expanded opportunities to use and develop the planning area. Resources would be protected to the extent required by applicable laws and regulations. Alternative 1 would authorize new leases and permits for oil, gas, and mineral development throughout the planning area consistent with existing regulatory requirements and statutory withdrawals and closures. Additional lands would be considered for fluid mineral leasing in the core area. There would be no changes proposed for ACECs. This alternative could result in modifications or amendments to previous land management decisions represented by the 1997 Green River RMP decisions.

Alternative 2 (Preservation)

Alternative 2 reduces opportunities to use and develop the planning area from the No Action Alternative. This alternative emphasizes improving and protecting habitat for wildlife and sensitive plant and animal species; improving riparian areas and water quality; and protecting historic, cultural, and Native American sites. Boundaries of existing ACECs would be expanded as necessary to protect sensitive resources, and Research Natural Area designations would be pursued as appropriate. Two new ACECs would be designated. Additional lands would not be considered for fluid mineral leasing in the core area. Alternative 2 would not allow development in areas with competing resource uses and would close or designate portions of the planning area to restrict some land uses. Development or activities could occur in specified portions of the planning area, with appropriate mitigation measures.

Alternative 3 (Conservation)

Alternative 3 provides opportunities to use and develop the planning area while ensuring resource protection. This alternative would allow development and activities to occur throughout the planning area provided that sensitive resources were protected and mitigation requirements were met. Mitigation requirements necessary to ensure the stability of the sensitive resource indicators would be determined through an adaptive management approach to resource use and protection. Additional lands would be considered for fluid mineral leasing in the core area. Boundaries of existing ACECs would be expanded as necessary to protect sensitive resources.

Proposed Plan

The BLM's Proposed JMH CAP provides opportunities to use and develop the planning area by providing a balance of uses. The Proposed Plan comprises a complementary mix of appropriate elements from each alternative; however, the Proposed JMH CAP also contains management actions not included in any of the other alternatives. As part of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation management strategy (Appendix 17), portions of the planning area would be available for development and other activities, with appropriate mitigation. Some portions of the planning area would be unavailable to new fluid mineral leasing consideration. An implementation strategy would be initiated, and monitoring and evaluation of activities would occur. The strategy provides for adjusting to change, and for further public participation and establishment of a JMH CAP working group. Boundaries of one existing ACEC would be expanded in order to better protect sensitive resources.

Environmental Consequences

The environmental consequences that could result from the management prescriptions of the five alternatives are described in Chapter 4 and are summarized and compared in Table 2-4, Summary of Impacts. These potential consequences are discussed for each resource program, providing an analysis of environmental effects resulting from management of all resources and resource uses. This includes an analysis of cumulative effects, which are defined as the impacts that result from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions.

COOPERATING AGENCY SUMMARY

The State of Wyoming was granted Cooperating Agency status along with Sublette County and three Conservation Districts under the State's umbrella status. Fremont County and later Sweetwater County were granted individual Cooperating Agency status. During this project, the BLM and cooperating agencies have participated in more than 20 joint meetings and work sessions, public informational and scoping meetings, and public hearings. The cooperators reviewed the preliminary final EIS concurrently with BLM. Their comments have been incorporated into the final EIS.

COORDINATION WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

Coordination with Tribes has been ongoing throughout the planning process. Several letters were sent as part of the consultation process with Native American tribal councils asking them to identify places of concern, and requesting contact information for any other people with whom the BLM should consult concerning sacred sites or other places of concern. The BLM followed up with a series of telephone calls to tribal councils. BLM and Native Americans also participated in numerous field trips, meetings, school visits, and presentations. This level of coordination is anticipated to continue as implementation of the JMH CAP occurs.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Over 40 public meetings, open houses, field tours, and hearings have been held. Additionally, information has been provided through the JMH CAP website, news releases, and newsletters. Interviews with numerous media have also been conducted. Prior to the release of the supplemental draft EIS in February of 2003, several open houses and scoping meetings were held. Additional meetings on preliminary alternatives occurred providing public input into the alternative formulation process. Following the release of the supplemental draft EIS, two hearings and two open houses were held, along with media outreach and interviews. More than 69,000 comments (mostly as form letters) were received during the 90-day comment period. Key issues raised in the comment period included: wilderness policy change; Native American consultation; Citizen's Wildlife and Wildlands Alternative evaluation; cumulative effects analysis; lack of baseline data on select resources (e.g., water, wildlife, cultural); consultation with USFWS regarding Biological Assessment; and justification and effective implementation of adaptive management plan. The comments have been addressed and responded to in the development of the final EIS. Once published, the final EIS will be subject to a 30-day protest period.

MODIFICATIONS IN THE FINAL EIS

The modifications in the final EIS are a result of public comment, incorporation of new information, internal review, and changes in management direction and policy. The Proposed JMH CAP is essentially a modification of the Preferred Alternative presented in the supplemental draft EIS. Modifications to the other alternatives were also made due to changes in policy and direction for WSAs and greater sage-grouse management.

The following are the areas for which modifications have occurred:

- Adaptive Management Strategy: Proposed changes in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) management direction based on the review of public comments and the incorporation of new information has resulted in reformulation of the implementation strategy for the Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan (JMH CAP) planning area. In light of the review, the adaptive management approach has been modified. A more traditional approach (in which many of the decisions are made up front and would require plan modification to change) has been adopted (Appendix 17).
- Cumulative Impact Analysis: Updated information relating to the cumulative impact analysis was included in the final EIS.
- Greater Sage-Grouse Management: Updated information and clarification regarding greater sage-grouse habitat were included in the final EIS. This led to consideration of the implementation of a management approach based on location of suitable habitat.
- Management of the Steamboat Mountain ACEC: The boundary of the ACEC would be modified to include the highest concentration and overlap of unique habitat features, natural systems, and cultural values.
- Designation of WSAs: Updated information and clarification regarding new direction for WSAs were included in the final EIS. As a result, the proposed designation of the Pinnacles WSA was not included in Alternatives 2 and 3 of the final EIS. However, the management actions for this area are still included in these alternatives.