

# **Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan**

## **Annual Report**

**September 2010**

**BLM**

High Desert District - Rock Springs Field Office



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## **Introduction**

The Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan (JMH CAP) encompasses approximately 622,000 total acres, of which the BLM administers approximately 574,800 acres through the Rock Springs Field Office (RSFO) in Rock Springs, Wyoming. The JMH CAP area encompasses 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 (SRMA) – Greater Sand Dunes; Continental Peak Side Trail; and the Oregon, Mormon Pioneer, Pony Express, and California National Historic Trails.

The RSFO has been in the process of implementing management decisions and actions from the JMH CAP since the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed in 2006. Many of the management decisions were immediately implemented at the time the ROD was signed, including identification of lands available for oil and gas leasing, and are administratively final.

Most activities identified as implementation decisions in the JMH CAP will require the preparation of additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, which considers project and site-specific conditions and identifies mitigation to reduce impacts before approval/initiation. Examples include future oil and gas lease sales, grazing permit renewals or future land exchanges. Public involvement opportunities, including further protest or appeal opportunities, are provided at that time.

### **JMH CAP Interagency Work Group**

The JMH CAP Interagency Work Group was established by the ROD. The Work Group is a forum for government agencies to aid BLM in management of the Jack Morrow Hills area. The Work Group considers numerous topics affecting the planning area, including mutual goals, policy coordination, resource conditions, pending actions or decisions, and opportunities for further cooperation. Through this cooperative management effort each agency will gain a better understanding of the issues and concerns surrounding resource management within the JMH CAP area.

In the past year, the Work Group has met to discuss a variety of issues during meetings in April, July, and November of 2009, and January, May, and August of 2010. Typically, meetings will be held on a quarterly basis or as needed.

### **JMH Implementation Matrix**

The BLM Wyoming State Office has developed a template matrix for all Resource Management Plan (RMP) implementation actions in conjunction with guidance from the Washington Office. The JMH CAP is an amendment to the existing Green River RMP; therefore, an implementation matrix has been created and will be available on the JMH CAP website. The Implementation

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Matrix is intended to help track the implementation of the JMH CAP decisions. Although it is quite extensive, all categories are designed to assist in tracking and monitoring progress of the various projects/activities identified in the planning document.

Updating the Implementation Matrix will be an ongoing process. The tasks will continue to be refined to more accurately reflect accomplishments, and progress on the tasks will be updated as necessary. An abbreviated task list called "Implementation Tasks" can be found on the JMH CAP website.

Below are a few of the implementation tasks that have been accomplished in the JMH CAP area within the last year:

- The prehistoric archaeological site called the "Finley Site," located approximately 4 miles east of Eden, WY within the JMH CAP, has been determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP). Through a partnership between the BLM and the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), SHPO has prepared the nomination materials necessary for NRHP listing. The site was discovered in the 1940s and field work has occurred there sporadically over the years. There are several specific styles of projectile points found in the Western United States that have helped archaeologists date sites based on their presence. The Eden point is among those specific points and its presence dates the site to between 9,200 and 8,800 years ago.
- The BLM has awarded a contract to provide Mule Deer distribution and habitat selection studies on public lands within the Steamboat Herd Area of Jack Morrow Hills CAP. This project will establish baseline data to identify current Mule Deer distribution and habitat selection. The anticipated length of the project is a five-year period, with the initial GPS collaring expected to begin in January 2011.
- The BLM conducted flight monitoring for Greater sage-grouse winter locations.
- The BLM has continued monitoring for Standards for Healthy Rangelands (see Resource Updates: Range section of this report for more information about monitoring efforts).
- In line with the ROD, on July 19, 2009, the 174 leases suspended for completion of the JMH CAP had the suspensions terminated and returned to original lease terms (see Resource Updates: Minerals Leasing for more information).
- A road survey has been completed for the entire JMH CAP area; however, identifying uses and needs for the surveyed roads still needs to be completed (see Transportation Planning section of this report for more information).

### **RMP Amendment/Revision**

The Green River RMP (August 1997) is one of six RMPs being amended to incorporate the management strategy of the BLM Instruction Memorandum WY-2010-012 "Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Policy on Wyoming Bureau of Land Management Administered Public Lands including the Federal Mineral Estate." An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being conducted to determine impacts within all six field offices for the implementation of this new core area habitat strategy. The EIS is expected to be completed with a Record of Decision for the amendment by October 2012.

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In addition to the ongoing amendment, the Rock Springs Field Office has been awarded funding to revise the existing Green River RMP beginning in the fall of 2010. The RMP revision will be incorporating all amendment decisions, including the currently ongoing sage-grouse amendment and the JMH CAP of 2006. The RMP revision is anticipated to be a four-year process, concluding in October 2014.

The public participation process for the RMP planning effort will consist of three components: preplanning, plan revision, and plan implementation. The preplanning component involves activities that include issue identification, development of planning criteria, determination of inventory needs, and the existing management situation analysis. The plan preparation phase involves development of alternatives for analysis, preparation of an environmental impact statement, a record of decision, and a revised RMP. Plan implementation includes implementing land use plan decisions, ensuring activities conform with the land use plan decisions, monitoring to track the implementation of land use plan decisions, and evaluating decisions made in the plan to determine if the decisions and NEPA analysis are still valid, or if changes are needed. Every effort will be made to assure meaningful public involvement throughout the planning process.

### **Transportation Planning**

The JMH CAP states, “A transportation plan for the JMH CAP planning area will be developed in coordination with local governments, users, and other members of the public” (JMH CAP, p 67). Transportation planning will provide for access to achieve multiple-use goals while providing maximum protection for crucial habitats and sensitive resources and will consider:

- Limiting points of access for all activities to minimize disruption.
- Closing and rehabilitating unused roads and trails and those causing resource damage.
- Avoiding construction of stream or riparian area crossings in sensitive areas and closing unnecessary crossings.
- Limiting development zones to be accessed by designated routes.

The transportation planning efforts are ongoing. A road survey has been completed for the entire JMH CAP area; however, identifying uses and needs for the surveyed roads still needs to be completed. Any decisions about road closures, etc., will need to undergo site-specific NEPA analysis, which includes the opportunity for public involvement.

### **Resource Updates:**

- **Minerals Leasing**

The ROD for the JMH CAP stated that suspensions granted on existing oil and gas leases within the JMH CAP area would be lifted three (3) years from the signing of the ROD or earlier if the RSFO approved a plan of development for the lease. In line with the ROD, on July 19, 2009, the 174 leases suspended for completion of the JMH CAP had the suspensions terminated and returned to original lease terms.

There are currently four (4) authorized and designated federal units in the JMH CAP area: Rim Rock (4 leases, 640 acres), Buccaneer (2 leases, 680 acres), Steamboat

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Mountain (2 leases, 635 acres), and Nitchie Gulch (6 leases, 5,840 acres). These 4 units combined contain 26 wells and are actively producing.

Currently, the RSFO has a total of 33 active oil and gas wells in the JMH CAP area. There are also three (3) approved Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs) that are approved in the Nitchie Gulch Unit. These three APDs expire on October 27, 2010; thus far no activity is expected. No other APDs for the JMH CAP area are outstanding.

There are five (5) existing authorized federal oil and gas leases in two of the seven Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) of the JMH CAP area. All 5 of the federal leases have effective dates prior to the establishment of the WSAs. Of the 5 leases, currently 1 lease is held by production (developed and actively producing); 2 leases have recently plugged wells and will expire in 2011; and 2 leases are suspended due to the establishment of the WSAs. The existing lease that is held by production will continue to be valid so long as oil or gas is being produced in paying quantities.

- **Range**

The BLM Wyoming manages the public lands in accordance with the Standards for Healthy Rangelands & Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Standards address the health, productivity, and sustainability of the public rangelands and represent the minimum acceptable conditions. The standards apply to all resource uses on public lands and are observed on a landscape scale. Guidelines provide for, and guide the development of, reasonable, responsible, and cost-effective management practices at the grazing allotment and watershed level. The guidelines apply specifically to livestock grazing management practices on the BLM administered public lands.

There are 15 grazing allotments in the JMH CAP area: Bar X, Bush Rim, Continental Peak, 4th of July, Pacific Creek, Red Desert, Sands, Steamboat Mountain, Houghton Place, Crookston Ranch, Chilton Place, Johnson Place, Hay Meadow, Middle Hay Place, and Rock Springs. Achieving the standards or making significant progress toward achievement of the standards will be the first priority for all grazing allotments.

The following standards were identified as 'not being met' in the indicated allotments: soil erosion (Pacific Creek) and riparian (Pacific Creek, Steamboat Mountain, Crookston Ranch, Rock Springs, and Hay Meadow). This information is available for review in the July 31, 2009 Handout – Range Monitoring Summary, which is posted on the JMH CAP website.

In 2009, two grazing allotments were re-evaluated for rangeland health standards (Steamboat Mountain and Bar X). The Steamboat Mountain allotment did not meet Standard #2, the riparian health standard. However, it was determined from monitoring data that riparian condition is showing upward trend and making significant progress towards meeting Standard #2; therefore, no adjustments to the management within the allotment were necessary. The Bar X allotment met all Standards and Guidelines for Healthy Rangelands.

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In 2009, the following allotments were monitored for upland trend: Bush Rim, Continental Peak, Pacific Creek, Red Desert, and Steamboat Mountain. A summary of this information is available for review in the July 31, 2009 Handout – Range Monitoring Summary, which is posted on the JMH CAP website.

Grazing allotments will continue to be monitored for compliance, utilization, trend, and riparian health. Re-evaluation of the Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands for each of the allotments will be scheduled in upcoming years, but no specified dates are available at this time.

- **Visual Resource Inventory**

The BLM Rock Springs and Rawlins Field Offices are currently undergoing a joint visual resource inventory (VRI) that includes approximately 7 million acres of BLM-administered public lands and 9 million acres of Federal mineral estate within Carbon, Albany, Laramie, Sweetwater, Uinta, Lincoln, Fremont and Sublette counties in southeastern and south-central Wyoming. The BLM is responsible for ensuring that the scenic values of the public lands are considered before allowing uses that may have negative visual impacts. In order to inventory visual values, the BLM looks at three factors: scenic quality, public sensitivity and distance zones; generally from designated observation points and corridors. Data gathered from the VRI will be incorporated into the upcoming Rock Springs RMP revision.