

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI) AND DECISION RECORD**

### **Welch Management Plan**

#### **Introduction**

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been prepared for implementation of the BLM Buffalo Field Office's (BFO) proposed Welch Management Area Plan.

This FONSI is based on the analysis of environmental consequences associated with managing the Welch Management Area discussed in the Welch Management Plan Environmental Assessment (WY-070-05-234), dated October 2005. Meetings and comments received during the public review period for the Welch Management EA and the Pittsburg Midway Coal Company Exchange EIS were considered in developing the final management plan and are summarized and responded to in the final plan. The EA, final management plan, and the Approved Resource Management Plan for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management Buffalo Field Office (April 2001) are incorporated by reference as supporting documents for this FONSI.

#### **Proposed Action**

To protect the resource values and fulfill the BFO's Approved Resource Management Plan's (RMP) lands and realty management objective, a management plan for the Welch Management Area (WMA) is necessary.

The proposal includes the following actions:

- managing livestock through a deferred rotation grazing system promoting sustainable and diverse vegetation (Alternative 2 as described in the EA);
- the WMA shall be available for mineral development, however other resource objectives shall take priority (Alternative 2);
- non-motorized forms of recreation shall be emphasized (Alternative 2);
- vegetation resources shall be managed for natural diversity (Alternative 2);
- and wildlife habitat shall be managed to improve biological diversity, forage, and habitat quality in support of Wyoming Game and Fish Department population objectives while providing for special status species (Alternative 2).
- Improve riparian areas (Alternative 2).

This management plan contains both management concepts and specific projects. The management concepts and some of the proposed projects require further refinement prior to implementation. Additional site-specific environmental analyses will be prepared for individual project plans prior to implementation in order to comply with the requirements of the NEPA. Where there is sufficient detail, this EA and FONSI will serve as the NEPA compliance.

#### **Public Review**

Area media announced the proposed land exchange, which resulted in the acquisition the WMA to be administered by the BLM- Buffalo Field Office. Public meetings were held

in Buffalo and Sheridan. Twenty people attended the meetings and several oral comments were received, mostly related to the potential for new coal mining activity in Sheridan County. Regional newspapers and radio stations carried stories following the public meetings. Following the public meetings and media coverage, six letters/E-mails providing comments on the land exchange were received. Many of the comments received related to management of the acquired lands following the exchange, and were used to define the scope of the Welch Management Plan and alternatives for the EA.

### **Alternatives**

The EA considered a reasonable range of alternatives including a no action alternative (Alternative 1), the proposed action (Alternative 2), a “resource protection” alternative (Alternative 3), and a “resource development” alternative (Alternative 4). The proposed management plan is the most consistent with the RMP and best balances competing resource values and uses.

### **Finding of No Significant Impacts**

Environmental consequences of the alternatives were evaluated in the EA, including effects on air quality, land uses, cultural resources, livestock grazing, minerals, recreation, social economics, soils, vegetation, water, and wildlife. The EA determined that there would not be a significant impact to any resource.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and implementing the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), I find that the proposed Welch Management Plan is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, no Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

### **Decision**

It is my decision to authorize the implementation of the Welch Management Plan.

### **Rationale for Decision**

The decision to authorize the proposed action, as described in the Environmental Assessment (EA), is based on the following:

- Proposed management is in accordance with the EA’s stated purpose and need.
- Proposed management will not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation.
- The management plan was developed with public involvement and meets public interest.
- The proposed action is in conformance with the Approved Resource Management Plan for the Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Buffalo Field Office, April 2001.

### **Implementation Date and Appeal Opportunity**

In accordance with 43 CFR 4, persons have the right to appeal this decision to the Interior

Board of Land Appeals. A person who wishes to appeal to the Board must file a Notice of Appeal in the Buffalo Field Office. A person must transmit the Notice of Appeal within 30 days after public notification of this decision.

If you have questions concerning the environmental assessment, or decision please contact Larry Gerard or the Buffalo Field Manager, Chris Hanson, at the Buffalo Field office (307) 684-1100.

/s/ Chris Hanson  
Chris Hanson  
Buffalo Field Manager

February 3, 2006  
Date