

**Finding of No Significant Impact
For
The Sand Hills Coordinated Travel and Transportation Management Plan and Associated
Resource Management Plan Amendment**

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing to amend the 2007 Casper Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and to implement the Sand Hills Travel and Transportation Plan as described under the alternative B. The amendment would expand the current Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) designation for the Sand Hills travel management area (TMA). The BLM has completed the Sand Hills RMP Plan Amendment and Comprehensive Coordinated Travel and Transportation Management Plan (CTTMP)/Environmental Analysis (EA No. WY-060-E09-04) to analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

The proposed action (Alternative B) will amend the 2007 RMP, and is in compliance with planning regulations in 43 CFR 1601.01 to 1610.8 and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA No. WY-060-E09-04). After considering of the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that the proposed action, with the proposed restrictions to off-route travel, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Rationale

This FONSI is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The Sand Hills transportation management area as mapped in the Casper Field Office RMP is located northeast of Casper, Wyoming and encompasses approximately 17,633 acres of BLM-administered lands (map 1). OHV use on these public lands is limited to designated roads and trails, however, transportation routes have not been designated for this area.

The boundaries for the Sand Hills management area and the Sand Hills transportation management area as defined in the Casper Field Office RMP are identical. Alternative B described in the environmental assessment (EA) explores the option of changing the boundary of the transportation management area. The extended boundary described in this alternative would include additional public lands to the west and to the southwest of the existing Sand Hills TMA increasing the public surface by 2,460 acres for a total of 20,090 acres of BLM-administered land. The total analysis area is 24,836 acres including 4,772 acres of Wyoming state trust lands. This boundary change requires an amendment to the RMP but would improve the likelihood of management success. It also addresses comments received during the public scoping process. The amendment described for this alternative would apply only to transportation and OHV use. The proposed changes would not affect any other decisions or boundaries described in the RMP. All decisions related to the Sand Hills management area would still apply as mapped in the 2007 Casper RMP. Appendix A lists RMP decisions that apply to public land parcels inside the proposed TMA boundaries described for the alternatives.

Alternative B outlines travel and transportation guidelines for both motorized and non-motorized travel. The decision to implement Alternative B would designate the main access routes for OHV use, limit use on certain routes to authorized users only and close unneeded primitive routes. This alternative would designate 28.15 miles of primitive roads open to motorized use. Additionally, the BLM would designate 12.14 miles of primitive roads as limited to authorized use only. A total of approximately 7.70 miles of existing travel routes on BLM lands would be closed. There would be a total of 34.25 miles of primitive roads within the analysis area that would not be impacted by this alternative. Physical traces of the Bozeman Trail, where identified within the analysis area would be closed.

The Sand Hills Management Area is located approximately 10 miles northeast of Casper, Wyoming and is located in both Natrona and Converse counties in Townships 35 & 36 North, and Range 76 and 77 West. BLM is the proponent.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The beneficial effects of the Sand Hills CCTTMP include a transportation system that meets user needs, provides for different levels of use and allows for the closure of unnecessary routes, all of which dramatically slow the proliferation of user created routes and non-native invasive plant species. Reductions in motorized use on routes that are designated solely for maintenance of fences and other rangeland improvement projects would be advantageous to healthy plant communities. The resulting vegetative cover would mitigate the potential for erosion. The closure of unnecessary routes would further benefit soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat.

Adverse effects of Alternative B would result from limiting the number of primitive roads by funneling OHV use onto the main throughways. These roads would become more developed over time. The increased vehicle traffic on these routes would result in soil compaction and would prevent vegetation from establishing within roadways. Vegetation cover would be non-existent and some increase in erosion rates would be expected. Maintenance would be required on some stretches of these roads to prevent blow-outs and creation of parallel routes.

2. Degree of effect on public health and safety.

The designation of routes separates some of the conflicting uses. Signing and maps will clearly define which uses will be allowed on each route. Closing and rehabilitation of certain routes will remove potential hazardous routes from the transportation network. Providing for non-motorized access will help to further separate use and has the potential to create a safer and more enjoyable experience for all users.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, prime farm land, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Sand Hills north of Casper are part of a much larger sand dune complex and is not in and of itself a unique geographic area. There are no prime farms lands or wild and scenic rivers within the analysis area. There are riparian and wetland habitats on private lands within the area but these do not fall under the authority of the BLM and are not directly impacted by the alternative B.

4. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The BLM held a public scoping meeting, distributed maps for public consideration, solicited and received public comments, conducted on-the-ground interviews, held landowner meetings and private interviews to discuss and address the affects of the action on the human and natural environment.

The effects of the alternative are controversial for local and out-of-state landowners and for a small segment of the recreating public. Some groups and individuals see this as an opportunity to interact with the BLM planning process. The alternative B fulfills the legal and regulatory mandates required of BLM to protect the public lands from resource impacts and provides a safer environment.

Alternative B also provides the best mix of travel opportunities that favor a variety of resource uses, while reducing environmental effects in the long run, and resolves some of the issues raised during public comment. The alternative B, when implemented, will also offer some measure of assurance that unauthorized entry onto public lands from adjacent private lands via motorized or mechanized means will diminish. The alternative allows for the opportunity to work with adjacent private landowners to provide non- motorized access. The EA follows established mandates outlined in the BLM national policy on Comprehensive Travel Management Planning, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the BLM Wyoming guidelines for transportation planning.

5. *Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.*

The effects of alternative B are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6. *Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principal about a future consideration.*

Alternative B requires the preparation of a comprehensive schedule of implantation and monitoring plan that will incorporate adaptive management principals. The adaptive monitoring plan will help to ensure that successful implementation occurs and that needed adjustments in the decision occur in a timely manner. Should resource impacts be observed and documented as a result of implementing any decisions approved as part of the CCTTMP, BLM will consider corrective measures. As an example, road segments that are damaged or eroding may require upgrades or maintenance.

7. *Whether the action is related t o other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impact.*

Alternative B does not produce any individual or cumulatively significant environmental impacts and is anticipated to reduce the adverse impacts occurring from current management (the no action alternative).

8. *The degree to which Alternative B may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on or eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The BLM operates under a Protocol Agreement between the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Site specific environmental documentation and assessment have been completed. No site specific ground disturbing activities have been identified as part of any decisions in these documents. The Bozeman Trail will not be adversely impacted by any decision in this document.

9. Degree to which that action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.

Based on field visits and a review of historical data, no threatened or endangered species occur within the analysis area. Suitable habitat does not exist for the endangered black-footed ferret, threatened Ute ladies-tresses Orchid, or the threatened Colorado butterfly plant. Suitable habitat is present for the endangered blowout penstemon; however, surveys conducted throughout the area had negative findings (WYNDD 2004).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Alternative B will not violate or threaten any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Approved:

This FONSI is released, unsigned, for public review.

The EA is also available for review at the following website: <http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/.....>

Joe Meyer
Field Manager
BLM, Casper Field Office

Date: _____