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## ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

The following travel management guidelines and mitigation measures are common to all alternatives.

1. Designated roads and trails would be available for use by both motorized and non-motorized means of transportation unless otherwise indicated at site location (*RMP decisions 6041, 6075*).
2. Cross-country or off-route travel *is allowed* to occur in the Sand Hills area for the following activities, so long as new routes are not created and resource damage does not occur.
  - a. Motorized travel up to 300 feet from roads for camping, recovering game animals, collecting firewood, picnicking, or other uses that do not require specific authorizations or permits (*RMP decisions 6038, 6075*).
  - b. During the hunting season, individuals possessing a valid WGFD “Disabled Hunter Permit” or “Disabled Hunter Companion Permit” would be allowed to use an OHV to hunt and retrieve harvested big game and trophy game animals beyond 300 feet without additional authorization (*RMP decision 6041*).
  - c. Muscle-powered activities such as hiking, back-packing, and snow-shoeing are allowed to occur off existing routes (*RMP decision 6040*).
  - d. Over-snow vehicles are allowed when snow cover is sufficient to prevent resource damage (*RMP decision 6041*).
  - e. Other necessary tasks that require OHV off-route travel would be allowed as long as resource damage does not occur. These tasks include, but are not limited to, activities such as maintaining range improvements, animal husbandry activities by the grazing lessee and his or her agents, and surveying ROW or other work-related tasks authorized by, or which lead to the issuance, of a permit or authorization. The authorized officer may allow necessary tasks without issuance of a formal permit (*RMP decision 6075*).
3. All permitted surface-disturbing activities and permits which include off-road travel would include the mitigation measures outlined in appendix C.
4. Travel on roads designated as limited to authorized use only will be restricted to permitted users having authorization for use of specific routes.
5. The historic Bozeman Trail ruts on BLM-administered public lands (historic trails will be inventoried and closed to OHV use as they are identified as having integrity of trail) would be closed (*RMP decision 6075*).
6. Pursue obtaining legal public access and limit use of that access to non-motorized activities (*RMP decision 6075*). This decision would be applicable to all alternatives. Motorized OHV use

would be allowed on all designated routes but any new public access routes would be limited to non-motorized use.

7. The BLM would provide law enforcement as available for patrols and would increase patrols in the area during the hunting season. The number of patrols would be limited to available personnel and the demands placed on law enforcement throughout the field office.
8. Important access points would be signed explaining that OHV use is limited to “designated routes”. Designated roads would be signed using the white arrow system and closed routes would be signed accordingly and barricaded when necessary. Reclamation would be completed as needed when natural reseeding does not occur. Seed mixtures may vary depending on location in order to improve the probability of success.

**NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the No Action Alternative the comprehensive travel and transportation plan for the Sand Hills MA would not be implemented and the boundary for the Sand Hills MA would not be expanded. Conformance with the Casper RMP would not be met. Compliance with BLM directives and OHV standards would not be fulfilled. Motorized travel within Sand Hills MA would be limited to all existing roads and trails without further designation and protection of the integrity of the soils and vegetation within the area would be compromised.

Essentially, the No Action Alternative and the Development Alternative (A) are the same with a few minor exceptions, as defined below:

No Action Alternative

No established Transportation Plan  
Non-conformance with RMP  
Use limited to existing routes and trails

Development Alternative (A)

Transportation Plan Implemented  
Conformance with RMP  
Existing routes and trails would be designated as opened for motorized use including OHV

The No Action Alternative alone does not conform to the current RMP; therefore it is not analyzed further. Instead, the Development Alternative (A) was developed as an alternative that conforms to the Casper RMP and serves as the current condition and expected future condition in the absence of the preferred alternative (B).

Analysis of the current condition and expected future condition in the absence of the project constitutes consideration of a no-action alternative as documented in guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). (CEQ Memorandum to Federal NEPA Contacts: Emergency Actions and NEPA (September 8, 2005) and CEQ Memorandum to Secretary of Agriculture and Secretary of Interior: Guidance for Environmental Assessments of Forest health Projects (December 9, 2002) (BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1, Jan 2008).

## **THE DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE (A)**

The Development Alternative (A) is representative of the existing management framework and environmental conditions as they currently exist. Alternative A would meet minimum requirements of the Casper RMP by implementing a transportation plan to designate the existing routes and trails for current and future uses. New rights-of-way would be allowed when management objectives for the area could still be achieved and would be integrated into the transportation system. New access points for private land owners that border the Sand Hills MA would be approved on a case-by-case basis which could lead to the approval of up to 25 new access points, based on each adjacent 40 acre parcel of privately owned land. The boundary of the planning area would not be adjusted to include public lands to the west and southwest, limiting the planning area to a total of 17,630 acres, as it is described in the Casper RMP.

Alternative A designates all existing routes and trails as opened for motorized use including OHV. These routes would not be required to meet minimum BLM road standards and may be impassable for extended periods of time.

The maintenance intensity level is classified as a Level 1. The management objectives for a Level 1 include, low or minimal maintenance intensity, with an emphasis given to maintaining drainage and run-off patterns as needed to protect adjacent lands. Grading, brushing, or slide removal is not performed unless drainage is being adversely affected, causing erosion, and route surface and other physical features are not maintained for regular traffic. Maintenance intensity level 1 is described as routes where minimal (low-intensity) maintenance is required to protect adjacent lands and resource values.

Non-motorized transportation would be allowed on all designated routes within the MA and non-motorized cross-country travel would be allowed as long as resource damage does not occur. The BLM would seek to obtain a right-of-way agreement across private land to allow non-motorized access to the Sand Hills MA. If successful, the BLM would construct a trail head and parking area on the public land near the access location. Currently no location has been selected nor has an existing landowner offered to negotiate with the BLM for this type of easement. Therefore, it would be necessary to complete a site specific environmental assessment before any action could be taken by the BLM in order to ensure that no significant environmental impacts would occur as a result of this management action.

New rights-of-way authorized for the development of existing leases would be approved at the lowest maintenance level necessary to protect soils and existing vegetation and would use the designated transportation system to the greatest extent possible. Rights-of-way would be shared whenever possible and would be reclaimed when no longer necessary.

In order to accurately analyze the impacts of alternative A, all inventoried routes from the analysis area have been included in the totals regardless of surface ownership. The vast majority of all routes were described as primitive roads with a total distance of 209 miles. There are 97 miles of roads on private land, 30 miles on State lands, and 82 miles on public lands. Alternative A would designate the entire 82 miles of BLM-administered routes as open to motorized use, including OHV. These designated routes would remain available to adjacent landowners and all persons with

permission to cross private lands. A total of 34 miles of primitive roads located within the analysis area, but outside the management area would not be impacted by this alternative. Map 5 depicts the transportation system as described under alternative A.

Under alternative A, the BLM would not make any designation recommendations regarding the existing routes located on State lands currently within the analysis area to the Office of State Land and Investments.

### **THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (B)**

The preferred alternative (B) strives to provide a transportation system that would meet the needs of users while removing unnecessary routes in order to preserve natural resources. Under this alternative, the planning area boundary would be adjusted to include public lands located to the west and southwest increasing the MA by 2,460 acres for a total of 20,090 acres of public surface. This would require an RMP amendment as transportation planning area boundaries are defined at that level.

Preferred alternative (B) designates specific routes as open for motorized use, including OHV that are most commonly used and provides adequate motorized access across the management area. Routes designated as open for motorized use, including OHV would be available to all persons with legal access and would be signed accordingly.

The maintenance intensity level is classified as a Level 1. The management objectives for a Level 1 include, low or minimal maintenance intensity, with an emphasis given to maintaining drainage and run-off patterns as needed to protect adjacent lands. Grading, brushing, or slide removal is not performed unless drainage is being adversely affected, causing erosion, and route surface and other physical features are not maintained for regular traffic. Maintenance intensity level 1 is described as routes where minimal (low-intensity) maintenance is required to protect adjacent lands and resource values. These roads may be impassable for extended periods of time.

The routes designated for authorized use only would not be required to meet minimum BLM road standards and would be limited to persons who have permitted uses in the area. Maintenance would be allowed where necessary to protect adjacent lands, resource values and prevent erosion.

Non-motorized transportation would be allowed on all designated routes within the MA and non-motorized cross-country travel would be allowed as long as resource damage does not occur. The BLM would seek to obtain a right-of-way agreement across private land to allow non-motorized access to the Sand Hills MA. If successful, the BLM would construct a trail head and parking area on the public land near the access location. Currently no location has been selected nor has an existing landowner offered to negotiate with the BLM for this type of easement. Therefore, it would be necessary to complete a site specific environmental assessment before any action could be taken by the BLM in order to ensure that no significant environmental impacts would occur as a result of this management action.

Surface disturbing activities (e.g., road maintenance) would be evaluated in a separate site-specific NEPA document. New rights-of-way authorized for the development of existing leases would be

approved at the lowest maintenance level necessary to protect soils and existing vegetation and would use the designated transportation system to the greatest extent possible. Rights-of-way would be shared whenever possible and would be reclaimed when no longer necessary.

In order to accurately analyze the impacts of alternative B, all inventoried routes from the analysis area have been included in the totals regardless of surface ownership. On public surface, alternative B would designate 28 miles of primitive roads open to motorized use, including OHV.

Additionally, 12 miles of primitive roads would be limited to authorized use only, and 8 miles of the existing travel routes on BLM administered lands would be closed. A total of 34 miles of primitive roads located within the analysis area, but outside the management area would not be impacted by this alternative.

The BLM would work with the Office of State Land and Investments to reduce the overall number of roads on adjoining State lands. The intention of working more closely with the Office of State Land and Investments would be to maintain the integrity of the transportation network, meet user needs, and reduce the overall impacts to the existing environment.

Recommendations for motorized use of State lands, under alternative B would include limiting motorized travel on one mile of ways to authorized use only, designating 13 miles of existing routes as open to motorized use, including OHV, and closures on 7 miles. The remaining 9 miles of existing routes on State lands would have no designation recommendations provided by the BLM. Map 6 depicts the transportation system as described under preferred alternative (B).

## **THE PRESERVATION ALTERNATIVE (C)**

The Preservation Alternative (C) would establish a transportation system while providing the most protections to preserve the natural resources and maintaining valid and existing rights. As described in the preferred alternative (B), the planning area boundary would be adjusted to include public lands located to the west and southwest increasing the MA by 2,460 acres for a total of 20,090 acres of public surface. This would require an RMP amendment as transportation planning area boundaries are defined at that level.

Alternative C would reduce the total number of miles designated as open for motorized use, including OHV within the transportation network. The routes designated as open for motorized use would be upgraded to meet BLM road intensity level 3, be available to all persons with legal access, and would be signed accordingly.

The maintenance intensity level is classified as a Level 3. The management objectives for a Level 3 include, medium or moderate maintenance intensity where drainage structures would be maintained as needed, surface maintenance would be conducted to provide a reasonable level of riding comfort at prudent speeds for the routine conditions of intended use, brushing would be conducted as needed to improve sight distance when appropriate for management uses, and landslides adversely affecting drainage would receive high priority for removal; otherwise, they would be removed on a scheduled basis. Maintenance intensity level 3 is described as routes requiring moderate maintenance because of low-volume use (e.g., seasonally or year-round for commercial, recreational, administrative

access) and may not provide year-round access but is intended to generally provide resources appropriate to keep the routes in use for the majority of the year.

The routes designated for authorized use only would not be required to meet minimum BLM road standards and would be limited to persons who have permitted uses in the area. Maintenance would be allowed where necessary to protect adjacent lands, resource values and prevent erosion. Alternative C provides the least options for travel from one end of the management area to the other.

Non-motorized transportation would be allowed on all designated routes within the MA and non-motorized cross-country travel would be allowed as long as resource damage does not occur. The BLM would seek to obtain a right-of-way agreement across private land to allow non-motorized access to the Sand Hills MA. If successful, the BLM would construct a trail head and parking area on the public land near the access location. Currently no location has been selected nor has an existing landowner offered to negotiate with the BLM for this type of easement. Therefore, it would be necessary to complete a site specific environmental assessment before any action could be taken by the BLM in order to ensure that no significant environmental impacts would occur as a result of this management action.

New rights-of-way authorized for the development of existing leases would be approved at the lowest maintenance level necessary to protect soils and existing vegetation and would use the designated transportation system to the greatest extent possible. Rights-of-way would be shared whenever possible and would be reclaimed when no longer necessary.

In order to accurately analyze the impacts of alternative C, all inventoried routes from the analysis area have been included in the totals regardless of surface ownership. On public surface, alternative C would designate 16 miles of existing routes as open to motorized use, including OHV. Additionally, 10 miles of primitive roads would be limited to authorized use only, and 22 miles of the existing routes on BLM administered lands would be closed. A total of 34 miles of primitive roads located within the analysis area, but outside the management area would not be impacted by this alternative.

The BLM would work with the Office of State Land and Investments to reduce the overall number of roads on adjoining State lands. The intention of working more closely with the Office of State Land and Investments would be to maintain the integrity of the transportation network, meet user needs, and reduce the overall impacts to the existing environment.

Recommendations for motorized use of State lands, under alternative C would include limiting motorized travel on 4 miles of ways to authorized use only, designating 7 miles of existing routes as open to motorized use, including OHV, and closures on 13 miles. The remaining 6 miles of existing routes on State lands would have no designation recommendations provided by the BLM. Map 7 depicts the transportation system as described under alternative C.