

# Environmental Assessment

## North Platte River Recreation Area Management Plan



High Desert District: Rawlins Field Office, Wyoming

March 2013



The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) multiple-use mission's is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The BLM accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

**DOI-BLM-WY-030-2013-0094-EA**

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
RAWLINS FIELD OFFICE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TITLE PAGE**

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## **I. Identifying Information**

The North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) is located from Prospect Wilderness Study Area (WSA) north to Seminoe Reservoir in the valleys and foothills west of the Snowy Range. The SRMA includes 5,060 acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Rawlins Field Office (RFO). The scope of the planning area for the North Platte River RAMP (NPRRAMP) includes parcels of land within the SRMA boundary from the Prospect Creek confluence to Seminoe Reservoir covering 110 river miles. This planning area includes both the Upper and Lower Platte River Watersheds.

The North Platte River is a central feature of the BLM's, RFO area. The river descends through whitewater in the North Gate Canyon and sections bordering the Prospect Wilderness Study Area before widening and gently meandering through the agricultural Saratoga valley. The SRMA provides diverse and popular recreation opportunities for local residents of south central Wyoming and Colorado Front Range residents including fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) touring, hunting, floating, swimming, picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, and whitewater paddling.

In close proximity to a growing population in nearby Fort Collins and Boulder, Colorado, the SRMA has seen growth in visitation since the 1990s and receives peak visitor use during seasons with higher stream flows. This peak use has resulted in impacts to natural resources and concerns over congestion and crowding that necessitates the establishment of an appropriate management strategy. This strategy will guide use and management of recreation resources for the next 15 years.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared by the RFO to present a range of potential management strategies for the North Platte River SRMA and analyze their possible effects on visual resources, recreation, cultural resources, water resources, vegetation, livestock grazing, soils, fisheries, and wildlife within the SRMA. Alternatives contain a range of opportunities for the development of overnight use, day use, education, and river access, as well as the allocation of Special Recreation Permits (SRPs).

The release of this draft EA marks the beginning of a formal comment period ending on April 12, 2013. This review period will include an open house meeting at the Saratoga Library, 503 West Elm St., Saratoga, Wyo., on April 8 from 4 till 6 p.m. Stakeholders, agencies, and members of the general public are encouraged to provide substantive comments regarding the action alternatives during this period. The Draft NPRRAMP EA is located at the following website: [http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/documents/rfo/rfo/n\\_platte\\_ramp.html](http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/documents/rfo/rfo/n_platte_ramp.html).

Public comments are most helpful if they cite specific actions or impacts, and offer supporting information. Written substantive comments should be received by April 12, 2013, and may be e-mailed to [BLM\\_WY\\_North\\_Platte\\_River\\_RAMP@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_WY_North_Platte_River_RAMP@blm.gov), (please list "North Platte RAMP

Comment” in the subject line), mailed or hand-delivered during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) to: BLM, RFO, North Platte RAMP Comment, 1300 N. Third St., Rawlins, WY, 82301.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Taking these comments into account, the BLM will formulate and release a final Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) and EA. It will be accompanied by a Decision Record that outlines the rationale for the decision, as well as an implementation schedule that identifies the timing of specific projects.

## **II. Purpose and Need**

### **A. Conformance with the RMP as Amended**

The 2008 Rawlins RMP and other related planning documents were reviewed for decisions applicable to the proposed North Platte River RAMP and EA. These decisions are listed below:

The proposed RAMP would update the 1985 North Platte River RAMP. Relative to managing the North Platte River SRMA, the 2008 Rawlins RMP (2-27) states that the management goal is to ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreation opportunities. Furthermore, the objectives for the SRMA include 1) maintain and enhance recreation opportunities to accommodate existing niche activities, 2) mitigate conflicts with other resource values and uses as appropriate, in coordination and cooperation with affected interests, 3) maintain or improve the quality of river-related recreation experiences and provide high-quality recreation experiences and benefits, and 4) maintain, restore, and enhance areas to meet Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands.

The prescribed management actions for the SRMA are stated within the 2008 Rawlins RMP (2-27) as follows:

- The SRMA (5,060 acres, including the one-quarter-mile area on either side of the river; Map 217b) will be managed to provide high-quality recreational opportunities, especially for floating, fishing, camping, and sightseeing. Current public facilities and access will be maintained to support the values of the SRMA.
- Access opportunities to the North Platte River will be identified and pursued.

- Manage commercial outfitting to disperse river usage.
- Manage the river parcels to meet Middle Country setting guidelines and reclaim unnecessary or undesirable vehicle routes.
- Manage the North Platte River area to meet the Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands.
- Manage OHV use as limited to designated roads or vehicle routes.
- The SRMA is open to oil and gas leasing with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation. Existing oil and gas leases will be intensively managed.
- The SRMA is open to locatable mineral entry and closed to mineral material disposals. Surface disturbing and disruptive activities will be restricted to maintain the quality of the visual resource.
- Surface disturbing activities on public lands within one-quarter mile on either side of the river will be intensively managed to maintain the quality of the visual resource.

The preferred alternatives being analyzed within this RAMP and EA are in conformance with the 2008 Rawlins RMP for all SRMA objectives and prescribed actions.

## **B. Need**

In defining recreation as a multiple-use resource, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 [Sec. 103(c), 43 U.S.C. 1702] mandates the BLM to consider the following:

- periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions
- the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and non-renewable resources, including, but not limited to, recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural scenic, scientific and historical values
- harmonious and coordinated management of these resources without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment

The BLM-Administered North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) provides diverse recreational opportunities for Southcentral Wyoming and Northern Colorado Front Range residents. Continued population growth in the urban and non-urban areas and shifting demographic patterns in Wyoming and Colorado have increased the demand for outdoor recreation within the planning area and nearby areas. This increased demand for outdoor recreation has translated into increased use on the North Platte River.

Since the previous 1985 RAMP, concerns about human impacts and visitor use density have been identified by the public, Wyoming Game and Fish (WGFD), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the BLM as well as other agency stakeholders. Since these concerns were identified in the 1990s, the BLM, WGFD, and the USFS have conducted extensive visitor surveys and counts to identify trends in social conditions and service quality on the North Platte River. The management objectives,

stated within the 2008 RFO Resource Management Plan (RMP), include “maintaining or improving the quality of river-related recreational experiences...to provide high-quality experiences and benefits to local residents and visitors” (2008 Rawlins RMP, 2.3.10.1, pg. 2-27). The increasing levels of peak use observed within the planning area have exceeded social condition indicators for Middle Country settings at recreation sites within the SRMA. Littering and trespassing as well as crowded put-ins, take-outs, parking areas, and campgrounds degrade the quality of visitor experience and create conflicts within the SRMA during periods of peak use. Crowded parking and boat launch wait times during peak weekends have been identified as an issue by the public, BLM, and cooperating agencies (see monitoring data results in Chapter IV).

Currently, there is a moratorium on new Special Recreation Permits (SRPs; i.e., permitted fishing outfitters and guides) for the North Platte River SRMA. Considerations for eliminating the moratorium and providing additional guidelines for allocating SRP permits has been identified as a critical issue to address in this document. Currently there is a waiting list of potential SRP applicants who have indicated an interest in obtaining a permit and are awaiting a decision on the moratorium.

Permitted commercial use and unregulated private recreational use along the river and its riparian areas has resulted in impacts to the area’s natural resources. This includes loss of ground cover and riparian vegetation, soil compaction, riverbank erosion, and human waste. These impacts not only pose a threat to ecological resources but also degrade the setting needed for high quality recreation and healthy lands. The management objectives, within the RMP include meeting Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands (Rawlins RMP, 2.3.10.1, pg. 2-27).

### **C. Purpose**

The BLM seeks to provide a management plan to address management of the planning area. The BLM’s purpose in rewriting the RAMP is to use new information to better manage the planning area for high-quality recreation opportunities, reduced conflict, as well as to meet standards for public safety and health as stated in the 2008 Rawlins RMP.

The purpose of developing the North Platte River RAMP is to establish a long-term framework that will determine how recreation opportunities are provided for and managed within the North Platte River SRMA. Relevant management strategies pursued within this RAMP correspond to the management actions prescribed within the 2008 Rawlins RMP (2-27). To address the current RMP management objectives and actions for the SRMA as well as issues which emerged during scoping, management strategies proposed in this RAMP include the following:

- Provide high quality recreation opportunities, especially for floating, fishing, camping and

sightseeing.

- Pursue access opportunities to the North Platte River.
- Manage commercial outfitting to disperse river usage.
- Manage river parcels to meet Middle Country Setting guidelines and reclaim undesirable vehicle routes.
- Manage the North Platte River area to meet the Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands
- Identify preferred alternatives that the BLM would take to implement these strategies

### III. Relationship to Other Documents

The 1985, North Platte River Recreation Area management Plan (RFO) and other related planning documents were reviewed for decisions applicable to the proposed North Platte River RAMP:

**Table 1. Guiding Documents to the North Platte River RAMP and EA**

<i>Document</i>	<i>Resource</i>
16 U.S.C 433, Antiquities Act	Cultural
16 U.S.C 470aa, Archaeological Resource Protection Act	Cultural
16 U.S.C 470, National Historic Preservation Act	Cultural
43 U.S.C. Federal Land Policy and Management Act	Federal Actions
16 U.S.C 4601-4, Land and Water Conservation Act, as amended	Realty
33 U.S.C. §1251, Clean Water Act	Hydrology
43 CFR 8340	OHV
43 USC 1201	OHV
Executive Order 11644 (as amended by Executive Order 11989)	OHV
BLM Manual 8341, Conditions of Use (Off-Road Vehicles)	OHV
BLM Manual 8342 Designation of Roads and Trails	OHV
42 U.S.C. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969	Planning
BLM Manual Special Recreation Permit 8372	SRP
BLM Handbook H-8372-2	SRP
BLM Manual Handbook H-8410-1 and H-8431-1	Visual Resources

BLM Manual 1601-1 Land Use Planning Handbook	Land Use Planning
BLM Manual H-2930-1 Recreation Permit Administration	Recreation
BLM Manual H-4180-1 Rangeland Health Standards	Range
BLM Manual H-9113-1 and H-9115-2, Roads Design	Engineering
16 U.S.C. 670, et seq., Sikes Act of 1974	Wildlife
16 U.S.C. 703-712, Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918	Wildlife
7 U.S.C. § 136, 16 U.S.C. § 1531, Endangered Species Act	Wildlife
Upper North Platte Watershed Standards and Guidelines Assessment, September 2005	Range and Hydrology
Lower North Platte Watershed Standards and Guidelines Assessment, September 2004	Range and Hydrology

## IV. Summary Results of Inventory and Monitoring Data

### A. Entire Planning Area

The BLM Outdoor Recreation Planners reported that the number of visits to the SRMA peaked in 2010. Approximately, 68,000 visits were recorded in 2010 followed by 2004 with 51,000, 2005 with 48,000, and 2006 with 45,000, respectively. The years with the lowest levels of use were, approximately, 2008 with 25,000 visits and 2009 with 31,000 visits. The number of vehicle passes and visits corresponded to a formula to determine the number of visitor days at 2.45 visitors per vehicle (2 recorded passes = one vehicle pass). This formula was generated by agreement among several prior outdoor recreation planners from extensive field observations. Over the past six field seasons, visitor days peaked in 2010 at, approximately, 48,000 followed by 2004 and 2005 both at 35,000, 2006 at 34,000, 2009 at 30,000, and 2008 at 26,000 (see Figure 2).

By comparison, the WGFD reported, approximately, 24,000 visits to Treasure Island boat launch in 2009 followed by 2001 at 19,000, 2006 at 18,000, and 2008 at 17,000. This take-out is the primary take-out used by the majority of the BLM visitors who launch at Bennett Peak Campground.

The BLM conducted a count of visitor encounters during a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Inventory in 2010 over a period of 16 days (totaling 61.5 hrs). Monitoring results indicated an exceedance of Middle Country limits at Dugway Campground on June 6, 2010, over a three hour period of observation. All visitors counted on that day were passing the recreation site in their vehicles on County Road 351 and were not stopping to visit the SRMA. Other visitor counts that

exceeded Middle Country limits occurred on June 23, 2010, in Township 15 North, Range 82 West, Section 14. Nine visitors within boats were encountered over a two hour observation period (see Table 4).

According to data collected at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) North Brush Creek Gauge, from May-September, between 2000 and 2012, average seasonal stream flows were at 179 cfs in 2011 followed by 2010 at 179 cfs, 2009 at 150 cfs, 2003 at 110 cfs, 2006 at 90 cfs, 2000 at 85 cfs, 2001 at 65 cfs, 2012 at 50 cfs, 2004 at 45 cfs, and 2002 at 30 cfs (see Figures 1a and 1b). Overall, higher stream flows corresponded closely to increases and decreases in visitor use during the majority of seasons reported. One exception to this trend is demonstrated in 2004, a year reported as low average discharge (cfs) and moderate visitor use.

The BLM surveyed visitors during the summers of 2009 and 2010. Eighty-two mail-back questionnaires were completed at 10 different study locations along the North Platte River. In 2009, there was, approximately, a 70 percent mail-back questionnaire return rate. In 2010, there was a 25 percent return rate. Ninety-five percent of the study sample consisted of private boaters while 5 percent were commercial users. The most frequent reported cities of residence were Boulder, Colo. (12.2 percent), followed by Denver (9.8 percent), Saratoga (7.3 percent), Laramie and Fort Collins, both at (4.9 percent). Nineteen and a half percent of the respondents were first time visitors with the majority of the sample being repeat visitors (80.5 percent). A majority, 20.7 percent, of respondents visited in group sizes of three followed by 18.3 percent traveling in groups of two and 18.3 percent traveling in groups of four. The duration of visits for most visitors was one day (30.5 percent), followed by two days (28 percent), and three days (18.3 percent).

The average expenditures during the visit was \$904 (S.D. = \$1,800). A total of \$65,100 was spent among 72 survey respondents reporting expenditures and the majority of those expenditures were spent in Carbon County, Wyoming (most report 100 percent spent in Carbon County). About half of respondents were non-Wyoming residents staying overnight.

There was very high satisfaction on the river. 96.33 percent were either satisfied or very satisfied with their trip on the North Platte while only 1.2 percent were very dissatisfied. Physical impacts from river use were not perceived to be high. No respondents indicated that physical impacts were extremely high and only 5.19 percent perceived there to be moderately high impacts from river use. Most respondents perceived physical impacts as extremely low.

An average of 9.16 boats were seen on the river but there was much disagreement among respondents with a standard deviation of 8.8 boats. Seventy-six and a half percent of respondents felt that there was about the right amount of boats seen while only 3.7 percent felt that there were far too many. The average number of people seen by respondents was 24 with much disagreement among respondents (Standard Deviation= 23). The majority of respondents, 75 percent, felt that there was about the right amount of people seen, on their float trip while about 22 percent of respondents felt that they saw either somewhat or far too many people during their float trip.

When comparing the 2008 and 2010 outfitter use, Hack's Tackle reported by far the highest number of visitor days with nearly 800 visitor days reported in 2008 and over 750 visitor days in

2010. In 2010, Grand Slam Outfitters had just over 200 visitor days followed by Stoney Creek and Kingfisher Drifters both with, approximately, 125 visitor days reported.

Water quality was monitored by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) which provides the following body contact guidelines for fecal coliform:

- (a) High use swimming areas - 235 organisms per 100 milliliters
- (b) Moderate full body contact - 298 organisms per 100 milliliters
- (c) Lightly used full body contact - 410 organisms per 100 milliliters
- (d) Infrequently used full body contact - 576 organisms per 100 milliliters

WY DEQ data from October 2003 to August 2012 at the USGS Sinclair Gauge demonstrated that fecal coliform counts increased with turbulence and run-off caused by higher peak stream flows (cfs) and a resulting increase in total solids. On May 24, 2005, there was a peak coliform bacteria count of 250 per 100 ml which was the highest reported in the last seven years (see Figures 1a and 1b). This count does not exceed the above guidelines for moderate full body contact (i.e., wade fishing). On May 24, the gauge indicated that the peak streamflow was at 6286 cfs. Total solids (TSS) on this same day were reported to be 147 mg per liter while *E coli* was at 230 counts per 100 ml. Overall, *E coli* counts were much lower than they were twenty years ago before the Sage Creek Watershed conditions were improved through various range projects (i.e., 600 fecal coliform counts per 100 ml on May 1992).

Additional monitoring data for water resources, vegetation, soils, fisheries, weeds, and water quality is available in the 2004 Lower Platte River Watershed Standards and Guidelines Assessment and 2005 Upper Platte River Watershed Standards and Guidelines Assessment. These assessments have been required on all BLM lands since 1998, and are the basis for evaluating and monitoring conditions for Healthy Rangelands.

## **B. Bennett Peak Campground**

The monitoring data for Bennett Peak Campground was analyzed site-specifically because of the high number of crowding complaints and conflicts reported to the BLM for this location (i.e., 30 complaints reported in one week to the BLM office in the summer of 2007). These complaints primarily concerned the blocking of traffic in the parking area and the waiting lines at the put-in during peak weekend and holiday use.

In 2010, approximately, 24,000 visitor days were recorded followed by 2009 at 15,000 and 2012 at 12,000 (see Figure 5). Between 2004 and 2010, the average visitation climbed sharply in June, peaked in early July, and declined quickly toward the latter half of September. Weekends which corresponded to ideal stream flows for float fishing during the month of June as well as July 4, tended to be the highest concentration of use. For example, on June 6, 2012, there were 104

visitors arriving to Bennett Peak Campground between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. and 80 visitors arriving between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. For the peak weekend of 2009, on June 30, there were nine visitors arriving between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., 28 visitors between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., and 42 visitors between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. Overall, the average yearly visitor use at Bennett Peak tends to follow higher average river flow years. For example, in 2010, the highest average visitor use peaked when the river reached an average of 180 cfs for the season (North Brush Creek Gauge, May-September).

A WGFD angler study was conducted in 2000. One set of angler surveys was conducted on the river bank and another set of angler surveys was filled out on boats. The WGFD study revealed that, overall, a high majority of fishermen were somewhat satisfied to very satisfied. Forty-three percent of bank fishermen were somewhat satisfied while 39 percent were very satisfied and only a small percentage were dissatisfied. Among boat anglers, 81 percent were very satisfied, 13 percent were somewhat satisfied, and only small percentages were neutral or dissatisfied. The activity of floating vs. bank fishing appeared to influence satisfaction ratings.

Among the BLM study respondents in 2009-2010, 96.4 percent of visitors were very satisfied with their river trip when surveyed at Bennett Peak Campground, no respondents were dissatisfied, and several visitors were neutral. Among factors that were listed as detracting from the trip, bad weather was the most frequently reported, followed by high water levels, rough roads (washboard from lots of trailers), private property limiting access points, lack of space, crowded, need to widen launches, restroom maintenance, and range allotment odors (see Figure 6). Twenty-nine percent of visitors commented that the North Platte was a good river. Another 29 percent of customers commented that Bennett Peak was a well maintained campground and boat launch. Twenty-four percent of customers felt that the wildlife added to the trip quality and commented that wildlife encounters were more frequent than in the past. Thirty-four percent of customers preferred to fish on the river while 31.4 percent indicated that they were camping at Bennett Peak.

In a separate campground survey conducted by the BLM during 2010 at Bennett Peak Campground, 75 percent of visitors surveyed indicated that the existing facilities at Bennett Peak Campground met their needs. In the same campground survey, customers were asked which facilities would meet their needs, approximately, 80 percent of customers responded that more information would be helpful, while 80 percent responded that more educational information would be help them meet their needs. Fifty-eight percent of respondents would like to see better signs, 80 percent more trails, 80 percent more campsites, and 60 percent more restrooms at Bennett Peak Campground.

## **V. Issues and Concerns**

### **A. Summary of Scoping**

The North Platte RAMP and EA received extensive external scoping and public involvement. An initial informational meeting was held on March 24, 2009, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the

Platte Valley Community Center in Saratoga, Wyo. Letters were sent to interested agencies, state representatives, senators, and public stakeholders including outfitters. Two additional open house public meetings were held on March 4, 2010, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and March 9, 2010, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. An interested agencies meeting was held at the BLM, RFO on November 29, 2012, from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. and a public meeting was held at the Platte Valley Community Center in Saratoga on November 18, 2012, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Additionally, an outfitters meeting was held on January 15, 2013, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Carbon County Library in Saratoga, Wyo. An additional public meeting for the purpose of reviewing this draft RAMP and EA will be announced to take place in Saratoga, Wyo., on April 8, 2013.

The BLM has already received numerous comments from the public and agencies. Comment letters, received to this stage of the planning process, include the following interested agencies and members of the public:

- Kingfisher Drifters - 1/02/2013
- Centennial Canoe Outfitters 12/17/2012
- North Platte Trouters 1/11/2013
- A Bar A Ranch – 04/01/2010
- Michael B. Enzi, U.S. Senator – 4/02/2009
- Harrison’s Guest House & Guide Service – 2/26/2010, 3/26/2009, 2/21/2013, 3/07/2013
- Spur Outfitters – 2/19/2009, 3/27/2009
- Old Baldy Club – 2/27/2009
- Will Faust – 2/18/2009
- John H. Collamer – 3/25/2009
- Saratoga/Platte Valley Chamber of Commerce – 3/27/2009
- Hack’s Tackle – 2/23/2009
- Fred Caccese – 07/16/2010

## **B. Key Issues**

A planning issue is defined as a matter of controversy, dispute, or general concern over resource management activities, the environment, or land uses. The goal of this planning effort is to effectively address these issues through a comprehensive recreation management strategy. Listed below are issues that were identified through the internal and external scoping process:

- Increased visitor use and crowding at Bennett Peak Campground on peak weekends
- Widen boat ramp and provide additional parking at Bennett Peak Campground
- Provide additional restrooms

- Create additional campsites within existing campgrounds
- Provide additional campgrounds (boat-in campground, tent site at Prospect Creek boat launch)
- Provide an additional boat launch at Corral Creek (i.e., canoe slide)
- Provide additional put-ins/take-outs
- Address human waste issues between Bennett Peak Campground and Treasure Island
- Provide road and launch improvements at Big Creek
- Improve Prospect Creek Road erosion improvements
- Consider ending moratorium on new SRP permits
- Determine method of allocating future SRP permits (if moratorium lifted)
- Improve boat ramp at Dugway Recreation Site

### **C. Issues Raised That Will Not Be Considered Further**

Certain issues raised during scoping will not be addressed in the North Platte RAMP EA because they are either outside the scope of this planning process or are outside the authority of the BLM.

- Develop easements with private land owners for additional river access
- Campground development near the Rochelle Easement requiring state land agreements
- Address human waste issues between Treasure Island and Saratoga

Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Detailed Analysis are also discussed in Chapter VI.

## **VI. Description of Alternatives including the Preferred Alternatives**

This chapter describes the alternatives. Aside from the No Action Alternative, the management actions described in each alternative were intended to resolve issues identified by the interested public, agencies, and the BLM interdisciplinary team.

### **A. No Action**

If this alternative is selected, it would involve no changes to the current level of recreation resource management in the North Platte River SRMA planning area. The BLM would not implement the proposed North Platte River SRMA Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP). Planning issues, identified by the interested public, agencies, and the BLM Interdisciplinary Team in the proposed North Platte River RAMP, would remain unresolved. Multiple recreation and resource protection opportunities would be compromised and potentially lost in the long-term. Social and resource concerns would likely escalate to higher-risk status until addressed by the BLM in a more reactive rather than proactive approach to planning.

## **B. Range of Alternatives**

If the preferred alternatives for all key actions are selected, planning would involve implementing the North Platte River RAMP as proposed. The actions would guide management of the recreation sites within the SRMA as well as the design of specific project plans. The proposed alternatives are intended to resolve issues identified by the interested public, agencies, and the BLM Interdisciplinary Team. The key actions for five sets of alternatives are described in Table 2. These alternatives provide a range of potential development and management in order to provide the opportunity to consider a variety of conditions and experiences within the SRMA during the planning process. Each row within the table represents a set of alternatives for a specific development or management direction that is being considered.

## **C. Alternatives for Future Consideration**

For purposes of this document, there will not be a detailed, site-specific analysis provided for key actions 1 (Boat-in Campground), 5 (Improvement of Corral Creek Campground), and 6 (Improvement of Prospect Road Access). Furthermore, the implementation of projects proposed in preferred alternatives for key actions 1, 5, and 6 will not be considered until this site-specific analysis has been considered and additional National Environmental Policy Act documents have been tiered to this RAMP EA.

## **D. Alternatives Given Full Analysis**

Key actions 2 (Leave-No Trace Education), 3 (North Platte River SRP Permit Allocations), and 4 (Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp at Bennett Peak Campground) will be given a complete site-specific analysis. The selected alternatives for each of these three key actions would be in full force and effect with immediate implementation upon signature of the Decision Record. The range of alternatives for Key Action 3, SRP Permit Allocations, were developed with guidance from the following members of the NPRRAMP Sounding Board: Thomas Powell, Carbon County Planner representing Sidney Fox, John Zeiger, Mayor of Saratoga, Brian Waugh, USFS Recreation Planner, John Russell, BLM Project Manager, Robin Fehlau, BLM Idaho Recreation State Lead, and Christopher D. Jones, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner and NPRRAMP ID Team Lead. All recommendations from the Sounding Board for Key Action 3 were submitted to the Field Manager, Dennis Carpenter, of the RFO for approval as a Preferred Alternative.

At Bennett Peak Campground, the Preferred Alternative in Table 2 proposes an overflow parking area. This overflow parking area is proposed to be primitive in nature and involve minimal surface disturbance. Surfacing at the site would consist of the native soils, existing grasses, and reseeded vegetation as documented in the Reclamation Plan (see Appendix C). The expansion of the boat ramp would involve a similar concrete surfacing as was applied at the existing ramp. Furthermore, the educational kiosk at Bennett Peak would be constructed of native-colored materials.

**Table 2. Key Actions and Range of Alternatives for the North Platte SRMA RAMP and EA**

Key Actions		No Action/ Existing Condition	Preferred Alternative	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
1	Boat-In Campground	No provision would be made for supplying/managing a boat-in campground.	Pursue a primitive to developed boat-in campground with an ADA accessible toilet, fire rings, picnic table, and beach area. Pursue access through private land for maintenance (see Map 1).	Pursue a primitive to developed boat-in campground with no maintenance or toilet. Maintenance would only occur through repeated visitor use such as trampling or camping on existing vegetation at the site (see Map 1).	Same as Preferred
2	Leave No Trace Education	No provision would be made for a Leave-No Trace educational program.	Provide a Leave No Trace educational program on a voluntary basis. Provide ongoing monitoring to determine adaptive management. If unacceptable impacts are identified, mitigation measures would be implemented after monitoring (i.e., pit toilets).	Provide a Leave No Trace educational program. The public would supply their own carry-in/carry-out supplies on a voluntary basis. No agency cost reimbursement for Leave No Trace supplies.	Provide a Leave No Trace educational program. Carry-in/carry-out would be voluntary. Seek reimbursement for Leave No Trace supplies and services.

**Table 2 cont...**

Key Actions		No Action/ Existing Condition	Preferred Alternative	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
3	North Platte River SRP Permit Allocations	No action. Continue moratorium of new SRP permits on the North Platte River SRMA.	Provide for allocation of commercial SRP permits using the average Middle Country limit to be no more than 22 craft encountered per day on any one section of the North Platte River SRMA. The number of visitor days would be allocated to SRPs to their actual levels, averaged over the last three years, at such a time that this Middle Country limit has been reached. Six SRP requests on the current waiting list will be considered for permit approvals every other year until such a time that the above Middle Country limit has been reached. This SRP release schedule is subject to adjustment if future monitoring data indicate that SRMA objectives are not being met ( <i>i.e.</i> , resource conditions).	Provide for allocation of commercial SRP permits using the Front Country Setting limit of an average of 30 or more craft encountered per day on any one section of the North Platte River SRMA. The number of visitor days would be allocated to SRPs to their actual levels, averaged over the last three years, at such a time that this Front Country limit has been reached. All SRP requests on the current waiting list will be considered for permit approvals in the first year and beyond until such a time that the above Front Country limits has been reached. This SRP release schedule is not subject to adjustment based on future monitoring data.	Provide for allocation of commercial SRP permits using the Back Country Setting limit of an average of no more than 11 craft encountered per day on any one section of the North Platte River SRMA. The number of visitor days would be allocated to SRPs to their actual levels, averaged over the last three years, at such a time that this Back Country limit has been reached. Three SRP requests on the current waiting list will be considered for permit approvals every other year until such a time that the above Back Country limit has been reached. This SRP release schedule is subject to adjustment if monitoring data indicate that backcountry conditions are exceeded.

**Table 2 cont....**

<b>Key Actions</b>		No Action/ Existing Condition	Preferred Alternative	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
4	Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp at Bennett Peak Campground	No provision would be made for a new parking lot or boat ramp expansion at Bennett Peak Campground.	Provide an overflow parking lot north of Bennett Peak boat ramp. Expand the existing boat ramp to 2 or 3 trailer spaces (see Map 2). Pursue a campground host to assist in monitoring and education. Provide an educational kiosk.	Provide a parking lot in front of Bennett Peak boat ramp by removing round-about island and creating new parking spaces (see Map 2).	Same as Preferred
5	Improvement of Corral Creek Campground	No provision would be made for improvements at Corral Creek Campground	Pursue a hardened surface (i.e., gravel) on existing two-track below Corral Creek Campground. Pursue a hardened boat launch and turn-around. Pursue additional parking above current gate, a reliable water source, and two additional tent sites. Pursue a campsite fee (see Map 3).	Pursue a canoe slide. Pursue additional parking, a reliable water source, and a campsite fee (see Map 3).	Pursue a canoe slide and no other additional services. Campsite would remain free of charge.

**Table 2 cont....**

Key Actions		No Action/ Existing Condition	Preferred Alternative	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
6	Improvement of Prospect Creek Undeveloped Recreation Site	No provision would be made for improvements or routine maintenance of Prospect Road (see Map 4).	Pursue maintenance of an existing, reclaimed two-track to BLM primitive two-track standards in order to provide for rerouting of Prospect Road. Pursue realignment of existing two-track to avoid wash-out areas. As needed, pursue future maintenance of Prospect Rd. as a primitive, rugged 4wd trail. Pursue space for passing vehicle on existing two-track. Pursue space for a primitive campsite and widen parking at boat launch (Maps 4a & b)	As needed, pursue maintenance of the existing two-track known as Prospect Road. Rerouting of Prospect Road would not be pursued.	Same as Preferred

**Table 2 cont....**

Key Actions		No Action/ Existing Condition	Preferred Alternative	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
7	Improvement of Big Creek Undeveloped Recreation Site	No provision would be made for improvements of primitive two-tracks or any other additional river access east of the confluence of Big Creek with the North Platte River.	Pursue maintenance of a primitive and/or hardened route at Big Creek Undeveloped Recreation Site in order to improve public river access. As needed, pursue future maintenance of two-track as a primitive 4WD trail. Pursue improvements of the primitive boat launch and a primitive parking lot (see Map 5b). Road maintenance would follow Route A as illustrated on Map 5a (crossing French Creek).	Pursue maintenance of a primitive and/or hardened route East of Big Creek Confluence in order to improve public river access. As needed, pursue future maintenance of two-track as a primitive 4wd trail. Road maintenance would follow Route B as illustrated on Map 5a (intersecting F.S. 211).	Same as Preferred

## **E. Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

### **Develop a Campground in the Rochelle Easement**

The BLM ID Team determined that the development of a new campground would be unlikely to disperse use away from congested areas on the Upper Platte River. This campground would involve access on state land and would require a Memorandum of Understanding which was not supported by WGFD for the potential location within the Rochelle Easement. Accessing a suitable camping area within this area would require extensive reconstruction of an overgrown two-track over rough terrain. This two-track would be both difficult to reconstruct and maintain for public access. Many of the other access areas within the easement would not allow for a suitable public campground site because of topography and/or private land access concerns.

### **Provide Additional Put-ins/Take-outs Created Through Private Easements**

The BLM has no authority over private easements and little support was expressed during agency and public or internal BLM meetings.

### **Provide Boat Ramp Repairs at Dugway Campground**

Boat ramp repairs were already made by the BLM Engineering at Dugway Boat Ramp in the spring of 2012 and since construction no further concerns have been identified.

### **Provide a Canoe Slide at Bennett Peak Campground**

This opportunity for action had a lack of support expressed during the public and agencies meetings. Agency members and outfitters stated that a canoe slide would be utilized by a small percentage of users. The BLM ID members stated that a proposed separate boat ramp or canoe slide at Bennett Peak could potentially interfere with handicapped accessible fishing due to the close proximity. Furthermore, a potential canoe slide access area just downstream from the existing boat ramp would not be compatible with the current roundabout. The potential loading of craft onto the canoe slide would likely impede traffic flow on the current roundabout in an area with existing traffic flow concerns.

## **VII. Affected Environment**

### **A. Visual Resources**

The North Platte River's view shed is surrounded by mountains, foothills, and rolling meadows creating the perception of a relatively natural and agrarian landscape. The North Platte River SRMA exhibits a variety of scenic qualities ranging from large intact stands of lodgepole pine and aspen in the Prospect WSA to, predominantly, cottonwoods and sage brush in agrarian areas downstream from the forest. The scenic qualities that exist within the North Platte River SRMA are managed through the assignment of Visual Resource Management Classifications. The Upper North Platte has a high level of scenic quality with canyons carved through the mountains and large, rounded boulders creating rapids which contrast with the clear water and darkness of the surrounding pine forest. The attributes of the Lower North Platte consist of rolling hills and meadows surrounded by agricultural and range developments with much deeper water and fewer rapids. The Lower North Platte gives the paddler a sense of mystery as the river often curves and meanders sharply.

The SRMA lies within three different Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes. The following class designations reflect the updated 2012 Approved Record of Decision for the Choke-Cherry Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project EIS: Visual Resource Management Plan Amendment (pg. 2-2). This amendment modified the VRM class designations in the 2008 Rawlins RMP for the majority of the North Platte River SRMA (for the planning area south of I-80). The VRM Classes just north of I-80 are still designated within the 2008 Rawlins RMP.

There is a VRM Class II designation for planning area sections from Prospect WSA to Bennett Peak Campground and from just south of Dugway Developed Recreation Site to Seminoe Reservoir. VRM objectives for VRM Class II are to retain the existing character of the landscape while landscape change should be low. For VRM Class II, any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features. The planning area sections from Bennett Peak Campground to Saratoga and from just north of I-80 to just south of the Dugway Developed Recreation Site are designated VRM III. Objectives for VRM Class III are to partially retain the existing character of the landscape while landscape change should be moderate. Changes in VRM Class III areas should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The planning area sections From Saratoga to just north of I-80 are designated as VRM Class IV. Objectives for VRM Class IV include management activities causing major modification of landscape character where landscape change can be high. Every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements of the landscape (BLM Handbook H-8410-1).

Past changes to the SRMA have included Best Management Practices (BMPs) for VRM to mitigate the impacts to visual resources and provide natural appearing settings for recreation activities. For example, restrooms, gates, and other facilities within Dugway, Corral Creek, and Bennett Peak Campgrounds have been painted with BLM Standard Environmental Colors or used native-colored building materials (i.e., wooden ties or posts) to reduce the contrast with surrounding scenery.

The SRMA has not experienced intensive development. However, existing development within the SRMA includes agricultural and recreation site developments as well as maintained and unmaintained access roads and two-tracks. The view shed surrounding the Lower Platte River includes numerous two-track roads and range improvements such as fences and hay meadows. The landscape is open, with little relief, and its ability to absorb man-made structures is low. The view shed surrounding the Upper Platte River is enclosed by the surrounding mountains and forest and the ability to absorb man-made structures is moderate.

## **B. Recreation**

### **Entire Planning Area**

The North Platte River and its tributaries are among Wyoming's most important fisheries and offers world class trout fishing and non-motorized floating. The North Platte River from the Colorado State Line to the confluence with Sage Creek has been designated as a Class I Water Resource by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality. This designation suggests that this section of the river provides ideal conditions for game fishing and provides for world-class trout fishing which is the primary focus of the BLM's recreation management program in Carbon County. Interest in fishing both as outdoor recreation and outfitted guiding, is increasing and creates a growing need to manage recreation use. Visitor use of the SRMA is highly dependent on water levels and stream flows. During drought years, use can decrease by as much as 50%. During the drought year of 2012 an estimated 41,234

visited the SRMA. During 2000, a high water year, 71,248 visitor days were recorded.

From Saratoga to the CO state line, non-motorized boating is allowed while motorized boating is permitted from Saratoga to Seminoe Reservoir. The North Platte River from the Colorado border downstream to Sanger Public Access Area is a popular paddling trip for canoeing, kayaking, and rafting. From Saratoga downstream to Fort Steele, visitation is lower than on the Upper North Platte, but is still a frequented section for recreational fishing and paddling. This section is more popular for overnight visitors who camp along the shoreline while paddling the length of this 44 mile float trip.

Commercial fly-fishing guiding, instruction, and outfitting are becoming more popular on the Upper North Platte River. The BLM granted 20 Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) in 2012 for commercial fly-fishing companies to access the SRMA. Permitted guides may access BLM public lands along the North Platte for launching, taking out, anchoring, and wade-fishing. SRPs are not required for State of Wyoming or WGFD access locations or on private lands. The North Platte River SRMA currently has a moratorium with regard to approving new SRP permits which was initiated, primarily, because of parking capacity and visitor use density concerns at the Bennett Peak boat launch and parking area.

The North Platte River SRMA is also a popular destination for big and small game hunting. Primary big game species for hunting include deer, elk, antelope, moose, black bear, and mountain lion. Primary small game species include blue grouse, greater sage-grouse, waterfowl, and cottontail rabbit. The planning area contains elk units, mule deer units, and antelope units. Other popular recreation activities within the SRMA planning area include camping, wildlife viewing, sightseeing, and OHV touring.

Much of the Lower North Platte River is surrounded by the checkerboard land ownership pattern where public and private sections of land are adjacent. The sections of private land underneath the water and on the riverbanks often prevents the public from gaining access to desired boat launches, take-outs, or convenient facilities along the river (i.e., restrooms). Many outfitters and members of the public get permission or pay an access fee to private landowners to use their private land. Some private landowners have provided recreational easements for public use (i.e., the Rochelle Easement). Boundary markers for recreational easements, BLM public lands, and state lands are painted blue while private land markers are painted red.

### **Recreation Sites within the SRMA**

The **Prospect Creek Undeveloped Recreation Site** is located 16 miles southeast of Encampment, WY. The elevation ranges from 7,400 to 8,430 feet. This recreation site is primarily utilized as a river launch for BLM visitors taking out at Bennett Peak Campground and as a take-out for Forest Service visitors who launch at the Six Mile and Routt launches. Prospect Creek provides a variety of recreational activities, including fishing, hunting, sightseeing, hiking, camping, rock hounding and wildlife viewing. The area is used by local residents and nonresidents. The site offers a primitive, sandy boat launch and primitive access on a rugged, steep two-track. The existing steep grade and condition of the two-track limits the number of visitors due to the need to access the area using a high-clearance, 4wd vehicle. The rocky wash-out areas on this two-track has caused many vehicles and trailers to receive extensive damage. Most SRP holders and members of the public avoid this recreation site due to the current condition of the access road.

The **Big Creek Undeveloped Recreation Site** is approximately 6 miles downstream from Prospect Creek. This area is currently accessed by high-clearance 4wd vehicle through F.S. 211 which connects to

this recreation site within the SRMA. The majority of recreation activities at this site include fishing, camping, hunting, hiking, OHV touring, and wildlife viewing. The poor maintenance condition of F.S. 211 currently prevents most SRPs and members of the public from accessing the boat launch and recreation site.

**Corral Creek Campground** is approximately eight miles downstream from the Big Creek Undeveloped Recreation Site and sits at, approximately, 7,200 feet in elevation. The area is located off of County Road 660 which leads to Bennett Peak Road (BLM 3404). The primary recreation activities at Corral Creek Campground are camping, fishing, floating, and hunting. The area has six campsites, a vault toilet, day use parking, and two foot trails to wade fishing. Seasonal openings, typically, occur from June 1<sup>st</sup> to November 15<sup>th</sup>. Game species in this area include bighorn sheep, pronghorn, elk, wild turkey, mule deer, mountain lion, and grouse as well as rainbow and brown trout. There are currently no fees required for camping at this recreation site and the campsite is in a semi-primitive condition without hardened campsites.

**Bennett Peak Campground** is approximately one mile downstream from Corral Creek Campground and is also on Bennett Peak Road (BLM 3404). This recreation site is at, approximately, 7,100 feet and is the most popular and heavily visited recreation site within the Rawlins Field Office. The primary recreation activities at Bennett Peak Campground are fishing, floating, camping, sightseeing, OHV riding, wildlife viewing, and hunting. There are 11 campsites along with a vault toilet, hand pump well, boat ramp, day use parking, and accessible fishing area. There is currently a \$10.00 per night fee required for camping at this recreation site. Seasonal openings and game species would be identical to Corral Creek Campground. The Bennett Peak Campground was reconstructed in 1996. There is currently a hardened boat ramp that is one vehicle wide and a boat ramp parking area for six vehicles with trailers. All campsites, picnic areas, and a handicap accessible fishing area are also hardened at Bennett Peak.

The **Dugway Developed Recreation Site** is approximately 7 miles north of the Sinclair exit on County Road 351. It is located on a bend in the North Platte River and is popular for fishing, floating, camping, sightseeing, OHV riding, wildlife viewing, and hunting. The area has 5 hardened campsites (1 pull-through, 4 spurs) along with a group site, vault toilet, picnic tables, fire pit, boat ramp, and day use parking. There is currently no fee required to camp at this recreation site. The area is open year round due to the low elevation of this recreation site at 7200 feet. Boaters primarily retrieve their craft rather than launch at Dugway Recreation Site because a control crest/low-head dam hazard just downstream of the ramp.

## C. Cultural Resources

Archeological investigations in the general NPRRAMP area indicate that people have inhabited the area for at least 12,000 years, from Paleo-Indian occupation to the present. Although prehistoric sites represent the largest percentage of cultural resource sites within the general area, historic-age sites including ranching and mining related properties are also common. Additional information about cultural resources in the general NPRRAMP area can be found in the Rawlins RMP FEIS Ch. 3, pp. 3-10 through 3-18.

Based on limited cultural resource inventories, there are no known cultural properties within the preferred alternative areas. Site-specific cultural resource inventories to locate and evaluate any prehistoric or historic cultural resources will be required for the areas proposed for disturbance that have not been inventoried. It is unlikely that cultural properties would be located immediately adjacent to the river within the modern floodplain as these sites would have been washed away or covered by alluvium

and rendered undetectable due to the seasonal flood events. It is anticipated that prehistoric and historic sites may be found within or near the preferred alternative areas outside of the modern floodplain.

Site-specific cultural resource inventories have been completed in the Bennett Peak Campground and the Corral Creek Campground areas to locate historic properties that may be impacted by the project in conformance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). No historic properties were identified during the inventories.

## **D. Water Resources**

The North Platte River originates in North Park, Colorado and then flows north into Wyoming. Major tributaries in Wyoming include the Encampment, Medicine Bow, Sweetwater and Laramie Rivers. All water within the North Platte drainage in Wyoming is allocated for beneficial use (under a U.S. Supreme Court decree), much of which is irrigation. The preferred alternative along with alternatives are planned to occur in the Upper North Platte watershed which is approximately 2,500,000 acres. Annual peak flow occurs in May or June in response to snowmelt; June has the greatest average discharge at 4,400 cfs. Peaks also occur later in the summer in response to thunderstorms. The majority of the Upper North Platte River is a Rosgen type C channel.

Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) classifies water bodies according to their designated uses; this classification is largely based on water quality. The North Platte from Sage Creek upstream to the Colorado line is classified as a Class 1 water body which means it supports all designated uses including drinking water and fish consumption. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has currently classified the Upper North Platte as a “Blue Ribbon Fishery” which means that this reach of river is a resource considered to be of national importance. Blue Ribbon streams are weighted relatively high when the USACE and other regulating agencies mitigate adverse impacts under their respective permit authority. According to the last rangeland assessment performed by the RFO, most of the Upper North Platte watershed was meeting the standard for watershed health and the entire watershed was meeting the standard for water quality. A few allotments in the Upper North Platte watershed failed the standard for riparian health due to livestock grazing. Some of these riparian areas surround tributaries to the North Platte River.

## **E. Vegetation**

Vegetation communities found along the SRMA corridor are influenced by soil type and water availability, and by human activities such as agricultural practices (grazing and irrigation) and recreation use.

In the Upper Platte River Watershed, upland vegetation is predominantly sagebrush-grass intermixing with mountain shrub and aspen communities at higher elevations. Mountain big sagebrush is the most common species of sagebrush, with basin and black sagebrush the next two principle types found in this area. Mountain shrubs, which include bitterbrush, snowberry, serviceberry, chokecherry, and mountain mahogany, occur in 10-inch or higher precipitation zones and are usually intermixed with themselves or with sagebrush and aspen. Aspen woodland is usually found above 7,000 feet in small pockets on north and east-facing slopes where snow accumulates or there is some other source of additional moisture. Conifer woodlands occur above 7,500 feet, with limber pine and juniper on drier sites and lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, and spruce on wetter sites. There is also a mix of scattered ponderosa pine.

Riparian and wetland habitats occur on a small percentage of the public lands. Cottonwood woodlands occur along the North Platte River, and other major drainages such as the forks of spring and Cow Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and lower reaches of Big Creek. Spruce/fir woodlands occur along the highest elevation foothill and mountains streams within steep gradients and confining canyons such as Prospect, Centennial and Heather Creeks. Other smaller drainages to the North Platte tend to be herbaceous or willow dominated riparian communities. Nebraska and beaked sedge are common dominant herbaceous species, and willow communities are composed of Geyer, Booth, sandbar and yellow willows.

In the lower portion of the watershed, upland vegetation is predominantly either sagebrush-grass or saline-influenced communities in this region. Wyoming big sagebrush is the most common species amongst the nine species or subspecies of sagebrush shrubs commonly occurring together or in site-specific habitats. Gardner's saltbush and black greasewood are the distinctive species of these saline-influenced communities.

Riparian and wetland habitats are even more limited in this portion of the analysis area. Some side drainages such as Jack Creek, Sage Creek and Pass Creek have riparian vegetation consisting of herbaceous or willow dominated vegetation communities, while many others are more ephemeral in nature. The North Platte River alternates between herbaceous or willow dominated to cottonwood galleries through this section; they are composed of the species listed for the upper portion of the watershed.

Non-native species within the corridor include Kentucky bluegrass, smooth brome, sweet clover, timothy, leafy spurge, salt cedar, Russian olive, Russian and spotted knapweed, hounds tongue, oxeye daisy, yellow toadflax, musk and Canada thistle, white top, perennial pepper weed, marsh sow thistle, and cheat grass.

The main noxious species present along the upper portion of the corridor are leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and musk thistle. Other noxious species include spotted knapweed, yellow toadflax, oxeye daisy, and hounds tongue. The main noxious species present along the lower portion of the corridor are leafy spurge, Canada thistle, and Russian knapweed. Other noxious species include perennial pepper weed, white top, salt cedar, Russian olive, and marsh sow thistle. There are also invasive species present which are normally restricted to disturbed areas. These include Russian thistle, halogeton, and cheat grass.

## **F. Livestock Grazing**

There are 19 allotments permitted for grazing use on public lands in the RAMP analysis area. Grazing use in these allotments along the Platte River is predominantly cattle use, including both cow/calf and yearling operations. Table 3 lists the allotment name, number, and season of use for these allotments. Seasons of use are primarily winter and spring at lower elevations, and summer/fall at higher elevations.

Hay meadows are common on private lands along the North Platte River from the forest to, nearly, Seminoe Reservoir. Hay production includes both alfalfa and grass hay, with ground preparation and fertilization in the spring, summer irrigation, followed by haying during the summer. Livestock in many cases may then be turned out on the hay meadows for the fall and winter season.

All of the allotments within the analysis area have cattle permitted during the high recreational use timeframes. The amount of conflicts with the ongoing livestock operation depends on whether there is public access to the river. Where there are BLM public recreation areas, increased human activity is common from spring until hunting season.

Several of the grazing operators in this analysis area do not allow public access across their private lands, thereby further concentrating recreational access at legal public access locations. Because of the limited access along the river, incidental and/or willful trespass by the recreating public is more common.

## **G. Soils**

Soils vary along the SRMA corridor and are influenced by topography and geology. Soils along the upper river corridor are mostly loamy sands and sandy loams, sometimes with numerous boulders and cobbles throughout. Toward the lower end of the corridor, soils shift to loams and clay loams with higher salt content. Soils exposed from disturbance typically have higher erosion rates and may get compacted, leading to increased difficulty in revegetation.

The Standards and Guidelines assessment failed five acres in the Prospect Mountain area for Standard #1 Watershed health. The access route to the North Platte River at Prospect Mountain was identified by the team as the worst erosional area identified in the assessment. Multiple routes up steep slopes with associated severe erosion occurring in the oldest and deepest set of ruts. This erosion eventually ends up in the North Platte River during spring or seasonal high flow events. The assessment recommended that improved and two-track roads with erosional areas be repaired or the road should be closed and reclaimed. In addition, the assessment recommended expanding public education particularly regarding impacts to roads from off-highway vehicular activities.

## **H. Fisheries**

Fisheries are most recognized for various species of trout, which have all been introduced into streams and ponds for recreational use. Increasing attention is being directed at non-game fish species found in the North Platte River drainage. Recreational fisheries within the assessment area that include significant portions of BLM-administered lands include the North Platte River, Encampment River and Big Creek. These fisheries afford the opportunity to catch several species of salmonid fish (i.e., trout), including brown trout, rainbow trout, and brook trout. These fisheries represent a somewhat limited resource in this arid region of Wyoming. Specifically, the North Platte River, Encampment River, and Big Creek receive significant use within the assessment area and therefore are a priority for the BLM and cooperating agencies.

Public access to recreational fisheries on the North Platte River remains limited throughout the assessment area. Public demand for access to recreational fisheries continues to increase within the Platte River Valley. Though the pursuit of additional access points has remained a priority, additional interest in private land easements or acquisition of access through land trades is needed to meet public demand.

There are currently no special status native fish species known to occur within the assessment area, though additional investigations would be required to assess the distribution and status of native fish.

### *Invasive Species*

On February 3, 1999, Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species was signed. This order directed federal agencies to:

- “use relevant programs and authorities to: (i) prevent the introduction of invasive species; (ii) detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner; (iii) monitor invasive species populations accurately and reliably; (iv) provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been

invaded; (v) conduct research on invasive species and develop technologies to prevent introduction and provide for environmentally sound control of invasive species; and (vi) promote public education on invasive species and the means to address them...” as well as “...not authorize, fund, or carry out actions that it believes are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species in the United States or elsewhere unless, pursuant to guidelines that it has prescribed, the agency has determined and made public its determination that the benefits of such actions clearly outweigh the potential harm caused by invasive species; and that all feasible and prudent measures to minimize risk of harm will be taken in conjunction with the actions.”



Figure 7. Zebra mussel. Actual size is approximately ¾ inch.



Figure 8. New Zealand mud snail.

Introduced pathogens of concern in the assessment area include *Myxobolus cerebralis*, which can cause whirling disease in salmonid fish, and Chytrid fungus, which can impact amphibian populations. Whirling disease is a parasitic infection that attacks the nerves and cartilage of small trout, reducing their ability to feed and avoid predators. These infections can significantly impact wild trout populations. The parasite responsible for causing whirling disease is known to occur at locations in the North Platte River drainage within the assessment area. Chytrid fungus has been cited as a major cause of declines in amphibian populations. Chytrid fungus attacks keratin of metamorphosed amphibians and can lead to 90-100% mortality in some species. The Boreal Toad Recovery Team (BTRT) has cited Chytrid fungus

as a major concern in the southern Rocky Mountain population (BTRT, 2001). Both of these pathogens can be transported via contaminated waders or other equipment.

Invasive species of concern in the assessment area include zebra mussel and New Zealand mud snail. Zebra mussels have become widely distributed in the United States, particularly east of the 100th meridian. These exotic mussels have been discovered as near as Colorado, likely the result of overland transport by trailered boats. These mussels can be found in large lakes, ponds, and river systems throughout their range in the U.S. A major transport mechanism of these mussels is through attachment to boats and trailers. New Zealand mud snails appear to prefer flowing water habitats with stable flows. Springs, spring creeks, and river sections downstream from dams are all places that they thrive in. They are most typically found on larger cobble substrates or on pieces of wood. These snails are known to occur in the Great Lakes region, as well as in isolated regions of the west, including Yellowstone National Park. New Zealand mud snails can be transported with fishing waders or other equipment that has been exposed to infected waters. The dispersal of these snails has been associated with recreational fisheries exhibiting high angler use. Neither the zebra mussels nor the New Zealand mud snails are currently known to occur in the analysis area and preventing their spread into this region will be particularly challenging.

## **I. Wildlife**

Wildlife is abundant and diverse within the project area. Antelope, mule deer and elk are common big game species, with limited numbers of bighorn sheep and moose. Greater sage-grouse are an important species of interest and a majority of the analysis area is within greater sage-grouse core area. Blue grouse are found in higher elevation aspen and conifer woodlands. Raptors include bald and golden eagles; ferruginous, red-tailed and Swainson's hawks; burrowing owls; and other hawks, harriers, and owls. Horned lizards and prairie rattlesnakes are the most common reptiles, while tiger salamanders are the most abundant amphibian species. Other commonly observed wildlife include coyotes, badger, beaver, muskrat, cottontail and jackrabbits, prairie dogs, ground squirrels, waterfowl, and songbirds.

### **Raptors**

There are several raptor species that have been observed within the analysis area, or their nests have been identified within the area. Raptors that have known nests within the area include the bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, Swainson's hawk, great-horned owl, Cooper's hawk, prairie falcon, red-tailed hawk, burrowing owl, and kestrel. Although nests have not been identified for the northern harrier, northern goshawk, long-eared owl, short-eared owl, and sharp-shinned hawk, these species have the potential to nest within the project area. The bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, and northern goshawk have been identified as BLM-State Sensitive Species.

### **Big Game**

The project area is within portions of five antelope herd units. These herd unit areas are identified as the: (1) Big Creek Herd Unit; (2) Elk Mountain Herd Unit; (3) Iron Springs Herd Unit; (4) Medicine Bow Herd Unit; and (5) South Ferris Herd Unit. The North Platte River Serves as the boundary between portions of these herd units. The project is within portions of crucial winter range for antelope as well as other seasonal ranges. Antelope rely heavily on Wyoming big sagebrush habitat, in addition to other 'open' communities like saltbush steppe, greasewood, and short grasslands, as well as open juniper woodlands. During the winter, antelope diets consist of primarily Wyoming big sagebrush. However, spring and summer diets include higher amounts of forbs, grasses, and other shrubs.

The project area is within portions of four elk herd units. These herd unit areas are identified as the: (1) Ferris Herd Unit; (2) Shirley Mountain Herd Unit; (3) Sierra Madre Herd Unit; and (4) Snowy Range Herd Unit. The project is within portions of crucial winter range for elk as well as other seasonal ranges. In addition, elk parturition (calving) areas overlap the project area. Elk normally prefer staying close to hiding cover, so are most often associated with conifer and aspen woodlands or tall shrublands. They prefer grasses and have a high diet overlap with cattle, but will include more forbs in their spring diets and more shrubs in their winter diets.

There is one mule deer herd unit that is primarily located within the watershed area. These herd unit areas are identified as the: (1) Ferris Herd Unit; and (2) Platte Valley Herd Unit. The project is within portions of crucial winter range as well as other seasonal ranges. Mule deer prefer areas with hiding cover and higher precipitation sites with forbs, which tend to occur close to the mountains, rims, and along stream drainages and lakes. Mule deer select forbs and grasses when green and more nutritious, shifting to primarily shrubs in the fall and winter, and prefer a mixture of sagebrush and other shrubs during the winter.

Three bighorn sheep herd units occur in portions of the analysis area. These herd unit areas are identified as the: (1) Douglas Creek Herd Unit; (2) Encampment River Herd Unit; and (3) Ferris-Seminole Herd Unit. The project area overlaps both crucial winter range and parturition (lambing) areas for bighorn sheep. The Douglas Creek and Encampment River Sheep herds appear to be declining to stagnant. Currently, efforts are concentrated on management efforts for the Ferris-Seminole Herd Unit.

The project area overlaps the Snowy Range/Sierra Madre Herd Unit. Moose occupy forest and drainage bottom lands within the analysis area and have attained population levels which allow a limited annual harvest in the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre Mountains. The species is not considered native to the area. The current population has colonized into Wyoming from populations introduced into the North Park area of Colorado during the late 1970's.

Whitetail deer also inhabit a portion of the analysis area. They are mostly limited to the bottoms of major creeks and drainages containing the heavy cover which they prefer. Found mainly in the valley bottoms and on irrigated agricultural land in the drainage, they are limited to predominantly deeded land, although can be found sporadically on public tracts. Habitat for whitetail deer within the analysis unit includes yearlong and winter-yearlong habitat.

### **Threatened and Endangered Species**

There are 17 endangered, threatened, proposed and/or candidate wildlife species that may be found, or have the potential to be found, within the RFO area. Habitat is not present for the following species: black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*), blowout penstemon (*Penstemon haydenii*), Colorado butterfly plant (*Gaura neomexicana coloradensis*), Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), Wyoming toad (*Bufo baxteri*), the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and the Colorado River species--humpback chub (*Gila cypha*), razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*), Colorado pike minnow (*Ptychocheilus Lucius*) and bonytail chub (*Gila elegans*). In addition, the project will not cause a water depletion; therefore, it will have no effect on and the Platte River species—whooping crane (*Grus Americana*), Interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum*), pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*), Western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*), and the piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*).

The project area may provide travel corridors for Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). In addition, Ute ladies' tresses (*Sprianthus diluvialis*) could occur along the North Platte River.

### **Canada Lynx**

The current status of the Canada lynx is threatened. Lynx occur in the boreal, sub-boreal, and western montane-forests of North America. Snowshoe hares are the primary food source of lynx, comprising 35-97 percent of their diet throughout the range. Other prey species include red squirrels, ground squirrels, mice, voles, porcupine, beaver, and ungulates as carrion or occasionally as prey. Lynx prefer to move through continuous forests and use ridges, saddles and riparian areas. Lynx have been known to cross large rivers and lakes and have been documented in habitats such as shrub-steppe, juniper, and ponderosa pine. Although it is highly unlikely that lynx will reside within the analysis area, there is the potential for travel corridors through the watershed, specifically using riparian habitats

### **Ute Ladies' Tresses**

The current status of Ute ladies' tresses is threatened. This plant is a perennial, terrestrial orchid. This plant blooms from late July through August; however, depending on location and climatic conditions, orchids may bloom in early July or still be in flower as late as early October. This orchid is endemic to moist soils in mesic or wet meadows near springs, lakes, seeps, and riparian areas within the 100-year flood plain of perennial streams ranging from 4,300-7,000 feet in elevation. It colonizes early successional riparian habitats such as point bars, sand bars, and low laying gravelly, sandy, or cobbly edges, persisting in those areas where the hydrology provides continual dampness in the root zone through the growing season.

### **Sensitive Species**

The objective of the sensitive species designation is to ensure that the BLM considers the overall welfare of these species when undertaking actions on public lands, and do not contribute to the need to list the species under the provisions of the ESA. The lack of demographic, distribution, and habitat requirement information compounds the difficulty of taking management actions for many of these species. It is the intent of the sensitive species policy to emphasize the inventory, planning consideration, management implementation, monitoring, and information exchange for the sensitive species on the list in light of the statutory and administrative priorities.

There are nine mammals, seventeen birds, five fish, three amphibians, and seven plant BLM Wyoming State Director's Sensitive Species List (sensitive) species that have the potential to be found or be affected by projects that may occur within Rawlins Field Office area.

It was determined that there is potential habitat for the following BLM Sensitive Species within the project area: long-eared myotis, fringed myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat, white-tailed prairie dog, Wyoming pocket gopher, and swift fox, western boreal toad, white-faced ibis, trumpeter swan, northern goshawk, ferruginous hawk, peregrine falcon, greater sage-grouse, long-billed curlew, burrowing owl, bald eagle, sage thrasher, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's sparrow, and sage sparrow, cedar rim thistle, Gibbens' beardtongue, and persistent sepal yellow cress. A description of the habitat type that each species is associated with is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: BLM State Sensitive Species That May Occur In the Project Area**

Mammals		
Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat Types
Long-eared myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	Conifer and deciduous forests, caves and mines
Fringed myotis	<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>	Conifer forest, woodland, caves and mines
Townsend's big-eared bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Forests, basin-prairie shrub, caves and mines
White-tailed prairie dog	<i>Cynomys leucurus</i>	Basin-prairie shrub, grasslands
Wyoming pocket gopher	<i>Thomomys clusius</i>	Meadows with loose soil
Swift fox	<i>Vulpes velox</i>	Grasslands
Amphibians		
Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat Types
Western Boreal Toad	<b>Bufo Boreas Boreas</b>	Pond Margins, Wet Meadows and Riparian Areas
Birds		
Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat Types
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Rivers, streams, lakes and waterways
White-faced ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	Marshes, wet meadows
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	Lakes, ponds, rivers
Northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Conifer and deciduous forests
Ferruginous hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Basin-prairie shrub, grassland, rock outcrops
Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Tall cliffs
Greater sage-grouse	<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Basin-prairie shrub, mountain-foothill shrub
Long-billed curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Grasslands, plains, foothills, wet meadows
Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Grasslands, basin-prairie shrub
Mountain plover	<i>Charadrius Montanus</i>	Short-grass prairie, shrub-steppe, prairie dog

		towns
Sage thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	Basin-prairie shrub, mountain-foothill shrub
Loggerhead shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Basin-prairie shrub, mountain-foothill shrub
Brewer's sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	Basin-prairie shrub
Sage sparrow	<i>Amphispiza billineata</i>	Basin-prairie shrub, mountain-foothill shrub
<b>Plants</b>		
<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Habitat Types</b>
Cedar rim thistle	<i>Cirsium aridum</i>	Barren, chalky hills, gravelly slopes, & fine textured, sandy-shaley draws at 6,700' - 7,200'
Gibbens' beardtongue	<i>Penstemon gibbensii</i>	Sparsely vegetated shale or clay slopes – 5,500' to 7,700'
Persistent sepal yellow cress	<i>Rorippa calycina</i>	Riverbanks & shorelines, sandy soils near high water line

## VIII. Environmental Consequences

### A. Visual Resources

#### Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives

The action alternatives proposed in the North Platte River RAMP EA have the potential to directly and indirectly impact visual resources. The surface disturbing activities proposed in Key Actions 1 and 4-6 would create additional visual contrasts to the surrounding natural landscape. These visual impacts would be mitigated with visual contrast reduced through the use of BLM Standard Environmental Colors, naturalized building materials, as well as Best Management Practices for reclaiming disturbance areas of soils and vegetation. Indirect visual impacts would occur through potential increases in recreational use caused by additional recreational facilities developed during the implementation phase of these action alternatives. These indirect impacts are analyzed in the Cumulative Impacts section of this document (Chapter IX) .

#### Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek

A site-specific visual impact analysis of the alternatives for each of these four key actions will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to the RAMP EA.

## **Key Action 2: Leave-No-Trace Education**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current visual resource conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* Negative visual impacts are not expected from the administrative actions of implementing a voluntary Leave-No-Trace Educational Program. However, positive impacts to the visual resource are anticipated from the implementation of this educational program. It is expected that near-view visual impacts will be reduced by an anticipated lower frequency of littering as well as decreased soil and vegetation damage along the banks of the river and within recreation sites and campgrounds.

*Alternative 1:* Visual impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Visual impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative.

## **Key Action 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current visual resource conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* Significant visual impacts are not expected from the administrative actions of implementing an SRP permit allocation system. However, ending the moratorium for new SRP permits would cause an increase in the numbers of outfitters and guides and the number of visitor days would likely increase as a result. This increase in use would cause additional visual contrast within near-view scenes such as soil and root exposure, soil compaction, trampling of vegetation, removal of ground cover, and littering. The connected action of implementing a Leave-No-Trace program would likely mitigate these impacts through education and practice of low-impact techniques. Any potential impacts resulting from implementation of the preferred alternative would result in minimal contrast to the surrounding landscape and, therefore, would conform to VRM Class II, III, and IV management objectives.

*Alternative 1:* Visual impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Visual impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative.

## **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp at Bennett Peak Campground**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* The preferred alternative includes the addition of an overflow parking lot and the widening of the existing boat ramp. When considering the contrast of existing campground disturbances, these two ground disturbance areas and the presence of native-colored surfacing material would create a low visual contrast to the surrounding characteristic landscape. The short-term analysis of this proposed action can be classified as intrusive. During the construction phase of the project, visual impacts from equipment and related activities would consist of large trucks and earth moving equipment at the campground and along Bennett Peak Road. Equipment would cause noticeable line, color, texture, and form contrasts within the characteristic landscape. While best management practices would be utilized including soil and vegetation reclamation and the application of BLM Standard Environmental Colors

(CC-001, June 2008) to blend the project with the surrounding landscape, the visual intrusion of this project would produce a low visual contrast. The visual contrast of the proposed action is reduced by the existing parking areas, facilities, and access roads. The low visual contrast created by the project would be in conformance with the VRM Class II objective for this area. Although these developments would decrease the visual value of the landscape, the low contrast of these developments within a previously disturbed landscape would not attract the attention of the casual observer. Given the context and intensity of the proposed action, this project is not anticipated to cause a significant visual impact to this Visual Resource Inventory Class II area.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts to visual resources from Alternative 1 would be similar to the Preferred Alternative but with less visual contrast due to having less ground disturbance area, surfacing material, and vegetation removal.

*Alternative 2:* Same as the Preferred Alternative

## **B. Recreation**

### **Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives**

There will be impacts to the recreation setting within the SRMA under each alternative. However, these changes to the recreation setting will conform to recreation setting objectives. Primary changes will include modified parking areas, campgrounds facilities, access roads, boat ramps, and administrative approaches to education and permit allocations. These setting changes would impact the nature and accessibility and availability of recreation opportunities, visitation frequency, use density, and dispersion of use as well as visitor satisfaction within the planning area. Action alternatives which enhance recreation opportunities desired by one visitor group (i.e., fly fishermen) may diminish those for competing visitor groups (i.e., canoeists and campground users). The project implementation schedule, subsequent shifts in recreation site preferences, and increases in regional population growth will have an effect on the overall visitation trends within the SRMA. Temporal trends in visitation will continue with peak weekends and holidays providing the highest visitor use density levels. Current land uses such as grazing and other agricultural uses adjacent to the planning area would continue. Impacts from recreational use will become more evident at dispersed sites as well undeveloped and developed recreation sites.

### **Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek**

A site-specific visual impact analysis of the alternatives for each of these four key actions will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to this RAMP EA.

#### **Key Action 2: Leave-No-Trace Education**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current recreation conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* Negative impacts to recreation are not expected from the administrative actions of implementing a voluntary Leave No Trace (LNT) educational program. However, positive impacts to the recreation resource are anticipated from this implementation. It is expected that the social and physical settings will be enhanced with low-impact practices resulting in a decrease in litter, human waste, and camping impacts. Furthermore, the decrease in physical impacts would likely decrease conflicts among

visitors and perceptions of congestion on the river. Mitigating visitor impacts through LNT would support a resource condition which conforms to the current Middle Country recreation setting objectives of the SRMA.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts to the recreation resource would be similar to the preferred alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Impacts to the recreation resource would be similar to the preferred alternative.

### **Key Action 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current recreation resource conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* Physical, social, economic and administrative impacts would occur as a result of the administrative action of implementing an SRP permit allocation system. Ending the moratorium for new SRP permits would cause an increase in the numbers of outfitters and guides and the number of visitor days would likely increase as a result. This increase in use would cause potential conflicts and crowding within the social setting. Impacts to the physical setting would include additional recreational user impacts such as soil and root exposure, soil compaction, trampling of vegetation, removal of ground cover, and littering. The connected action of implementing a Leave No Trace program would potentially mitigate these impacts through education and practice of low-impact techniques. Administrative impacts would include the overall demand for services and staffing caused by the potential increase in visitation. These services may require additional staffing hours, maintenance, and oversight of public safety.

Allowing additional SRPs and providing permit allocation limits would promote recreation opportunities in the area to be consistent with the recreation setting objectives for the SRMA. This system of permit allocation would also allow for the overall financial sustainability of the outfitting, guiding, and tourism industry in the local community and the region. The business communities of Saratoga, Encampment, and Riverside would benefit, long-term, from potential tourism growth while Front Range outfitters would also receive economic benefits. Overall, local and regional businesses that provide outfitting and guiding services would continue to thrive as a result of the growing popularity of the river.

*Alternative 1:* Visual impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Visual impacts would be similar to the preferred alternative.

### **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp Expansion at Bennett Peak Campground**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in a continuation of current trends regarding the recreation setting as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* The preferred alternative includes the addition of an overflow parking lot and the expansion of the existing boat ramp within Bennett Peak Campground, a Developed Recreation Site. This preferred alternative would cause changes to the physical setting, as well as changes to the social and administrative settings. The physical setting for overnight use would be changed by the additional ground disturbance of the overflow parking lot and expanded boat ramp, and the presence of additional vehicles utilizing these new areas of physical disturbance. The physical setting on the Upper North Platte River

would also change with the number of craft launching simultaneously from the expanded boat ramp. The physical setting of Bennett Peak Road would potentially change with additional vehicles accessing the convenience of the expanded boat ramp and additional parking.

Social setting characteristics would change for day use opportunities and for overnight use. The proximity of the overflow parking lot to nearby campsites would allow noise levels to be in closer proximity to overnight visitors and would likely result in higher instances of user conflict. However, overall visitor perceptions of crowding in the campground are likely to decrease with decreased waiting times at the boat ramp and less congestion caused by undesignated parking along the roundabout. Overall visitor satisfaction with the recreation site during peak weekends should increase with less congestion and conflicts for parking and wait times at the ramp.

A displacement effect would likely occur for visitors who prefer greater solitude and privacy. These visitors will likely disperse to less developed and managed settings within the SRMA, nearby USFS recreation sites, or to private and public lands elsewhere in the region.

Key changes to the administrative setting would include the presence of additional signage and rules for parking. Levels of managerial presence will increase notably through the presence of a volunteer host stationed within view of the boat ramp and campsites. Increased levels of visitor contact and monitoring of visitors would be present at the site. The addition the overflow parking lot and the expansion of the boat ramp would require additional maintenance, staffing, and administrative oversight.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts to recreation from Alternative 1 would be similar to the Preferred Alternative with the exception of the social setting. Removal of the existing roundabout to expand this existing parking lot would concentrate vehicles in close proximity to the boat ramp. This concentration of parking next to the ramp would create higher levels of visitor use density allowing the potential for increased visitor conflicts and perceptions of crowding during peak use.

*Alternative 2:* Same as the Preferred Alternative

## **C. Cultural Resources**

### **Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives**

Implementation of the NPRRAMP has the potential to directly, indirectly, and cumulatively impact historic properties (cultural sites that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places). Surface disturbing activities, such as those proposed in the action alternatives, have the potential to physically destroy or displace cultural materials. Displacement of cultural resources adversely affects the potential to understand the context of the site and limits the ability to extrapolate data regarding prehistoric settlement and subsistence patterns. The potential for these types of impacts will be minimized through site specific cultural resource inventories and appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures.

Under all of the alternatives, indirect and cumulative impacts may occur to cultural resource from the continued recreational use of these areas. This could be either through illegal collection and disturbance of the physical remains, or the secondary effects of wind and water erosion caused by resource development and the removal of vegetation by recreation activities. Additional information regarding impacts to cultural resources and mitigation can be found in the Rawlins RMP FEIS Ch. 4, pp. 4-12 through 4-32.

## **Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek**

A site-specific, cultural resources analysis of the alternatives for each of these four key actions will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to the RAMP EA.

### **Key Action 2: Leave-No-Trace Education**

No impacts to cultural resources are anticipated from the administrative action alternatives in Key Action 2, Leave-No Trace Education.

### **Key Action 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

No impacts to cultural resources are anticipated from the administrative action alternatives in Key Action 3, North Platte SRP Permit Allocations.

### **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp Expansion at Bennett Peak Campground**

*No Action:* Under the No Action alternative, impacts to cultural resources would be minimal. No new surface disturbing activities with the potential to affect historic properties would be pursued. Continued recreational use of the NPRRAMP area would still have the potential to affect cultural properties through artifact collection and erosion.

*Preferred Alternative:* Under the Preferred Alternative, surface disturbing activities associated with the Bennett Peak Campground improvements would have the potential to directly impact cultural resources. Site-specific cultural resource inventories have been completed to identify historic properties that may be impacted by the project in conformance with the NHPA.

Site-specific cultural resource inventories have been completed for Bennett Peak Campground. No cultural resources were identified that would be affected by development of the additional parking areas and boat ramp at the Bennett Peak Campground. Standard cultural resource design features that address buried discoveries apply and would minimize the potential for the loss or destruction to unanticipated historic properties should they be encountered during construction.

*Alternative 1:* Under Alternative 1, impacts to cultural resources would be similar to those identified under the Preferred Alternative, except that the surface disturbing activities would be reduced at Bennett Peak Campground. This would reduce the potential for direct impacts to cultural resources. Site-specific cultural resource inventories have been completed for Bennett Peak Campground. No cultural resources were identified that would be affected by development of the additional parking area or boat ramp expansion at Bennett Peak Campground. Standard cultural resource design features that address buried discoveries apply and would minimize the potential for the loss or destruction to unanticipated historic properties should they be encountered during construction.

*Alternative 2:* Under Alternative 2, impacts to cultural resources would be similar to those identified under the Preferred Alternative, except that the surface disturbing activities would be reduced at Bennett Peak Campground. This would reduce the potential for direct impacts to cultural resources in this area.

Site-specific cultural resource inventories have been completed for Bennett Peak Campground. No cultural resources were identified that would be affected by development of the additional parking area or boat ramp expansion at Bennett Peak Campground. Standard cultural resource design features that address buried discoveries apply and would minimize the potential for the loss or destruction to unanticipated historic properties should they be encountered during construction.

## **D. Water Resources**

### **Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek**

A site-specific, analysis of water resources for alternatives, considered within each of the four key actions, will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to this RAMP EA.

#### **Key Action 2: Leave-No-Trace Education**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* Depending on the public reception of Leave No Trace responsibilities, there would be a positive impact to water quality in the North Platte. Without the implementation of carry-out actions, pollutants are deposited along the river bank and floodplain and are then washed down the river when a flood event occurs. If the public chooses to adhere to Leave No Trace guidelines, there would be fewer pollutants deposited along the river banks and consequently fewer risks to water quality.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts from alternative 1 would be similar to impacts from the preferred alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Impacts from alternative 1 would be similar to impacts from the preferred alternative.

#### **Key Action 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* The preferred alternative would cause increase the number of boats and recreationists on the river. Increased boats could potentially cause a decrease in bank stability as more boats would be tied up to banks, more recreationists would be walking up and down banks, and more trailers would be utilizing provided boat ramps. A decrease in bank stability could potentially cause a decrease in water quality and overall proper function of the river. More recreationists utilizing the river would also mean more human waste being deposited along the river banks which would also cause a threat to water quality.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts from alternative 1 would be similar to impacts from the preferred alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Same as the preferred alternative

#### **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp Expansion at Bennett Peak Campground**

*Preferred Alternative:* The proposed alternative would remove the most amount of stabilizing vegetation along the river bank and floodplain; it would also expose the most amount of soil to compaction from vehicular traffic. The preferred alternative would remove approximately 14,500 ft<sup>2</sup> of vegetation. Vegetation removal and soil compaction would cause an increase in storm water runoff volume as well as storm water runoff velocity. Increases in runoff volume and velocity would decrease storm water infiltration causing more runoff to reach the North Platte River, increased erosion and increased sedimentation. Increased erosion and sedimentation would have a negative impact on water quality within the North Platte.

BMPs would be implemented to mitigate negative impacts from vegetation removal. New parking areas would be cleared of brush and left in a native grass cover. The boat ramp extension would be stabilized with gravel and concrete slabs. A buffer of native vegetation would be left in place between the additional parking areas and the river. This buffer area would act as a sediment trap for sediment being carried by storm water runoff from the parking areas. It is expected that BMPs would reduce anticipated impacts to a level that would not produce a measurable difference in stream flow, channel morphology or water quality, therefore reducing impacts to an acceptable level.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts to water resources from alternative 1 would be similar to the preferred alternative but with less ground disturbance and vegetation removal. Only approximately 6,350 ft<sup>2</sup> of vegetation would be cleared. BMPs would be implemented to mitigate impacts to water resources to an acceptable level.

*Alternative 2:* Impacts to water resources from alternative 2 would be similar to the preferred alternative but with less ground disturbance and vegetation removal. Only approximately 6,565 ft<sup>2</sup> of vegetation would be cleared. BMPs would be implemented to mitigate impacts to water resources to an acceptable level.

### **E. Vegetation**

#### **Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek**

A site-specific vegetation impacts analysis of the alternatives for each of these four key actions will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to the RAMP EA.

#### **Key Actions 2: Leave-No-Trace Education and 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

Impacts to vegetation from the implementation of the Leave-No Trace Education and the North Platte SRP Permit Allocations alternatives are previously analyzed in the Recreation section of Environmental Consequences.

#### **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp Expansion at Bennett Peak Campground**

*No Action:* Implementation of the no action alternative would result in the continuation of current vegetation conditions as described in the affected environment section of this EA.

*Preferred Alternative:* The existing big sagebrush plants (*Artemisia tridentata*) in the proposed overflow parking area (less than one surface acre) would be removed to provide for additional vehicle parking during high use periods of the campground, and to delineate the parking area. Two junipers (*Juniperus occidentalis*) would also be removed to complete the clearing of the area. The existing forbs and grasses (mainly lupine, Indian rice grass, and wheatgrass) would be left in place to hold the soil and maintain the scenic quality of the campground area.

The area between the existing road and proposed boat ramp expansion (less than 0.1 surface acres) would have all vegetation removed for vehicle access, visibility, and safety. Musk thistle is found in the area to be cleared for the proposed boat ramp expansion. These would be removed along with the other vegetation during construction and would be removed if they return after construction. There are some weedy species (gum weed, wild licorice, cheat grass) along the existing campground road which may spread as a result of the increased vehicle parking in the overflow area. They would be reduced either mechanically or chemically if needed. Construction equipment would be cleaned prior to being brought in to this project area to prevent the introduction of any new species.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts from Alternative 1 would be similar to impacts from the Preferred Alternative.

*Alternative 2:* Same as the Preferred Alternative.

## **F. Livestock Grazing**

### **Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives**

The potential for increased recreational use caused by implementation of the action alternatives could affect the livestock grazing conditions within and surrounding the planning area. In areas where rafters can access the river, use is concentrated during the spring and summer when calves are younger and more susceptible to injury. This can also cause disruption to livestock operations. Fences and gates may be damaged or left open resulting in livestock movement to other allotments. Increased erosional issues with respect to roads also results in reducing the available forage for both livestock and wildlife. In addition, fugitive dust caused by vehicles traveling these access roads settles on vegetation used as forage, especially alongside roadway corridors with heavy traffic. This dust potentially affects the quality and regenerative capacity of roadside grasses and forbs as well as decreases the palatability of the forage for livestock/wildlife use and potentially increases operating costs by affecting livestock health.

### **Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek**

A site-specific analysis of impacts to livestock grazing for each of the actions alternatives represented in these four key actions will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to the RAMP EA.

### **Key Actions 2: Leave-No-Trace Education and 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

No impacts to livestock grazing are anticipated from the administrative actions including the Leave-No Trace Education or the North Platte SRP Permit Allocations Moratorium

### **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp Expansion at Bennett Peak Campground**

Livestock are excluded from Bennett Peak Campground; therefore, implementation of any of the action alternatives would not affect livestock grazing.

## **G. Soils**

### **Key Actions 1, 5, 6, and 7: Development of a Boat-in Campground and Improvements to Corral Creek, Prospect Creek, and Big Creek**

A site-specific analysis of impacts to soils for each of the action alternatives represented in these four key actions will be reported in a forthcoming NEPA document tiered to the RAMP EA.

### **Key Actions 2: Leave-No-Trace Education and 3: North Platte SRP Permit Allocations**

No impacts to soils are anticipated from the administrative actions including the Leave-No Trace Education or the North Platte SRP Permit Allocations Moratorium

### **Key Action 4: Additional Parking Lot and Boat Ramp Expansion at Bennett Peak Campground**

*No Action:* There would be no additional disturbance to soils from this alternative.

*Preferred Alternative:* Soils in Bennett Peak Campground are mostly moderately deep to deep loamy sands. There would be no soil disturbance proposed in delineating the overflow parking area by removing big sagebrush and two junipers. The large rocks would be moved and used either as part of the overflow parking area delineation or as boat tie-up anchors downstream of the boat ramp.

The proposed boat ramp expansion area would be leveled for placement of the concrete blocks. Soil disturbance would be kept to a minimum to leave the root masses in place for revegetation of the site. The area between the existing road and proposed boat ramp expansion (less than 0.1 acre) would have all vegetation removed for vehicle access. Very little soil would be moved to level the area and it would be graveled, if needed, to minimize soil erosion.

If needed in the future, the overflow parking area would be inter-seeded with grasses (species to be determined at that time) or graveled to minimize soil erosion. The access to the expanded boat ramp would also be graveled if needed to ensure there would be no increase in soil erosion. The limited soil disturbance associated with this action would not require revegetation, and no additional reclamation practices are anticipated. The project would be monitored by BLM personnel and if an issue arises, it would be addressed at that time.

*Alternative 1:* Impacts from Alternative 1 would be similar to impacts from the Preferred Alternative.

## **H. Fisheries**

### **Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives**

Developments that cause ground disturbance and roads can affect fish populations through fragmentation of habitats at road crossings and disturbance sites, concentration of overland flow which can result in stream channel adjustments, and increased sediment delivery where the ground surface has been disturbed. In addition, concentrated overland flow may generate greater water velocities that are foreign

to the stream channel. The stream channel can, in turn, adjust to these increased velocities by changing its geometry through erosional processes such as channel incision. Fragmentation of stream habitats can limit access to habitat features that are required by stream fish. Stream fish require habitats for spawning, rearing, feeding, and refuge from environmental extremes (Schlosser and Angermeier 1995). The spatial distribution of these required habitats can necessitate the seasonal movement of fish among habitats. If barriers to movement are present, such as those caused by improperly designed road crossings, fish may not have access to all of the habitats necessary to fulfill their life history requirements. Additionally, barriers can interrupt metapopulation dynamics that allow for the recolonization of habitats that have experienced local extirpations.

Additional impacts of roads on fish communities are associated with increased sedimentation. The concentration of overland flow and increased rill and gully erosion associated with roads can affect required fish habitats. Increased sediment delivery to the stream can lead to the embedding of stream gravels. Some stream fish, such as trout species, require clean gravels for successful reproduction. Clean stream gravels are also necessary for the production of macro invertebrates – a key food source for many stream fish.

An example of a North Platte River access road currently affecting both sedimentation rates and public access is the Prospect Mountain Road. Incorporation of appropriate design criteria to limit erosion and increase its effectiveness and safety as an access road to the North Platte River would be a benefit to both fish habitats and recreationists.

Nonnative fish have been introduced and become naturalized in much of the assessment area. Their impact on native fish is not fully described in this area. As in other areas of the West, the use of desirable nonnative fish for their recreational and aesthetic values will need to be balanced with the needs of native fish. Emphasis should be placed on managing habitats for a diversity of fish, including providing habitats for native and desirable nonnative fish.

## **Invasive Species**

The spread of several invasive species has been contributed to transport via anglers. Education of the angling community in relation to effective disinfection procedures has proven a difficult undertaking to many State and Federal resource management agencies. Angler use and, therefore, the potential for angler movement of invasive species are at their greatest within this portion of the RFO. The BLM's opportunities to educate anglers about the problems associated with invasive species and appropriate disinfection procedures also have their greatest potential within this portion of the RFO. The use of interpretive sites at access points along the North Platte River, Encampment River, and Big Creek to provide the angling public with information relative to invasive species represents the Rawlins Field Office's greatest potential to control the spread of invasive aquatic species.

As the distribution of invasive species is not fully known, disinfecting equipment and materials that have been used in riparian or wetland environments should be considered standard precautions.

## **I. Wildlife**

### **Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives**

#### *Raptors*

The primary impact to raptors would be disruption from human activity during the breeding and nesting season. Currently, recreational activity already occurs in the area. Even with expected increases in use,

impacts to raptors are not expected to be significant due to Plan implementation. Although construction activities may occur during plan implementation, a timing stipulation would be applied to surface disturbing and disruptive activities. This stipulation would prevent disturbance during critical time periods, unless an evaluation of the area, under the exception request process, reveals that activities would not be detrimental to raptors in the area.

There are no raptor nests within the specified buffer of the Bennett Peak Campground. Therefore, proposed improvement projects at the campground are not expected to impact raptors due to implementation of the projects.

### *Big Game*

The primary impact to big game species would be disruption from human activity, especially during critical time periods in critical habitats such as parturition areas and crucial winter range. For the most part, recreational activities are very low during the crucial winter period. However, there is potential for significant activity during the parturition time frame of May 1 – June 30. During this time human activity could displace or disrupt big game species during lambing/calving. This could result in reduced lamb/calf survival, but it is not expected to impact big game populations at the herd level. Currently, there is some level of activity associated with recreation in the area. Implementation of the plan is not expected to significantly increase the impact to big game in the analysis area. Construction activities that disturb new ground would result in additional habitat loss in big game habitat. This would result in big game utilizing adjacent habitats and increased competition for space and resources with individuals using the area. Project implementation that results in surface disturbing or disruptive activities would include mitigation that would stipulate the time of year that activities could occur, in order to protect big game during critical time periods. Due to these stipulations, impacts to big game are not expected to be significant due to Plan implementation.

The proposed projects at the Bennett Peak Campground are with mule deer, elk and bighorn sheep crucial winter range. A stipulation will apply that will preclude construction in the area from November 15 – April 30. In addition, all construction is planned to occur within the boundary and adjacent to the current campground area. Due to this, impacts to big game in the area are expected to be negligible.

### *Threatened and Endangered Species*

Potential habitat exists in the analysis for Ute Ladies' Tresses. The analysis entire analysis area has not been surveyed for the presence/absence of the plant. Site specific surveys would be completed as projects are proposed.

### *Canada Lynx*

There should not be any management issues with the Canada lynx since this species only use the riparian habitats between ranges during dispersal and it would be unlikely that this species would be traveling through the analysis area, although this may occur. There should not be any impacts to this species as a result of implementing actions within the area. If site specific analysis determines that specific project would potentially impact Canada lynx, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be initiated. The improvement projects proposed at Bennett Peak Campground would have No Effect on Canada Lynx.

## *Ute Ladies' Tresses*

Impacts could occur to Ute Ladies' Tresses if construction or surface disturbing activities occurred within a population of the plant. Site specific surveys would be completed for any projects that would occur in the analysis area. If Ute Ladies' Tresses were found, the project would be modified to avoid the plant. Due to this, implementation of the Plan is not expected to impact Ute Ladies' Tresses.

Site specific surveys were completed for the improvement projects at Bennett Peak Campground. No Ute Ladies' Tresses were found during the site visit. Therefore, the improvement projects proposed at Bennett Peak Campground would have No Effect on Ute Ladies' Tresses.

## **Sensitive Species**

Impacts to sensitive species would be disruption due to human activity and loss of habitat due to construction of projects associated with plan implementation. Currently, recreational activity already occurs in the area. Even with expected increases in use, impacts to sensitive species are not expected to be significant due to Plan implementation. Surface disturbing activities would result in some level of habitat loss for some species as well as displacement of individuals utilizing that habitat. This would result in increased competition for space and resources of those individuals. As identified, stipulations would be applied to projects that would prevent surface disturbing or disruptive activities from occurring during critical time periods. These stipulations would be applied on a project/site specific basis.

Sensitive species identified that could occur in the Bennett Peak Campground area are: Western boreal toad, fringed myotis, long-eared myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat, Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, loggerhead shrike and sage thrasher. Although the campground area would not be considered typical sage grouse habitat, the area is within the South Rawlins Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area. In addition, the area could be used by bald eagles as well as other raptors. The proposed projects at the Bennett Peak Campground would have a stipulation that precludes construction from March 1 – July 15. This stipulation would reduce impacts to sage grouse, brewer sparrow, loggerhead shrike, sage thrasher and sage sparrow, as well as other bird species, during the breeding and nesting period. In addition, construction activities would be precluded within 500 feet of identified boreal toad habitat from April 15 to June 30 for the protection of breeding toads. A density and disturbance calculation will be completed in order to ensure that the project complies with BLM WY IM 2012-019. Due to these stipulations, impacts to sensitive species are expected to be minimal due to the project implementation at the Bennett Peak Campground.

## **IX. Cumulative Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives**

The North Platte River SRMA has a number of multiple uses which incrementally impact the resource with implementation of the action alternatives. Increasing the number, convenience, and type of recreational opportunities has the potential to cause an incremental increase in the number of recreation-impacted areas of visual disturbance. Visual contrast related to soil erosion, root exposure, and soil compaction would occur with additional trampling, camping, removal of vegetation and ground cover for fire rings, vehicle use, and littering. In addition, the growing number of recreation users and their vehicles increase the spread of exotic weeds throughout the SRMA.

These cumulative impacts are particularly salient when considering the incremental impact of

development at Bennett Peak Campground. Cumulative impacts from implementation of the action alternatives at Bennett Peak would be low given the relatively small area of ground disturbance and implementation of BMPs. This implementation would provide conveniences for larger visitor group sizes as well as higher overall visitation. These increased use levels could cause, incrementally, higher levels of resource impacts at developed, undeveloped, and dispersed recreation sites.

Enhancing recreation opportunities within the planning area could potentially increase economic benefits to the surrounding communities of Saratoga, Encampment, and Riverside. Improving roads, campgrounds, parking, and facilities would provide additional recreation opportunities for nearby residents and tourists to access the SRMA. The combination of past, present and future recreation management actions within the planning area is likely to result in increased recognition of the North Platte River SRMA as destination for a wide range of recreation activities and opportunities. The addition of campgrounds, river access, and road additions/improvements would result in additional administrative maintenance for the BLM.

Developments for recreation, grazing, tourism, and seasonal homes are being cleared of vegetation and causing fragmentation of native habitat for a number of wildlife species. Recent concerns expressed from WGFD include the cumulative impacts of increased recreation use on Mule Deer winter range along the North Platte River. OHV use and trails within the SRMA have contributed to additional fragmentation of habitat and disturbance of Mule Deer and their winter range migrations as well as additional erosion. The establishment of additional access roads and recreation facilities will affect sedimentation within the watershed, overall water quality, riparian health, and further fragmentation of Mule Deer winter range.

On the Lower North Platte River, livestock grazing, and mining are primary land uses. There is an impact to rangelands along the shoreline of the North Platte River due to grazing, recreational use, and the subsequent invasion of exotic weeds. In limited areas, cottonwood and willow recruitment may be affected by wildlife and livestock.

## **X. Implementation and Future Monitoring Strategies**

Upon implementation of the RAMP, the BLM would monitor resource conditions to evaluate trends and the outcomes of implementing the selected action alternatives. Monitoring results for the various resource conditions would be utilized to determine the effectiveness of management strategies and conformance with SRMA goals and objectives.

Compliance and effectiveness monitoring will be conducted in the planning area through routine inspections during the implementation phase and periodic site inspections will be conducted after implementation. The results of the monitoring would provide an opportunity to identify corrective actions to protect resources, enhance visitor experiences, and address health and safety.

To evaluate the effectiveness of project implementation and management strategies, monitoring approaches have been divided into three categories: Physical Resource Conditions, Social Resource Conditions, and Administrative Resource Conditions. Baseline monitoring studies would be designed in the summer and fall of 2013 and would be implemented beginning in summer of 2014.

### **Physical Resource Conditions:**

- Sensitive, threatened and endangered species surveys including bird (i.e. sage grouse) and small

mammal habitats and nesting areas

- Bald and Golden Eagle counts and surveys
- Winter range evaluation for elk, mule deer, and pronghorn
- Noxious and invasive weed inventory
- The planning area would be assessed for conformance to the six Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands.

#### **Social Resource Conditions:**

- Vehicle counts to determine visitor days at developed and undeveloped recreation sites
- Number of craft to craft encounters while floating the river
- Waiting times to launch and retrieve and number of boats launched and retrieved
- Number of commercial vs. private visitors and number of visitors per SRP holder
- Visitor perceptions of social and physical conditions and economic expenditures (visitor surveys)
- Mitigation of recreational impacts
- Observed conflicts
- Distance between craft
- Visitor registration boxes would be used to monitor and record use and collect comments to assess the effectiveness of SRMA management

#### **Administrative Resource Conditions:**

- Determine a baseline carrying capacity of existing camping and parking facilities at recreation sites.
- Update carrying capacity of camping and parking facilities after implementation of action alternatives
- Determine the effectiveness of implementing the Leave No Trace Program and evaluate corrective actions
- Record management actions completed each year (campgrounds and landing site upgrades, parking areas stabilized, miles of road upgraded, miles of road closed/reclaimed, noxious & invasive weeds treated, and restoration projects implemented/successful).
- Monitor road and trail conditions on all currently existing routes including photo points.

## **XI. Tribes, Individuals, Organizations, or Agencies Contacted**

Native American were contacted for the North Platte RAMP and EA. No properties that may be important to Native American tribes were identified within the proposed project areas described in this document.

#### **Tribes Contacted**

Northern Cheyenne Tribe  
The Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation  
Eastern Shoshone Tribe of the Wind River Reservation  
Northern Arapaho Tribe

## **Agencies Contacted**

Bureau of Reclamation  
Carbon County  
City of Encampment  
City of Rawlins  
City of Riverside  
City of Saratoga  
Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District  
State Senator for Wyoming  
State of Wyoming, House of Representatives  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
U.S. Representative for Wyoming  
U.S. Senator for Wyoming  
U.S. Forest Service  
Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department  
Wyoming State Parks

## **Organizations Contacted**

Trout Unlimited

## **XII. Acronyms**

**BLM:** Bureau of Land Management

**BTRT:** Boreal Toad Recovery Team

**EA:** Environmental Assessment

**EIS:** Environmental Impact Statement

**ESA** Endangered Species Act of 1973

**FEIS:** Final Environmental Impact Statement

**FLPMA** Federal Land Policy and Management Act

**ID Team:** Interdisciplinary Team

**IM:** Interoffice Memorandum

**NEPA:** National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

**NHPA:** National Historic Preservation Act

**NPRRAMP:** North Platte River RAMP

**OHV:** Off-Highway Vehicle

**RAMP** Recreation Area Management Plan

**RFO:** Rawlins Field Office

**RMP:** Resource Management Plan

**SD:** Standard Deviation

**SRMA:** Special Recreation Management Area

**SRP:** Special Recreation Permit

**TSS:** Total Suspended Solids

**VRI:** Visual Resource Inventory

**VRM:** Visual Resource Management

**WSA:** Wilderness Study Area

**WGFD:** Wyoming Game and Fish Department

**WY DEQ:** Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality

### **XIII. References**

BTRT. 2001. Boreal toad conservation plan and agreement for the southern Rocky Mountain population of the boreal toad (*Bufo boreas boreas*). Colorado Division of Wildlife, Denver, CO.

Schlosser, I. J., and P. L. Angermeier. 1995. Spatial variation in demographic processes of lotic fish: conceptual models, empirical evidence, and implications for conservation. Pages 392-401 in J. L. Nielsen, editor. Evolution and the aquatic system: defining unique units in population conservation. American Fisheries Society, Symposium 17, Bethesda, Maryland.

Record of Decision for the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project and Approved Visual Resource Management Plan Amendment. 2012. Bureau of Land Management, Rawlins Field Office, Rawlins, Wyoming.

Record of Decision and Approved Rawlins Resource Management Plan. 2008. Bureau of Land Management, Rawlins Field Office, Rawlins, Wyoming.

## XIV. Appendix A: Tables, Figures, and Photos

**Table 3. Allotments within the Planning Area and Seasons of Use**

Allotment Name	Allotment Number	Season of Use
Prospect Mountain	11049	1-June thru 15-October
A Bar A Ranch	11001	Yearlong
A Cross Ranch	11027	1-May thru 30-September
Bennett Peak	11004	1-May thru 31-October
John Rouse	11052	25-May thru 24-June
Beaver Creek Hills	11024	1-May thru 30-June
Arthur Rouse	11023	10-May thru 30-September
Rainbow Canyon	21053	1-June thru 1-September
North Lake Creek	00863	1-June thru 28-August
Corpening	00861	18-April thru 31-May
Platte River	20613	1-April thru 15-November
Pine Grove/Bolten	10623	1-March thru 31-December
Lone Tree Allotment	00839	16-May thru 31-October
Fort Steele Breaks	00816	Yearlong
East Sinclair	00704	Yearlong
Haystack River Pasture	00708	Yearlong
North Walcott	00819	Yearlong
Haystack	00707	Yearlong
Seminole	10218	Yearlong

**Table 4. 2010 Recreation Opportunity Inventory: Number of Visitors Encountered in North Platte River SRMA**

<b>Township, Range, and Section</b>	<b>Hours Spent at Site</b>	<b>Number of Visitors Encountered</b>	<b>Date</b>
21n 85w sec 10	2	0	7-6-10
21n 85w sec36	8	0	8-11-10
22n 86w sec14	3	14	6-10-10
13n 81w sec1	5	8	6-23-10
15n 82w sec 14	2	9	6-23-10
15n 82w sec 23	1.5	0	6-22-10
15n 82w sec15	2	6	7-21-10
18n 85w sec 2	1	0	8-11-10
18n 85w sec 12	1	2	8-11-10
19n 85w sec 2	8	0	8-11-10
19n 85w sec 14	10	0	8-11-10
19n 85w sec 20	1	0	8-11-10
19n 85w sec 22	1	4	8-11-10
19n 85w sec 34	1	0	8-11-10
20n 85w Sec10	4	5	7-9-10
21n 85w Sec 4	2	0	7-6-10

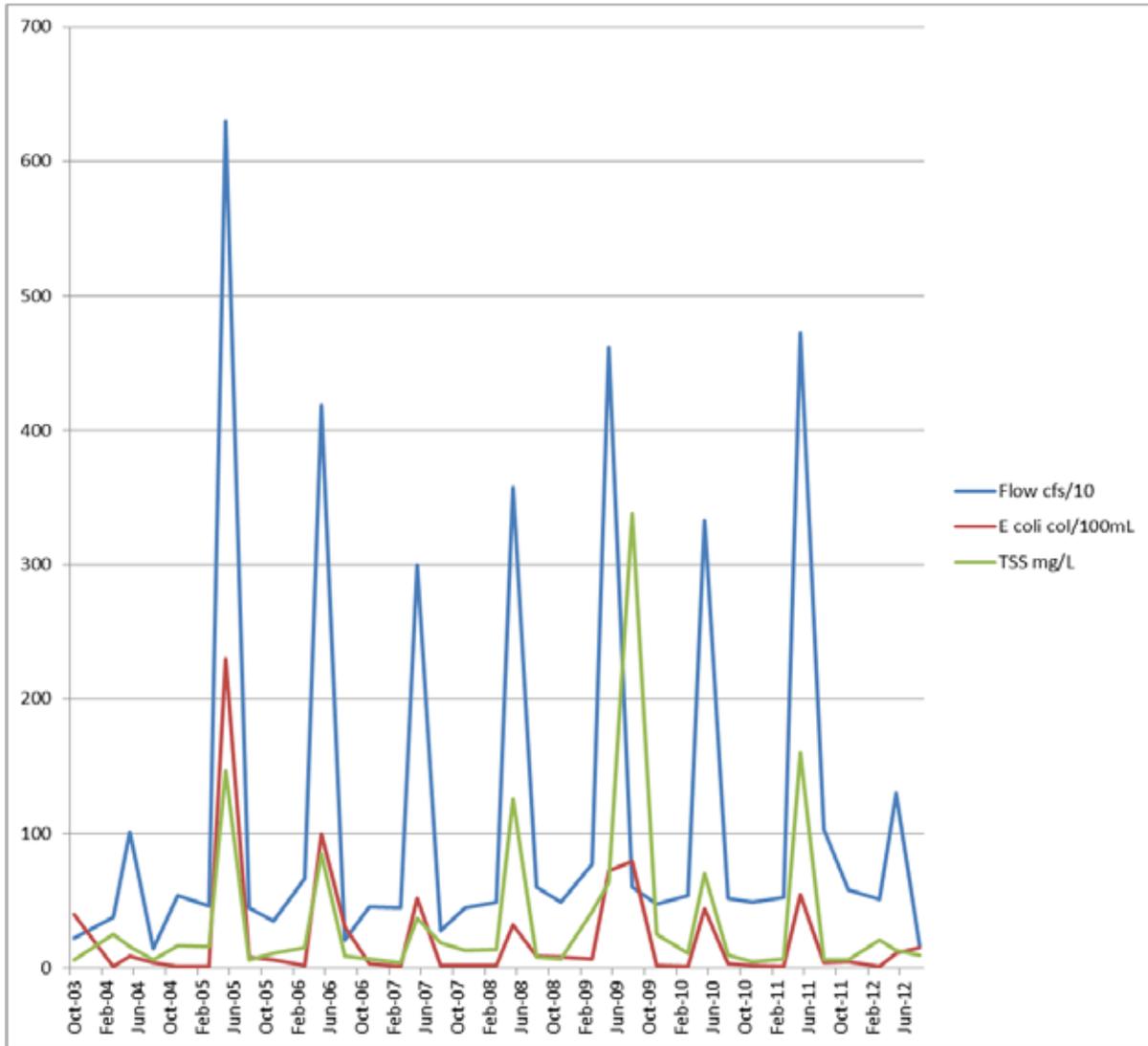


Figure 1a. 2003-2012 WY DEQ *E. Coli*, Flow, and Total Solids at Sinclair USGS Gauge.

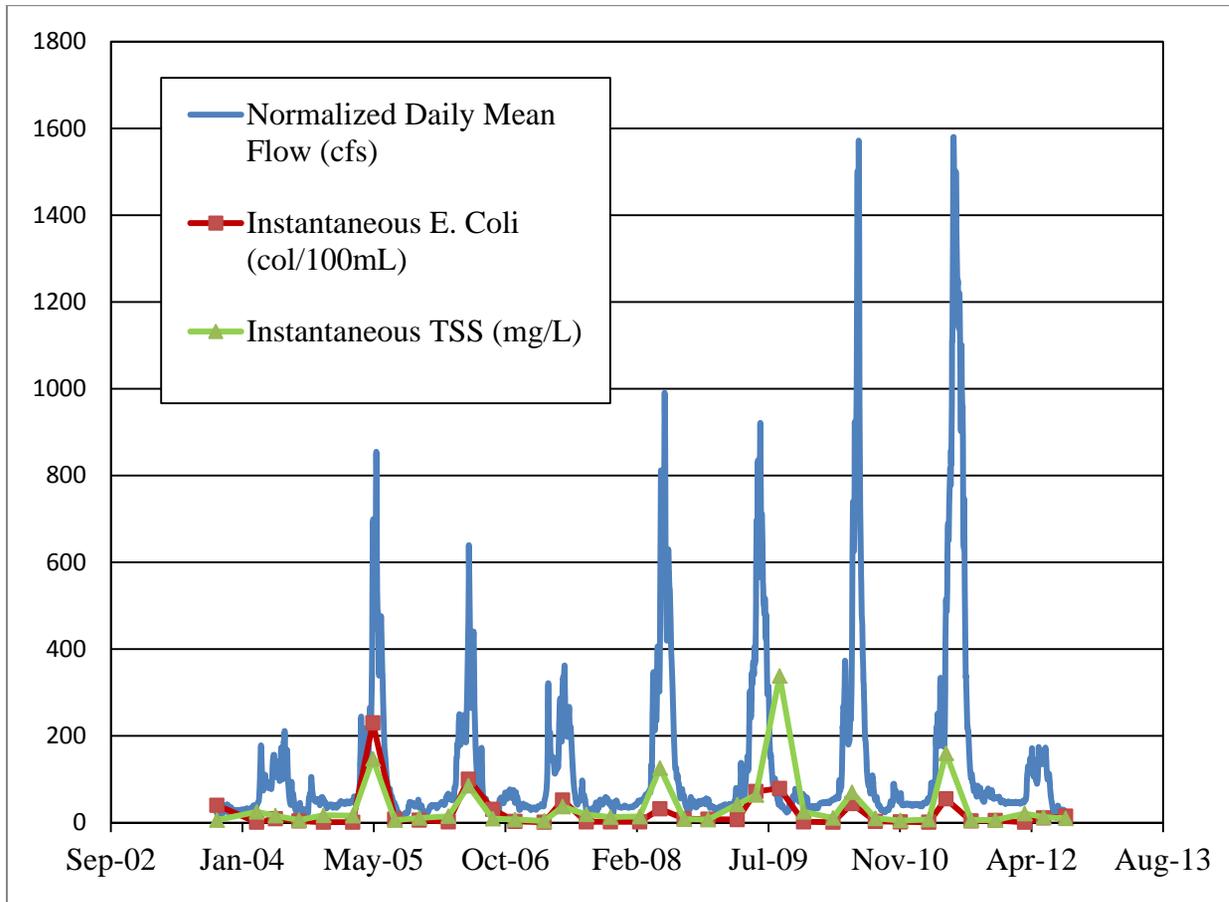


Figure 1b. 2001-2012 WY DEQ, Average flow, E. Coli, and Total Suspended Solids (TSS) at Sinclair USGS Gauge.

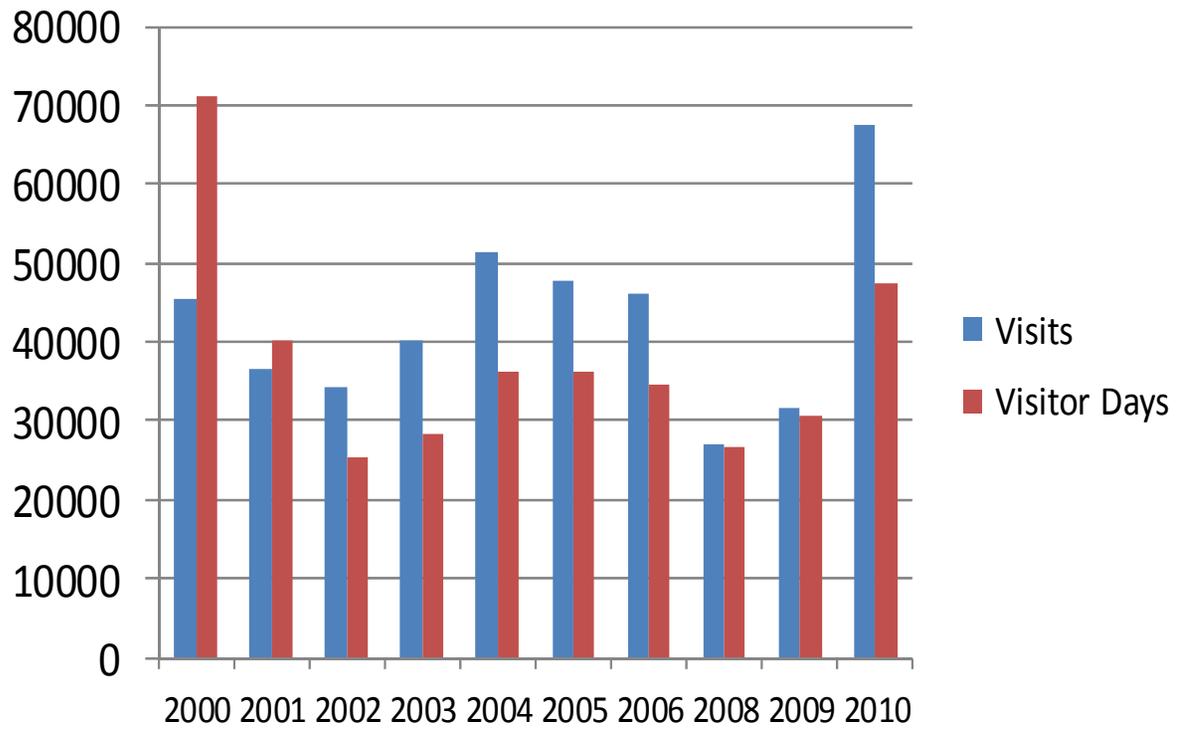


Figure 2. BLM North Platte River SRMA Visits & Visitor Days 2000-2010

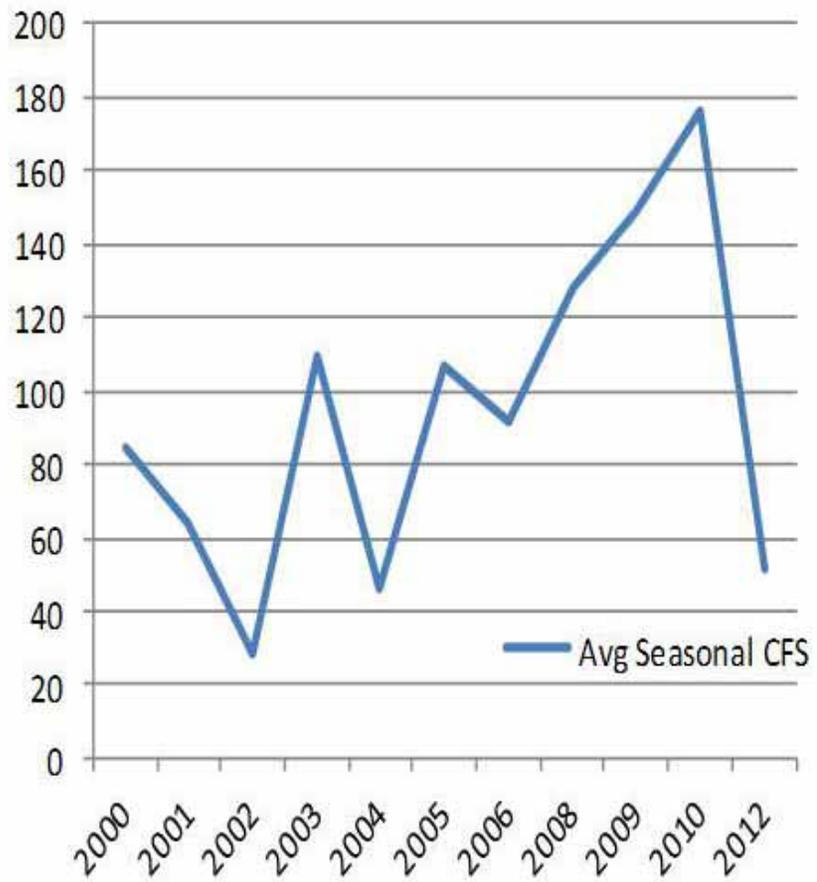


Figure 3. 2000-2012 USGS Average Seasonal CFS – Brush Cr. Gauge

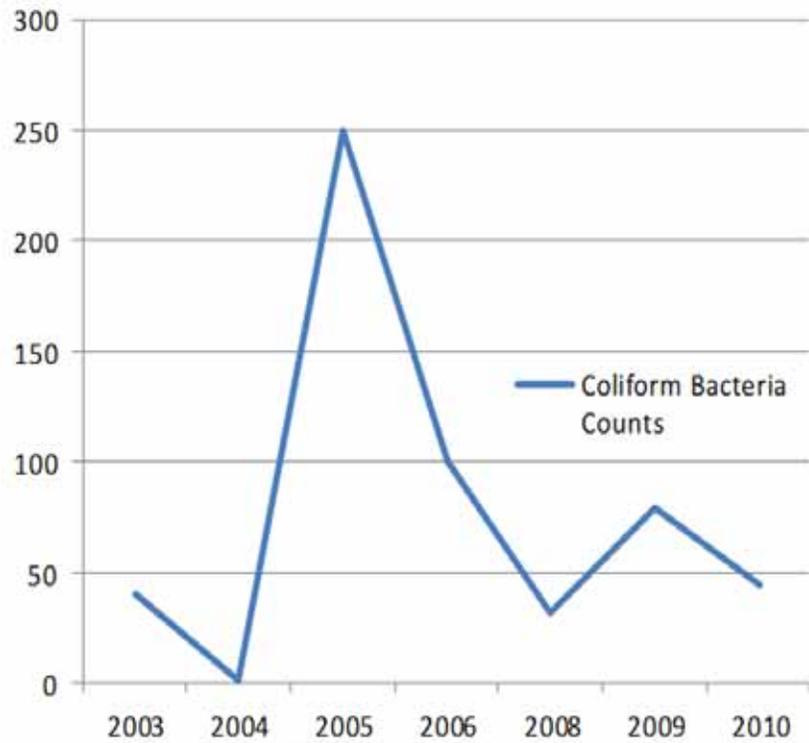


Figure 4. WY DEQ Fecal Coliform Bacteria Counts, USGS Sinclair Monitoring Station

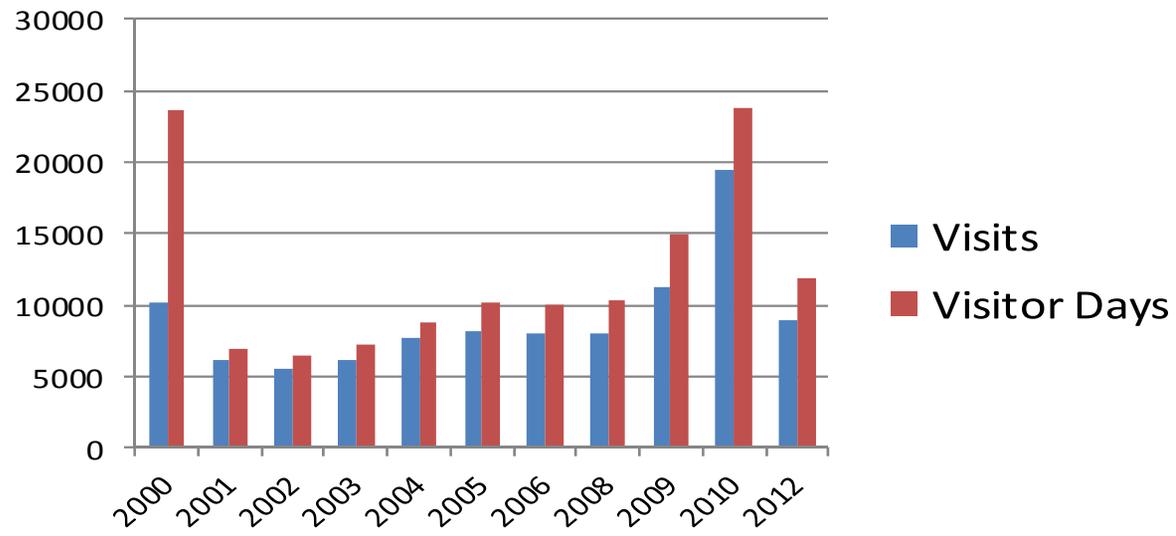


Figure 5. 2000-2012 BLM Visits and Visitor Days at Bennett Peak Campground

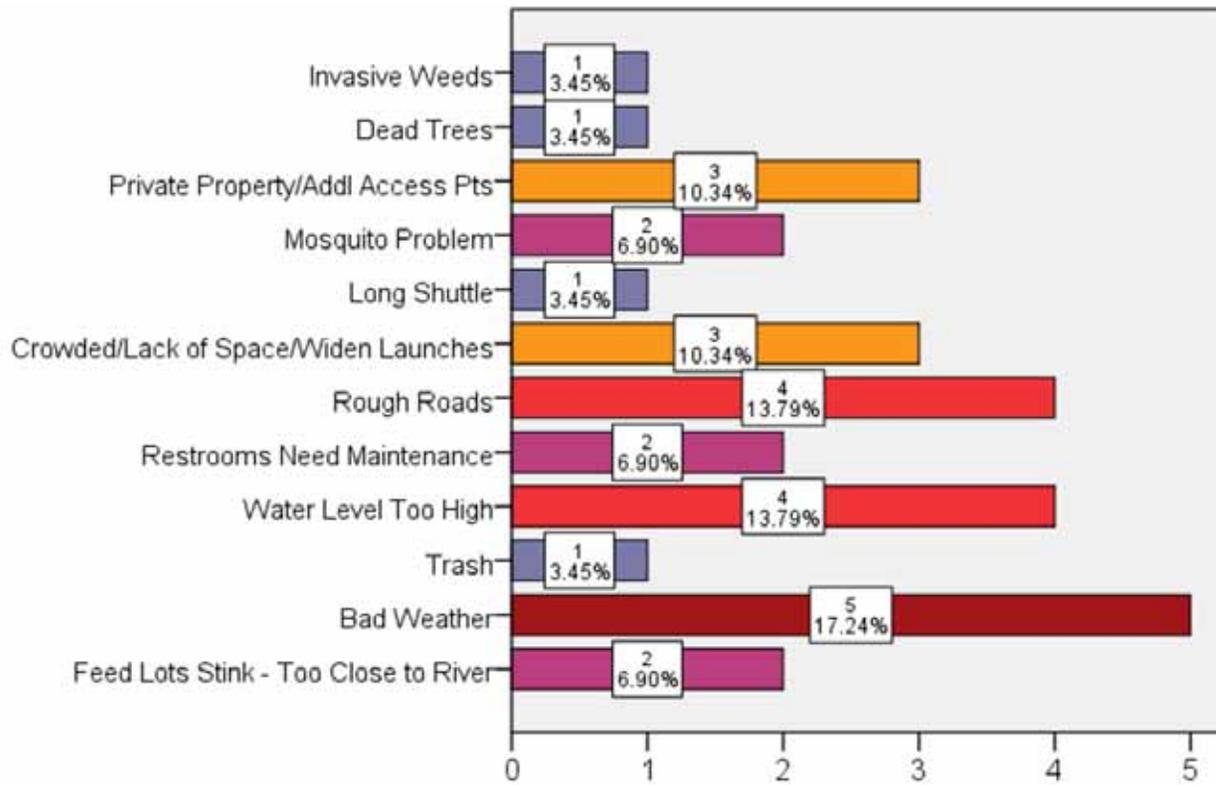


Figure 6. BLM 2009-2010 Survey Results. Visitor Reported Factors that Detracted from Trip Quality at Bennett Peak Campground



Photo 1: Bennett Peak Boat Ramp Parking Lot - Peak Use Weekend



Photo 2: Bennett Peak Boat Ramp looking south toward proposed expansion area in the Preferred Alternative.



Photo 3: Bennett Peak Boat Ramp, Proposed Expansion Area is to the right, Preferred Alternative.



Photo 4: Bennett Peak Boat Ramp Round-About Proposed for Removal, Alternative 1



Photo 5: Bennett Peak Campground, Proposed Parking Area, Preferred Alternative.



Photo 6: Bennett Peak Campground, Proposed Parking Lot, Alternative 1 (Simulation)



Photo 7: Corral Creek Campground, Proposed river access on existing two-track,  
Preferred Alternative



Photo 8: Corral Creek Campground, Proposed river access on existing two-track, Preferred Alternative



Photo 9: Corral Creek, Proposed Canoe Slide Opportunity, Alternative 2



Photo 10: Corral Creek, Potential Canoe Slide Opportunity, Alternative 2



Photo 11: Prospect Road. Two-track currently being maintained by outfitters.

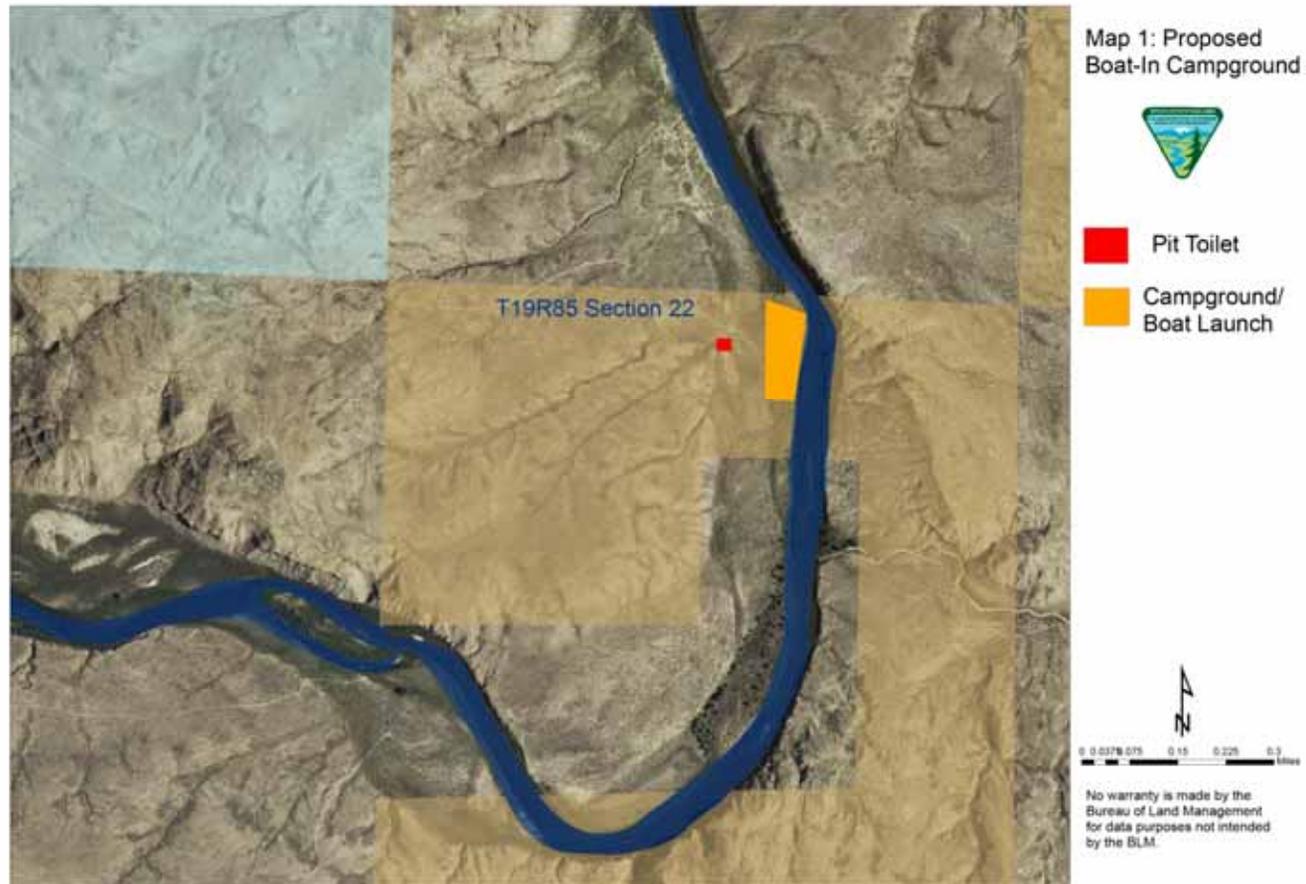


Photo 12: Prospect Road Boat Launch, turnaround widened here in the Preferred Alternative

## XV. Appendix B: Map of Preferred Alternative at Bennett Peak Campground



## XVI. Appendix C: Potential Future Projects Pending NEPA Analysis





Map 3: Proposed Parking, Two-Track Improvement, & Boat Ramp at Corral Creek



-  Parking Area
-  Boat Ramp
-  Tent Sites
-  Improved Two-Track & Turnaround



0 0.00420005 0.017 0.034 0.051 0.068 Miles

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for data purposes not intended by the BLM.



Map 4a: Proposed Improvements at Prospect Access



- Campsite
- Additional Parking
- Passing Pull-off
- Reroute of Two-Track & Turnaround



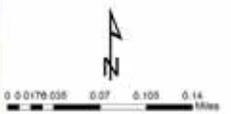
No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for data purposes not intended by the BLM.



Map 4b: Proposed Improvements at Prospect Access



Reroute of Prospect Creek Rd



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for data purposes not intended by the BLM.



Map 5a: Proposed Road Improvements at Big Creek Access



- Proposed Action: Big Creek Access Route
- Alternative 1: Improvement of Existing Access Route to F.S. 211

- Surface Ownership**
- Bureau of Land Management
  - Bureau of Reclamation
  - Department of Defense
  - Fish & Wildlife
  - Forest Service
  - Private
  - State
  - Water



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for data purposes not intended by the BLM.



Map 5b: Proposed Boat Ramp & Parking Areas at Big Creek Access



- Improved Two-Track & Roundabout
- Parking Areas
- Boat Launch



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management for data purposes not intended by the BLM.

## **XVII. Appendix D: Reclamation Plan for Bennett Peak Campground**

### **Site description**

This reclamation plan is being prepared in response to the proposed boat ramp extension and parking area expansion at the Bennett Peak Campground. The Bennett Peak Campground is a BLM; RFO managed recreation facility located in T.15N R.82W Sec.15 of Carbon County, Wyo. The main uses at Bennett Peak Campground include: camping, fishing, floating the river and other recreational activities. The proposed boat ramp extension is located on the east bank of the North Platte River which has a slight slope. The area receives an average of 12 inches per year of precipitation (average from years 1895 to 2012) and has a five year average of 11.5 inches. The project area is located within the USDA plant hardiness Zone 5a (PRISM Climate Group).

### **Management of waste materials**

The only waste material anticipated is trash. Trash will be placed into lined containers present at the site and disposed of in an authorized disposal facility. No waste material will be buried at the location.

### **Subsurface integrity and eliminate sources of ground and surface water contamination**

This project does not affect the subsurface integrity of any aquifers. Proper surface erosion control will be applied to the project as needed.

### **Re-establish slope stability, surface stability, and desired topography**

This project will be a long term disturbance. The parking area expansion is naturally level and vegetated; existing sagebrush will be brush hogged, leaving the mulch to protect the soil surface. The slope at the extended boat ramp will not be adjusted. Existing herbaceous vegetation will be left in place to maintain surface stability around the boat ramp extension. If needed, the BLM will implement erosion control measures to reduce potential sedimentation to the river.

### **Reconstruct and stabilize water courses and drainage features**

The extended boat ramp into the North Platte River will armor the river bank and will be low profile so that the natural flow of the river is maintained. This project will not alter the existing profile of the bank.

## **Maintain the biological, chemical and physical integrity of the topsoil and subsoil**

This project has been designed to minimize the level of surface disturbance. If needed, the extended parking area will be inter-seeded to stabilize the soil. The area exposed for access to the extended boat ramp will be surfaced, if necessary, to reduce erosion. No topsoil is planned to be salvaged for this project.

## **Prepare site for re-vegetation**

Bare areas next to the ramp that need erosion control will have the appropriate BMPs installed and will be raked.

## **Establish a desired self-perpetuating native plant community**

If any disturbances require stabilization, broadcast seeding with native species will occur. The seed mix will be selected at that time. The topsoil will be raked and then seed will be broadcast by a handheld broadcaster. The soil will then be raked again to cover the seeds and allow for better seed to soil contact, and to prevent the seed from blowing away or being exposed to birds and rodents.

## **Reestablish a complementary visual composition**

Visual composition will not be restored as the areas will be used for parking and as a boat ramp for the long term.

## **Manage invasive plants**

The Bennett Peak Campground currently has several invasive species present: Canada thistle, cheat grass, leafy spurge, musk thistle, and spotted knapweed. The noxious species have been treated and will continue to be controlled by the RFO.

The new disturbances proposed by the expanded boat ramp and the extended parking area will be monitored for invasive species annually.

Noxious species will be controlled using an integrated management approach. This may include manual removal, chemical treatment, or other appropriate management techniques depending upon the species.

## **Reclamation monitoring**

The table below represents the monitoring form that can be used to evaluate the site:

**Modified from Table A36-1 in the Rawlins RMP, Record of Decision, Appendix 36.**

<b>General</b>	Project Name
	Qtr/Qtr Sec, T, R, County, State
<b>Disturbance</b>	Disturbance Dates
<b>Reclamation</b>	Area (Acres or Square Feet)
<b>Seeding</b>	Seeding Date
	Seeding
	Seeding Method (Drill, Broadcast, Depths)
	Copy of Seed Tag (Species %, Purity %, Germination %)
	Area Seeded (Acres or Square Feet)
<b>Other</b>	Soil Amendments Used (Describe)
	Mulching/Erosion Netting/Tackifier
<b>Weeds</b>	Type(s) of Weed Treated
	Weed Contractor Name
	Contractor License #
	Weed Treatment Date
	Weed Treatment Type (Chemical, Mechanical)
	Chemicals Used and Rates Applied
	Area Treated (Acres or Square Feet) (GIS Extent and Location)
<b>Inspection</b>	Inspector's Name
	Inspection Date
	Time After Seeding
	Seedlings/Square Feet Growing
	% and Extent of Bare Soil
	% Ground Cover (Describe)
	% Desirable Species (Describe)
	% Noxious/Invasive Weeds (Describe)
	Erosion Features Present? (Describe)
	Evidence of Livestock Grazing (Describe)
Reclamation Successful (Yes/No)	
<b>Monitoring</b>	Permanent Reference Point
	Reference Photos
	Close-Up Photos
<b>Future Management Prescription</b>	Reseeding
	Weed Control Needed
	Erosion control Needed
	Grazing/Predation Issues
	Other Cultural or Mechanical Needs

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