

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzes the proposed action to revise the existing Platte River land use plan (i.e., Resource Management Plan [RMP]) for the Casper, Wyoming, planning area. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires developing, maintaining, and, as appropriate, revising land use plans for public lands. The purpose, or goal, of the land use plan is to ensure lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are managed in accordance with the FLPMA and the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

Revising an existing land use plan is a major federal action for the BLM. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, requires federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major federal actions; thus, this Draft EIS/RMP is a combined document. The Draft EIS analyzes the impacts of five alternative RMPs for the planning area, including the No Action Alternative and agency Preferred Alternative. The No Action Alternative reflects current management (the existing plan). Formerly referred to as the Platte River Resource Area, the revised plan currently is titled and referred to as the Casper RMP.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Within the Casper planning area, the BLM manages approximately 1.4-million acres of BLM-administered public land surface and 4.7-million acres of federal mineral estate. Since 1985, the existing plan has served as the framework for managing these BLM-administered lands; however, the existing plan has undergone more than 50 maintenance actions, including updates and amendments, and is in need of revision. In the 20 years since the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed in July 1985 for the existing plan, new data have become available, new policies established, and old policies revised. This, along with emerging issues and changing circumstances, resulted in the need for revision. This new version will address the changing needs of the planning area and select a management strategy that best achieves a combination of the following:

- Employing a community-based planning approach and complying with applicable tribal, federal, and state laws, standards, and implementation plans, as well as BLM policies and regulations
- Establishing goals and objectives (desired outcomes) for managing resources and resource uses according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield
- Identifying land use plan decisions to guide future land-management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions
- Identifying management actions and allowable uses anticipated to achieve the established goals and objectives and reach desired outcomes
- Providing comprehensive management direction by making land use decisions for all appropriate resources and resource uses administered by the BLM Casper Field Office
- Recognizing the Nation's needs for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber, and incorporating requirements of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act Reauthorization, the Energy Policy Act, the National Fire Plan, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (USC 2003), and the Healthy Forest Initiative.
- Retaining flexibility to adapt to new and emerging issues and opportunities and providing for adjustments to decisions over time based on new information and monitoring
- Striving to be compatible with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, state, tribal, and federal agencies and consistent with federal law, regulations, and BLM policy.

PLANNING ISSUES AND CRITERIA

Planning issues identified through the scoping process and other public outreach efforts focus on conflicts among resources and resource uses. Major issues described and analyzed in the EIS include the following:

Energy and Mineral Resources

- What areas are suitable or not suitable for energy and mineral resource development?
- What level of development should be allowed in areas suitable for energy and mineral resource development?

Vegetation and Habitat Management

- How should soil, water, and vegetation be managed to reduce fuel loads, achieve forest health and healthy rangelands while providing for livestock grazing and fish and wildlife habitat?
- How should special status species conservation strategies be applied given BLM's requirement for multiple use management and sustained yield? How will these strategies affect other public land resources?

Land Ownership Adjustments, Access and Transportation

- What land adjustments are necessary to improve access and management of public lands?
- How should travel be managed to provide access for recreation, commercial uses, and general enjoyment of the public lands while protecting cultural and natural resources?

Special Designations

- What areas, if any, contain unique or sensitive resources requiring special management?

Planning criteria are the standards, rules, and guidelines that help direct the RMP planning process. In conjunction with planning issues, planning criteria ensure the planning process is focused and incorporates appropriate analyses. Planning criteria for the Casper RMP revision also apply to development of the final RMP and are summarized below.

- Address all BLM-administered public lands in the planning area.
- Recognize valid existing rights.
- Comply with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and all applicable laws, regulations, policy, and guidance.
- Be collaborative and multi-jurisdictional in nature and complementary to BLM's planning jurisdictions and adjoining properties within the boundaries described by law and regulation.
- Consider a reasonable range of alternatives that reflects the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.
- Consider current scientific information, research, new technologies, and the results of resource assessments, monitoring, and coordination.
- Apply the Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands to all activities and provide for public safety and welfare relative to fire, hazardous materials, and abandoned mine lands.
- Consider current and potential future uses of the public lands through the development of reasonable foreseeable future development and activity scenarios based on historical, existing, and projected levels of use.
- Coordinate with tribes to identify sites, areas, and objects important to their cultural and religious heritages.

OVERVIEW OF ALTERNATIVES

The BLM conducted a series of workshops with an Interdisciplinary (ID) Team comprising BLM specialists and local, state, and federal cooperating agencies. The BLM formulated three alternatives (B, C, and D) reflecting a range of resource use and conservation. Following analysis of these three alternatives, the ID Team provided recommendations for selecting the Preferred Alternative—Alternative E. The Preferred Alternative indicates the agency’s preliminary preference at this stage in the planning process and does not represent a final BLM decision.

Including the No Action Alternative (Alternative A), the five alternatives analyzed in this Draft EIS represent differing approaches to managing resources and resource uses in the planning area. Each alternative comprises two categories of land use planning decisions: (1) desired outcomes (goals and objectives) and (2) allowable uses and management actions.

Goals and objectives provide overarching direction for BLM actions in meeting the agency’s legal, regulatory, policy, and strategic requirements. Goals are broad statements of desired outcome, but generally are unmeasurable. Objectives are more specific statements of a desired outcome that may include a measurable component. Objectives generally are anticipated to achieve the stated goals.

Allowable uses and management actions are anticipated to achieve the desired outcomes (goals and objectives). Management actions are proactive measures or limitations intended to guide BLM activities in the planning area. Allowable uses are a category of land use decisions that identify where specific land uses are allowed, restricted, or prohibited on BLM-administered surface lands and federal mineral estate in the planning area. Alternatives may include specific management actions to meet goals and objectives and may exclude certain land uses to protect resource values.

For each alternative, the BLM predicted actions and associated surface disturbance acreage for each resource over the life of the plan. For example, for livestock grazing, the BLM predicted the number of infrastructure developments (e.g., springs, wells, pits, reservoirs, fences, and pipelines) and estimated surface disturbance acreage for each alternative. For oil and gas, the BLM predicted the number of wells and estimated acres of surface disturbance for each alternative, as well as for the unconstrained (baseline) scenario. These predicted actions, allowable uses, and management actions form the basis for the impact analysis of alternatives described in Chapter 4. The four Action Alternatives and the No Action Alternative are described in detail in Chapter 2 and summarized in the following section.

Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

The No Action Alternative represents a continuation of current management and provides a baseline from which to identify potential environmental consequences when compared to the Action Alternatives. The No Action Alternative describes current resource and land management direction as represented in the 1985 Platte River Resource Area (existing plan) and associated maintenance actions, updates, and amendments. The current designation of two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) (Jackson Canyon and Salt Creek Hazardous Area) does not change and no Special Management Areas (SMAs) are identified if the No Action Alternative is selected. Current management does not actively address habitat fragmentation in the planning area and generally addresses resource conflicts on a case-by-case basis. The No Action Alternative results in no revision to the existing plan at this time and does not meet the purpose and need of the proposed action.

Alternative B

Alternative B emphasizes conservation of physical, biological, and heritage resources with major constraints on resource uses. Relative to all alternatives, Alternative B conserves the most land area for physical, biological, and heritage resources and places the most restrictions on resource uses. For example, Alternative B designates the highest number of ACECs (seven); manages the largest area of

intact, contiguous blocks of native vegetation to minimize habitat fragmentation; includes the most restrictions on activities relative to protecting highly erosive soils; and is the most restrictive to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, livestock grazing, wind-energy development, and leasing for oil and gas and other solid leasable minerals. Alternative B also establishes the Bates Hole SMA, with an emphasis on the greater sage-grouse and watershed values, and the Sand Hills SMA, with an emphasis on sensitive soils.

Alternative C

Alternative C provides physical, biological, and heritage resource conservation similar to current management but with additional restrictions. Alternative C generally falls between alternatives B and D relative to conservation of physical, biological, and heritage resources and restrictions on resource uses. Alternative C designates five ACECs and establishes the most SMAs (six). Two of the SMAs (Salt Creek and Wind River Basin) have an emphasis of oil and gas development. However, Alternative C establishes the most acreage for the proposed South Bighorns/Red Wall SMA and includes management of intact, contiguous blocks of native vegetation, although over a smaller area than Alternative B. Relative to current management of highly erosive soils, Alternative C also places more restrictions on OHV use, livestock grazing, wind-energy and ROW development, and leasing for oil and gas and other solid leasable minerals.

Alternative D

Alternative D emphasizes resource uses (e.g., energy and minerals, grazing, recreation, and forest products) while lessening some resource conservation measures relative to current management. Alternative D retains the existing Jackson Canyon ACEC, eliminates the Salt Creek Hazardous ACEC, establishes two SMAs (Salt Creek and Wind River Basin) with an emphasis on oil and gas development, and establishes one SMA (Alcova Fossil Area) for paleontological resources. Alternative D does not manage intact, contiguous blocks of native vegetation to minimize habitat fragmentation and conserves the least land area for physical, biological, and heritage resources relative to all alternatives. Relative to current management, Alternative D reduces restrictions on OHV use, livestock grazing, and leasing for oil and gas and other solid leasable minerals.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

At this stage in the planning process, Alternative E is the BLM's Preferred Alternative because it reflects the best combination of decisions to achieve BLM goals and policies, meet the purpose and need, address the major planning issues, and consider the recommendations of cooperating agencies and BLM specialists.

Alternative E retains the existing Jackson Canyon ACEC, eliminates the Salt Creek Hazardous ACEC, and establishes the Alcova Fossil Area ACEC for paleontological resources. Alternative E also establishes three SMAs (Bates Hole, Sand Hills, and South Bighorns/Red Wall) with an emphasis on resource conservation and two SMAs (Salt Creek and Wind River Basin) with an emphasis on oil and gas development. Alternative E manages intact, contiguous blocks of native vegetation to minimize habitat fragmentation, although over a smaller area than alternatives B or C. Relative to current management, Alternative E places more restrictions on OHV use, livestock grazing, wind-energy development, and leasing for oil and gas and other solid leasable minerals.

In addition to the five alternatives analyzed in this Draft EIS, several alternatives were considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis because they:

1. Did not fulfill requirements of FLPMA or other existing laws or regulations
2. Did not meet the purpose and need

3. Were already part of an existing plan, policy, requirement, or administrative function
4. Did not fall within the limits of the planning criteria.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Environmental consequences potentially resulting from each of the five alternatives were analyzed relative to meaningful direct, indirect, short-term, and long-term impacts. The impacts of each alternative are summarized in Table 2-4 and described in more detail in Chapter 4. Also included in Chapter 4 is a discussion of cumulative impacts that could result from the incremental impact of each alternative when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

As the lead federal agency for the RMP revision, the BLM invited local, state, and federal agencies to participate as cooperating agencies. Converse, Natrona, and Platte County Commissioners, as well as five local conservation districts, agreed to participate as cooperating agencies in the RMP revision. The State of Wyoming, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Park Service are cooperating agencies as well. To date, the BLM and cooperating agencies have participated in three workshops to formulate alternatives and multiple meetings to keep cooperating agencies informed and to solicit their input. Comments from cooperating agencies on previous administrative drafts were considered in development of this Draft EIS.

COORDINATION WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

The BLM also invited tribes to participate as cooperating agencies and conducted ongoing coordination throughout the RMP revision process. Coordination included four letters, multiple phone calls, and face-to-face meetings with interested tribe representatives to identify places and issues of concern regarding the RMP revision.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The BLM issued a Notice of Intent (NOI), on June 20, 2003, indicating a revision of the existing plan and preparation of this EIS. Issuance of the NOI initiated a 5-month scoping period to solicit input from the public and interested agencies on the nature and extent of issues and impacts to be addressed in the Draft EIS. The BLM conducted four public scoping meetings in Wheatland, Torrington, Douglas, and Casper, Wyoming, during the 5-month scoping period to identify planning issues and introduce the public to the project and preliminary planning criteria. The BLM also established a project web site (<http://www.blm.gov/rmp/casper>) to keep the public informed about the RMP revision and to provide an ongoing method for public comment.

THE NEXT STEPS

This Draft EIS, now issued, provides 90 days for public comment. A series of four public hearings on this Draft EIS are scheduled during the 90-day comment period in Wheatland, Torrington, Douglas, and Casper, Wyoming. Following the 90-day public comment period, the BLM will prepare a Final EIS considering comments submitted. The Final EIS/Proposed RMP is scheduled for release in the summer of 2007 with a ROD scheduled for late 2007.

READER'S GUIDE TO THIS DOCUMENT

Volume 1

Chapter 1. Purpose and Need for Action. This chapter introduces the Draft EIS, describes the purpose and need to which BLM is responding, provides an overview of the BLM planning process, identifies planning issues and criteria, summarizes consultation and coordination, and identifies topics not addressed by this RMP revision.

Chapter 2. Resource Management Alternatives.

Chapter 2 describes how the five alternatives (A through E) were developed, the components and content of each alternative, and discusses the alternatives considered but eliminated from further consideration. It also presents a comparative summary of impacts of each alternative. Resource discussions in chapters 2, 3, and 4 are organized according to the following eight resource topics:

- 1000** Physical Resources—Air, Geology, Soil, and Water
- 2000** Mineral Resources—Locatable, Leasable, and Salable Minerals
- 3000** Fire Management and Ecology—Unplanned/Wildland Fire, Planned/Prescribed Fire, and Rehabilitation
- 4000** Biological Resources—Vegetation, Fish and Wildlife, and Special Status Species
- 5000** Heritage and Visual Resources—Cultural, Paleontological, and Visual
- 6000** Land Resources—Lands and Realty, Renewable Energy, ROW and Corridors, Transportation, OHV, Livestock Grazing, and Recreation
- 7000** Special Designations—ACECs, SMAs, National Back Country Byways, and NHTs and Other Historic Trails
- 8000** Socioeconomic Resources—Social and Economic Conditions, Health and Safety, Environmental Justice, and Tribal Treaty Rights.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment. This chapter describes the Casper planning area and the existing environmental conditions that could be impacted by the alternatives.

Chapter 4. Environmental Consequences. Chapter 4 forms the scientific and analytic basis for comparing environmental impacts of each alternative, including the No Action Alternative. Impacts generally are described in terms of direct or indirect and short-term or long-term, when applicable. Potential cumulative and unavoidable impacts and irreversible and irretrievable commitments also are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5. References. This chapter provides full citation information for all references cited within the document.

Chapter 6. List of Preparers. Chapter 6 presents the names and qualifications of the people responsible for preparing this EIS.

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Volume 2

Appendices. The appendices include documents that support existing resource conditions or situations, substantiate analyses, provide resource management guidance, explain processes, or provide information directly relevant or supporting conclusions in the RMP revision. Twenty-four appendices, labeled Appendix A through Appendix X, are included.

Glossary. The glossary defines select terms used throughout this document.

Maps. Maps depict the alternatives by resource. In hardcopy documents, maps can be found on a CD attached to the inside back cover of Volume 2. For CD versions of the document, maps are provided as a separate file on the CD. Electronic copies of the maps are also available on the RMP web site (<http://www.blm.gov/rmp/casper>).

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