

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Pinedale Field Office (PFO) administrative area is located in western Wyoming (see Map 1.1-1). The planning area for the Pinedale Resource Management Plan (RMP) is shown on Map 1.1-2. Within the planning area, BLM administers about 928,000 acres of public land surface and 1,144,000 acres of federal mineral estate in Sublette and Lincoln counties. Roughly 918,000 acres are federal surface and federal mineral estate. Map 1.1-2 shows the location, major features, and places and names within the Resource Management Plan Planning Area (RMPPA). See Table 1.1-1 for a complete summary of land and mineral ownership and administrative jurisdictions within the RMPPA.

The public lands and federal mineral estate within the Pinedale RMPPA boundary is the subject of this document. Lands within the PFO boundary that are administered by other federal agencies, such as lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the U.S. Air Force, are not subject to decisions made in the Pinedale Resource Management Plan (RMP). Public land in Teton County, Wyoming, is covered by the Snake River RMP and is not included in the Pinedale RMPPA.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR A REVISED PINEDALE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The PFO within BLM is responsible for preparing and modifying, when necessary, the RMP for the Pinedale RMPPA. An RMP is a set of comprehensive long-range decisions concerning the use and management of resources administered by the BLM. The RMP—

- Provides an overview of goals, objectives, and needs associated with public lands management
- Resolves multiple-use conflicts or issues associated with those requirements that drive the preparation of the RMP.

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the existing Pinedale RMP was signed on December 12, 1988. The revised RMP will replace the previous plan signed in 1988 and will provide guidance and direction for management of the planning area. The Pinedale planning area includes the following special management areas: two Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)—Scab Creek and Lake Mountain; two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)—Rock Creek and Beaver Creek; and three Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA)—Scab Creek, Upper Green River, and Boulder Lake. Major land uses in the planning area are recreation, wildlife habitat, oil and gas development, and livestock grazing.

Considerable changes within the PFO area have occurred since completion of the existing RMP (including RMP amendment and maintenance actions). Heightened public awareness, increase in demand for use of the lands, and increase in land use conflict

continue to challenge BLM's management goals and objectives. The PFO is facing a wide variety of issues affecting local communities, regional and state interests, and the management of natural resources. Therefore, the PFO is revising the RMP for the planning area.

1.3 PURPOSE AND USE OF THE MANAGEMENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Management Situation Analysis (MSA) provides information that describes the physical and biological characteristics and condition of the resources within a planning area and how these resources are being managed. An analysis of the resource conditions, capabilities, and effects of current management provides a reference for developing land use plans.

The MSA represents a critical early component of BLM's land use planning process. The land use planning process ultimately results in an RMP.

1.4 SYNOPSIS OF THE MAJOR PLANNING PROCESS STEPS

The BLM land use (or resource management plan) planning process, explained in 43 Code Federal Regulations (CFR) 1600, BLM 1601 Manual, and BLM Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1), falls within the framework of the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) of 1969 environmental analysis and decision-making process described in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations of 40 CFR 1500-1508, the Department of the Interior NEPA Manual (516 Departmental Manual [DM] 1-7), and the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1. Table 1.4-1 summarizes the planning steps. As noted in the table, public participation opportunities are provided throughout the process.

1.5 MANDATES AND AUTHORITIES FOR PREPARATION OF THE PINEDALE RMP/EIS

BLM's land use planning process (as described in 43 CFR 1600) intertwines requirements from two important laws:

- **Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976.** "The Secretary shall, with public involvement...develop, maintain, and when appropriate, revise land use plans." FLPMA sets the overall tone and policy concerning the management of BLM lands.
- **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.** "Utilize a systematic, interdisciplinary approach which will insure the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and environmental design arts in planning and in decision making which may have an effect on man's environment." Because the implementation of a new RMP could cause significant impacts, NEPA requires the analysis and disclosure of potential environmental impacts in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The planned process for revising the Pinedale RMP/EIS includes consideration of both FLPMA and NEPA. Other federal legislation has been enacted over the last 30 years to further establish a comprehensive environmental and land use-planning framework. A summary of the relevant federal statutes for the Pinedale RMP/EIS process is included in Appendix A.

1.6 CONSTRAINTS/CONSISTENCY REQUIREMENTS

BLM land use plans and amendments must be consistent with officially approved or adopted resource-related plans of Indian tribes, other federal agencies, and state and local governments to the extent practical. BLM land use plans must also be consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of FLPMA and other federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2 (a)).

If these other entities do not have officially approved or adopted resource-related plans, then BLM land use plans must, to the extent practical, be consistent with their officially approved and adopted resource-related policies and programs. This consistency will be accomplished so long as BLM land use plans are consistent with the policies, programs, and provisions of public land laws and regulations (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2 (b)).

Before BLM approves proposed land use plan decisions, the Governor(s) must have 60 days to identify inconsistencies between the proposed plan and state plans and programs and to provide written comments to the State Director. (BLM and the State may mutually agree on a shorter review period satisfactory to both.) If the Governor(s) does not respond within this period, it is assumed that the proposed land use plan decisions are consistent (see 43 CFR 1610.3-2 (e)).

1.7 PRELIMINARY PLANNING CRITERIA

Guidelines have been developed to assist in preparing the Pinedale RMP. These guidelines, or planning criteria, are the constraints or ground rules that guide and direct the planning review for and modification of the Pinedale RMP. The planning criteria serve to—

- Ensure that the planning effort follows and incorporates legal requirements, provides for management of all resource uses in the planning area, is focused on the issues, and is accomplished efficiently
- Identify the scope and parameters of the planning effort
- Inform the public of what to expect of the planning effort.

Planning criteria are based on standards prescribed by laws and regulations; guidance provided by the BLM Wyoming State Director; results of consultation and coordination with the public, other agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes; analysis of information pertinent to the planning area; public input; and professional judgment.

The planning criteria focus on the development of management options and alternatives, analysis of their effects, and selection of the Preferred Alternative and the Proposed RMP. Planning criteria applicable to the Pinedale RMP/EIS process are organized into several categories:

- General planning criteria
- Planning criteria for specific resource programs
- Planning criteria for developing alternatives
- Planning criteria for analyzing environmental consequences
- Planning criteria for selecting the preferred alternative
- Planning criteria for using the NEPA process to develop RMP planning and management decisions.

The planning criteria for modification of the RMP to date have been developed in enough detail to ensure that the process is tailored for addressing the identified resources issue and to avoid unnecessary data collection and analysis. The planning criteria for the Pinedale RMP revision process are listed in Appendix B. Additional planning criteria may be identified as the planning process progresses.

1.8 MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The process for developing an RMP/EIS begins with identifying issues. Issues express concerns, conflicts, and problems with the existing management of public lands. Frequently, issues are based on how land uses affect resources. Some issues are concerned with how land uses can affect other land uses, or how the protection of resources affects land uses. The following preliminary planning issues for the Pinedale RMP have been identified and are presented below with no emphasis on priority.

- **Development of Energy Resources and Minerals Related Issues.** Special attention is needed to address mineral development (e.g., oil/gas; coalbed methane; coal, solar, and wind energy) and related transportation network conflicts with other land and resource uses and values. Principal considerations include disruptive activities and human presence in fisheries habitat, big game (i.e., moose, elk, deer, and antelope), crucial habitat (crucial winter range and birthing areas), and other important wildlife species habitats (e.g., greater sage-grouse, mountain plovers, white-tailed prairie dog towns, and raptors); and on recreation values, forage uses, air quality, sensitive vegetation types, and sensitive watersheds. Areas where surface disturbing activities (e.g., mineral exploration and development activities, right-of-way construction activities) are suitable, not suitable, or should be restricted, need to be identified.
- **Land Tenure Adjustment.** Some parts of the PFO area are isolated and difficult (legally or physically) to access and manage. Land disposals and acquisitions could provide improved access and manageability of public lands.
- **Vegetation Management.** There are conflicting demands for consumptive and nonconsumptive uses of the vegetation resources in the planning area. The main issue is maintaining resource values and nonconsumptive uses while allowing for

consumptive uses. Resource values include vegetative cover; watershed protection; maintenance and enhancement of riparian areas; soil stabilization; and maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitat (particularly big game crucial winter range and habitat for candidate, sensitive, proposed, or threatened and endangered wildlife and vegetative species). Consumptive uses include livestock grazing, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, and vegetation removal by mineral development, rights-of-way construction, and other surface disturbing activities. Vegetation is also removed by wildlife foraging.

- **Recreation, Cultural Resources (Including National Historic Trails), and Paleontological Resources Management.** Certain resources and areas need protection, whereas others need to be considered for more public and recreational uses. OHV use can conflict with other land and resource uses and can cause damage to resources, including wildlife and watershed values and other recreation values. Principal considerations include providing for suitable and sufficient recreation uses and facilities (both dispersed and commercial), visual resource management direction, OHV use designations, management of paleontological resources, and management of cultural and historical resources. (Of particular concern is the need for protection of Congressionally designated National Historic Trails; other significant emigrant trails, such as the Lander Trail; and other historic transportation resources in the region, including prehistoric and historic Indian trails, early historic exploration trails, Expansion Era roads, and Native American respected places.) Visual intrusions along these trails and surrounding Native American respected places are also an issue.
- **Wildland/Urban Interface.** New demands are being placed on public lands as a result of accelerated growth in and around cities and towns in the planning area. Growth has changed the way communities relate to surrounding public lands and has changed the communities' expectations. The basic problem is providing for public land management along with increased demands for public land and resource uses. Principal considerations include providing for healthy air and water quality, preventing water source depletion, and preventing fragmentation of wildlife habitat. Considerations also include providing for development patterns, transportation and utility corridor planning, and demands for open space and recreational uses, land tenure adjustments, and wildland fire management.
- **Special Status Species Management.** Attention should be focused on addressing the management of special status species (threatened and endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive plant and animal species) and the interrelationships of these species with other resource uses and activities. Principal considerations include management of species habitats to ensure continued use by these species. Areas in which other resource activities may conflict with special status species and their habitat requirements need to be identified.
- **Water Quality.** Concerns exist with maintaining or improving water quality, and complying with state and federal requirements.

- **Special Management Designations.** There are unique areas or sensitive lands and resources in the planning area that meet the criteria for protection and management under special management designations. Two areas are designated as ACECs: Rock Creek and Beaver Creek. These Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) contain unique resources requiring special management attention. Three (Special Recreational Management Areas (SRMA)—Upper Green River, Boulder Lake, and Scab Creek—contain recreation values that require special management attention. Special management designations in the PFO area need to be reviewed for completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness.
- **Wildlife Habitat.** There are conflicts between the various land and resource uses and wildlife habitat. Wildlife habitat is a critical resource within the planning area. For example, much of the important and crucial big game winter range in this area is located on BLM-administered public land. Because quite often winter range is the limiting factor in this area, impacts to this habitat by other land and resource uses have the potential to affect wildlife populations both within and outside of the planning area. In addition to big game habitat, conflicts with habitat of other species such as sage grouse and non-game species are of concern in the planning area.