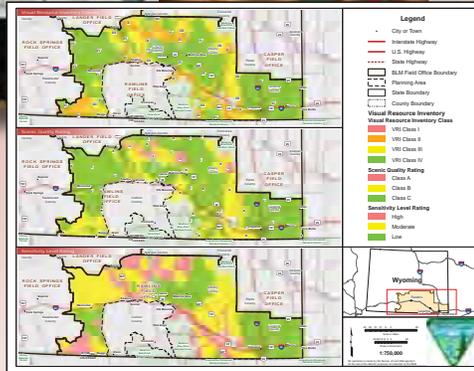
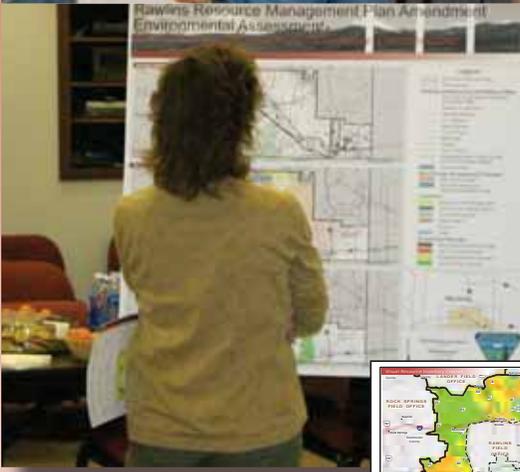


Rawlins Resource Management Plan Amendment Environmental Assessment Final Scoping Report



High Desert District - Rawlins Field Office, Wyoming



August 2012

Rawlins Resource Management Plan Amendment and Review of Visual Resource Management Class Decisions: **Scoping Summary Report** Final

Prepared for:
Bureau of Land Management
RFO, Wyoming
Rawlins Field Office

August 2012

List of Acronyms

ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CDNST	Continental Divide Scenic Trail
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DR	Decision Record
EA	Environmental Assessment
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
LSR	Little Snake River
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
RFO	Rawlins Field Office
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RMP-A	Resource Management Plan Amendment
ROD	Record of Decision
SER	Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins
SWCCD	Sweetwater County Conservation District
U.S.	United States
USFS	United States Forest Service
VRI	visual resource inventory
VRM	visual resource management
WSA	wilderness study area

Contents

1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 General Description of the Plan Amendment and Planning Area.....	1
1.2 Purpose of Scoping	3
2.0 Summary of Scoping Meetings and Comments	4
2.1 Notification	4
2.1.1 Consultation and Coordination with Federal, State, and Local Governments.....	4
2.1.2 Tribal Government-to-Government Consultation	5
2.2 Scoping Meetings	6
2.2.1 Public Scoping Meetings	6
2.2.2 Interested Agency Meeting.....	6
2.3 Summary of Scoping Comments	7
3.0 Identification of Issues.....	7
4.0 Alternative Formulation	9
5.0 Activities Following Scoping	10

List of Appendices

Appendix A Agency Notification

Appendix B Scoping Meeting Materials

Appendix C Comprehensive List of Scoping Comments

List of Tables

Table 1	Newspaper Publications	4
Table 2	Tribal Contact List	5
Table 3	Scoping Meetings.....	6
Table 4	Individual Comments by Category.....	9
Table 5	Opportunities for Participation in the Planning Process.....	11

List of Figures

Figure 1	Rawlins RMP Amendment Planning Area.....	2
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1.0 Introduction

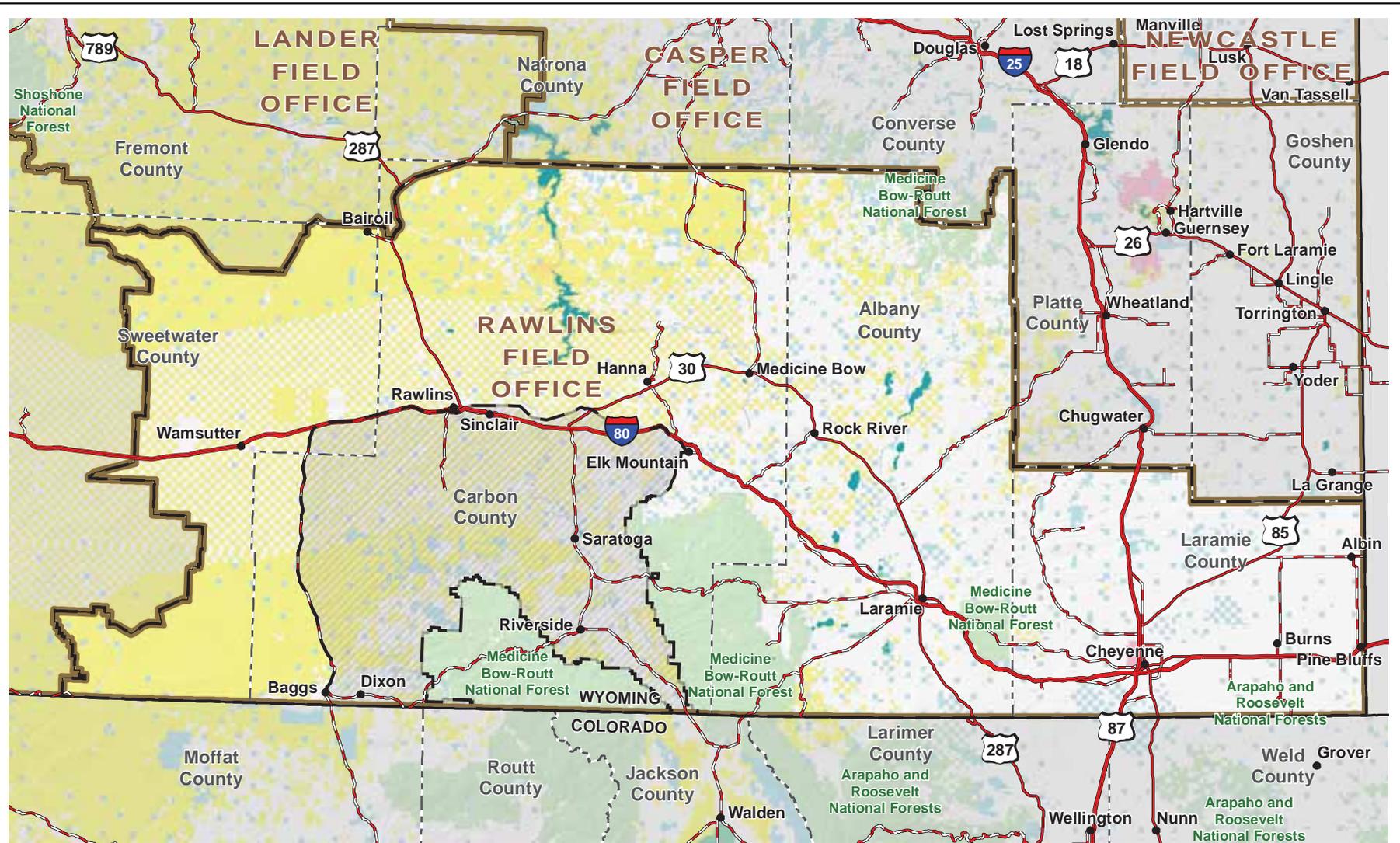
The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) in support of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment (RMP-A) for visual resource management (VRM) in the Rawlins Field Office (RFO), Wyoming. The BLM is the lead agency, and the local government and cooperating agencies will assist the BLM in preparation of the RMP amendment. One of the primary principles of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is open public participation throughout the decision-making process. The Scoping Summary Report provides an overview of the public scoping process, a summary of the scoping comments, and the issues and concerns identified during the scoping process.

1.1 General Description of the Plan Amendment and Planning Area

The Rawlins RMP provides management guidance and direction for approximately 3.5 million acres of BLM-administered public land surface and 4.5 million acres of BLM-administered federal mineral estate in Albany, Carbon, Laramie, and eastern Sweetwater counties. The Planning Area is depicted in **Figure 1**. Areas administered by other federal agencies within the Planning Area include the Medicine Bow National Forest, administered by the United States (U.S.) Forest Service (USFS); Pathfinder/Seminole Reservoirs administered by the Bureau of Reclamation; and a portion of the Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. BLM land use plan decisions do not apply to these areas, or state or private lands.

The need for a planning review of the Rawlins RMP was precipitated by a protest of proposed VRM classes presented in the 2008 Rawlins Proposed RMP/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and assertion of lack of compliance with BLM VRM policy in BLM VRM Manual 8400 and 8410. The protest of proposed VRM classes and policy compliance question resulted in a remand of the proposed visual resource management (VRM) class decisions and requirement to complete a visual resource inventory (VRI) for the RFO area. The planning review will encompass all public land within the RFO administrative area in Laramie, Albany, Carbon, and eastern Sweetwater counties, Wyoming, with the exception of public land analyzed for the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project area where VRM decisions currently are being considered for amendment in a separate effort (**Figure 1**).

The BLM is responsible for ensuring that the scenic values of the public lands it manages are considered before allowing uses that may have negative visual impacts. Scenic quality is one of the resource values specifically addressed and provided for in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Consideration of scenic quality is accomplished through the VRM program. The VRM program involves inventory of scenic values, establishment of management objectives for those values and evaluation of proposed activities to determine whether they conform to the management objectives. The BLM considers scenic quality, sensitivity levels, and distance zones during the VRI process. The BLM has completed a VRI for the RFO area (Otak, Inc. 2011). According to BLM Manual 8410, the VRI establishes VRI classes that serve two purposes: 1) an inventory tool that portrays the relative value of the visual resources; and 2) a management tool that portrays the visual management objectives. The objective of the planning review is to consider and incorporate new VRI data into the VRM planning process. The growing interest in wind energy development has increased the urgency to complete the Rawlins VRM planning review in a timely manner.



Legend		
Interstate Highway	Bureau of Land Management	US Department of Defense
U.S. Highway	Bureau of Reclamation	US Fish and Wildlife Service
State Highway	National Park Service	US Forest Service
BLM Field Office Boundary	Private	State
Planning Area	US Department of Energy	
CCSM Decision Area		

**Rawlins Field Office
RMP-A/EA**

**Figure 1
Rawlins Field Office
VRM Planning Area**

0 10 20 40 Miles
0 10 20 40 Kilometers

1:1,700,000

1.2 Purpose of Scoping

Scoping is the process of actively soliciting input from the public and other interested federal, state, tribal, and local government entities (also referred to as “agencies”). Information gained during scoping assists the BLM in identifying potential environmental issues and alternatives associated with the proposed RMP-A. The process provides a mechanism for determining the scope and the significant issues (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1501.7 and 40 CFR 1508.25) so that the EA can focus the analyses on areas of interest and concern. Therefore, public participation during the scoping period is a vital component to preparing a comprehensive and sound NEPA document. Scoping provides the public, Tribes, and agencies several opportunities for meaningful involvement in the decision-making process.

BLM’s overall scoping goal for the RMP-A is to engage a diverse group of public and agency participants in the NEPA process, solicit relevant input, and provide timely information throughout the duration of the process. The BLM developed planning issues in the Preparation Plan using public scoping and information gathered during the analysis of the existing management situation for the 2008 Rawlins RMP. These issues have been further refined based on input from BLM personnel, the public, and cooperating agencies during the scoping process for the RMP-A. The planning issues are described below:

1. Resolve the remand associated with the VRM classes in the 2008 Rawlins RMP Record of Decision (ROD). The remand was brought about by protests that the proposed VRM class decision was not based on a current VRI as required by BLM guidance.
2. Review areas recommended for designation as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) that were not adequately considered and documented in the 2008 Rawlins RMP process. The following areas will be reviewed: McCarty Canyon, areas surrounding the North Platte Reservoirs, Flat Top Mountain (including any habitat for Gibben’s penstemon), Ferris Dunes (including the large dune field, grass-dominated wetland communities, and any habitat for the kangaroo rat), and Ferris Mountain (including any habitat for Cedar Rim thistle).
3. Determine if the current VRM decisions for special designations/management areas need to be reviewed or changed and if current VRM class designations support special designations/management area decisions.
4. Review current VRM decisions to balance visual quality protection with existing decisions for energy and mineral development (i.e., oil and gas, coal, and wind energy) and related transportation networks.
5. Determine if the current VRM class designations limit management actions in the wildland/urban interface and if VRM class designations influence where urbanization/development would ultimately occur.
6. Consider how certain resources and areas will be protected while other resources and areas would be considered for more public recreation. Principal considerations include providing for suitable and sufficient recreation uses and facilities (both dispersed and commercial), VRM direction, off-highway vehicle road and trail designations.
7. Assess whether the current VRM class designations support national trails management, the viewshed along the national trails (the Overland Trail, the Cherokee Trail, and expansion era roads, as well as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail [CDNST]); and Native American traditional cultural properties.
8. Edge match the new VRM classes with the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre decision area and adjacent planning areas, including the BLM and USFS to the extent that is it reasonable and practicable.

2.0 Summary of Scoping Meetings and Comments

2.1 Notification

The initial step in the NEPA process is to notify the public and other government entities of the lead agency's intent to amend the current land use plan and prepare an EA by publishing the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*. The NOI for the Rawlins RMP-A/EA was published in the *Federal Register* on April 11, 2012, and included a project description and BLM contact information. Additionally, scoping post cards were mailed on April 16, 2012, to over 400 interested parties including federal, state, and local government agencies and tribes. The postcards described the scoping meetings and provided a website for access to additional project information. **Appendix A** lists the federal, state, and local government agencies that were notified. Additionally, the BLM prepared and issued a press release on April 12, 2012, announcing publication of the NOI and the initiation of the public scoping period.

Display advertisements were placed in local newspapers (**Table 1**) providing information about the upcoming public scoping meeting dates, times, and locations.

In addition, a project website was established to convey information to the public throughout the process. The project website is found at <http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/programs/Planning/rmps/rawlins/VRM.html>.

Table 1 Newspaper Publications

Newspaper	Dates Published
<i>Casper Star Tribune</i>	April 25 and April 29, 2012
<i>Rawlins Daily Times</i>	April 25, 2012
<i>Saratoga Sun</i>	April 25, 2012

2.1.1 Consultation and Coordination with Federal, State, and Local Governments

Specific regulations require the BLM to coordinate and consult with federal, state, and local agencies about the potential of the proposed plan amendment alternatives to affect sensitive resources. The coordination and consultation must occur in a timely manner and are required before any final decisions are made. Issues related to agency consultation may include biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomics, and land and water management. Biological resource consultations apply to the potential for activities to disturb sensitive species or habitats. Cultural resource consultations apply to the potential for activities to disturb important cultural or archaeological sites. The BLM has initiated these coordination and consultation activities through the scoping process.

To-date the following agencies will be participating as a cooperating agency on the RMP-A:

- State of Wyoming;
- City of Rawlins;
- Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins (SER) Conservation District;
- Little Snake River (LSR) Conservation District;
- Medicine Bow Conservation District;

- Sweetwater County Conservation District (SWCCD);
- Board of Carbon County Commissioners; and
- Board of Sweetwater County Commissioners.

2.1.2 Tribal Government-to-Government Consultation

Under Executive Order 13084, the BLM is required to establish regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with Native American tribal governments on development of regulatory policies and issuance of permits that could significantly or uniquely affect Tribal communities. On November 10, 2011, the BLM sent a letter to the eight Tribal Chairs described in **Table 2**, offering them cooperating agency status and notifying them of a cooperating agency meeting held December 6, 2011, at the RFO. Formal consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, Section 106 will occur throughout the amendment process.

Table 2 Tribal Contact List

State	Tribe	Chairman	Cultural Contact	Date Sent
Montana	Crow	Mr. Cedric Black Eagle Crow Tribal Council	Mr. Hubert Two Leggins Tribal Historic Preservation Officer	November 10, 2011
Montana	Northern Cheyenne	Mr. Leroy Spang, President Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council	Mr. Conrad Fisher Tribal Historic Preservation Officer	November 10, 2011
South Dakota	Cheyenne River Sioux	Mr. Kevin Keckler, Sr. Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council	Mr. Steve Vance Tribal Historic Preservation Officer	November 10, 2011
South Dakota	Oglala Sioux	Mr. John Yellow Bird Steele, President Oglala Sioux Tribal Council	Mr. Richard Iron Cloud Tribal Historic Preservation Officer	November 10, 2011
South Dakota	Rosebud Sioux	Mr. Rodney Bordeaux, President Rosebud Sioux Tribe	Mr. Russell Eagle Bear Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Rosebud Sioux Tribe	November 10, 2011
Utah	Northern Ute	Ms. Irene Cuch, Chairperson The Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation	Ms. Betsy Chapoose, Director Cultural Rights and Protection The Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation	November 10, 2011
Wyoming	Eastern Shoshone	Mr. Mike Lajeunesse, Chairman Eastern Shoshone Tribe of the Wind River Reservation	Mr. Wilfred Ferris Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Eastern Shoshone Tribe of the Wind River Reservation	November 10, 2011
Wyoming	Northern Arapaho	Mr. Jim Shakespeare, Chairman Northern Arapaho Tribe	Ms. Darlene Conrad Tribal Historic Preservation Officer	November 10, 2011

2.2 Scoping Meetings

2.2.1 Public Scoping Meetings

Public scoping meetings offer an opportunity for public involvement during the scoping process. The meetings are designed to promote information exchange about the proposed plan amendment and to gather public input. BLM hosted four public scoping meetings: one each in Rawlins, Baggs, Saratoga, and Laramie, Wyoming. The dates, locations, and number of public attendees at the scoping meetings are provided in **Table 3**.

Table 3 Scoping Meetings

Meeting Location	Meeting Date and Time	Number of Registered Attendees
Rawlins, Wyoming	April 30, 4-7 pm	14
Baggs, Wyoming	May 1, 4-7 pm	5
Saratoga, Wyoming	May 2, 4-7 pm	20
Laramie, Wyoming	May 3, 4-7 pm	11

The scoping meetings were conducted in an informal open house format to allow for an open exchange of information and opportunities for attendees to discuss questions and concerns with the BLM and cooperating agency representatives. Display boards showing various aspects of the proposed plan amendment (e.g., planning area, project schedule, VRI results, and VRM alternatives considerations) were presented to facilitate discussion. **Appendix B** contains the meeting handouts and posters and includes the following:

- Project Area Location
- NEPA Process Flow Chart
- VRI Class Descriptions and Terminology
- VRI/VRM Comparison Descriptions
- Planning Issues and Criteria Descriptions
- VRM Class Management Objectives
- Current VRM Class Assignments
- Checkerboard Land Ownership Descriptions
- Alternative Considerations Descriptions
- How to Submit Comments

2.2.2 Interested Agency Meeting

Prior to initiation of public scoping, local government agencies were invited to attend an interested agency meeting scheduled for December 6, 2011, with a follow-up meeting held on April 19, 2012, to invite their participation at the public scoping meetings. At the interested agency meeting on December 6, 2011, in the BLM RFO, the BLM provided presentations about visual resources and VRM management as well as cooperating agency training. The meeting allowed for information exchange among agency representatives, the BLM, and third party contractors involved in the planning process. Interested agency personnel that participated in the interested agency meeting included representatives from the State of Wyoming, Carbon County, Sweetwater County, the SER Conservation District, and the LSR Conservation District.

2.3 Summary of Scoping Comments

BLM received a total of 9,369 comment submittals (e.g., letter, comment form, email) of which 9,320 were form letters and 49 submittals contained unique comments. Of the comment submittals, 214 unique comments were identified. Most of the comments received were from private individuals and nongovernmental organizations.

Following the close of the public scoping period, comments were compiled and analyzed to identify issues and concerns. Each comment was identified, reviewed, and entered into an electronic database. The mailing list was updated as commenters requested to be added to the mailing list to ensure that all interested parties would receive information throughout the EA process. All comment submittals were added to the administrative record.

After the individual comments were compiled in the database, reports were generated categorizing the issues by topic (e.g., NEPA process, alternatives, cumulative impacts, etc.) and/or resource (e.g., wildlife, soils, visual, etc.). The summary reports were reviewed to identify data entry errors and eliminate duplication. A comprehensive list of scoping comments was sorted by topic and is presented in **Appendix C**. Some of the scoping comments were eliminated from consideration in the EA because they were not substantive or addressed issues outside of the scope of this process or the comment stated an opinion (e.g., I oppose/support this project).

3.0 Identification of Issues

Information gained during scoping assists the BLM in identifying the potential environmental issues and concerns associated with the plan amendment. As previously discussed, the process provides a mechanism for narrowing the scope of issues so that the EA can focus the analysis on areas of high interest and concern. A majority of the comments were related to impacts associated with preserving land uses, protecting scenic viewsheds, managing cultural and historic areas, and ACEC determination. The following summarizes the concerns expressed during scoping.

Cultural Resources

- Concern about impacts to historic trails, such as the Overland Trail, the Cherokee Trail, and expansion era roads.

Land Use Planning/NEPA

- Concern about preserving community use of multiples resources such as recreation, grazing, wildlife, etc. along with energy development on public lands.
- Portions of public lands should be protected such as historic trails; ACECs; wilderness study areas (WSAs); proposed WSAs; critical wildlife habitat; and landscapes of scenic, cultural, or recreational value.
- Concern about special designations management areas preventing continuation of the current uses or authorizations in an area that is rich in natural resources.
- Concern about checkerboard ownership in the area presenting a challenge for the BLM to manage appropriately.
- Concern about the RMP-A changing land use restrictions that would consequently change the land lease options.

- The plan amendment needs to consider the goals and principles of the Carbon County Land Use Plan.
- The EA should clearly disclose how designations will impact existing uses of the land.

Public Involvement

- Maps of the ACECs being reviewed should be made available to the public.
- The BLM needs to explain how new designations would impact existing leases.

Recreation

- Concern about scenic landscapes with recreational importance.
- Concern about possible changes to the VRM impacting the CDNST.
- The proposed VRM changes should consider the CDNST management plan.
- Concern about access to public lands for hunting.

Socioeconomic Resources

- Concern about the ability to use the land to support a healthy community.
- More restrictive VRM classes may restrict mineral development and consequently the county and state tax base may be negatively impacted.
- The BLM is required by law to ensure the socioeconomics are carefully analyzed in all possible regulatory changes.

Special Designation/Management Areas

- Concern about creation of any new or additional ACECs in the RFO.
- Concern about wildland designations, including ACECs, WSAs, Wilderness, and other special designations in checkerboard without considering it as a potential federal taking of property rights.
- The BLM must evaluate the North Platte Reservoirs, Flattop Mountain, Ferris Dunes, Ferris Mountain, and McCarty Canyon as potential ACECs.
- Concern about creation of new ACECs that would result in new constraints on oil and gas leasing and development in areas that contain opportunities for expansion or new exploration activities.
- The nomination of an ACEC should not change or prevent the management of public lands during the amendment process or after it.
- BLM should inventory and protect lands with wilderness characteristics.

Additional key concerns were related to the cumulative impacts analysis, alternatives selection process, visual classifications, and wildlife habitat. **Table 4** describes the total individual comments received and their associated categories.

Table 4 Individual Comments by Category

Category	Number of Comments
Alternatives	105
Cultural	1
Cumulative	1
Energy Development	15
Environmental Justice	1
Land Use	7
NEPA Process	7
Public involvement	3
Purpose and Need	2
Recreation	6
Socioeconomic	6
Special Designation Management Areas	46
Visual	3
Wildlife	6
Total	209

4.0 Alternative Formulation

One of the objectives of scoping is to identify alternatives or options for evaluation in the EA. Planning issues and criteria will be used to develop an array of potential alternatives for consideration by the BLM. Potential alternatives will then be screened to eliminate those that do not meet the project's defined purpose and need. Potential alternatives will then be further narrowed down to the options that are "feasible" and "reasonable" based on technical, economic, and environmental factors. Alternatives or options that are eliminated from detailed evaluation will be discussed in the EA including the reasons for elimination.

Below is a summary of areas of concern and interest that the BLM will evaluate further as part of the VRM alternatives in the RMP-A.

- Adobe Town WSA
- Adobe Town – BLM Dispersed Recreation Use Area outside the WSA
- Adobe Town – "Very Rare and Uncommon" State of Wyoming Designation
- Adobe Town – Other Surrounding Area
- Checkerboard land ownership areas
- Cherokee Trail and 5-mile viewshed
- Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and 5-mile viewshed

- Elk Mountain and surrounding areas
- Ferris Dunes
- Ferris Mountain
- Ferris Mountains proposed expansions (i.e., Black Canyon)
- Flattop Mountain (adjacent to SH 487 north of Medicine Bow)
- Flat Top Mountain (east of Adobe Town, northwest of Baggs)
- Grazing – permitted allotments
- Kinney Rim Citizen-Proposed Study Areas – North and South units
- Laramie River corridor
- Medicine Bow National Forest – fringes and foothills
- North Platte reservoirs
- North Platte River corridor
- Overland Historic Trail and 5-mile viewshed
- Pathfinder Reservoir and surrounding areas
- Pedro Mountains
- Powder Rim
- Seminoe Mountains
- Seminoe Reservoir and surrounding areas
- Shirley Basin
- VRM Class I and II areas
- Energy and transportation corridors
- Areas leased for oil and gas development
- Oil and gas high and moderate potential development areas

5.0 Activities Following Scoping

The NEPA process provides numerous opportunities for public input. Using information obtained during the public scoping period, the BLM will develop the VRM alternatives to be considered in a Draft RMP-A/EA. After the Draft RMP-A/EA is complete, the BLM will publish and distribute the document for public review and comment period. During the public review and comment period, the public can comment on key issues and the adequacy of the purpose and need, VRM alternatives, and impact analysis presented in the Draft RMP-A/EA. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be released to the public concurrently with the RMP-A/EA. A 30-day public protest period and a 60-day Governor's consistency review period would then begin. After the review periods end, the RMP Amendment is approved and a Decision Record (DR) is released. **Table 5** identifies additional opportunities and the anticipated schedule for the public to provide comments and participate in the process.

Table 5 Opportunities for Participation in the Planning Process

Steps in the Process	Anticipated Date
Scoping Period for the RMP-A	Summer 2012
Public Review and Comment of the Draft RMP-A/EA/FONSI	Summer 2013
Public Protest Period of the Proposed RMP-A/ EA/FONSI	Fall 2013
Resolution of Protest	Fall 2013
Issuance of DR, Amendment Approved	Winter 2013