



## ISSUE-DRIVEN PLANNING

The BLM planning regulations generally equate land use planning with problem solving or, in other words, with issue resolution. An issue may be defined as an opportunity, conflict, or problem regarding the use or management of public lands and resources. Obviously not all issues can be resolved through land use planning but may instead require changes in policy, budgets, or legislation.

As a practical matter, issue-driven planning means that only those aspects of current management direction that are felt to be at issue are examined through the formulation and evaluation of alternatives. Alternatives are not developed for those aspects of current management direction that are felt to be satisfactory.

## ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE HEADWATERS RMP

Eleven issues are addressed in this document. These issues were identified based on the judgment of planning team members, interagency consultation, public input, and review by BLM managers.

### Issue 1: Oil and Gas Leasing and Development

Special attention is needed in the Rocky Mountain Front to reduce the likelihood of future conflicts between oil and gas activities and other important

resource uses and values. The principal considerations in the Rocky Mountain Front include grizzly bear, wolf, bighorn sheep, mule deer, and elk habitats and social and economic values. Needed decisions include:

What public land should be made available for oil and gas leasing and development?

What special stipulations would be needed to accommodate such use?

### Issue 2: Grazing Allotment and Riparian Habitat Management

Management changes appear to be needed in some livestock grazing allotments in order to reduce conflicts between livestock grazing and other important resource uses and values. Such conflicts typically involve elk and mule deer habitat, riparian areas, and/or sensitive watersheds. In the Rocky Mountain Front, grizzly bear and bighorn sheep habitats are also resources of special concern. Riparian habitat is considered particularly important because of its relationship to watershed protection, water quality, fisheries habitat, and terrestrial wildlife habitat diversity. Resolution of this issue should satisfy the requirements of the court-ordered agreement between the BLM and the Natural Resource Defense Council, thus responding to litigation filed in 1973. Needed decisions include:

How should grazing allotments be categorized for selective management?

What allotment-specific objectives should be established to guide future grazing management decisions?

What allotments will require further activity planning, such as allotment management plans, and according to what priorities?

What short-term adjustments in livestock forage allocations may be needed to meet management objectives?

What condition objectives should be established for riparian habitat areas?

### **Issue 3: Wilderness Study Recommendations**

The Headwaters Resource Area includes two BLM Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and three other areas being studied for possible wilderness designation. All areas must be studied through the BLM planning process to determine whether they are to be recommended to Congress as suitable or nonsuitable for designation as wilderness. Primary considerations include the protection of wilderness values, manageability, and the value of the energy, mineral, range, timber, and recreation resources in the areas. Needed decisions include:

How much of the public land in each area should be recommended to Congress as suitable for wilderness designation?

How will each area be managed if it is not designated as wilderness?

### **Issue 4: Forest Management**

Special attention is needed to identify portions of the Headwaters Resource Area that are suitable for producing forest products and to assure that other important resource uses and values are adequately protected. Principal considerations include areas being studied for wilderness; grizzly bear, elk, moose, and mule deer habitat; recreation values; sensitive watersheds; land ownership patterns; and timber values. Needed decisions include:

What public land should be made available for the harvest of forest products?

What stipulations and support actions would be needed to accommodate such use?

What areas will require further activity planning, such as compartment management plans?

### **Issue 5: Land Ownership Adjustments**

Special attention is needed to identify those portions of the Headwaters Resource Area where land ownership adjustments are needed to achieve

more efficient management and utilization of public resources. Adjustments include exchanges, sales, transfers, and acquisition. Principal considerations include public resource values, current use, location, proximity to other agencies, manageability, and compatibility with adjacent land uses. Needed decisions include:

What public land should be disposed of; what land should be retained in public ownership; and what land requires further study?

### **Issue 6: Mineral Exploration and Development**

Special attention is needed to reduce, if possible, the potential for future impacts from mining on other important resource values in the Scratchgravel Hills. The BLM presently has only limited authority to regulate mining activity on mining claims. However, opportunities do exist to withdraw certain public land in the Scratchgravel Hills from additional mineral entry in order to protect groundwater quality, open-space values, and other important resource values. The principal considerations include mineral potential, water quality, visual resources, property values, and other open-space values. The decision needed is:

What public land, if any, should be withdrawn from mineral entry in order to protect groundwater quality, and open-space and other resource values?

### **Issue 7: Motorcycle Use Areas**

The demand for motorcycle race areas in the Helena Valley and the Limestone Hills appears to be high. Public land could be used to accommodate at least part of such demand. However, off-road motorcycle use in certain areas could result in unacceptable impacts to wildlife habitat, watershed values, other public land users, and adjacent residential and agricultural property owners. Special attention is needed to identify, if possible, appropriate motorcycle use areas on public land in the Helena Valley and the Limestone Hills. Primary considerations include sensitive watersheds, wildlife habitat, compatibility with adjoining land uses, and conflicts with other users. Specific areas of use or interest include the Scratchgravel Hills, Hilger Hills, Spokane Hills, Montana City, Marysville, and the Limestone Hills. The decision needed is:

How should public land be allocated for motorcycle racing?

**Issue 8: Motorized Vehicle Access**

In portions of the Limestone Hills and the Helena Valley, current levels of motorized vehicle use are resulting in conflicts with wildlife, range users, and adjacent landowners. Special attention is needed to identify appropriate levels of motorized access for these areas. Principal considerations include sensitive watersheds, wildlife habitat, compatibility with adjoining land uses, and conflicts with other users. Specific areas of concern include the Scratchgravel Hills, Hilger Hills, and Limestone Hills. The decision needed is:

What public land, if any, should be designated as restricted or closed to motorized vehicle access?

**Issue 9: Utility and Transportation Corridors**

Special attention is needed to assure that public land located in the logical path of linear energy and transportation facilities remains available for use and that such development does not result in undesirable impacts to other important resource uses and values. The primary areas of interest include the Sleeping Giant and Devils Kitchen areas, the Helena Valley, and Jefferson and western Broadwater counties. Principal considerations include visual and recreation resources, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness values, and compatibility with adjoining land uses. The decisions needed include:

What public land should be excluded from future routing of major utility and transportation corridors?

What public land should be avoided, if possible, during future routing of major utility and transportation corridors?

What special stipulations would be necessary if such avoidance areas were to be crossed?

What public land should remain available for future corridor development?

**Issue 10: Coal Leasing**

Special attention is needed to determine the suitability of federal coal for possible future consideration of coal leasing in the Great Falls Coal Field. This area has been subject to underground mining in the past and could be a source of fuel for a coal-fired power plant expected to be built in the Great Falls area during the next decade. Principal considerations include wildlife habitat, recreation values along the Smith River, and social and economic values. The decision needed is:

What portion of the Great Falls Coal Field should be made available for further consideration of coal leasing?

**Issue 11: Special Designations**

Public land and resources along the Rocky Mountain Front and in the Sleeping Giant area may warrant special management attention and public recognition through such special designations as Area of Critical Environmental Concern and Outstanding Natural Area. Principal considerations include the effects such designations would have in providing additional management emphasis for the protection of important surface values (primarily wildlife and recreation) and the possible loss of resource development opportunities. Needed decisions include:

What public land, if any, should be included within a special designation?

How should such areas be managed?

**PLANNING CRITERIA**

Planning criteria were developed and revised at several points during the planning process to assure that the planning steps focused on the issues. Planning criteria were used to guide resource inventories, to establish an outline for the management situation analysis, to aid in formulating alternatives, and to highlight factors to be considered in evaluating alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative.

The various criteria used are available for review at the Headwaters Resource Area office.

**Alternative Formulation Criteria**

The criteria developed for alternative formulation are as follows:

All alternatives will assume a continuation of oil and gas leasing as recommended in the Butte District Oil and Gas Environmental Assessment. However, the level of leasing and the kinds of stipulations required may be different.

All alternatives for the Rocky Mountain Front will provide at least minimum levels of protection for the habitat of threatened and endangered species, as required by the Endangered Species Act.

All alternatives will assume a continuation of existing interagency cooperative agreements.

## 1 — ISSUES AND CRITERIA

(Headwater Final)

At least one alternative will be developed that ensures that sufficient forage is available on grizzly bear spring/summer habitat and big-horn sheep winter/spring habitat to maintain or achieve at least a satisfactory habitat rating.

At least one alternative will be developed that strives to maintain or improve crucial wildlife habitat and to minimize disruptions to existing livestock operators.

At least one alternative will consider increasing livestock use in those allotments that have additional forage available after other consumptive and nonconsumptive needs have been met.

The no action alternative, which constitutes the existing management direction, will be considered the initial proposed action for livestock grazing in all allotments. The BLM's preferred alternative, which is based on rangeland monitoring and consultation with permittees, may differ from the initial proposed action (no action alternative).

Three alternatives will be considered in detail for each area being studied for wilderness—all wilderness, no wilderness, and no action.

All alternatives will, at a minimum, provide for maintaining riparian habitat in current condition.

At least one alternative will be developed with the objective of improving unsatisfactory riparian habitat conditions to satisfactory, to the extent practicable.

All alternatives will be reasonable and attainable.

At least one alternative will be developed which addresses the following land ownership adjustments:

- retention of public land in the Rocky Mountain Front and Limestone Hills,
- retention and/or acquisition of land in Jefferson and western Broadwater counties and the Sleeping Giant area, and
- disposal of scattered tracts with low resource values.

At least one alternative will consider a mineral withdrawal in the Scratchgravel Hills to reduce the potential for future impacts from mining on other resources.

At least one alternative will strive to balance the need for motorcycle race areas with protection of other resource uses and values.

At least one alternative will strive to balance the need for motorized access with protection of other resource uses and values.

At least one alternative will strive to balance the need for corridor development with the protection of other resources and values.

All alternatives will assume continued National Guard use at existing levels.

At least one alternative will be based on application of the coal unsuitability criteria, multiple use conflict resolution, and social and economic considerations regarding development of federal coal in the Great Falls Coal Field.

### Evaluation Criteria

The criteria that were used to evaluate alternatives are as follows:

- social and economic impacts;
- consistency with federal, state, and local plans;
- management efficiency or effectiveness;
- availability of public land for use and development, including:
  - oil and gas leasing,
  - livestock forage allocations,
  - locatable minerals,
  - timber harvest,
  - utility and transportation corridors, and
  - coal leasing;
- impacts on surface values:
  - wildlife habitat condition,
  - wilderness characteristics,
  - watershed/water quality,
  - range vegetation condition, and
  - recreation opportunities;
- compatibility with adjoining land uses; and
- implementation requirements.

