



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN
THE BLM
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
PLANNING PROCESS

SURVEY RESULTS

Prepared by
The Montana Consensus Council
Room 233, State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620
May 2001

Survey Results

In late March 2001, the Montana Consensus Council mailed a short survey to about 1,000 people interested in resource management planning (RMP) within the Dillon Field Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. The mailing list was provided by the BLM. The survey presented three questions designed to ask the public how they would like to provide input for the resource management planning process, and what public participation strategies would be most effective.

Out of 1,000 surveys mailed, a total of 263 people completed and returned surveys by April 30, 2001. This is a return rate of 26 percent. Another 136 (13.6 percent) were returned as undeliverable.

Some people did not complete all parts of the survey, while others added written comments. Most people gave their responses using the suggested three-point scale, where 1 is the most important, effective, or preferred, and 3 is the least. A few people, however, ranked the criteria from 1 to 8 (or 1 to 4 in the case of Question 3). Finally, a few people used check marks instead of numbers, with no indication of greater or lesser importance or effectiveness among items checked. For these responses, we assigned a value of “1” to all check marks.

This report summarizes results from the survey, which, we emphasize, is but the first step in designing the public participation component of the resource management planning process. The information reported here is by no means final or complete. Additional information will be gathered during the next “interview” phase of the process, as well as during other public scoping throughout the duration of the RMP process.

Question 1. What are your primary interests in BLM lands?

The first question on the survey asked people to rank eight interests and an “other” category as “most important,” “less important,” or “least important.” Each of the eight interests (as well as interests identified by respondents under “other”) was ranked as most important by at least some of the respondents. Table 1 lists the interests in order of the number of people who ranked them as most important. “Wildlife and fish” was ranked most important by 133 people (51 percent of respondents), and also received the fewest rankings as least important. The next three “most important” interests, in order, are livestock grazing, outdoor recreation, and watershed. Only one interest (cultural and historical resources) was ranked as most important by less than 20 percent of survey respondents (see Table 1).

Table 1. Ranking the Importance of Interests.

Interest	Number (and Percentage) of People Who Ranked this Interest as “Most Important”	Number (and Percentage) of People Who Ranked this Interest as “Least Important”
Wildlife & Fish	133 (51%)	12 (5%)
Livestock Grazing	120 (46%)	33 (13%)
Outdoor Recreation	113 (43%)	37 (14%)
Watershed	112 (43%)	18 (7%)
Wilderness	68 (26%)	71 (27%)
Oil, Gas, & Minerals	66 (25%)	51 (19%)
Timber	63 (24%)	39 (15%)
Cultural & Historical Resources	38 (14%)	56 (21%)
Other	37 (14%)	0

Respondents identified the following “other” interests, most of which were ranked as most important:

Educational use	Big game hunting	Multiple use
Balance	Sage grouse critical habitat	Trails
Public access	Land exchange policy	OHV access
Bird watching	Fishing	Paleontology
Mineral exploration	Snowmobile trails	Stop the let burn policy
Riparian management	Native ecosystems	Jobs/commodities
Utility resources	ACEC designations	Weed management
Minimizing resource damage	Water	Vegetation health
Balanced ecological management	Economic Stability	Sale of land/Subdivisions
Tax base and payments in lieu of taxes	Maximum benefits for Montanans	Post-fire timber management
Coordinated BLM/USFS management	Impacts to County finances, growth policy and local economic and environmental health	Interagency cooperative projects, e.g. walk in hunting, ecosystem plan, Blackfoot River planning, etc.

Question 2. What is the most effective way for you to provide input to the BLM for this planning and decision-making process?

The second question on the survey asked people to rank eight methods for providing public input and an “other” category as “most effective,” “somewhat effective,” or “least effective.” Each of the eight methods (as well as methods identified by respondents under “other”) was ranked as most effective by at least some of the respondents. Table 2 lists the methods in order of the number of people who ranked them as most effective. “Surveys and questionnaires” was ranked most effective by 132 people (50 percent of respondents). “Public meetings and hearings” was ranked most effective by 106 people (40 percent) and was ranked least effective by the fewest number of people. Four methods (submit your own alternative, open houses, advisory committees and the Internet) were ranked “most effective” by less than 20 percent of the respondents and ranked “least effective” by more than 20 percent of the respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Ranking the Importance of Public Participation Methods.

Method	Number (and Percentage) of People Who Ranked this Interest as “Most Effective”	Number (and Percentage) of People Who Ranked this Interest as “Least Effective”
Surveys and Questionnaires	132 (50%)	31 (12%)
Public Meetings or Hearings	106 (40%)	26 (10%)
Focus Groups or citizen panels	72 (27%)	39 (15%)
Collaborative Problem Solving	67 (25%)	50 (19%)
Submit own Alternative	43 (16%)	72 (27%)
Open Houses	44 (17%)	63 (23%)
Advisory Committees	28 (11%)	75 (29%)
Web Pages and the Internet	20 (8%)	86 (33%)
Other	9 (3%)	0

Respondents identified the following list of “other” input options:

- Submit letters regarding specific issues
- Meet with BLM
- One-on-one meetings with BLM Range Cons
- Field trips
- NEPA/FLPMA
- Review draft documents
- Use all options to reach as many people as possible
- Put article in newspaper and encourage the public to apply pressure as well as advise other council members

Question 3. Would you like to further help design the public participation process for the Resource Management Plan? If no, please explain. If yes, how would you like to provide input?

The third question on the survey asked people whether they would like to further help design the public participation process and, if so, to rank four formats for providing input (and an “other” category) as “most preferred,” “somewhat preferred,” or “least preferred.” Each of the four formats (as well as formats identified by respondents under “other”) was ranked as most effective by at least some of the respondents. Ninety respondents (34 percent) indicated that they did not want to further help design the public participation process. They did so either with a “no” answer or by declining to complete that portion of the survey. Table 3 lists the formats in order of the number of people who ranked them as most effective. “One-on-one interviews” and “small group interviews with like minded people” were ranked most effective by 87 people (33 percent of respondents) and 78 people (30 percent), respectively. Participation “through one or more people who can speak on my behalf” was ranked “most preferred” by 19 people (7 percent) and “least preferred” by 66 people (25 percent) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ranking the Importance of Formats to Help Design the Public Participation Process.

Format	Number (and Percentage) of People Who Ranked this Interest as “Most Preferred”	Number (and Percentage) of People Who Ranked this Interest as “Least Preferred”
One-on-One Interview	87 (33%)	26 (10%)
Small Group Interview	78 (30%)	8 (3%)
Existing Public Forum	57 (22%)	9 (4%)
Others Speak on my Behalf	19 (7%)	66 (25%)
Other	8 (3%)	

Respondents identified the following list of other options to assist with the design of the process:

- Via e-mail
- Field trips with the manager there to answer questions
- Use examples of what has been done before

Respondents who indicated that they did not want to further help design the public participation process offered the following explanations for declining to participate:

- Live too far away
- Live out of state
- Limited interest in public lands in the Dillon area
- Lack of time

- NEPA process is adequate
- Don't have the expertise and/or experience
- Confident in the RAC
- Confident in the BLM to involve the public
- Skeptical that anything meaningful will come from being involved

Comments

Many respondents also offered written comments about their interests and concerns. We have paraphrased them here. More issues will likely be raised as this process moves forward.

- Control the special interests and get young people involved.
- There are too many special interest groups that don't even want our forests used at all.
- Our groups [PLAA and Anaconda Sportsmen] are particularly concerned about land exchanges and loss of access to public lands. The BLM has not done a very good job here in the Butte office in these areas. The Dillon resource office has done a much better job.
- Surveys are good, if the information they produce is actually used.
- Many residents of the Bitterroot [re create] on the Beaverhead NF and BLM lands in that area. Public meetings should be scheduled in Hamilton and Missoula and not just in Butte, Dillon, and Lima.
- Friends of the Bitterroot has, for over a decade, taken an active role in the administration of the Beaverhead NF. We have participated fully in the NEPA process covering such things as grazing allotments, proposed timber sales, ORV use and administration, mining, trail construction, reconstruction and maintenance, watershed restoration, transportation planning, land management planning, etc. We fully intend to continue that process on the federal public lands (natural resource lands) administered by the BLM's Dillon office.
- Be good to the land.
- Listen to the people that have been on the land all of their lives. Learn from history with regard to natural resources. Learn what has happened and why. Use this information to help solve resource problems. Most of our resource problem is no boss, too much public, and nothing gets done to improve resource. No management because of public bickering and no one with authority to do anything.
- These deals are all just window-dressing. You folks have no interest in listening to folks who have had the responsibility of caring for these lands since the Taylor Grazing Act was enacted. You're more "in tune" with the supposed "masses"—the enviro groups who don't care about the resource like we have. They just want to control and kick us off the land. Unfortunately, for the sake of this country, they're slowly succeeding. The agency seems more apt to try and please the public than the rancher who is paying and taking responsibility of the lease. We feel it is a waste of our time to get involved. We've been caring for this land since the Taylor Grazing Act was enacted, but our opinions mean nothing. Those that have no financial responsibility are who you listen to.
- All interests are important to the citizens of Butte-Silver Bow. Our primary interest is to foster multiple use of BLM lands.
- My interest is in having a balance among the competing activities and in finding ways to be good stewards while permitting activities to occur.

- I am skeptical that anything meaningful will come from being involved.
- Hopefully, to Gov. Judy Martz. None of the above (interests) can be accomplished if you continue to torch Montana with your stupid let burn policy. That policy destroys all the above (list of interests) for years to come. What the hell good does it do for an individual to respond to any of the above (question #2 list). The BLM has their minds made up and that's the way it will continue to be. An ounce of common sense would work wonders. The people in Montana are used to putting fires out and they don't need 8 days training to continue the fires going like you people did last summer. How many ranchers had the fires nearly contained on their property and then have you people come and order them away so fire could continue to burn. That happened not once but many times. I hope it never happens here. I know where this little letter will go, but I hope at least one of you reads it. Native Montanan.
- Four more years of paper shuffling. Livestock grazing—the Montana Wildlife Federation peddled a so-called riparian grazing program to federal agencies. This program is a total failure. What next? “Paper shuffling” Waste of time (regarding #2) Bad idea. This spreads to public out to ask questions to the specialist. I want the manager's feet put to the fire. BLM managers must be held accountable but now they are not. The manager must respond directly to the public concern and follow up on the ground with the questions. BLM has continued to resist the opportunity to develop rest-rotation grazing programs on public land. Rest-rotation grazing, as developed by August L. Hormay, is the only system that works. The so-called “riparian” is a total failure. I was a wildlife biologist with the BLM for 35 years in Montana and I can tell you that nothing will be accomplished by this paper shuffling exercise for 4 more years. The lack of field experience of the current BLM and poor leadership at higher levels will create more of the same after the exercise is over. BLM has drifted away from their multiple use mandate over the last 10 years and I expect no return to normal.
- I am trying to convey to you as a rancher that managed grazing is beneficial not only to me but also to other interests – wildlife, recreation, watershed, etc.
- All of the interests (question #1 list – except watershed and wilderness) are important for the economy and the health of the land. A recent C-Span hearing held by the Senator from Idaho produced memos stating public input was to meet requirements and the plans were decided weeks in advance. I would like to help but it has been my experience that input is useless as government policy is preset and the government will not deal in good faith. Environmentalists make the rules and the general public is not considered in all policy.
- I may want to respond to the proposed resource management plan but not in the design of the public participation process.
- Quite one-sided (question #2). General directives that fits all areas and states. Montana is even different from east to west. One size doesn't fit all.
- As an adjacent resource manager, I'm interested in being informed about the proposed management so we can evaluate how that matches what we are managing for. There are only 3 sections adjacent to the Targhee NF on my District (Ashland/Island Park)
- These lands should be managed for maximum benefit of Montanan's while maintaining a sustainable condition.
- I really like the standard process. 1) Have a public scoping open house to get ideas not just about issues but also about how to respond to them. 2) Open house and comment on draft. The problem with a more intensive process, like focus groups (the best of the lot) and task forces and especially

collaborative processes is that they slow down the whole process and wear you down and then you're still nowhere when all the non-participants show up and find fault with the result.

- Encourage BLM to consider a newsletter to inform public of RMP process and alternatives and issues in order to stimulate public thought processes and promote and invite public comment. Make newsletter available on paper and on the Internet and/or via e-mail. Meet with local community organizations/groups. Hold public meetings.
- You have a responsibility to preserve and protect these lands for future generations.
- I don't have much faith in the public involvement process especially since your ranking system seems to be looking for a "magic bullet." There needs to be as many options as possible for public interaction. Doing things the same way over and over doesn't do much for obtaining new results. Also, cf Linda Ellison's letters for her critique of each of the methods for public involvement.
- It looks like a good public participation process is in place.
- They are all equally important (interests in question #1). That is why multiple use concepts need to be maintained and the various uses balanced with each other.
- My primary interest in BLM lands is to see that their overall integrity of health continues to support native ecosystems.
- I don't know anything about planning a public participation process! But, I'm willing to try.
- Water – if one manages the landscape to obtain water, all the other resources, i.e. landscape, will be managed correctly. The water naturally has to meet the fed/state standards.
- I like to snowmobile and go 4-wheeling on my ATV and any restrictions on these recreations are not to my idea of good public policy.
- I want to stay updated on the issues and make decisions on scientific data.
- All must be balanced (interests in #1) with each other. I would like it to be used but used properly.
- Based on the Gravelly landscape analysis experience, it will help to have a focused purpose with BLM authority clearly presented at the outset and a reasonable time frame for the process to unfold and be completed.
- Have BLM show me where they are spending our wildlife money and look closer at land pooling and other land deals.
- Is this the one [referring to open houses] where you are met at the door, taken to a corner, debriefed and sent on your way without hearing what others came to say?
- Timber harvest, livestock grazing, oil and gas development can be done without degrading recreation, water, and/or fish and wildlife if done properly.
- I believe that BLM has the experience and expertise to do the public participation process fairly and correctly.

- My interests are only for long-range use. These lands belong to all the people in the US, not just Montanans! We must stop thinking of our personal interests and make plans for future generations. We have already cheated future citizens of US of some use of natural resources.
- I would rather see Montana citizens who have live in Montana for more than 20 years and reside in the Dillon Resource Area participate. My home has always been in eastern MT. Therefore, I may not be able to adequately address southwestern MT issues.
- Need coordinated management and staffing opportunities with the Forest Service. Providing “service first.”
- People in Montana need to be able to make a living. We can’t all work for the government. Someone has to produce the products and the things we need to survive. Gas, oil, timber, cattle and recreation and mining all of these are needed for growth.
- NEPA process must form the backbone of public involvement. This is vital for those not living in the immediate area.
- In response to the phrase “RMP will allocate” – Don’t you believe it, they will go against fair play and will favor the greens. In response to question #1 – getting government personnel back to making land available to us instead of always closing it up. (3) Since these (public meetings or hearings) are always rigged their way for most government meetings. So far, they have never listened (to own alternatives).
- Interested in ecosystem management from a multiple use perspective that conserves watersheds, airsheds, vegetation, soils, fish and wildlife, and endangered species.
- Wondering why the public participation processes established under NEPA and FLPMA are not adequate means to gather public input.
- Outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, timber, minerals, watershed and wildlife and fish are all rated as a number 1 priority. All of these are possible and necessary in the year 2001 and beyond. Cultural and historical resources should also be preserved by they should not always be able to be used by special interest groups to get their way. Wilderness should be our last priority, unless common sense is used in making the regulations.
- I think the most productive forum is a citizens panel that includes diverse interests, with an opportunity for the public not on the panel to express their views as well. I also think some one-on-one outreach or small group interviews are very important to include people who don’t have the time or inclination to participate in formal processes but are affected by BLM decisions. Without this outreach, they can come around at the end and undermine the whole process and say they weren’t consulted.

Preliminary Conclusions

1. Wildlife and Fish, Livestock Grazing, Outdoor Recreation and Watershed were ranked most important by the greatest number of people responding to the survey. But all of the listed interests (and those identified under “other”) were ranked as most important by a significant number of respondents. The resource management planning process should accommodate public participation to seek a fair, effective, and reasonable balance among these interests.
2. Most people prefer Surveys and Questionnaires, and Public Meetings or Hearings as the most effective ways to provide input to the BLM for the resource management planning process. Some people also favor Focus Groups or Citizen Panels, and Collaborative Problem Solving (though not in the form of advisory committees). This suggests that most people prefer the approach commonly used in the NEPA process, perhaps relying on focus groups and citizen panels to address specific issues, and with an emphasis, where appropriate, on collaborative problem solving.
3. Most people who want to further help design a public participation process prefer a one-on-one or small-group interview. A number also favor relying on an existing public forum. We should interview those who requested a one-on-one interview and arrange small-group interviews that include existing public forums (such as the Big Hole Watershed Committee and the Beaverhead Community Forum, etc.). Many people also said they do NOT wish to further participate in the process design. We may want to include room for people to comment on substantive issues (such as how to frame the issues to be addressed by the RMP) during the interviews, perhaps after we have heard their advice on process design.