

July 15, 2004

SHEPHERD AH-NEI OHV CLOSURE AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

The BLM's Shepherd Ah-Nei recreation area near Billings is a very popular destination for a variety of recreationists, including off-highway vehicle riders. An adjacent private landowner filed suit in 2002 claiming that current use was causing resource damage, noise, increased fire danger, and impacts to wildlife.

The OHV portion of Shepherd Ah-Nei is comprised of 1,115 acres, 640 of which were acquired in a land exchange in 1994. In April 2004, the judge in the case ordered the 640 acres closed to OHV use because the BLM had failed to designate trails as open, limited, or closed when the land was acquired. Because no boundary or fence exists between the 640 acres and the rest of the OHV area, the entire area was closed to OHV use to ensure compliance with the judge's order.

ISSUES:

Issues include the impacts caused by OHV use--noise, resource (including cultural) damage, litter, erosion, and displacement of wildlife. The area also provides one of the few opportunities for OHV use near the city of Billings, and it is now closed during the highest-use season.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

According to the 2003 Montana/Dakotas OHV EIS and Plan Amendment, each field office was to select high priority areas for travel management planning. The Billings Field Office selected four high priority areas, one of which was Shepherd An-Nei. The field office had planned to work on the four travel management plans simultaneously, but because of the court order, it has made Shepherd Ah-Nei its first priority. Work is underway on the preparation of an environmental assessment and plan with hope that it will be completed in the fall of 2004 and the area re-opened soon thereafter. The field office is asking the OHV community to assist in the development of the plan.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

The BLM wants to provide OHV opportunities and is committed to getting the area re-opened as soon as possible while at the same time mitigating the resource concerns.

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