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BLM Extends Target Shooting Closures--Schedules Public Meeting

Three areas of public lands north of Billings will remain closed to firearms target shooting for another year. The Bureau of Land Management – Billings Field Office closed the Shepherd, 21-Mile, and Acton recreation areas to target shooting in December of 2002.

The BLM closed the areas for public safety and resource protection purposes. In addition to the public safety concerns, resource damage was occurring as a result of the accumulation of debris from target materials. The closure does not include the area commonly used for target shooting known as the 17-Mile area, located on the Crooked Creek Road west of Highway 87 north of Billings.

A public meeting to discuss target shooting at the three areas will be held October 15 at 7 p.m. at the Fish, Wildlife and Parks office at 2300 Lake Elmo Drive. According to Billings Field Office Manager Sandra Brooks, “The Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council has formed a subcommittee to look at this issue, and I’m hoping that we’ll get some members of the public to work with the subcommittee to develop management alternatives for the areas.”

The recreation areas are used for a variety of recreational activities such as hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, off-highway vehicle use, wildlife viewing, hunting, and, until last year, target shooting.

“In order to provide for public safety, it’s necessary to temporarily close the areas to target shooting while we find a permanent solution to the problems,” Brooks stated.

“Hikers, horseback riders, and other users can plan their activities around hunting seasons, but it is impossible for them to know when and where target shooters are also using the area.” Brooks added that the areas will remain open to hunting by licensed hunters during seasons administered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

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