



National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy



January 2012

Planning Process

The BLM Planning Process

To ensure the best balance of uses and resource protections for America's public lands, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) undertakes extensive land use planning through a collaborative approach with local, state, and tribal governments, the public, and stakeholder groups. The result is a set of land use plans – called Resource Management Plans (RMPs) – that provide the framework to guide decisions for every action and approved use on the National System of Public Lands.

As required by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), these plans ensure that public lands are managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. RMPs establish goals and objectives for resource management (desired outcomes) and the measures needed to achieve these goals and objectives (management actions and allowable uses). They are the basis for every on-the-ground action the BLM takes. Where changing conditions (such as the federal listing of a wildlife species as threatened or endangered) require updates to the information or analysis contained in the RMP, the BLM may amend the RMP to bring it into conformance with these changing conditions.

Ensuring these plans are up-to-date is critical because so many Americans look to the public lands for a wide variety of resources, including energy, rights-of-way that support communications and energy delivery, a variety of recreational uses, and crucial habitat for species associated with the Western landscape, such as the sage-grouse and pronghorn antelope.

Actions approved by the BLM under the RMP will be conducted under the appropriate level of environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). For projects that have the potential for significant effects, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is required. The distinction between the planning and the environmental analysis is important. Planning (producing the RMP) selects the goals and identifies the management actions needed to achieve them. Environmental analysis (producing the EIS or other NEPA document) identifies the consequences of achieving those goals. The BLM has an obligation to seek consistency with state, local, and tribal land management plans, but only to the degree that such plans are also consistent with applicable federal law and regulation.

The specific steps in the development of an RMP, or an RMP amendment, include:

1. Issue a Notice of Intent to Prepare the RMP.
2. Conduct scoping, which is a public process to assist in the identification of planning issues.
3. Analyze the management situation. This is an analysis of available inventory data and other information to characterize the resource area profile, portray the existing management situation, and identify management opportunities to respond to identified issues. This analysis provides the basis for formulating reasonable alternatives.
4. Develop Alternatives to address planning issues. Considering a reasonable range of alternatives helps the BLM and its partners understand the various ways and different scenarios for management of the resources and uses in the planning area.

5. Analyze the effects of the alternatives. The analysis should provide adequate information for evaluating the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of each proposed planning alternative. The analysis should include direct, indirect, and cumulative effects considered in both short- and long-term perspectives, at various geographic scales.
6. Select a preferred alternative.
7. Prepare a draft RMP/draft EIS.
8. Provide a 90-day public comment period upon publication of the draft RMP/draft EIS.
9. Prepare a proposed RMP/final EIS based on comments received. The BLM is required to respond to substantive comments that reveal new information, missing information, or flawed analysis that could substantially change the conclusions.
10. Provide a 30-day public protest period upon publication of the proposed RMP/final EIS. The Final RMP–Final EIS is subject to a 30-day protest period. Any party that participated in the planning process and may be adversely affected by approval of the RMP may file a protest with the Director of the BLM.
11. Provide a 60-day Governor’s consistency review period (concurrent with the 30-day public protest period) upon publication of the proposed RMP/final EIS. This period ensures that the RMP is consistent with state and local plans, policies, and programs. BLM state offices can potentially negotiate a shorter review period with the Governor.
12. Approve the RMP through a record of decision (ROD) once the protests have been resolved. When the ROD is signed, the RMP has been completed.
13. Implement, monitor, and evaluate plan decisions. A monitoring strategy, developed as part of the land use plan, identifies indicators of change, acceptable thresholds, methods, protocols, and timeframes that will be used to evaluate and determine whether or not desired outcomes are being achieved. BLM strongly encourages tribal, federal, state, and local entities to work with us in developing monitoring strategies and participate in assessing the effectiveness of plan implementation.

Cooperating Agencies

By regulation, the BLM can invite tribal, state, and local governments, as well as other federal agencies, known as cooperating agencies (CAs) to participate in creating both RMPs and NEPA documents, such as EISs. We believe that by working closely with our state, local, tribal, and federal government partners, we will improve communication and understanding, identify common goals and objectives, and enhance the quality of our management of the public lands.

As the lead agency, the BLM is expected to use the analyses and proposals of a CA “to the maximum extent possible consistent with its responsibility.” CAs accept obligations to contribute staff to the EIS team, develop analyses for which they have particular expertise, and fund their own participation.

Under the BLM planning regulations, CA status can only be established through a written agreement, usually a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the BLM and the eligible governmental entity which describes the authorities and responsibilities of the parties, and how they propose to work together through the planning process.

During this effort, the US Forest Service (Forest Service) will be a CA. The Forest Service will use the EISs and RODs to amend their own land use plans.