

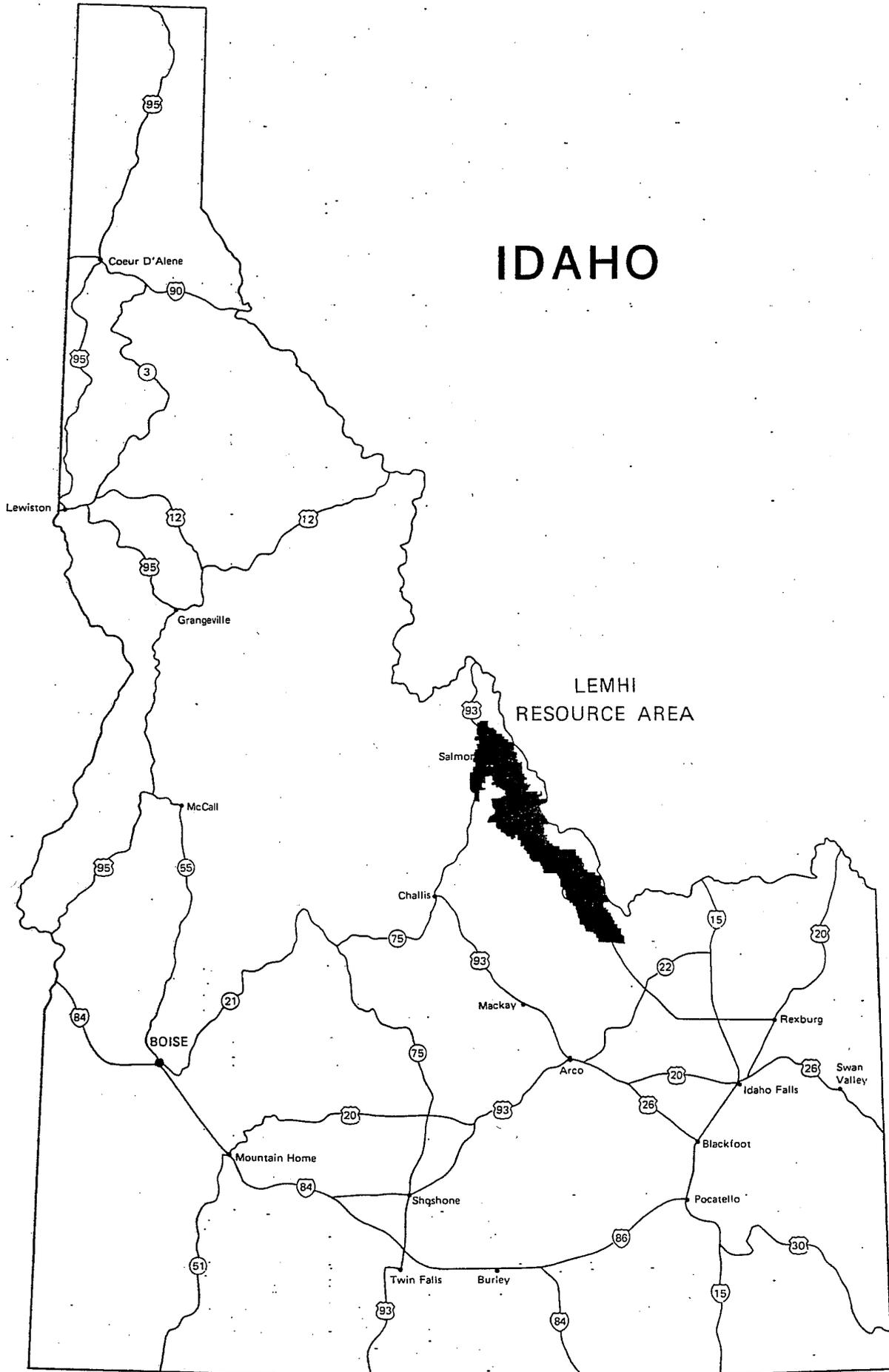
RECORD OF DECISION
FOR THE
LEMHI
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT STATEMENT



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Salmon District, Idaho
April 1987



IDAHO



GENERAL LOCATION MAP

RECORD OF DECISION
LEMHI RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Introduction

This record of decision (ROD) documents approval of the Lemhi Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Lemhi RMP is a land use plan that will guide resource management in the Lemhi Resource Area for the next 15 to 20 years.

The Lemhi Resource Area contains 499,566 acres of public land in south-central Idaho administered by the Salmon District of the Bureau of Land Management. The Resource Area consists of the Lemhi Planning Area (459,566 acres) and part of the old Ellis/Pahsimeroi planning units and is shown on the map on the inside front cover. A portion of the Ellis Planning Unit (approximately 40,000 acres) is now a part of the Lemhi Resource Area. The entire Ellis-Pahsimeroi area was recently covered by the Ellis-Pahsimeroi Management Framework Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (1982). Since that plan is still current, we have not analyzed or developed a new plan for that portion of the Ellis Planning Unit which is now in the Lemhi Resource Area.

The final environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Lemhi RMP was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on July 16, 1986. This ROD meets the requirements of 40 CFR Part 1505.2 pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

This document contains only a draft proposal for wilderness. A separate Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared for the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area (WSA). A proposed wilderness decision for the Eighteenmile WSA is not included in this plan. This is because while the BLM's Idaho State Director has the decision authority for resource management plans in general, Congress has specifically reserved the authority to make final wilderness decisions. The wilderness recommendations listed under the alternatives on the next few pages are for reference only and do not represent decisions.

Decision

The approved Lemhi RMP is unchanged from the proposed Lemhi RMP and is the same as Alternative F of the Final Lemhi EIS. See page 13 of the Lemhi Proposed Plan for the Management Action Summary under Alternative F. See page 43 of the Lemhi Proposed Plan for the Proposed Management Prescriptions.

Alternatives

Seven alternative plans were developed for consideration in the selection of a RMP for the Lemhi Resource Area. Each alternative addressed the planning issues in a different way and was developed to cover a range of possible resource uses. The environmental consequences of various management options were available for consideration in selecting a RMP.

Alternative A

Alternative A represents the existing situation. The present level of management on the public lands would be continued, with measures being taken to prevent or correct deteriorating conditions. Any changes in management would be brought about through monitoring and the environmental analysis process. All actions would be handled on a case-by-case basis.

The Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area would not be recommended for wilderness designation. The area would be managed for multiple use values.

Alternative B

Alternative B emphasizes livestock grazing, given present and anticipated future budget levels. A total of 14,796 acres would be recommended as suitable for wilderness and 10,126 acres as nonsuitable.

Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes wildlife and fisheries enhancement, wilderness and recreational values, cultural resource management, and watershed protection. A total of 24,922 acres would be recommended as suitable for wilderness designation.

Alternative D

Alternative D emphasizes mineral development on the public lands. The objective is to manage the federal mineral estate to allow optimum exploration and development, while minimizing unnecessary impacts to other resources. The Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area would not be recommended for wilderness designation. The area would be managed for multiple use values.

Alternative E

Alternative E emphasizes intensive management on 30,309 acres of commercial forest land for sustained yield production. The 24,922 acres in the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area would be recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

Alternative F

This alternative is now the approved Lemhi RMP. In this alternative a variety of resource uses will be allowed. Production and use of commodity resources and commercial use authorization will occur, while protecting fragile resources and wildlife habitat, preserving natural systems and cultural values, and allowing for nonconsumptive resource uses.

Under Alternative F the BLM will consider 4,495 acres for transfer from federal ownership through public sales or exchanges. An additional 1,340 acres will be considered for transfer under the Desert Land Act. The BLM will attempt to acquire 5,600 acres primarily through exchange.

A total of 161,909 acres will be open for oil and gas leasing with standard stipulations, 221,519 acres with seasonal occupancy restrictions, and 77,369 acres with no-surface-occupancy restrictions. Approximately 14,796 acres will be closed to oil and gas leasing and 15,596 acres closed to geothermal leasing. A total of 455,434 acres will be open for location of mining claims while 18,921 acres will be closed to mineral entry. Material sales will not be allowed on 92,010 acres, but the remaining 382,888 acres will be open to material sales.

Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest. Of this, 1,179 acres will receive restricted management to reduce impacts to crucial elk winter range. Set-asides included in this alternative will reduce the timber production base by 1,444 acres. About 23,138 acres of woodland will be available for non-sawtimber products, while 3,131 acres will be closed.

Livestock management will provide 43,602 AUMs of livestock forage. The BLM will maintain or improve existing perennial forage plants, maintain or improve soil stability and stabilize or improve areas currently in a downward trend. Range improvements will be implemented to help achieve these objectives.

Game populations of 9,350 deer, 2,194 elk, 2,950 antelope, and 200 big-horn sheep will utilize 6,466 AUMs of forage. Project development will occur, providing water, habitat, and safety for wildlife. Six habitat management plans will be developed on 260,056 acres.

A total of 15.5 miles of riparian area will be fenced and four watershed activity plans will be written. New timber harvest roads will be closed when timber sales are completed, except for use in forest and fire management.

The BLM will maintain 94.7 miles of fisheries habitat in present condition and improve 3.0 miles. Surface-disturbing activities adversely affecting Class III streams will be avoided, if practical.

Recreation will be recognized as the principal use of the lands in the three special recreation management areas (SRMAs). Additional mineral withdrawals, restrictions on some nonrecreational uses, and restrictive visual management practices will be implemented. A recreation area management plan will be written for each SRMA.

Off-road vehicle use will continue to be limited during winter months on 16,230 acres of big game range. A year-round closure to all vehicle use will be placed on 14,796 acres recommended suitable for wilderness designation.

A total of 14,796 acres will be recommended as suitable for wilderness designation.

Full suppression fire management guidelines will be followed on 444,770 acres. Prescribed burns will be conducted on 30,078 acres, and heavy fuel loading caused by logging debris and dead trees will be reduced on 10,000 acres to decrease the likelihood of having a disastrous fire.

Cultural resource management plans will be completed for the Chief Tendoy Cemetery, Lewis and Clark Trail, Salmon River Corridor, Indian Area A, and Indian Area B. A recreation area management plan will be written for the Lewis and Clark Trail that will provide for protection of cultural and historic values.

Alternative G

Alternative G is identical with the proposed action (Alternative F) except for the Eighteenmile WSA. It was developed to manage those resources that would be affected if Congress did not designate as wilderness the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area recommended in Alternative F.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The alternatives considered in the EIS would achieve all the requirements of sections 101 and 102(1) of NEPA and other environmental laws and policies. Each alternative is environmentally acceptable. Each of the alternatives is designed to use practicable means to create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, but the emphasis is different in each alternative.

In terms of effects on biological and physical components of the environment, Alternative C would be the environmentally preferable alternative. Alternative C would preserve the most wilderness values and natural history values. It would result in the greatest increase in wildlife populations. It would result in the most vegetation in good ecological condition, the least in downward trend, the most in upward trend, the lowest average erosion rate, and the least area in a severe erosion category.

In terms of economic benefits, Alternative B would be the preferable alternative. It would generate the greatest increase in income and jobs in the Lemhi Planning Area. It would make the least amount of land available for transfer to private ownership and development for agriculture. It would also have the highest management cost. The average erosion rate would be the highest, and wildlife populations would decrease.

In terms of social benefits, no alternative is clearly preferable to another. Alternative C would protect the most high-density cultural resource occurrence areas from surface disturbance. Alternative B would have the highest level of grazing. Alternative A would have the lowest management cost.

Alternative F, the proposed Lemhi RMP, is the approved Lemhi RMP. In comparison with the other alternatives considered in the EIS, it will attain the widest range of beneficial use of the environment while preserving important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage. The effects on the various resource uses and values will be between those of the other alternatives. Considering the effects of the alternatives, including effects on biological and physical components of the environment, economic effects, and social effects, Alternative F is the environmentally preferable alternative in terms of the overall human environment.

Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail

Two alternatives were considered by the RMP Core Team but were not developed or analyzed in detail because they did not meet the criteria for selection. These alternatives and the reasons for their elimination are presented below.

No Livestock Grazing

This alternative would have excluded all livestock grazing on public lands in the planning area. It was eliminated for the following reasons:

1. Resource conditions, including range, vegetation, watershed, and wildlife habitat, do not warrant prohibition of livestock grazing resource area wide. However, elimination of livestock grazing was considered on selected allotments and in riparian areas under other alternatives.
2. Elimination of grazing would be in direct conflict with existing laws and regulations and would not provide for multiple use of public lands.
3. The cost of removing range improvement projects not benefitting other programs would be prohibitive.
4. The enforcement of no livestock grazing on the fragmented pattern of public lands in the resource area would be unmanageable and very expensive.
5. Public comments received during the issue identification and criteria development steps indicate a general acceptance of livestock grazing on public lands, provided that such grazing is properly managed.
6. It is estimated that permittees using BLM lands generate \$1.9 million in annual income for Lemhi County and 239 jobs. Given this economic significance and general social acceptance of livestock grazing, people in Lemhi County and the state of Idaho would not support a no grazing alternative.

This alternative was considered to be unreasonable and unrealistic.

No Timber Harvest

This alternative would have excluded all timber harvest on public lands in the planning area. It was eliminated because it was not consistent with existing laws and regulations, did not include adequate provisions for multiple use of public lands, and would have had adverse social and economic impacts. A total of \$336,000 and 19 jobs would be lost to the local economy. The timber industry in Lemhi County is already depressed because of a shortage of timber. This alternative would have worsened the situation and thus been unacceptable to the people of Lemhi County. However, elimination of timber harvest was considered on selected areas to protect wilderness, wildlife, and recreation values under other alternatives.

Rationale for Selection of the Plan

The resource management plan (RMP) gives no special emphasis to any one resource but emphasizes balanced, multiple use management and is based upon a realistic expectation of funding. Alternative G would be the RMP if the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area is not designated by Congressional action. The rationale for selection of the RMP is summarized below.

Lands

The resource management plan will allow for a balanced sale, exchange and Desert Land Entry Program. The RMP maintains continuity in the grazing program and retains parcels that have high wildlife and other multiple use values.

Minerals

Under the RMP wildlife concerns are mitigated by seasonal closures for fluid mineral leasing and by some of the closures to solid mineral leasing and material sales.

Through the RMP over half (roughly 60%) of the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area (WSA) will be recommended for wilderness designation. Designation of the WSA as wilderness will close it to mineral activity. Preliminary data (Geology, Energy, and Mineral Studies phase 1 and phase 2) indicate that potential for mineral development in the WSA is low.

None of the existing recreation sites, or future/proposed sites, are in areas with known mineral potential, so any impact on minerals will be small if recreation sites were closed to or withdrawn from mineral entry.

Cultural resource closures to energy and minerals will be small and will have little, if any, impact on local or nationally significant mineral values.

Forest Management

Selection of the RMP provides an even supply of timber to local markets, yet mitigates the impacts of timber harvesting on other important resource values. Designation of set-asides and restrictions are consistent with current BLM forest land policy, they eliminate major impacts to conflicting resources while having negligible economic impact to the local community.

Range Management

The RMP recognizes livestock grazing on public land as the third most important economic resource for this area. It maintains most of the current livestock operations with the exception of those allotments which will be transferred to private ownership through lands actions. The RMP will provide for multiple use by allowing livestock grazing, soil protection, wildlife habitat, and other resource uses. It addresses the major range management problems of repetitive early grazing of spring range and

over-utilization of riparian zones and meadows, both wet and dry. It also provides the parameters for controlling the spread of noxious plants. It identified small allotments which could be combined with other adjoining small allotments to improve management flexibility and opportunities.

Wildlife

The RMP formally recognizes the habitat and forage values associated with viable populations of wildlife species. To do this we will make adjustments in competing resource values to allow for wildlife. The RMP will provide the enhanced habitat conditions that will make possible population increases for many wildlife species.

Watershed

The RMP recognizes that water and water-related resources in the area are of great importance to both public and private lands. Mitigation efforts for water and watershed resources will support this recognition. The RMP will maintain or improve riparian and watershed conditions such that, benefits associated with healthy riparian areas and watersheds (improved wildlife, fisheries, recreation, water quality, and flood control) will be maintained or improved.

Fisheries Habitat Management

The RMP recognizes the importance of the aquatic/riparian habitat along 3.0 miles of perennial stream that will be improved. The other 94.7 miles will remain in an overall static condition.

Soils

To solve the problem of early spring turnout and overgrazing by livestock on highly erosive, low elevation rangeland; the RMP will establish lower stocking rates, implement more range improvements, and improve livestock distribution.

Recreation

The development and protection of recreation sites and nationally designated trails will help meet the projected demand for recreation in the area. There has been an increasing demand for recreation opportunities along the Salmon River. The special recreation management area designations will provide for more detailed planning so that most uses will be accommodated. The closure of 14,796 acres to ORV use is required for the area recommended for wilderness (if designated by Congress).

Wilderness

The area recommended for wilderness designation contains the heart of the Eighteenmile Wilderness Study Area, including all of the primitive and most of the semi-primitive nonmotorized lands. This area is manageable as wilderness, is little influenced by past land uses, and borders a portion of the Italian Peaks Roadless Area recommended for wilderness by the U.S. Forest Service.

Fire Management

The RMP provides for prescribed fire as an economical means of carrying out brush control and other vegetative manipulation projects. Suppression restrictions will be accomplished in the Eighteenmile WSA and a hazard reduction program will be conducted on the rest of the Lemhi Resource Area.

Cultural Resources

The Lemhi Resource Area's cultural resources are fragile, nonrenewable resources. They have significant socio-cultural values as well as excellent archaeological research potential. The RMP recognizes the nature and significance of these resources and will recommend protective and interpretive measures. The Bureau is required by law to protect the cultural resources on the public lands. Cultural resource protection and use will remain consistent and compatible with other public land resource uses and activities. The standard operating procedures will help protect cultural resources throughout the planning area.

PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning criteria are the factors or data that BLM must consider prior to arriving at a land use decision relative to any issue. Listed below are the planning criteria and a discussion of how the ten general criteria have been applied in selection of the RMP.

1. Social and Economic Values

The RMP considers social and economic values in Lemhi County by providing for land disposal, livestock grazing, mineral development, timber harvest and wildlife values. About 5,835 acres will be transferred from federal ownership. Livestock management will provide 43,602 AUMs of livestock forage. A total of 460,797 acres will be open for oil and gas leasing and 455,434 acres will be open for location of mining claims. Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest, with an allowable cut of 1.07 million board feet per year.

2. Plans, Programs, and Policies of Other Federal Agencies, State and Local Governments, and Indian Tribes

The BLM's resource management plans must be consistent with officially approved and adopted resource-related plans (or in their absence, policies or programs) of other federal agencies, state, and local governments, and Indian tribes. The RMP is consistent with the 1981 Lemhi County Comprehensive Plan. Public input from federal agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes does not indicate that there are any inconsistencies with their plans.

3. Existing Law, Regulations, and BLM Policy

In the RMP, there does not appear to be any discrepancy with existing law, regulation, or BLM policy.

4. Future Needs and Demand for Existing or Potential Resource Commodities and Values

The demand for minerals and energy is expected to remain low. The demand for the livestock grazing resource is high and there is a moderate demand for the timber resource. The RMP meets or exceeds these demands.

A significant portion of the Resource Area is presently leased for oil and gas or on the oil and gas simultaneous list. However, actual development for oil and gas is limited. Coal does occur in the Lemhi Resource Area but is of low quality; no coal mines have operated in the area for over 40 years. Leasing interest for geothermal resources is low. Phosphate rocks of low and medium grade do occur but development in the near future is unlikely.

The average use by livestock the past five years has been 52,541 AUMs. While the initial stocking rate will be 43,602 AUMs, the long-term stocking rate will increase to 52,632 AUMs.

Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest, with an allowable cut of 1.07 million board feet per year.

5. Public Input

The RMP has taken into consideration the concerns of the minerals and energy industry by making lands accessible and available for exploration. Other public concerns have dealt with range resource, wildlife habitat, wilderness, lands disposal, and timber harvest. The Proposed Plan provides for the protection and use of all of these resources.

6. Public Welfare and Safety

Facilities provided at developed campgrounds and other recreational areas will provide for public welfare and safety. While public land within areas identified as open to motorized vehicle use generally will remain available for such use without restrictions, restrictions could be imposed when there was a need to promote user safety. To provide for public safety, stipulations will be included in mining plans of operations. Public hazards will be clearly marked and fenced, if necessary, to prevent injury. Full suppression fire management guidelines would be followed on 444,770 acres. In addition, heavy fuel loading caused by logging debris and dead trees would be reduced on 10,000 acres to decrease the likelihood of having a disastrous fire.

7. Past and Present Use of Public and Adjacent Lands

The RMP provides for the continuation of past and present use of public and adjacent lands while still providing for the protection and development of other resource values.

Livestock management will provide 43,602 AUMs of livestock forage in the short-term and 52,632 in the long-term. A total of 460,797 acres will be open for oil and gas leasing and 455,434 acres will be open for location of mining claims. Approximately 28,865 acres of public forest land will be open to commercial harvest, with an allowable cut of 1.07 million board feet per year. Game populations of 9,350 deer, 2,194 elk, 2,950 antelope, and 200 bighorn sheep will utilize 6,466 AUMs of forage. For fisheries, BLM will maintain 94.7 miles of stream in their present condition and improve 3.0 miles. A total of 15.5 miles of perennial stream riparian area would be improved.

This plan will recognize recreation as the principle use of the lands in three special recreation management areas. Lands open to unrestricted vehicle use will total 428,540 acres.

8. Public Benefits of Providing Goods and Services in Relation to Costs

It is estimated that it will cost \$1.7 million over the 20-year life of the RMP to provide goods and services. However, over a 20-year period, revenues of \$10.8 million will be generated and state and local governments will receive \$9.6 million.

9. Quantity and Quality of Noncommodity Resource Values

The RMP provides for protection of noncommodity resource values such as wildlife, fisheries, watershed, recreation, wilderness, and cultural sites. The quantity and quality of these resources would best be protected by Alternative C. However, the RMP will result in game populations of 9,350 deer, 2,194 elk, 2,950 antelope, and 200 bighorn sheep. For fisheries, BLM will maintain 94.7 miles of stream in their present condition and improve 3.0 miles. A total of 15.5 miles of perennial stream riparian area would be improved.

This plan will recognize recreation as the principle use of the lands in three special recreation management areas. Lands open to unrestricted vehicle use will total 428,540 acres. The RMP recommends 14,796 acres as suitable for wilderness designation. Five cultural resource management plans will be written.

10. Environmental Impacts

Transfer of lands out of federal ownership will result in a loss of administrative control of all resource values. Designation of the Eighteenmile WSA as wilderness will result in the loss of harvestable timber yield from suitable commercial forest land in that area.

Completion of nonstructural range improvements will represent a commitment of land and resources for the lives of the projects. Recreation opportunity spectrum classes that shifted from primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized to semi-primitive motorized and roaded natural will likely never return to the original class.

On the positive side, the RMP will provide for improvement in ecological range condition. Livestock AUMs will show a minor increase over the 5-year average use. Wildlife habitat condition and available AUMs will increase. Fisheries habitat will show a moderate improvement. Improvements in riparian areas and watershed can be expected. A major increase in recreational opportunities will take place. Wilderness acreage will be 14,796 acres. Impacts to cultural resources will decrease slightly.

Consultation and Coordination

BLM's Resource Management Plan must agree with and support officially approved and adopted resource-related plans (or in their absence, policies or programs) of other Federal agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes, so long as BLM's plans also agree with and support Federal law and regulations applicable to public lands. A special effort has been made to ensure that the proposed RMP is consistent with approved plans. No inconsistencies have been identified by the Governor of the State of Idaho, other agencies, governments, or Indian tribes.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Mitigation

The results of implementing the Lemhi RMP will be examined periodically to inform the resource manager and public of the progress of the plan. The results being achieved under the plan will be compared with the plan objectives.

The proposed monitoring and evaluation plan for the Lemhi RMP is shown in Appendix I of the Draft Lemhi RMP/EIS. The plan specifies resource components to be monitored, how they will be monitored, where they will be monitored, the estimated cost of monitoring, and a suggested threshold level that will warrant a management concern. If future monitoring shows a variation from RMP objectives warranting management concern, the reason for the variation will be examined closely. Modification of a RMP decision may be needed, or the variation may be due to factors beyond BLM's control, such as climatic or economic fluctuations.

All mitigating measures identified in the final EIS for the proposed Lemhi RMP will be implemented. The resource management plan has been designed to avoid or minimize environmental harm where practicable. Specific mitigation measures are described in the standard operating procedures on pages 60-82 of the RMP and in Chapter 2 of the Draft Plan.

Mitigation That Will Take Place

The Lemhi RMP will utilize State Director Planning Guidance being prepared in cooperation with the Environmental Protection Agency titled Resource Management Plan Water Quality/Riparian Monitoring Guidance. This document utilizes or references techniques and procedures specifically developed to detect water quality and riparian habitat degradation prior to their having significant adverse impact on beneficial uses.

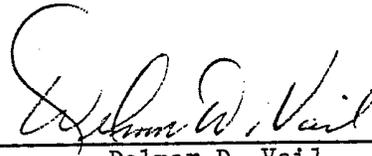
Public Involvement

The views of the public have been sought throughout the planning and decision making process. Public participation in the process is summarized in chapter 5 of the Draft Plan.

Public Availability of the RMP

Copies of the Lemhi Resource Management Plan are available on request at the Lemhi Resource Area, P.O. Box 430, Salmon, Idaho, Phone 208-756-5400.

April 8, 1987
Date



Delmar D. Vail
Idaho State Director
Bureau of Land Management