

Purpose and Need

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Lewistown Field Office (LFO) and Butte Field Office (BFO), proposes to prepare a resource management plan (RMP) for the Lewistown RMP planning area (included within the RMP planning area is a small area in northern Lewis and Clark County that lies within the BFO). Within the RMP, the BLM will analyze the effects of proposed management decisions under one environmental impact statement (EIS). This area was previously recognized as the Headwaters north planning area and the Judith Resource Area. The Lewistown RMP will not include the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

Land use decisions developed through this RMP process will be based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). However, not all lands may be available for all uses. Some uses may be excluded on some lands to protect resource values either by law, regulation, or decision reached through the planning process. The RMP will be prepared using the most current and best available information and with public involvement. The new RMP will establish appropriate land uses and constraints to attain desired resource condition goals and objectives, as well as provide a framework to guide subsequent management decisions.

The land area to be covered under the Lewistown RMP is located in the central part of the State of Montana in Cascade, Chouteau, Fergus, Judith Basin, Meagher, Petroleum, Pondera and Teton counties, and the northern portion of Lewis and Clark County. The Lewistown RMP planning area comprises approximately 654,025 acres of BLM-managed surface. Of the 3,598,988 acres of federal mineral estate in the planning area, 1,399,880 acres or 38.9% are BLM-managed minerals.

Management decisions are currently based on the Headwaters RMP, approved in July 1984 and the Judith RMP, approved in September 1994, as amended (see Table 1). Preparation of a new resource management plan will facilitate public understanding and provide consistent and integrated land use plan decisions for the area of jurisdiction. The RMP will be supported by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis in an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Table 1. Planning Documents and Decisions within the Lewistown RMP Planning Area

<i>Document Title</i>	<i>Year</i>
Petroleum Management Framework Plan	11/1977
Fergus Management Framework Plan	1/1978
Headwaters RMP and EIS Final EIS	11/1983
Record of Decision (ROD)	07/1984
Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States Final EIS*	07/1991
Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report	09/1991
Judith RMP and EIS Final EIS	10/1992
ROD	09/1994
Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Final EIS	05/1997
ROD	08/1997
Off-Highway Vehicle EIS Final EIS	01/2001
ROD	06/2003
Fire/Fuels Management Plan (Statewide amendment) EA	07/2003
Decision Record	09/2003

<i>Document Title</i>	<i>Year</i>
Wind Energy Development Programmatic EIS Plan Amendment to the Headwaters and Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP	12/2005
Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States* Final EIS ROD	06/2007 09/2007
Geothermal Leasing in the Western United States Final EIS	2008

*Final EIS and ROD disclosed and analyzed the effects of vegetation treatments, as well as provided decision guidance on standard operating procedures on use of such treatments, and established the research and demonstration plots for offices; however, the FEIS/ROD did not amend these RMPs.

Planning Area Description

The Lewistown RMP planning area is located in central Montana (see Figure 1). The BLM manages numerous blocks of BLM public lands within the planning area, ranging in size from less than 40 acres to a large contiguous block of BLM lands totaling about 215,575 acres. These BLM-managed public lands are located in nine counties: Fergus, Petroleum, Chouteau, Judith Basin, Cascade, Teton, Pondera, Meagher and the northern portion of Lewis and Clark County.

The BLM public lands to be addressed in this RMP revision include lands managed by both the Lewistown Field Office and Butte Field Office and total approximately 654,000 surface acres in nine counties. (Note: based on a recent administrative boundary realignment effective October 1, 2011 (and published in the Federal Register Notice of Administrative Boundary Change, Volume 76, Number 237, 12/9/2011), about 14,537 surface acres and 749,733 acres of subsurface federal mineral estate within the northern portion of Lewis and Clark County are managed by the Butte Field Office; however, for purposes of this planning effort, that portion of Lewis and Clark County will be addressed as part of this RMP revision.)

The area is bordered to the west by the Lewis and Clark National Forest along the Rocky Mountain Front, to the east by the Musselshell River, to the north by the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, and to the south by the Butte and Billings BLM Field Offices. Within the Lewistown planning area, land ownership is mixed (Table 2). The public lands managed by the BLM are adjacent to National Forest, National Wildlife Refuge, state, private, and tribal lands. Table 2 identifies the acreage of the various land ownerships within the planning area. Table 3 identifies the mineral estate within the planning area. Other major federal land systems in the planning area include National Forest system lands, Blackfeet Indian Reservation, National Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas, National Park Service, and U.S. Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation lands scattered throughout the planning area.

Table 2. Land Ownership within the Lewistown RMP Planning Area

<i>County</i>	<i>Land Ownership (Surface) within the Planning Area</i>			
	<i>BLM</i>	<i>Other Federal</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Private</i>
Cascade County	24,732	196,340	89,796	1,414,710
Chouteau County	25,720	32,976	113,913	745,699
Fergus County	217,189	144,264	147,004	2,077,463
Judith Basin County	11,560	299,365	108,279	778,025
Lewis and Clark County*	14,537	685,795	101,832	538,844
Meagher County	7,899	471,892	93,425	959,433
Petroleum County	331,680	62,524	63,929	608,186
Pondera County	1,170	266,470	58,117	718,605
Teton County	19,538	263,975	126,215	1,057,399
Total	654,025	2,423,601	902,510	8,898,364

* Includes only the northern portion of Lewis and Clark County.

Table 3. Mineral Ownership within the Lewistown RMP Planning Area

<i>County</i>	<i>Mineral Ownership within the Planning Area</i>	
	<i>Federal Minerals</i>	<i>Other</i>
Cascade County	274,223	1,445,852
Chouteau County	85,900	832,408
Fergus County	660,670	1,925,250
Judith Basin County	351,149	846,080
Lewis and Clark County*	749,733	591,170
Meagher County	480,546	1,052,103
Petroleum County	442,314	624,006
Pondera County	179,568	864,837
Teton County	374,885	1,091,773
Total	3,598,988	9,273,479

*Includes only the northern portion of Lewis and Clark County.

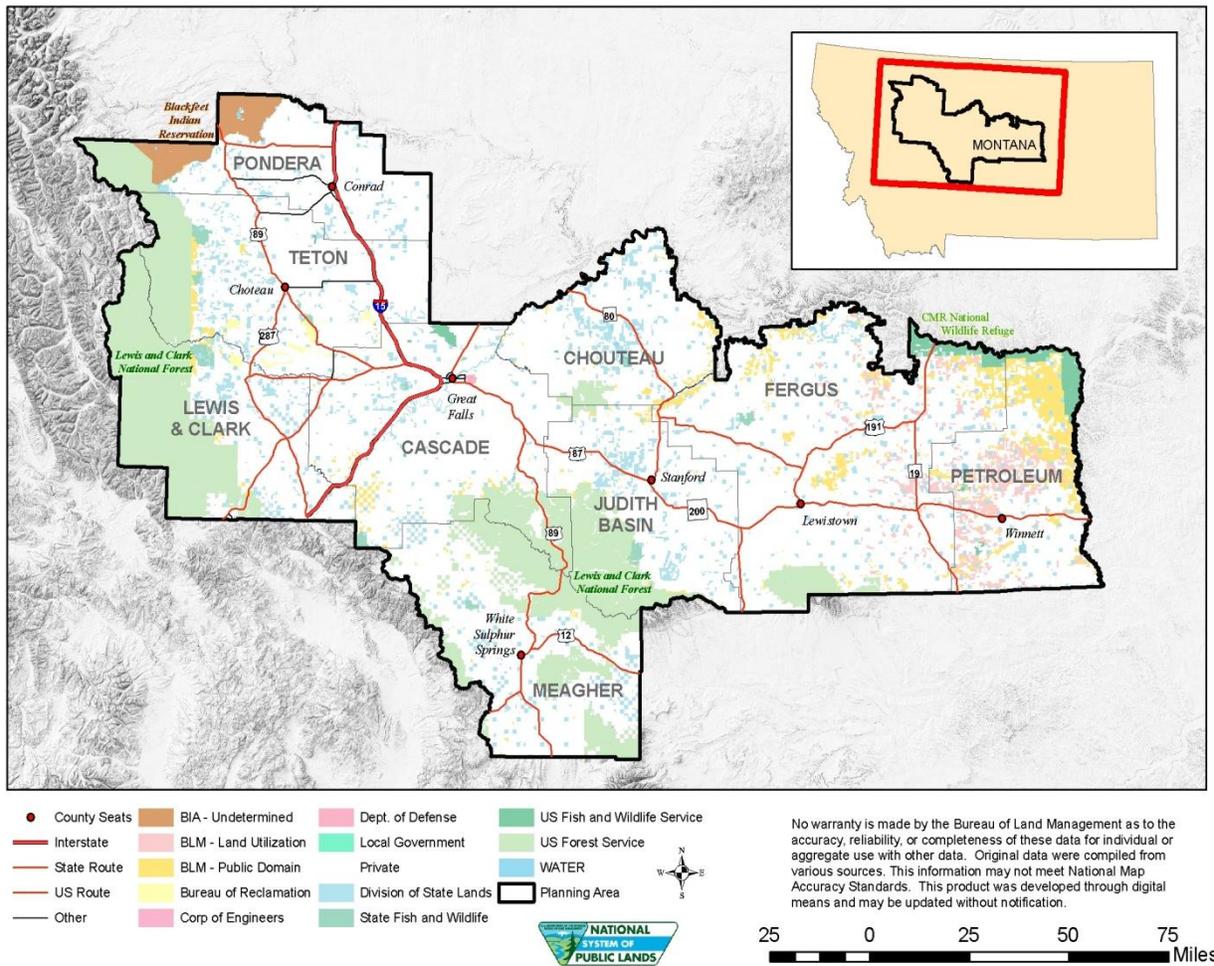
The Lewistown RMP is being prepared for all public lands and federal minerals managed by the BLM Lewistown Field Office and the northern half of Lewis and Clark County which is managed by the BLM Butte Field Office. The Lewistown RMP does not address U.S. Forest Service-administered lands or federal mineral estate within national forest units. Oil and gas leasing decisions for federal mineral estate under lands administered by other federal and state agencies within the planning area will be considered in the Lewistown RMP in cooperation with those agencies.

Currently, the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR) is undergoing a land use plan revision. Coordination between the BLM, CMR, and other agencies will continue during the planning process, especially for those resources and issues such as fire management, roads and trails, and rights-of-way that share administrative boundaries.

Major topographic features in the planning area include the Rocky Mountain Front, the Judith, North Moccasin, South Moccasin, Snowy, Highwood, Castle, Crazy and Belt Mountains, and Square Butte. The planning area is part of the Missouri River basin, with some of the major tributary systems of the Missouri River including the Judith, Musselshell and Sun Rivers. Each of these large drainage systems has dissected the land, forming cliffs, broad valleys or badlands-type topography. The topography is very diverse, and provides for a unique transitional environment between the Rocky Mountains of the western portion of the planning area to the vast plains and river breaks of eastern Montana, with island mountain ranges punctuating the landscape. The vegetation is also diverse, from prairie grasslands and shrublands, timbered breaks and high elevation forest types. Livestock grazing, commercial and non-commercial recreation, rights-of-way, and utilization of forest products are among the most important uses of BLM lands in the planning area.

Except for several contiguous blocks of land in Fergus and Petroleum counties, most of the BLM public lands in the planning area are scattered tracts, intermingled with private and state lands. Private lands are usually located along the drainage bottoms and more productive uplands. The BLM manages a variety of public land parcels in the area and as mentioned above, many of these parcels are widely scattered and often pose multiple resource management challenges. Lands managed by the LFO include public domain (lands which have never left federal ownership), acquired lands and/or mineral interests (lands and/or minerals which left federal ownership and were later returned to federal ownership through purchase, donation, or condemnation), and federal mineral estate (subsurface) lands beneath private or state lands or lands administered by other federal agencies. The Lewistown RMP will not make decisions for the surface or mineral estates of private or state-owned lands and minerals. The Lewistown RMP, however, will provide management decisions for split estate situations involving federal minerals managed by the BLM overlain by private or state-owned surface.

Figure 1. Lewistown RMP Planning Area



Purpose and Need

The purpose of the RMP is to establish guidance, objectives, policies and adaptive management actions. The proposed RMP will be comprehensive in nature and will discuss the current management situation, desired future conditions to be maintained or achieved, and management actions necessary to achieve objectives. The RMP will fulfill the needs and obligations set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and other applicable laws, regulations, and policies. Following the completion of the RMP process, separate implementation and monitoring plans will be developed.

The Headwaters RMP and Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP guided BLM’s management of public lands for the past 18 to 28 years. Resource conditions, public demands, and policies have changed sufficiently to warrant revisiting these decisions. Past plan evaluations (5 and 15 year plan evaluations for Headwaters and 8 year plan evaluation for the Judith RMP) indicated a need for a plan revision.

Although the Judith-Valley-Phillips Resource Management Plan (JVP RMP) was approved in 1994 to guide management of all resources within the LFO, it did not make any specific decisions relative to leasing of fluid minerals due to a protest on the 1992 Final JVP RMP/EIS. Since that time, the LFO has deferred fluid mineral leasing of nominated parcels that would require special stipulations to protect important wildlife values until a new RMP is completed for the planning area (the leasing of nominated parcels not requiring special wildlife stipulations

has continued in LFO through reliance on the leasing decisions made in previous land use plans and programmatic analyses).

The purpose of the Lewistown RMP is to: (1) respond to resource conditions that have changed, (2) respond to new issues and policies, and (3) prepare a comprehensive framework for managing public lands administered by the Lewistown Field Office and Butte Field Office (for the northern portion of Lewis and Clark County). This RMP will result in the development of new land use planning decisions for those issues identified through public scoping and, where appropriate, will incorporate decisions from the existing Headwaters and Judith-Valley-Phillips RMPs.

The Lewistown RMP will provide a comprehensive plan to enhance or maintain resource conditions and provide for the economic needs of local communities over the long term. The land use planning process is the key tool used by the BLM, in coordination with state and local government, tribes, land users and the interested public, to manage resources and provide for their use on public lands. The EIS developed with the RMP will include analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of all proposed management actions in the RMP. Future site-specific NEPA documents will be tiered to the RMP/EIS, eliminating repetitive discussions of issues.

Preparation Plan

The preparation plan defines work that must be completed for this effort and provides a general blueprint for development of the Lewistown RMP/EIS. It is intended that the preparation plan be flexible since new issues and resource management considerations will be identified during the planning process. The preparation plan is prepared in accordance with Washington Office Instruction Memorandum No. 2001-038, *Development/Approval of Preparation Plans for New Planning Starts* and the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1.

The purpose of this preparation plan is to:

1. Identify anticipated planning issues and management concerns;
2. Identify preliminary planning criteria and questions to be addressed to support management decisions;
3. Identify a standard document format (documents, maps, tables, figures, photographs, etc.) for the internal and external presentation of the process, information, and decisions, including presentation on the internet;
4. Identify information or data needed to resolve or address identified issues, management concerns, planning criteria and outstanding questions to perform the requisite analyses;
5. Identify available data, metadata and data collection/format standards employed, and provide an explanation of how the data support the plan itself, and how the data address the planning requirements and anticipated issues or outstanding questions;
6. Identify any known or anticipated data gaps and provide an explanation of why the data are needed to support the plan itself, how the data support the planning requirements and how the data address anticipated issues or outstanding questions;
7. Establish a data inventory and collection activity plan that is coordinated with other agencies, which includes data standards, work-month costs, staffing and skill requirements, and estimated time-frames needed to establish an integrated, automated geospatial database for filling in data gaps;
8. Establish a communication process for direct communication with the public and to ensure greater public involvement in the planning process and to ensure wide distribution of relevant information;
9. Establish a work plan which identifies the staffing and technology needs to support public involvement and communication through use of the internet;
10. Identify the analytical process required to answer or address outstanding questions, issues or concerns;
11. Form a basis for statements of work for contracted work;

12. Help identify potential cooperators and interested publics; and
13. Help identify needed work-month costs, staffing, and operational dollars to complete the land use planning process and issue a Record of Decision.

Decisions to be Made

Land use plan decisions are broad-scale decisions that will guide future management actions within the Lewistown RMP planning area. Land use plan decisions for the RMP will apply to natural, biological, mineral, and cultural resources. The land use planning process will integrate social science information which can include the economic, political, cultural, and social structure of communities, regions, and the nation as a whole. Decisions will address resource uses and possible special designations, if identified during the land use planning process.

This preparation plan addresses planning actions in order to achieve the decision requirements outlined in Appendix C, Program-Specific and Resource-Specific Decision Guidance of the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1 and achieve adaptive management.

The planning process and the resultant RMP will identify land use planning allocation decisions as well as implementation decisions. While most will be allocation decisions, some implementation-level decisions may be identified.

The planning process will recognize ongoing programs, plans, and policies that are being implemented in the planning area by other land managers and interested governments. The BLM will seek to be consistent with or complimentary to other management plans. Whenever possible, existing valid resource decisions and management prescriptions would be carried forward into the planning process.