CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This approved resource management plan (RMP) sets forth the land use decisions, terms and conditions for guiding future management of lands and minerals administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the Judith Resource Area (RA). All uses and activities within this resource area must conform with the decisions, terms and conditions described in this plan. This approved RMP has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The Judith RA of the Lewistown District includes BLM land in Fergus, Petroleum and Judith Basin Counties and that portion of Chouteau County south of the Missouri River. The Judith planning area encompasses 5,970,249 acres, of which 701,581 surface acres (12%) and 867,591 acres of mineral estate (15%) are administered by the BLM. The majority of landownership is private. Other significant landowners include the State of Montana and the U.S. Forest Service (FS).

RELATIONSHIP TO THE BUREAU PLANNING SYSTEM

Development of an approved RMP occurs within the framework of the BLM planning system. The planning system is divided into three distinct tiers; policy planning, land use planning, and activity planning. The completion of this approved RMP along with the previously completed steps in the land use planning process, the draft Judith-Valley-Phillips RMP and environmental impact statement (JVP RMP/EIS, July 1991), proposed JVP RMP/final EIS (October 1992), and JVP ROD (August 1994) satisfies the requirements for the land use tier of the Bureau planning system.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE APPROVED RMP

This approved RMP is available upon request to all individuals, groups, entities, companies, and agencies.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COORDINATION

Throughout the planning process, concerns and interests of all publics were solicited and then addressed in a variety of formal and informal public participation activities. These involved various public meetings, one-on-one meetings with individuals or specific entities, the establishment and use of three coordinated resource management planning committees, public mailings, media news releases, and coordination briefings with governmental agencies. If more in-depth information is desired, please refer to Chapter 5, Consultation and Coordination, of the draft JVP RMP/EIS (1991) and proposed JVP RMP/final EIS (1992).

IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING DECISIONS

Decisions in this plan will be implemented over a period of years depending on budget and staff availability. Funding levels would affect the timing and implementation of management actions and project proposals, but would not affect the decisions made under this RMP. An implementation schedule will be developed to provide for the systematic accomplishment of decisions in the approved RMP.

Decisions will be monitored to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the decisions in the plan. This provides the information needed to chart the progress being made toward reaching the plan's stated goal and objectives. Monitoring the land use plan will provide the following:

1. Determine if a multiple-use prescription is fulfilling the purpose for which it was designed.

2. Determine if predictions of effects and impacts from management actions were accurate as a basis for appropriate management action.

3. Reveal unanticipated and/or unpredictable effects including off-site impacts.

4. Determine if mitigation measures are satisfactory and are as effective as predicted.

5. Determine if any established threshold levels have been met or exceeded.

6. Provide for continuing evaluation of consistency with plans or programs of federal, state, and local government or Indian Tribes.

7. Provide for continuing comparison of plan benefits versus costs (social, economic, and environmental).

8. Determine if new data and/or information have affected the plan, its conclusions, or estimation of effects.

9. Determine the rate and degree to which the plan is being implemented in terms of both the decisions that can be implemented without activity planning and those that require activity planning.

Monitoring guidelines can be found in the Judith Monitoring Plan available at the resource area office. These guidelines will be used to monitor the implementation of specific management guidance and actions and updated as necessary.

Land tenure adjustments will be monitored to identify changes in the respective county tax base and the net change in BLM land.

The following inventory and monitoring requirements for riparian-wetland areas will begin with implementation of the plan for the six groups of allotments identified under the Preferred Alternative in Appendix J of the proposed RMP/ final EIS (1992). The allotments were ranked into these six groups based on resource conditions and whether riparian objectives are being met. The list of allotments will be updated through plan maintenance based on inventories and monitoring.

Implementation will be by watershed and management will consider the streams, water sources, and uplands within that watershed. Prioritization for implementation will begin with the watershed containing the greatest number of group one allotments. All allotments within a watershed will be considered when managing for riparian-wetland values. The resource area will determine the size of the watershed applicable to management actions. The actual boundaries of the selected watershed will correspond to those major, submajor, minor, or hydrologic units as defined by the State of Montana, Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Division. Implementation for an individual allotment will consider the implications (standards and guidelines) and effects to the entire watershed and to other allotments within the watershed. Exceptions will be considered for C allotments, if it is determined that the amount of public land involved is to insignificant that overall improvement in the watershed cannot take place.

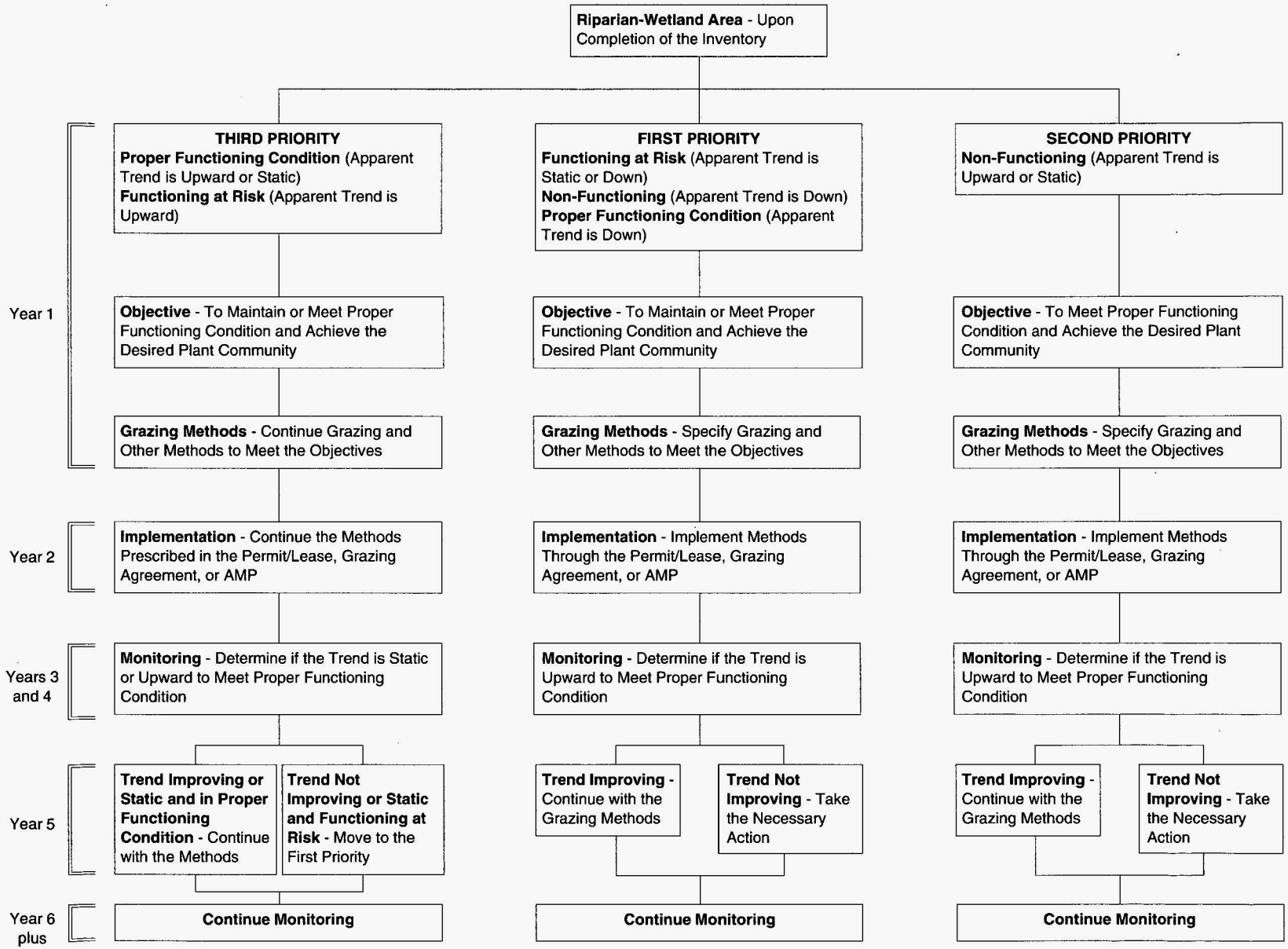
Inventories of riparian-wetland areas already have or will determine functioning condition (proper functioning condition, functioning at risk, or non-functioning) and the potential to produce a certain type of plant community.

Allotments with riparian-wetland areas that are in proper functioning condition (and apparent trend is static or upward) or are functioning at risk (and apparent trend is upward) will remain at the existing allotment category (Improve (I), Maintain (M), or Custodial (C)). The riparian-wetland objectives will be to maintain or meet proper functioning condition and achieve the desired plant community. To meet these objectives, grazing and other methods will continue as specified in the permit/lease, grazing agreement, or allotment management plan (AMP). The plant communities in these riparian-wetland areas will be monitored to determine if the trend is maintained or improving. If the trend is down or static/functioning at risk, the allotment will be recategorized as an I allotment and grazing and other methods will be specified to meet the objectives as discussed in the following paragraph.

Allotments with riparian-wetland areas that are in proper functioning condition (and apparent trend is down), functioning at risk (and apparent trend is static or down) or non-functioning will be recategorized as Category I allotments. The riparian-wetland objectives will be to maintain or meet proper functioning condition and achieve the desired plant community. Grazing and other methods to meet these objectives will be implemented during the next grazing season. Grazing methods will be specified in the permit/ lease, grazing agreement, or AMP. The plant communities in these riparian-wetland areas will be monitored for two years immediately following implementation of the grazing methods to determine if the trend is improving to meet proper functioning condition. If the trend is not improving, the necessary action will be taken the next grazing season to achieve an upward trend toward proper functioning condition and the desired plant community.

Figure 1 shows the general implementation schedule for riparian-wetland management. A specific implementation schedule will be prepared for the allotments with riparian-wetland areas. This specific implementation schedule will maintain the time frame shown in Figure 1 and will be updated each year based on additional inventory and monitoring.

Figure 1
General Implementation Schedule for Riparian-Wetland Management



MAINTAINING AND AMENDING DECISIONS

Decisions in this plan will be maintained to reflect minor changes in information. Maintenance is limited to refining or further clarifying a plan decision and cannot expand the scope of the decision nor change the terms or conditions of the decisions. Maintenance will be documented in supporting records. A plan amendment may become necessary if major changes are needed or to consider a proposal or action that is not in conformance with the plan. Plan amendments are accomplished with public input and environmental analysis.