

# BLM creating new management plan for Central Montana

By JENNY GESSAMAN  
Reporter

After several decades, and some internal restructuring, the Bureau of Land Management is creating a new resource management plan tailored to the Lewistown Field Office area.

Dan Brunkhorst, planning and environmental coordinator for the office, has been with the project since its start in 2012.

“Broadly, what a resource management plan does is limit, provide or exclude the use of resources,” he said.

Brunkhorst listed soil, fish and wildlife as just some of the resources the plan governs. He explained the document would set goals for resources, while taking stock of what Central Montana currently has and how it is used.

The plan will combine and update two older management plans from 1994 and 1984, reflecting a change in BLM district boundaries that has since combined both areas under the management of the Lewistown Field Office.

“Part of the process is to look at what’s been in place in existing plans,” Brunkhorst said.

He added the plan also encompasses a small part of Lewis and Clark County, whose BLM lands fall under the Butte Field Office. Brunkhorst explained its inclusion saves the BLM money: It keeps the agency from paying to overhaul Butte’s recent management plan for a comparatively small part of their management area.

A draft of the new resource management plan is being reviewed internally, and Brunkhorst expects the first



A view showing the diversity of landscapes near the Musselshell River is captured during a Montana Wilderness Association flight on Sept. 19.

Photo by Jenny Gessaman, flown by LightHawk

draft to be released to the public late this year. He noted that, as a draft, the plan would include alternatives for each resource and use.

The release will signal the beginning of the plan’s public comment phase, according to Brunkhorst. Copies will be available, and the BLM will host five open houses throughout the planning

area.

“Our goal is to solicit public feedback and review,” he said.

While it’s too early to tell how much public feedback there will be, the plan has drawn the public’s attention. Earlier this month, the Montana Wilderness Association offered the media free flights over some

of the planning area.

MWA Central Field Director Mark Good said the group wanted to put the upcoming plan on the radar.

“We wanted to make sure people are aware of it, and the area is an important

place to Central Montana,” he said.

Good said the MWA appreciated the high wildlife value of the area, as well as the recreational and historical value in the Judith Mountains.

“What we want them [the BLM] to do is to apply some sort of protective measures so the lands stay the way they are,” he said. “We want it to continue to be a good place to hunt, and to continue to be a place with good opportunities for solitude.”

Bill Berg volunteered to be a guide on the flight, and was excited to show off some of Central Montana’s “unique ecosystems.” Berg learned about the landscapes surrounding Lewistown during 24 years as the former deputy project manager of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge.

“The intent of the flight was to show people the area, and express an opportunity for people to get involved with the planning in the Missouri River Breaks,” he said.

Berg described the area as beautiful, but emphasized its ecological importance.

“We always refer to it as an intact ecosystem,” he said. “The Missouri Breaks is a large block of habitat that’s still functioning the way it did 100 years ago.”

Berg conceded the area has more recreation and grazing now than in last few centuries, but maintained the area’s native ecosystem has been preserved.

“But the fact that the grass is still there, the shrubs, the timber that’s out there and valuable to animals is still intact: There aren’t many places in the world that you can find a landscape that hasn’t been altered to some extent.”

This, Berg argues, gives an even greater importance to public participation.

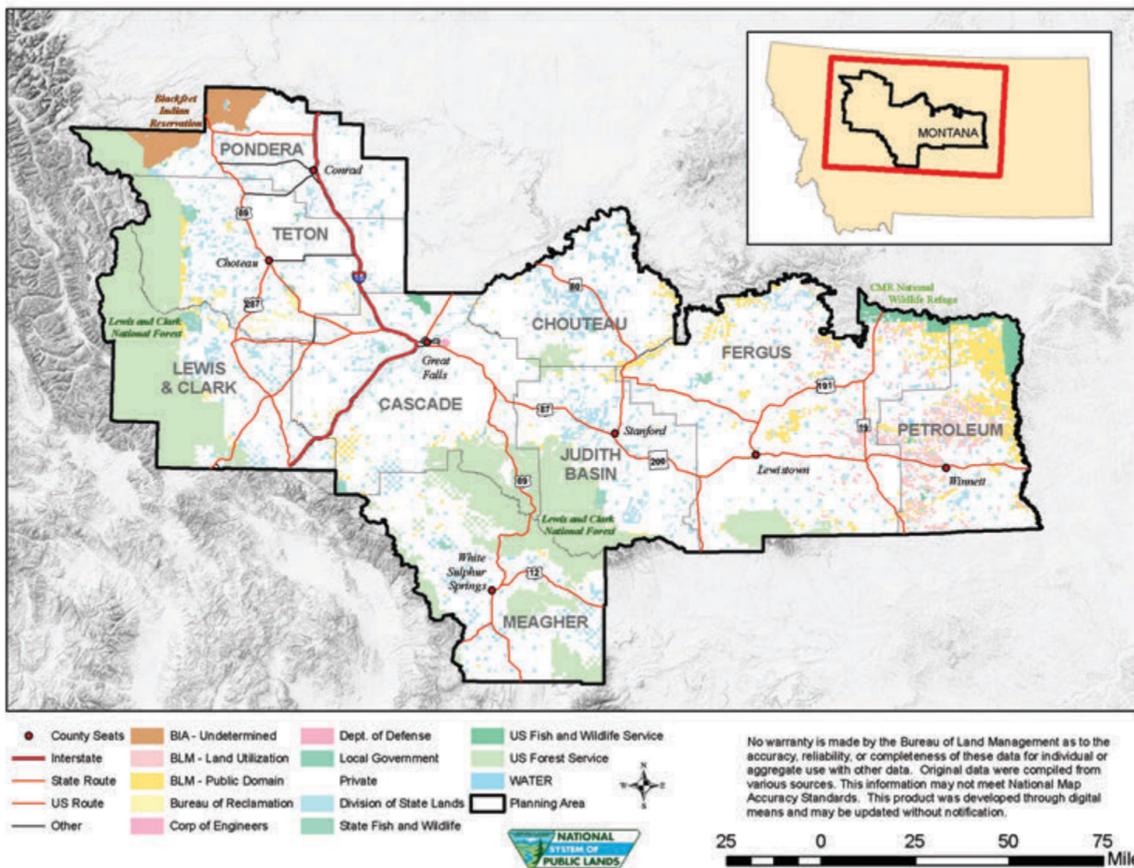
“When I was working at the refuge, we went through a similar planning process,” he said. “I was always amazed at how nonchalant people are at getting involved in these types of activities.”

Although management plans can be large, and sometimes dry, Berg warned the decisions they make directly affect users of public lands for years to come.

“It will affect habitat,” he said. “People need to understand that, and not just expect that it’s going to be managed today the same that it will be managed in twenty years.”

Berg paused and found a more light-hearted summary.

“It’s like raising a family: You’ve got to stay involved, otherwise things go awry,” he laughed.



A map shows the planning area covered by the upcoming Lewistown Draft Resource Management Plan.

Map courtesy of BLM