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# Envisioning Situation Assessment

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Resource Management Plan

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Bureau of Land Management- Missoula Field Office

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BLM





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# Missoula BLM Resource Management Plan

## Situation Assessment

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## **Background and Purpose**

The Missoula Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is revising its 30-year-old Garnet Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Missoula Field Office (MFO) to provide goals, objectives, and direction for approximately 156,000 acres of surface BLM-managed lands and approximately 268,000 acres of sub-surface BLM-managed minerals in western Montana.

The MFO is pioneering a newly developed approach for this effort called “Public Envisioning.” Envisioning is a pre-scoping component of the BLM’s new Planning 2.0 initiative. Envisioning is intended to occur during the initial phases of the planning process along with preparation of the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). Envisioning sessions aim to create additional, earlier opportunities for public engagement in the planning process. There are three specific goals:

1. To create a more dynamic and efficient planning process;
2. To enhance opportunities for collaborative planning; and
3. To plan across landscapes and at multiple scales.

The Missoula BLM requested assistance from Kearns & West (K&W) facilitators to assist with public envisioning. Envisioning is aimed at collaboration on high-level concepts, such as goals and processes, and setting the stage for a collaborative relationship throughout the land use planning process. The K&W facilitators, Mike Lunn and Diane Groves, will focus on problem-solving and fostering collaborative management strategies at the ground level. BLM Missoula will work with the public to achieve those goals by encouraging relationships, building trust, and creating a common voice for the land through shared methods, terms, and definitions.

## **Situation Assessment Process**

K&W facilitators agreed to conduct a Situation Assessment (SA) in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of both the issues (ecological and social) and opportunities for collaboration within the area. This type of assessment draws on published information, including various websites and stakeholder discussions. SA findings are then used to inform the development of general recommendations and some specific next steps that are responsive to site-specific conditions, public interests, or issues.

The specific purposes of the Situation Assessment are:

- To identify interested parties and people who will be important to issue resolution;
- To learn from them their perceptions and concerns about the existing situation;
- To learn their knowledge about planned future processes and willingness to participate in collaborative efforts;
- To begin to understand the many issues and concerns that may be ancillary to the primary purpose of RMP Revision;
- To document findings in a very transparent way to ensure that people feel listened to; and
- To use the information to help develop some initial avenues for moving forward.

During the period of February 29-March 4, 2016 the SA team including Mike Lunn and Diane Groves, (private conflict resolution specialists) along with Margaret (Maggie) Ward and Micah Helser, the BLM Revision Team Lead and Writer/Editor respectively visited with approximately 50 people. They met face-to-face with a wide range of organizations and individuals to listen to their perspectives, concerns, and suggested opportunities for working together to develop a shared vision and understanding on various issues. An offer was made to talk by telephone with other interested people who were unable to visit in person during the primary week.

An initial participant list was developed by the BLM's RMP Revision interdisciplinary team, and included a broad and diverse spectrum of people (BLM employees and stakeholders). Still others were added at their request as they became aware of the work. Individuals on the initial list were sent a letter (2/5/2016) informing them of the Envisioning process and the opportunity to participate in the situation assessment. Follow-up contacts were made to help confirm interest. Some people forwarded the letter within their networks, generating additional interest and conversations with people who self-selected to attend a discussion either with others or individually.

SA team members met with individuals, and occasionally a few small groups, with discussions typically lasting up to an hour. Time was extended with larger groups. The purpose of stakeholder discussions was to: (1) learn about the local situation; (2) meet involved parties and begin building relationships with them; (3) understand their perspectives of the situation; and (4) hear about the issues with which they are concerned. With each conversation, it was noted that everything said by participants is confidential; nothing would be quoted nor attributed to any individual in the report. The SA team did not take notes during the discussions, beyond simple items such as cited documents, contact information for other people, or other similar small reminders. The SA team wanted to focus on actually listening and not trying to capture specific notes during the discussions.

During the discussions, the SA team used a model of "listening with respect." After initial introductions, the team listened to the perspectives and insights of participants, without judging the content. People were encouraged to speak from their own knowledge and perspective about the situations or issues they felt were most important. Some general questions were usually asked by the SA team to prompt discussion and to clarify points that were being made. This approach helps foster a sense of trust between the participants and SA team, and provides a foundation for working together. Discussions were also designed to begin to create a shift in thinking within the participants, in some instances helping move them beyond the current situation to ideas for how the situation might be improved for all parties. In addition, participants were provided opportunities to ask questions about the plan revision, the BLM approach, and how this information will feed into the larger revision process.

## **Situation Assessment Report**

This report documents, in general terms, the issues and concerns that were identified during the situation assessment, and provides recommended next steps based on this information. The report is not meant to be a comprehensive statement of fact; rather, it represents the personal knowledge and opinions of the people with whom the team spoke. By necessity, this report condenses, summarizes, and perhaps simplifies a large body of complex and often conflicting information. In some cases, there are information conflicts among various people or with published documents and the report reflects this. The discussions and subsequent report are not designed to ascertain the accuracy behind individual statements;

but, rather to identify and document perceptions and opinions held by people. It very likely contains what some people view as errors or omissions, and clearly cannot capture all of the feelings and beliefs that were heard during the discussions. The range of opinions and perceptions that exist is the starting point for exploring the potential to develop understanding, shared visions, and potential areas with which to work collaboratively to resolve issues. The SA team and project sponsors greatly appreciated the willingness of the people in the area, and beyond, to openly share their thoughts and ideas.

The completed Situation Assessment will be provided to all participants in the discussions as well as other people and agencies who want to review the document. It will be made available as well on the BLM website.

## **Project Area**

The 156,000 surface acres managed within the Missoula Field Office occurs within three counties; Granite, Powell, and Missoula, and generally is described as consisting of five primary management blocks, these are: the Garnet/ Chamberlain Mountain area, Hoodoos, Lower Blackfoot River Corridor, Mineral Hill/ Marcum Mountain, and lands south of interstate-90 around Philipsburg, MT. See Figure 1. Missoula BLM "management blocks" on the next page for the location of these areas. Across all blocks there is a highly mixed landscape of diverse management and ownership. State, National Forest, and private lands are all mixed together. The predominant acreage is within the Lolo, Beaverhead-Deerlodge and Helena National Forests. Approximately 80% of BLM-managed lands are within the Blackfoot River Watershed.

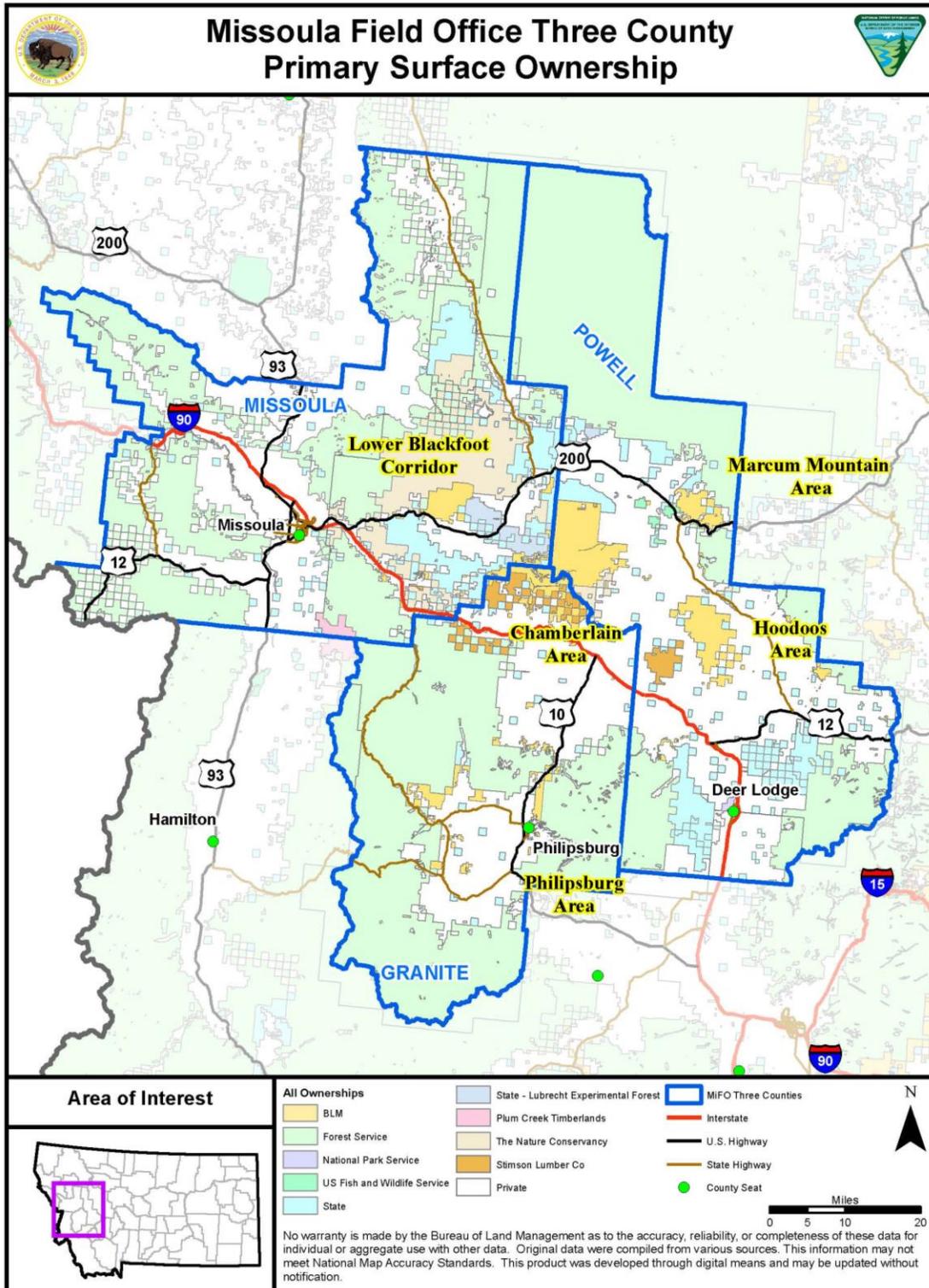
The largest public land area administered by the MFO is within the Garnet/Chamberlain mountain area. This also is one of the most commonly used blocks and has a number of differing recreation uses and opportunities. Garnet Ghost Town is a famous landmark and historical area that attracts over 10,000 visitors a year. A BLM-designated Back Country Byway bisects the Garnet range, and offers important summer and winter access. The Whales Creek Wilderness Study Area encompasses much of Chamberlain Mountain and a high-elevation forested landscape. There are many patented and unpatented mining claims most with little activity currently but the potential remains high for future development. There are also many opportunities for exchanging private and public lands to block up ownership and make for a more manageable situation. There are approximately 80 miles of groomed snowmobile trails within the area.

The Hoodoo Mountain area to the southeast of Helmville consists of a mostly solid block of public land but with a number of private in-holdings, some of which are landlocked with no approved road access. Most of these in-holdings are along the southern fringe of the area. This block is quite remote with only four-wheel-drive access across the middle section. The Hoodoos Wilderness Study Area is located within this block and offers an important habitat and connectivity corridor for wildlife species.

Another important block of land is located along the lower Blackfoot River north of Highway 200 and contiguous with lands recently purchased from Plum Creek by the nature Conservancy. Because of the close proximity to the population hub of Missoula, this area is popular amongst river recreationists and hunters. The local ranching communities of Potomac and Greenough are adjacent and have historically used the area to provide for a rural way-of-life through grazing, timber harvest, and irrigation water.

The Mineral Hill section west of the Town of Lincoln and mostly north of Highway 200 has a long history of minerals development and timber harvest that has left a relatively high density of roads. This area is also very important for wildlife winter range along with special interest species including Wolf and grizzly bear. Biologists and natural resource managers from government agencies and universities have long-valued this area for its research opportunities. The southernmost public lands within the MFO are near Philipsburg, where the public land areas are smaller, separated, and generally bordered by National Forest or private. The small public landholdings in this area are nearly all managed for livestock grazing. Bull trout and cutthroat trout are present in some of the streams, raising the importance of quality riparian habitat. The small area of public lands north and east of Phillipsburg are used mostly by locals for ATV use, target shooting, and contains some historical mining evidence.

Figure 1. Missoula BLM "management blocks"



# Summary of Findings

## Stakeholder Listening Sessions

### General Attitudes About Discussions

In general people seemed to be very supportive of the opportunity early on in the revision process to be part of discussions and appreciated the BLM for giving them the opportunity to share their perspectives, values, and interests. For a number of people, being listened to early in the process was a refreshing change in agency behavior. People were often very passionate about describing the lands as public lands that the BLM manages on behalf of the American people rather than being owned by the Federal Government. Upfront listening to the public sends a good signal that this relationship is understood and respected by BLM.

A number of people discussed the importance of clearly explaining the relationship and scope of the revised RMP to other planning activities BLM employs such as specific travel management planning that regulates access and travel on specific roads and trails, allotment management planning or timber sales. Concern was expressed that people need to fully understand the sideboards, scope, and purpose for the planning at the RMP level if they are to be successfully engaged and able to have realistic expectations for outcomes. There were also some questions about why the plan was being redone and if there was something specific that happened that caused the old plan to no longer work.

### Public Lands- Value and Existence

In general people placed a high value on having public lands, and on public lands being managed for the people of the United States. One individual called the public lands “necessary for the sanity of man,” while others observed an almost spiritual value while standing atop a mountain looking across a valley or broader landscape. Many people highlighted the importance of sharing their experiences on public lands with their children and grandchildren. Many expressed a concern that their children and grandchildren will not have the same opportunities as they have had with public lands.

Many people highlighted the importance of these lands being managed by the federal government. Others noted that a discussion about whether the public lands should be managed by the state is happening throughout the state. Many people expressed concern with the “giving away” public lands to private ownership.

The occupation at the Malheur National Wildlife Area in Oregon was a frequent topic of conversation. Generally the people who talked about that situation did not feel that such an event could occur in their area, but some people felt that those same type feelings do exist among some segments of the population locally. A few people acknowledged there is support locally for the reasons behind the occupation but not the actions themselves. Concern was expressed by several people, ranchers and others, about the overreach of the federal government and the fear that continued livestock use of public lands is threatened. A large number of people expressed concerns that some agencies have become arrogant and ineffective, and unwilling to engage in real participative dialogue on issues.

## Importance of Outreach and Relationships

Many people described having a good relationship with the BLM in western Montana. Some of these relationships have existed for decades and there is a positive feeling about both new management and other BLM staff who are working in a respectful way with land users. It was seen as important to communicate frequently and well and to be inclusive of all interests to maintain these healthy working relationships. Some individuals were initially concerned that with the presence of facilitators, the BLM perceived these relationships as potentially conflicted and created a barrier between stakeholders and the agency.

## Revision Process and BLM's Planning 2.0

As people learned about the proposed changes to the BLM planning process embedded in the Planning 2.0 initiative, both interest and support for the process was expressed. Many people explained that the explanation of the Public Envisioning process in the BLM letter of February 5 seemed to be a good path to follow. People in this area are largely comfortable with working together on problems up front, and they supported the BLM in their purpose of listening to the people and their ideas before tossing out the agency ideas in scoping. Several people expressed that this was a very welcome change in agency approach. A few people mentioned the importance of a well-managed and timely process, as well as a frustration for the slow pace of government planning and decision making.

Most people stressed their desire to be included in future processes and the importance of continuous communication by the BLM throughout the RMP process. Several people expressed a desire for communication to be electronic through email. A few people asked for communication to be through the traditional postal service mail delivery. Several people appreciated the schedule modifications to the planning process, such as up-front listening and sending out the preliminary alternatives to the public between Scoping and release of the DEIS. This was seen to reduce the period of time where there normally is little or no public outreach (the planning "black hole") where the public often in the past has lost connection to the planning work being done.

## Plan Revision Elements Discussed by the Public

### Maintain and Restore Ecological Sustainability

There were a number of people who spoke in general terms of sustainability and resiliency of ecological processes. They tended to see a major role for restoring and maintaining healthy forest conditions on the landscape scale, and for broad management objectives that maintained the diversity of healthy forest and range conditions. Climate change was mentioned by a few in this regard, but it seemed that people believed that managing the land well over time was what is needed. Some people spoke about the importance of ecological resiliency to support bird and wildlife populations. They spoke to the importance of the soils beneath the vegetation as importance for achieving resiliency goals.

### Access for Public Use and Resource Management

Various aspects of access management were the most widely discussed topics, and included a broad array of different types of access and limitations, and widely diverging opinions. It was noted there is room for many multiple uses, but it is important to protect some pristine backcountry and wildlife habitat areas to excessive access and use.

User conflicts were a commonly discussed access issue. The changing modes and popularity of motorized or mechanized access brings with it new and different conflicts. Some people talked about what in the past user access issues tended to be, for example, between horse users and hikers. There also have long been issues between different types of motorized users and hikers and/or horse users. The growing popularity of mountain bikes and length of seasons available to bikers due to the updated designs of bikes has increased conflicts with hikers and horseback users. Additionally, the sport of mountain biking has evolved considerably; it is not just an access method but for many a type of extreme sport where speed and difficult terrain plays a big role. Improved design and larger size of snowmobiles has also made more areas accessible by snow machines and for longer periods than used to be the case.

Horse and mule riders and packers have invested considerable time, effort and ingenuity in improving the way they use trails, campsites, streamside areas and vegetation to reduce impacts over the past number of decades. One well-known local packer/guide has been improving wilderness horse packing techniques for a half-century, and he continues to share his knowledge in educating and training a diverse clientele. High scenic values, well-maintained trails, and “unspoiled” backcountry are important attributes to this group. Horse users have reduced their impacts through such methods as limiting the size of groups, reducing weight of the equipment, campsite protection, and how they care for their stock in backcountry areas. Some people with whom we spoke are largely day riders while others take extended pack trips into the backcountry and Wilderness areas. One of their larger concerns on mixed use trails is with mountain bikers. To a horse and rider, bicycles are very quiet (compared to motorbikes and ATVs) and at such a rate where a horse can be easily spooked with a close encounter. Also, it was noted that while many hikers have learned to move off the trail on the downhill side as a string of horses and mules pass, the many new users on bicycles may not be as familiar with good trail etiquette. Horses have a natural fear of predators from uphill, and may become skittish when bikers stand uphill.

Backcountry bike use also was noted to have an adverse impact on trails by creating small trenches that do not drain well and over time develop a “v” shape within the center of the trail prism. While no one indicated the conflicts were insurmountable there was acknowledgment of the need for improving and continuing education. There was also positive feedback on new and innovative ways of designing multiple use trail systems. Separate trails started, and ultimately ended in the same destination, however each trail restricted uses to avoid known conflict (for instance horses and bicycles had their own trail). The expansion of a system of biking trails (and hiking) was seen as beneficial to local tourism in areas such as Phillipsburg and other rural areas. Some people focus on more bike trails in the urban/rural interface.

Snowmobile use is also a highly popular access method. The area features many miles of well groomed trails. At times there are conflicts between people who want to drive UTV or Jeep type vehicles in on the same roads that may be groomed for snowmobiles. Some landowners are requesting additional miles of access roads and/or lengthening the period when existing roads are plowed to make access easier. The Garnet area was specifically mentioned where this is a problem at times. It was noted that the modern snowmobile has the capability of going to more places than its predecessors, and also has reduced exhaust emissions and lower noise levels. Some people saw the ability to go to more places as a positive thing, while others indicated this could lead to more wildlife encounters and stress during the critical winter periods in some places.

One major frustration people expressed was when there is not good communication about planned changes to access. While this seemed to be aimed mainly at the Forest Service, people want to know about and be involved with decisions that might limit or modify access options. Several people talked about how arrogant government agencies could be when they go up and put locked gates on roads without discussions and warnings. One example was given on a BLM 4 wheel drive road that crosses a long section of public land, and a gate was placed on one end; but the rest of the road from the other end was open all the way to the gate. You could drive to the gate from either direction, but not go through it.

Another access issue that was highlighted was the limitations on access to some privately held lands that currently have limitations on road access or no roads. Some of these have seasonally closed roads that are groomed for snowmobiles; some landowners would like to see roads plowed during the winter so they can be used by pickups or other vehicles. But snowmobile users like to continue their use season on roads and groomed routes to the extent snow conditions allow. Snowmobilers are concerned that new winter plowing of the roads would decrease their opportunities to use public lands. It was explained that there is no “right” to access by landowners where the property lacked road access at the time of purchase

Some individuals acknowledged the importance of existing motorized and mechanical travel and wanted to see these uses maintained. However, there was a desire to concentrate this to areas that have only allowed these uses in the past. The same individuals felt it was important to keep roadless areas such as Wilderness Study Areas free from future motorized and mechanical use. Other people were concerned that use of public lands is increasing, and without the expansion of roads, trails, and dispersed sites, resource integrity and opportunities for recreation will decline.

## Provide for Recreation Opportunities at all Scales and Users, while Always Protecting Resources

Several people discussed the importance of managing the public lands in a way that to the greatest extent possible provided a place for all users. These people also understood and described the importance of taking care of the most pristine and undeveloped areas for the long term. Those areas are particularly important for wildlife species such as grizzly bear and wolf along with fisher, lynx, and wolverine. In those most important wildlife habitat areas management similar to what would occur in designated wilderness is seen as most appropriate. There would be little or no motorized access and few or no newly developed trails. Where roads already exist, the system will be carefully managed to minimize future resource damage and reduced motorized use such as seasonal closures. Some individuals expressed that simply the existence of lands with little human impact are important, even if access is difficult. At the opposite end of the spectrum would be areas with a much more robust system of trails and different levels of road access. These would largely be the front areas nearer to communities and other developed features. Between those two extremes would be a general land area where more decision space would be available between protection and development. Additionally, several people talked about the importance of better access for close by cities or communities to enable people of all abilities to be able to enjoy the beauty and diversity of the surrounding environment. Several examples were discussed of long stretches of roadside trails between communities or around communities. Some of these opportunities would require groups of managing agencies and landowners working together to maximize opportunities.

Hunting for deer, elk, grouse and other game remains a highly important activity among a high portion of the local/regional population. Hunting has long been an important part of the western culture, and particularly so in this area. Hunting brings people from across the U.S. along with local people, adding to the economy and employment opportunities for communities. As with other uses, there was recognition of the importance of providing hunting opportunities for people of all abilities, including the older or physically impaired group, along with people who seek backcountry exploration and enjoyment as part of their hunting experience.

Some people expressed concern about taking care of that segment of the public with limited abilities including older people who may have once been strong hikers or horse users but no longer are physically capable of that type access but still want to enjoy all the area has to offer and that many remember. Some of those people question why more area is not open to use by off-road vehicles such as utility vehicles (UTV). They see it as unfair that many areas are no longer available to them simply because of diminished physical capability.

Garnet Ghost Town remains a popular location for many people. Many people expressed a desire to continue the current management of the area as available for winter and summer use. People talked about taking their families to the cabins at Garnet Ghost Town to enjoy the experience. Other people talked about how their out-of-town visitors were in awe of the opportunity to have this historic town exist on public lands.

## River Uses

Floating, boating, and fishing activities on the Blackfoot River have increased greatly over the past several decades. This increase is both in the number of users, and also the number of sections of river being used. The lower part of the river near Missoula has an extremely high number of users throughout the summer season nearly every day. This easily accessible and relatively gentle water where almost any raft, inner tube, or other floating platforms can be used provides a non-challenging and relaxing social context for people to enjoy.

Some of the upper reaches of the river are less accessible, offering more challenging water conditions and greater opportunities for reduced user encounters with other people. Some people expressed concern that River managers needed to be working together up front with the public and other agencies to maintain a variety of different floater experiences and environmental attributes, perhaps even limiting the number of users on certain reaches with a permit system. Many individuals shared the importance of making management decisions and planning for the future with a “ridge top to ridge top” approach.

Fishing for trout offers a broad spectrum of opportunities ranging from high quality sections of river for fly fishing purist anglers similar to those portrayed in the movie “A River Runs Through It” to places where children can learn to fish using spinning tackle or other simple methods. Again, during discussions people exhibited interest in maintaining opportunities for all the various users to the extent possible so long as the basic resource was being protected.

## Range Management

The team visited with several people who have livestock operations or who have an interest in livestock operations on public lands. Several lessees expressed concern that in the letter dated February 5, describing the revision process and Situation Assessment, that range management and forestry were not among the items listed in terms of the specific purposes of the work. Compared to many BLM field offices the grazing program is fairly small on the Missoula area. But to the individual operators and many others, it nonetheless is very important to the cultural and economic well-being and way-of-life. Lessees wanted to make sure their interests are known.

Several people expressed concerns about the health and condition of riparian areas along streams in areas due to over grazing or improper grazing. Riparian areas are widely seen as being important to good fish habitat and it was also noted that a high percentage of all wildlife depends at some point in its life cycle on riparian and stream habitats. Some people stated that there are extremists on both ends of the grazing issue; those who want all livestock removed, and those who see it as their “right” to graze as they choose. But the broad majority locally is more in the middle, willing to work together with others to achieve good outcomes. Some highlighted the importance of an interdisciplinary approach by the BLM to looking at issues on the ground.

The BLM generally received support and appreciation for the job they are doing in working with lessees and their issues. A few people commented that over the years there had been some “difficult” employees to work with, but it was more of an individual issue than a BLM issue.

It was recommended that during the revision process the interdisciplinary team should have strong skills and knowledge in range management to take best advantage of livestock for maintaining the health of the range and riparian and also carefully planned grazing management similar to some of the teachings of

Alan Savory. These people believe that livestock can be managed to help restore and/or recover rangeland or forest areas by improving plant composition, foliar cover and groundcover over time. This is largely accomplished through careful adjustments to the timing, intensity and duration of grazing practices based on an understanding of plant phenology. Others felt the RMP revision is a perfect opportunity to conduct a comprehensive landscape-level analysis on the impacts of grazing and how plant communities have shifted from pre-grazing conditions. The same individuals communicated the importance of factoring the decline of aspen tree stands into the grazing management analysis.

A diversity of people also commented on the importance of maintaining ranching and livestock operations as part of the cultural, historic, and economic values within this area of Montana. Some noted how traditional ranching attracts tourism and overnight hospitality opportunities on ranches. Since these visitors are coming to experience a scenic and ecologically functioning landscape, this acts as an incentive for land owners to be good stewards of the land. They associated ranching with large open spaces and Western culture. Several people commented on the interdependence of the ranching community and how ranching fosters a sense of people working together and community to be successful whereas farming can be done more independently.

One lessee felt endangered species regulations concerning bull trout were important and were willing to comply with stipulations on grazing federal lands. However under one circumstance when these rules required the livestock to be moved off the grazing allotment earlier than expected, the only other location available to the ranchers was on the same stretch of stream but on private land. The location of which was closer to sensitive bull trout habitat which they felt had a higher impact. They felt frustrated with the BLM and other agencies for not coordinating management decisions for the common good of the species.

## Invasive Weeds

Invasive and noxious weeds are viewed by essentially all who participated in discussions as a major problem, and one that requires high levels of cooperative work. The identification of locations occupied by invasive weeds in the area, and subsequent containment and/or control of weeds was a topic where there is virtually no division about importance. Knapweed and perennial pepper weed (white top) were the most commonly addressed invasive species, and people are highly concerned about their presence and potential to be very damaging to native vegetation, riparian areas, and wildlife habitat. There are a number of other invasive species, and with all of them there is strong support for aggressive cooperative suppression actions. If a “common enemy” can bring people together, invasive weeds could do it in western Montana.

## Forest Management

Forest management is one of the most changed resource uses within the Missoula area of public lands and surrounding lands of other ownerships. Logging was an important part of the history of Missoula from its founding. Lumber was necessary for building towns and homes. A variety of forest products were needed for mining, railroad ties and fuel. As recently as the 1960s and early 70s, Missoula was largely a mill town. The air was so laden with smoke during the winter inversions that an almost toxic environment was created for many of the people living there. Teepee burners were used to dispose of sawmill waste creating constant plumes of smoke; and the Hoerner-Waldorf pulp mill, constructed in the middle 1950s, added to the poor air quality and bad odor associated with operations. Dramatic improvements in technology and loss of large scale milling operations over the years have provided a very different environment for the Missoula valley of today.

Many millions of board feet were harvested annually for many decades from the mountains surrounding Missoula from both National Forest and private lands. Over the years large blocks of private land were held and operated by such companies as Plum Creek, Champion International and others. Vast stands of virgin timber provided most of the production. As with many other Intermountain forest areas, site productivity was generally moderate or low compared with productive West Coast or southern US timber stands. The nearby Bitterroot National Forest became the focus for major reconsideration of timber management practices in 1970's when the Bolle report was issued by a group of University of Montana scientists. The report criticized timber management from an ecological and economic viewpoint and forever changed commercial forest management in that area and greatly impacted forest management across the National Forest system.

Today a small number of sawmills still exist and all face a difficult and uncertain future. It was pointed out when talking to some operators that while the volumes available from BLM-managed public lands is not large, that every offering is important. It was noted that the BLM has a good history of working to provide a diverse mix of offerings of commercial timber sales, stewardship operations, forest health treatments and others. Operators said the BLM typically was quite effective and efficient in producing volume/projects and compared those efforts to the Forest Service which seems to be stifled by the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. They pointed out that some Forest Service timber project plans may take up to eight or nine years to complete and by the end have been so compromised for fear of litigation that there is little worthwhile production available.

Another difficulty currently facing the local timber industry is that some sales that were purchased several years ago when lumber and timber products had much higher value now cannot economically be operated and the contract termination dates are approaching. This may cause some operators to go out of business and others to struggle and try to complete the contracts at a financial loss. Loss of additional logging and milling capacity presents a broad scale conundrum. Forest restoration and the reduction of threats from wildland fire will continue to require timber harvest and removal. And timber harvest or removal (or nearly any stand modifications) without an economically viable forest products industry could quickly become infeasible and/or inefficient.

Some individuals within the forestry and lumber community felt it important to differentiate between small, family-owned sawmills against much larger corporate-owned mills. They feel that family-run mills are more vested in the community and are better stewards of the land, while corporations are only focused on profit and not a long-term sustainable resource.

It was pointed out that today, collaboration and working together to achieve multiple objectives is the only hope that sawmills have for maintaining their operations. The days of relying solely on commercial timber sales are past. Successful mills often focus on niche markets and not just traditional products. Timber companies recognize the importance of being a valued community member, and some are making major investments in the well-being of both their community and their employees through such actions as improved wages and benefit packages, and being part of the groups of people working for improved community well-being. Education and communication at all levels of communities and government about sustainable forest uses and management was also cited as an important activity.

Many individuals from various interests were concerned with a lack of active forest management. Individuals were concerned that forests that had not seen fire, thinning, or harvest for many years were no longer healthy and susceptible to disease, fire, and bug infestation. Some felt it could be the BLM's

position to act as a broker between government agencies, private landowners, and forest product outlets to participate in projects which result in multiple benefits such as fuels reduction, big game habitat enhancement, and economic contributions to the local community. One rancher felt that forests were over-grown to such a state that spring developments were no-longer producing at past rates, but when a fire burned the area above the spring, it increased the flow of water to past levels. Others felt that by allowing forests to be disturbed by only natural processes, it provided the most benefit to wildlife and ecosystem health.

## Mining

Mining is one of the oldest activities in the vicinity, and the reason many Caucasians began coming to the area as early as 1860 according to some. Gold, in both placer and lode claims, along with other minerals such as copper, lead and zinc, were present in various locations. The General Mining Act of 1872 provided the clear legal basis for acquiring and protecting mining claims on public land. This law remains very important to people who have claims or want to prospect. It was noted that for people who have claims in the Missoula Field Office area, this law provides them the legal assurances they need in order to continue exercising this right.

Other people are very concerned that the law provides too much latitude to operators, and over the years there has been considerable degradation in some areas from minerals exploitation. There remain several potential large scale operations in the Blackfoot drainage that people fear would be very damaging to recreation, watershed and land health values.

Many inholdings of private land have resulted from location of mining claims; some of these create access issues, as there may be only small areas of public land between the claims. These may be essentially unmanageable by BLM depending and often are seen as land trading opportunities for blocking up ownership. They also are creating conflicts between people who own the claims, and the general public seeking access to the public lands. Concern was expressed by one miner that road management decisions can be very frustrating when roads get closed with little/no explanation or discussion, or when agency decisions cause the public to use private lands due to closed public roads.

## Land Acquisition

The BLM has an ongoing program of land ownership consolidation. Prior to 2002 the program primarily consisted of land exchanges with private individuals, large corporate owners, and non-profit organizations. Since 2002 the program has shifted from these exchanges to acquisitions focusing on the purchase of former Plum Creek Timberlands property by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The purchase and disposition of the former Plum Creek lands by TNC and the Blackfoot Challenge has occurred in three large scale projects, referred to as the Blackfoot Community Project (89,000 acres), the Montana Legacy Project (310,000 acres), and the Clearwater-Blackfoot Project (117,000 acres). To date, the BLM has acquired 12,400 acres of Blackfoot Community Project lands, 3,302 acres of Montana Legacy Project lands, and is working with TNC to acquire Clearwater-Blackfoot Project parcels.

Whenever the land acquisition program for BLM was discussed there seemed to be strong support for public management or other conservation management that would preserve the character of the landscape within the Blackfoot River drainage and other areas of the Missoula Field office. There also was encouragement to continue to block up ownership by targeted exchanges that would resolve some of the access issues for both private landowners and the public land users. In the experience of the situation

assessment team, this is very different than frequently held attitudes in other areas across the Western United States. While there is often support for lands to be maintained by the BLM and/or forest service, there is often strong opposition to federal lands management or the acquisition of additional federal lands. That is at the heart of the efforts to have public lands and national forest turned over to the states for management. This support for conservation management seems to be rooted in the collaborative work that has been ongoing in the Blackfoot Valley for several decades, and the strong relationships that have been fostered within the public and with the BLM.

## Large Scale Landscape Planning: Connectivity, Collaboration, Cooperation

A number of the people talked about the planning revision and the importance of large-scale landscape planning in an area like the Missoula and Blackfoot drainage area. An important consideration was the ability of the BLM to integrate the important elements of its public lands within a much larger framework of diverse ownerships. It is important not only to planning at that level but to be able to explain to the interested public and partners how planning can occur at such large levels and also provide clear long-term guidance on specific areas of land and activities. Clarity and simplicity, similar to that contained in the existing RMP, was suggested as a model by a few people. That plan has served well for both conservation and project development over the years.

Some people suggested that a focus of BLM be on those areas contiguous with other land ownerships that are being managed for similar purposes. Connectivity across that large landscape is seen as critically important by many particularly for large carnivores and special interest species including Wolverine, lynx, and fisher. The identification of special habitats for protection that may be uncommon within the much larger area was suggested by some. Wetlands and aspen stands were two such special habitats. Some of the important connections include the larger Yellowstone ecosystem to the south, and the “Crown of the Continent” spanning the area mostly from Yellowstone along the continental divide to Glacier National Park and Canada’s Waterton Lakes National Park. And according to several people, it isn’t enough to simply look at the land area, but a similar connection must be made to the people across that land area in order to be successful.

The region has developed a robust group of strong collaborative working groups, including the Blackfoot Challenge, the Southwestern Crown Collaborative, the Clark Fork Coalition and others. These groups maintain strong local volunteer presence, and include large Non-Governmental Organizations and government agencies. Most people stressed their belief that collaboration is key in achieving a multi-use balance in natural resources. Because there is such a strong history of collaboration already in place it is important to tap the richness of work already done as it is relevant to BLM managed lands.

Communication with all parties and groups is a major theme heard multiple times, and solving problems by consensus has been important for the larger, collaborative working groups mentioned above. The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Audubon, Sierra Club and other NGO’s are major players along with industrial and business partners.

A small number of people were concerned that a collaborative process might be used and that there would be some people would be excluded who have a deep interest in the area but do not have the time and resources to be a part of an ongoing collaborative group. There was also a concern that using a collaborative process would result in decisions made by a small group without true representation of all local and/or national interests. Some people stated that they have concerns group agreements may be reached on the basis on compromises that are not truly in the best interest of the resources or people.

## Rural Way of Life vs Rural Lifestyle

In describing what many people seek from this area, it was noted that some people speak about a “rural lifestyle.” A distinction was made by some, with one person coining the phrase a “rural way of life.” To her, a rural lifestyle is what some city people seek where there are very high scenic values and recreation opportunities such as golf courses. In listening to many however, the rural way of life encompasses working to care for the land, appreciating neighbors and working together, and understanding the values presented by both protected landscapes and working landscapes. People talked about, for example, the importance of maintaining livestock operations that provide connections to the culture and history of the area, help to maintain large areas of open green space, and contribute to the small town local economies. It isn’t just about observing special places, or recreating; it’s about working together to foster continuity in the culture, conditions and economy that makes the area so special.

## Recommendations

There are two primary recommendations by the Situation Assessment consultants.

1. The first is to provide feedback opportunities to interested publics after they have had a chance to review the Situation Assessment. This would involve three separate meetings, 2-4 hours each, at locations that could optimize attendance by the public and partner agencies. One location would be in the Missoula area, one in Phillipsburg, and one in the Greenough area, such as Lubrecht Experimental Forest. These would tentatively be scheduled during the week of April 11-15. An overview of the Situation Assessment would be provided at the meeting, followed by a listening session where attendees could provide their thoughts on the process and findings, along with their recommendations for moving forward in a collaborative manner.
2. Second would be to hold a one-day workshop with members of the revision interdisciplinary team to ensure they have the opportunity to fully understand the findings of the Situation Assessment. Additionally, they would focus on the importance of building/maintaining strong working relationships within their group and their partners and counterparts in the public and agencies.

## List of Participants

- Dan Schilz
- Mack Long
- Connie Long
- Denny Iverson
- Chris Bryant
- George Hirschenberger
- Peter Nelson
- Erin Edge
- Kylie Paul
- Rose Leach
- Jim Brown
- Andrea Stierle
- Amy Cilimburg
- Kit Fischer
- Dave Morgan
- Don Philips
- Zach Porter
- Jon Martin
- Riley Egan
- Kyle Kelly
- Lee Kelly
- Gordy Sanders
- Owen Retzlaff
- Tom Toman
- Claudia Narcisco
- Nick Jose
- Chris Bryant
- Jordan Reeves
- Josh Osher
- Jerry O'Connell
- Ken Kronsperger
- David Sharbono
- Ralph Smith
- Jody Wills
- Leslie & Denny Iverson
- Charles Johnson
- Barbara Clark
- Larry Clark
- Neil Clark
- Don Pettit
- Bill Gabriel
- Anne Nelson
- Kurt Luoma
- Rich Lane
- Steve Immenschuh
- Ed Brumsvold
- Smoke Elser
- Jean Belangie-Nye
- Dan Harper
- Ken Brown