
SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This draft environmental impact statement (EIS) describes and analyzes a reasonable range of management alternatives for the public lands and resources administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Pinedale Field Office (PFO) in western Wyoming (Map 1-1). This analysis will aid the BLM decisionmaker in formulating a revised resource management plan (RMP) for the Pinedale planning area. Within the planning area, BLM administers approximately 922,880 acres of public land surface and 1,199,280 acres of federal mineral estate in Sublette and Lincoln counties. The planning area includes the Rock Creek and Beaver Creek Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); Lake Mountain and Scab Creek Wilderness Study Areas (WSA); and Boulder Lake, Scab Creek, and Upper Green River Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA).

This RMP revision will result in a land use allocation plan for the Pinedale planning area. Previous site-specific or project-level implementation decisions, such as those made for the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline gas fields, would not be immediately altered by this RMP revision. The analysis in this draft EIS considers a comprehensive range of alternatives that provide for various levels of resource protection and opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreational activities, leasing and development of mineral resources, livestock grazing, and other land use activities. The draft EIS analyzes the potential environmental consequences of implementing each management alternative and the potential land allocation and/or resource use conflicts.

PLANNING ISSUES

The identified planning issues are based on the demands, concerns, conflicts, or problems concerning use or management of public lands and resources in the planning area. The planning issues were identified through public scoping and information gathered in analyzing the existing management situation in the planning area. Based on the input of the public, other government agencies, and BLM and cooperating agencies (also known as cooperators), the following 10 key issues or unresolved conflicts were identified:

- Development of energy resources and minerals-related issues
- Land tenure adjustment
- Vegetation management
- Cultural resources (including national historic trails) and paleontological resource management
- Travel management—OHV use
- Wildland/urban interface
- Special Status Species management
- Water quality
- Special management designations
- Wildlife habitat, including greater sage-grouse.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAFT EIS ALTERNATIVES

Four alternatives are analyzed in detail, all of them multiple use oriented. Each alternative provides for resource production and environmental protection. The management prescriptions of the four alternatives are described in Chapter 2. Alternatives were developed to establish a framework for measuring the

impacts that might result from management decisions. The alternatives represent reasonable approaches to managing land and activities consistent with law, regulation, and policy. The BLM may select an alternative in its entirety or may combine aspects of the various alternatives presented in this draft to develop the Final EIS proposed plan and RMP.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative) includes RMP maintenance and updates to the direction provided by the Record of Decision (ROD) and RMP for the Pinedale Resource Area (1988), and new direction and policy that have been implemented subsequently.

Minerals

Alternative 1 would make available approximately 1,026,790 acres for oil and gas leasing and development. No areas would be administratively unavailable for oil and gas leasing or limited in surface disturbance for protection of wildlife habitats. Timing and distance mitigation would be applied to protect greater sage-grouse, raptors, and big game, and their habitats. Additionally, 14,540 acres would be proposed for withdrawal from locatable mineral entry and land disposal.

Other Resources

The current permitted animal unit months (AUM) for livestock grazing (107,907 AUMs) would be maintained unless monitoring indicated a need for adjustment. The Desert General Use area (237,360 acres) would be open to OHV use without restrictions. The Upper Green River, Boulder Lake, and Scab Creek SRMAs would be retained. No coordinated, areawide transportation planning would be conducted. Access across private lands would be pursued as needed through a variety of methods, including, but not limited to, purchase of rights-of-way (ROW) or easements, land exchange, reciprocal ROWs, and other statutory authorities.

Under Alternative 1, approximately 641,140 acres would be managed as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class IV; 187,070 acres would be managed as VRM Class III; 73,430 acres would be managed as VRM Class II; and 21,290 acres would be managed as VRM Class I. Management actions would emphasize the reduction of soil erosion and sediment and salinity contributions to the Green River Basin water system. An activity plan for reducing erosion and channel degradation would be prepared for the Tip Top watershed. A watershed/recreation plan would be prepared for the Stuart Point-Mount Airy area to reduce sedimentation while still allowing off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Threatened and endangered (T&E) species and their habitats would be protected. Actions determined to degrade habitat to a point of jeopardizing the continued existence of a T&E species would not be allowed. Mule deer, elk, pronghorn, and greater sage-grouse use patterns would be monitored. High priority would be given to improvement of wildlife habitat through vegetation manipulation.

Surface disturbance restrictions included in the 1988 RMP ROD for protection of cultural, visual, vegetation, wildlife, soils, and other resources would continue to be implemented. Examples are restrictions on development on steep slopes, protections for significant cultural sites, and restrictions on disturbance on or near greater sage-grouse and raptor nesting areas.

Special Management Areas

The Rock Creek and Beaver Creek ACECs (8,860 acres) would be retained under their current management.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is designed to evaluate the impacts of maximizing the production of oil and gas resources while providing an adequate level of environmental protection for other resources. The BLM would implement performance-based objectives and operating standards that would provide the appropriate flexibility to adapt management decisions to changing and uncertain environmental conditions on the ground while ensuring appropriate mitigation. Performance-based objectives and standards would provide the minimum protection for all natural resources from impacts of oil and gas activities. The mitigation guidelines and standards are presented in Appendix 3 and provide requirements, consultation, guidance, and limitations on all aspects of oil and gas related activities.

Minerals

Alternative 2 would make available approximately 1,177,430 acres for oil and gas leasing and development. The entire planning area would be open to oil and gas leasing and development except for WSAs (21,200 acres) and the Trapper's Point ACEC (550 acres). The planning area would be divided into three areas for management of oil and gas leasing and development (Map 2-7). Intensively Developed Fields would be managed for intensive oil and gas activities while protecting wildlife habitats to the extent practicable. Minimally Developed Areas would be managed for protection of important values during oil and gas exploration but would provide opportunity for intensive oil and gas activities. Unavailable Areas would be managed for protection of wildlife habitats through indefinitely postponing the availability of lands for oil and gas leasing. The planning area would be open to geophysical exploration and operations except where prohibited by law. Specific timing and distance mitigation would be applied for wildlife habitat protection only to the extent required by law (for example, for T&E species protection) (Appendix 12). Transportation planning would facilitate and designate access to the public lands. Sensitive aquatic species habitats would be maintained.

Other Resources

In Alternative 2, the integrity of the visual setting of national historic trails would be protected by prohibiting surface occupancy within one-quarter mile of the trails. Permitted AUMs for livestock grazing would be increased from 107,907 to 157,308 by activating suspended nonuse AUMs. Alternative 2 would limit OHV use in the Desert General Use area to existing roads and trails. No recreation area management plans (RAMP) would be completed, and no new SRMAs would be established under this alternative. Vegetation would be managed to support wildlife habitat and livestock grazing needs, control soil erosion and provide riparian stability, control noxious weeds, and protect Special Status Species. Under Alternative 2, the number of acres in VRM Class IV would be increased to 717,390 acres; the number of acres in Class II would be increased to 87,150; and the area in Class III would be reduced to 118,390 acres. There would be no VRM Class I areas. Discharge of produced waters to streams or other nonisolated surface features would be allowed if permitted by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ). Alternative energy development proposals would be considered on a case-by-case basis and would be permitted throughout the planning area except in WSAs and where prohibited by law.

Special Management Areas

The Rock Creek and Beaver Creek ACECs would be eliminated. A new ACEC would be designated in the Trapper's Point area (550 acres).

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 is designed to analyze the impacts of providing the maximum level of environmental protection for all competing resources while allowing for the production of oil and gas resources. The BLM would implement performance-based objectives and operating standards that would provide the appropriate flexibility to adapt management decisions to changing and uncertain environmental conditions on the ground while ensuring appropriate mitigation. The mitigation guidelines and standards would provide the highest level of protection for all natural resources from impacts of oil and gas activities. The performance-based objectives and standards are presented in Appendix 3 and provide setbacks, consultation, guidance, and limitations on all aspects of oil and gas related activities. In addition, land allocations and areas unavailable for oil and gas leasing would be implemented.

Additional goals of Alternative 3 are to protect and sustain resources and land uses, such as livestock grazing and recreation, in the planning area. To meet these additional goals, BLM would implement objectives and management actions that include restrictions and protective mitigation for each resource and land use. SMAs would be emphasized under Alternative 3.

Minerals

Alternative 3 would make available approximately 487,360 acres for oil and gas leasing and development. The planning area would be divided into three areas for management of oil and gas leasing and development (Map 2-8). Intensively Developed Fields would be managed for intensive oil and gas activities while protecting wildlife habitats to the extent practicable. Minimally Developed Areas would be managed for protection of important values during oil and gas exploration but would provide opportunity for intensive oil and gas activities. Unavailable Areas would be managed for protection of wildlife habitats through indefinitely postponing the availability of lands for oil and gas leasing. No surface occupancy (NSO) would be allowed on big game crucial winter ranges (865,300 acres), migration routes and bottlenecks, and parturition areas (151,290 acres) unless other restrictions were applied through ACEC or other SMA designation. Timing and distance mitigations would be applied to protect greater sage-grouse, raptors, and big game, and their habitats. Transportation planning would be required in all areas to reduce road density, duplication of routes, and unnecessary routes. Sensitive aquatic species habitats would be maintained or improved. Furthermore, 65,750 acres (New Fork Potholes, Trapper's Point, Upper Green River, and CCC Ponds ACECs; Boulder Lake and Scab Creek SRMAs; East Fork River Unit wild and scenic rivers [WSR], the Upper Green big game migration bottleneck; the Sublette Cutoff historical trail; and several sensitive cultural sites) would be withdrawn from locatable mineral entry and land disposal.

Other Resources

The integrity of the visual setting of national historic trails would be protected from surface disturbing activities by relocating or redesigning projects within 3 miles from either side of the trail to conform to a VRM Class II designation. Alternative 3 would provide for prescribed and natural wildfire management to emulate historic natural fire regimes. Permitted use for livestock grazing would be reduced to 84,000 AUMs. OHV use in the Desert General Use area would be limited to existing roads and trails. BLM would complete RAMPs, and an array of outdoor recreation activities, settings, and experiences on public lands for local residents and visitors would be provided. The Green and New Fork Rivers SRMA would be established. Vegetation would be managed to support wildlife habitat and livestock grazing needs, control soil erosion, provide riparian stability, control noxious weeds, and protect Special Status Species. The number of acres in VRM Class IV would be reduced to 282,300; the number of acres in Class III would be increased to 225,830 acres; and the area in Class II would be increased to 393,260 acres. Alternative 3 would limit soil erosion and impacts on riparian areas by working with the state to prohibit

the discharge of produced waters to streams or other nonisolated surface features. Proposals for alternative energy development would be considered on a case-by-case basis and would not be approved in sensitive areas.

Special Management Areas

The Rock Creek and Beaver Creek ACECs would be retained. New ACECs would be designated in the Trapper's Point, New Fork Potholes, Upper Green River, White-tailed Prairie Dog Habitats, Ross Butte, and CCC Ponds areas (64,830 acres). The Trapper's Point ACEC would be larger under this alternative (9,540 acres). The Miller Mountain and Wind River Front Management Areas would be established (424,840 acres). Four river units would be managed as suitable for inclusion in the WSR System: East Fork, Scab Creek, Silver Creek, and the upper Green River (10,440 acres).

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 (Preferred Alternative) is designed to evaluate the impacts of optimizing production of oil and gas resources while providing the appropriate level of environmental protection for all competing resources. The BLM would develop and implement performance-based objectives and operating standards that would provide the appropriate flexibility to adapt management decisions to changing and uncertain environmental conditions on the ground while ensuring appropriate mitigation. The mitigation guidelines and standards are presented in Appendix 3 and provide setbacks, consultation, guidance, and limitations on all aspects of oil and gas related activities. In addition, land allocations and areas unavailable for oil and gas leasing would be implemented.

Additional goals of Alternative 4 are to protect and sustain resources and land uses, such as livestock grazing and recreation, in the planning area. To meet these additional goals, BLM would implement objectives and management actions that include restrictions and protective mitigation for each resource and land use.

Minerals

Alternative 4 would make available approximately 1,024,880 acres for oil and gas leasing and development. The planning area would be divided into four areas for management of oil and gas leasing and development (Map 2-9). Intensively Developed Fields would be managed for intensive oil and gas activities while protecting wildlife habitats to the extent practicable. Minimally Developed Areas would be managed for protection of important values during oil and gas exploration but would provide opportunity for intensive oil and gas activities. Large Block NSO Areas would be managed for protection of wildlife habitats through offering oil and gas leases with NSO stipulations. Unavailable Areas would be managed for protection of wildlife habitats through indefinitely postponing the availability of lands for oil and gas leasing. Transportation planning would be required in all areas to reduce road density, duplication of routes, and unnecessary routes. Sensitive aquatic species habitats would be maintained or improved. Additionally, 13,770 acres (New Fork Potholes and Trapper's Point ACECs, CCC Ponds SRMA, East Fork River Unit WSR, and several sensitive cultural sites) would be withdrawn from locatable mineral entry and land disposal.

Other Resources

The integrity of the visual setting of national historic trails would be protected from surface disturbing activities by relocating or redesigning projects within 2 miles of either side of the trail to conform to a VRM Class II designation. The Preferred Alternative would also provide for prescribed and natural wildfire management to emulate historic natural fire regimes. The current permitted AUMs for livestock

grazing would be maintained unless monitoring indicates a need for adjustment. The Preferred Alternative would limit OHV use in the Desert General Use area to existing roads and trails. BLM would complete RAMPs to provide an array of outdoor recreation activities, settings, and experiences on public lands for local residents and visitors. The Green and New Fork Rivers and CCC Ponds SRMAs would be established. Transportation planning would be conducted to provide access to and across public lands, and to control the density and distribution of roads. Vegetation would be managed to support wildlife habitat and livestock grazing needs, control soil erosion and provide riparian stability, control noxious weeds, and protect Special Status Species. The number of acres in VRM Class IV would be reduced to 249,940 acres; the number of acres in Class III would be increased to 395,380 acres; and the area in Class II would be increased to 256,320 acres. Soil erosion and impacts on riparian areas would be limited by working with the State to prohibit the discharge of produced waters to streams or other nonisolated surface features. Use of high-quality produced waters to assist in reclamation could be considered on a case-by-case basis, would be limited in scope, and would be governed by a number of operating standards (Appendix 3). Proposals for alternative energy development would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Special Management Areas

The Rock Creek and Beaver Creek ACECs would be retained. New ACECs would be designated in the Trapper's Point and New Fork Potholes areas (5,980 acres). The Miller Mountain, Ross Butte, and Wind River Front Management Areas would be established (303,350 acres). Four river units would be managed as suitable for inclusion in the WSR System: East Fork, Scab Creek, Silver Creek, and the upper Green River (10,440 acres).

Environmental Consequences

The environmental consequences that could result from the management prescriptions of the four alternatives are described in Chapter 4 and are summarized and compared in Table 2-34, Summary Comparison of Impacts. These potential consequences are discussed for each resource program, providing an analysis of environmental effects resulting from management of all resources and resource uses. This includes an analysis of cumulative effects, which are defined as the impacts that result from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

The primary role of cooperating agencies (also called cooperators) is to provide special expertise and/or assistance to the lead agency throughout the RMP/EIS process. Cooperator roles include participation in the scoping process; provision of staff, information, and assistance to the lead agency; performance of (or assistance with) independent preparation of analysis where cooperating staff has special expertise; review of draft information; and provision of overall advice during the EIS process.

The following agencies with jurisdiction, special expertise, or interest in the Pinedale RMP EIS development process are cooperating agencies:

- Sublette County
- Sublette County Conservation District
- Lincoln County
- Lincoln Conservation District
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Wyoming Office of Federal Land Policy

- Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Wyoming Office of State Lands
- Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission
- Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office
- Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality
- Wyoming Department of Agriculture
- Wyoming Department of Transportation
- Wyoming Governor's Office
- Wyoming State Geological Survey
- Wyoming Business Council.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public participation in the EIS process includes a variety of efforts to identify and address public concerns and needs. The public involvement process assists the agencies in broadening the information base for decisionmaking, informing the public about the RMP EIS and the potential impacts associated with various management decisions, and ensuring that public needs and viewpoints are understood by the agency. Information is provided to the public through meetings, news releases, the Pinedale RMP website, and newsletters.

Public scoping meetings were held in Rock Springs, Pinedale, and Marbleton, Wyoming, on March 3, 10, and 11, 2003, respectively. During the 3 scoping meetings, more than 140 people registered their attendance. The meetings were structured in an open house format, with various information tables representing issues such as livestock grazing, mineral development, and other resource areas. Comments from the public were collected during the scoping meetings and throughout the scoping period through the following methods: mail, e-mail, and through the project website.