

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ES.1 INTRODUCTION

The BLM Monticello (Utah) Field Office (Monticello FO) is revising its current land use plan, the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP), which was signed in 1991. The new plan revision, which is to be called the Monticello RMP, and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), would provide the management direction for public lands within the boundaries of the Monticello FO. The newly revised RMP covers the same area as did the 1991 RMP, which is two-thirds of San Juan County with a small portion located within southern Grand County (BLM 1991). The Monticello FO planning area (Monticello PA) comprises approximately 4.5 million acres of land which includes approximately 2.5 million acres of mineral estate and 1.8 million acres of public land administered by the BLM. Elevations vary from approximately 3,700 feet above sea level near Lake Powell to 11,360 feet in the Abajo Mountains.

The Monticello PA is situated in the canyon, plateau, and desert areas of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province. The Monticello PA encompasses Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, the Abajo Mountains of the Manti-La Sal National Forest, Canyonlands National Park, Natural Bridges and Hovenweep National Monuments, and the White Mesa Ute and Navajo Indian Reservations. The Monticello FO shares boundaries with lands administered by the BLM Moab and Dolores FOs.

ES.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

ES.2.1 PURPOSE

Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires that the BLM "develop, maintain, and when appropriate, revise land use plans" (43 United States Code [U.S.C.] 1712 [a]). The BLM has determined it is necessary to revise the existing land use plan (LUP) and prepare a new RMP for the Monticello PA based on a number of new issues that have arisen since preparation of the existing plan. In general, the purpose of this RMP is to provide a comprehensive framework for BLM's management of the public lands within the Monticello PA and its allocation of resources pursuant to the multiple-use and sustained yield mandate of FLPMA. In addition, the purpose of this plan revision is to:

- Reevaluate, with public involvement, existing conditions, resources, and uses, and reconsider the mix of resource allocations and management decisions designed to balance uses and the protection of resources pursuant to FLPMA and applicable law.
- Resolve multiple-use conflicts or issues between resource values and resource uses. The resulting Monticello RMP will establish consolidated guidance and updated goals, objectives, and management actions for the public lands in the decision area. The RMP will be comprehensive in nature and will address issues that have been identified through agency, interagency, and public scoping efforts.
- Disclose and assess the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the reasonably foreseeable future actions resulting from the management actions in each alternative pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), its implementing regulations, and other applicable laws.

ES.2.2 NEED

A revision to the 1991 RMP is necessary because there have been significant alterations in the Monticello PA in light of new information and changed resources, circumstances, and policies that may be relevant to the future management of public lands and allocation of resources under the multiple-use and sustained yield mandate. This determination is further corroborated by a Special Evaluation Report, completed in 2002 by the Monticello FO, which concluded that some of the decisions within the 1991 RMP are in need of revision.

There have been changes in the laws, policies, and regulations that direct the management of the resources on Monticello PA public lands. There has also been an increase in the amount of new information and resource data that need to be considered to better manage the public lands. Population in and visitation to the region have grown, and population demographics have changed, as have public awareness and use of lands within the Monticello PA. Specifically, there may be a need to evaluate management prescriptions and resource allocations to address the increases in recreation and visitor use, including scenic quality and open spaces, as well as the increased interest in oil and gas development. Land use plan decisions may be changed only through the amendment or revision process.

ES.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public scoping is a process designed to meet the public involvement requirements of FLPMA and NEPA. This cooperative process includes soliciting input from interested agencies (federal, state and local), organizations, and individuals on issues, concerns, needs, resource uses, resource development, and resource protection. The scoping process is an excellent method for opening dialogue between the lead agency and the general public about management of the public lands and for evaluating the concerns of those who have an interest in the area.

As part of the scoping process, the BLM also requested the public to submit nominations for potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and nominations of rivers for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The scoping period for the Monticello RMP began on June 4, 2003 and ended on January 31, 2004. Scoping included scheduled open houses in six communities (Green River, Monticello, Moab, Blanding, and Salt Lake City, Utah, and Grand Junction, Colorado), and visitations to 12 locations throughout the planning area by BLM personnel. In addition, news releases and radio announcements were used to notify the public regarding the scoping period and the planning process and to invite the public to provide written comments. Comments obtained from the public during the scoping period were used to define the relevant issues that would be resolved by a broad range of alternative management actions.

ES.4 PLANNING ISSUES

As noted above, issues to be addressed in the RMP were identified by the public and the agencies during the scoping process for the Monticello RMP. The Final Scoping Summary (available for review on the Monticello planning web page at www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/prog/planning.1.html), prepared in conjunction with this RMP, summarizes the scoping process. The issues identified in the Scoping Report fall into one of 10 broad categories (see below). Other resource and use

issues are identified in the BLM Planning Handbook and Manual (H1610-1). All of the following issues were considered in developing the alternatives brought forward in this RMP.

ISSUE 1. –RECREATION USE AND OHVs

How can increased recreation use, especially motorized vehicle use, be managed while protecting natural resource values?

ISSUE 2. -MINERALS

What areas will be available for mineral development, and what restrictions should be imposed?

ISSUE 3. –SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS

What areas should have special designations such as ACECs and Wild and Scenic Rivers?

ISSUE 4. –ECOSYSTEM RESOURCES

How can resources such as watersheds, wildlife, and vegetation be protected, maintained, or restored?

ISSUE 5. –LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Are there areas where grazing should not be allowed due to resource conflicts?

ISSUE 6. –RIPARIAN AND WETLAND AREAS

How can riparian/wetland areas be managed to protect, maintain, and restore their proper functioning condition?

ISSUE 7. –CULTURAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

How can cultural and paleontological resources be protected from the predicted influx in visitation as well as from impacts from other resource uses (e.g., motorized recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development)?

ISSUE 8. –LAND TENURE ADJUSTMENTS AND WITHDRAWALS

What lands within the planning area should be identified as targets for acquisition, disposal or withdrawal?

ISSUE 9. –FIRE MANAGEMENT

Where is fire desired and not desired, and in what areas could fire be utilized as a management tool for vegetative treatments?

ISSUE 10. –NON-WSA LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

How should non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics be managed?

ES.5 ALTERNATIVES

Some of the decisions in this Draft RMP/EIS are carried forward from the existing San Juan RMP (BLM 1991) because there are no impending issues associated with them, and they do not need to change. These decisions are common to all alternatives because a range of alternative decisions is not necessary for these resources or uses. Other decisions are common to all action alternatives (Alternatives B, C, D and E), but are different from the No Action Alternative (A) due to a change in circumstances. An overview of some specific components of each alternative of this RMP is provided below. A full discussion of each alternative is provided in Chapter 2.

ES.5.1 ALTERNATIVE A- NO ACTION

Alternative A would be a continuation of existing management under the current San Juan Resource Area Management Plan (1991) as amended.

Under Alternative A, 611,310 acres are open to cross country OHV use, 276,430 acres are closed, and OHV use is limited to either designated or existing routes in the remainder of the planning area (Table ES1). Under this alternative, 540,260 acres have limited seasonal use.

Under Alternative A, three Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) would be designated to manage extensively-used recreation areas (Table ES3). Under this alternative, 10 ACECs would be designated. About 385,316 acres would be closed to oil and gas leasing. About 161,224 acres would be managed with no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulations, and 578,604 acres would be open with standard stipulations (Table ES6). The remaining 659,626 acres would be managed with timing limitation or controlled surface use stipulations.

ES.5.2 ALTERNATIVE B

Alternative B would offer more protection for wildlife and other natural resources, and favor natural systems over commodities development. It would emphasize the protection of natural resources and landscapes as well as non-motorized recreation.

Under Alternative B, zero acres would be open to cross country OHV use, 423,698 acres would be closed, and OHV use would be limited to designated routes in the remainder of the planning area (Table ES1). Approximately 1,521 miles of travel routes would be designated (Table ES2). Under Alternative B, 5 SRMAs would be designated (Table ES3).

Twelve ACECs would be designated under this alternative, and 9 segments of 9 eligible rivers would be recommended as suitable for wild and scenic river designation (Table ES4). About 416,612 acres would be closed to oil and gas leasing. About 125,105 acres would be managed with no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulations, and 365,170 acres would be open with standard stipulations (Table ES6). The remaining 876,740 acres would be managed with timing limitation or controlled surface use stipulations.

ES.5.3 ALTERNATIVE C- PREFERRED

Alternative C (Preferred Alternative) would protect important environmental values and sensitive resources while allowing for commodities development. It would provide a balance between protection of important natural resources and commodity production, as well as offer a full range of recreation opportunities.

Under Alternative C, 2,311 acres would be open to cross country OHV use, 418,667 acres would be closed, and OHV use would be limited to designated routes in the remainder of the planning area (Table ES1). Approximately 1,947 miles of travel routes would be designated (Table ES2). Under Alternative C, 5 SRMAs would be designated (Table ES3).

Six ACECs would be designated under this alternative, and 3 eligible rivers segments would be recommended as suitable for wild and scenic river designation (Table ES4). About 395,329 acres would be closed to oil and gas leasing. About 39,323 acres would be managed with NSO stipulations, and 629,472 acres would be open with standard stipulations (Table ES6). The remaining 719,501 acres would be managed with timing limitation or controlled surface use stipulations.

ES.5.4 ALTERNATIVE D

Alternative D would emphasize commodity development over the protection of natural resources, and would emphasize motorized recreation.

Under Alternative D, 2,311 acres would be open to cross country OHV use and OHV use would be limited to designated routes in the remainder of the planning area (Table ES1). Approximately 2,205 miles of travel routes would be designated (Table ES2). Under Alternative D, 5 SRMAs would be designated, (Table ES3).

No ACECs would be designated under this alternative, and no river segments would be recommended as suitable for wild and scenic river designation (Table ES4).

A total of 386,853 acres would be closed to oil and gas leasing. About 14,175 acres would be managed with NSO stipulations, and 962,283 acres would be open with standard stipulations (Table ES6). The remaining 421,000 acres would be managed with timing limitation or controlled surface use stipulations.

ES.5.5 ALTERNATIVE E

Alternative E would be based on Alternative B except 582,360 acres of non WSA lands would be managed to maintain their wilderness characteristics. These lands are managed as: closed to mineral leasing, closed to OHV use, proposed for withdrawal from mineral entry, right-of-way exclusion area, closed to disposal of mineral materials, closed to private and commercial woodland harvest, and managed as VRM I. Large areas on the west side of the Monticello FO would be difficult to access or do any kind of surface disturbing activities. Wilderness characteristics would be enhanced as would adjacent wilderness found in WSAs.

Table ES1. OHV Categories (acres) by Alternative

OHV Designation Category	Alternative A No Action	Alternative B	Alternative C Preferred	Alternative D	Alternative E
Open	611,310	0	2,311	2,311	0
Limited – designated	218,780	1,359,417	1,362,142	1,780,807	812,679
Limited use –seasonal	540,260	NA	3.8	NA	NA
Limited – existing	570,390	NA	NA	NA	NA
Closed	276,430	423,698	418,667	0	970,436

Table ES2. Designated Routes

Areas Limited to Designated Roads and Trails	Alternative A No Action ¹	Alternative B	Alternative C Preferred	Alternative D	Alternative E
B Roads	0	875	873	873	875
D Roads	0	1,521	1,947	2,205	1,342

¹ No route were formally designated in the 1991 San Juan RMP. Use of existing routes includes 890 miles of B Roads and 2,179 miles of D Roads.

Table ES3. SRMAs

SRMAs	Alternative A No Action	Alternative B	Alternative C Preferred	Alternative D	Alternative E
Number	3	5	5	5	5
Acres	703,761	508,856	508,512	505,018	508,856

SRMAs are established to manage intensively used recreation areas and generally do not restrict other uses.

In Alternative B, non-motorized recreation is emphasized.

In Alternative C (preferred), opportunities for both non-motorized and motorized recreation are provided.

In Alternative D, motorized recreation is emphasized.

Table ES4. Special Designations

Type		Alternative A No Action	Alternative B	Alternative C Preferred	Alternative D	Alternative E
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	number	10	12	6	0	12
	acres	488,616	521,141	76,764	0	521,141
Wild and Scenic Rivers	eligible river segments	6	12	12	12	12
		56.8 miles	92.4 miles	18.4 miles	0 miles	92.4 miles
	suitable segments	Not evaluated	12	3	0	12
Wilderness Study Areas	number	13				
	acres	386,027				

Acres may overlap (Scenic Highway and Cedar Mesa) and are different than previously published values.

Table ES5. Non-WSA Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

	Alternative A No Action	Alternative B	Alternative C Preferred	Alternative D	Alternative E
WC Units (#)	0	0	0	0	29
Acres	0	0	0	0	582,360

Table ES6. Oil and Gas Leasing Stipulations

Stipulation	Alternative A No Action	Alternative B	Alternative C Preferred	Alternative D	Alternative E
Standard	578,604	365,170	629,472	962,283	213,288
TL and CSU	659,626	876,740	719,501	421,000	545,641
NSO	161,224	125,105	39,323	14,175	53,915
Closed	385,316	416,612	395,329	386,853	971,463
Projected No. of wells/LOP	73	66	74	75	54

Oil and gas stipulations would apply to other surface disturbing activities where they are not contrary to laws, regulations, or policy. The following stipulations would be applied to land use authorizations: 1) standard stipulations, 2) timing limitations (TL), 3) controlled surface use (CSU), and 4) no surface occupancy (NSO). Areas identified as closed would not be available for oil and gas leasing.

Areas identified as NSO and closed would be avoidance and exclusion areas for rights-of-way, respectively. NSO and closed areas may be recommended for withdrawal of locatable minerals in the future if it is determined that unacceptable resource conflicts are occurring.

ES.6 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The Monticello FO is known for both its scenic quality and its recreational opportunities, which are an important land use in the planning area. Approximately 2 million visitors per year enjoy the diverse and varied recreational opportunities of the planning area and is an important part of San Juan County's economy. Recreational opportunities include scenic driving, mountain biking, hiking, rafting and boating, rock climbing, riding off-highway vehicles (OHVs), and horseback riding. The many trail-based recreational activities in the planning area are highly dependent upon route systems.

Mineral exploration and development are another major use of public lands in the Monticello PA. The oldest oil field in Utah is in the Monticello PA. Oil was discovered in Mexican Hat in 1879. In 1956 the development of the Aneth field sparked oil and gas exploration in San Juan County which continues to this day. Production of oil and gas is currently taking place in Mexican Hat, Aneth, Lisbon Valley and the Blanding Basin. There are approximately 42 active oil and/or gas fields in the Monticello PA.

Uranium and vanadium deposits can be found within 17 historical mining districts throughout the planning area. With the recent rise in oil, gas and uranium prices, there has been renewed interest in exploration and development of these mineral resources in the Monticello FO. Other mineral resources within the planning area that are likely to be developed during the life of the plan include: placer gold, limestone, building stone, sand and gravel, and clay.

Other land uses within the planning area include rights-of-way (ROWs) for roads, pipelines, powerlines, and communication sites, film permits, and livestock grazing.

Many important natural and cultural resources are found in the Monticello PA. A number of federally listed wildlife species inhabit the planning area, including the Mexican spotted owl, Southwestern willow flycatcher, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, and bonytail chub. The planning area also contains habitat for mule deer, elk, desert bighorn sheep, pronghorn, Gunnison Sage-grouse and Gunnison's prairie dog.

Pre-Columbian cultural sites affiliated with Pueblo people, and sites related to Archaic and Paleo Indian cultures are present (12,000 – 5,000 B. C.). Historic Period (post-Columbian) occupation in the area includes one National Historic Trail (Old Spanish National Historic Trail) and one pioneer historic trail (Hole in the Rock). Other historic properties are related to Ute, Navajo, Apache sites and Anglo ranching, farming and mining locations. Over 28,000 cultural sites have been recorded.

ES.7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Selection of Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, would maintain the current rate of progress in meeting land health standards and protecting resource values. It would allow for use levels to mostly continue at current levels in the same places in the planning area, with adjustments required in order to meet Standards for Rangeland Health or to mitigate resource concerns in compliance with existing laws and regulations.

Alternative B would have the least potential to adversely impact physical and biological resources and would protect a variety of vegetation types and wildlife habitats. Alternative B would be restrictive to resource extraction. Alternative B would have potential for short-term adverse impacts to local economies and businesses that depend on public land for resource extraction.

Implementation of Alternative C would allow for many uses to continue but would constrain certain activities in order to maintain or protect important natural resources. This could result in some short-term adverse impacts to local economies and resource extraction businesses, but long-term economic benefits would be gained from the emphasis on a diversity of recreational activities.

Alternative D offers the greatest potential benefits to the local economy from resource extraction, although economic benefits from recreation use would not be maximized. Resource extraction uses would generally be least encumbered by management decisions under this alternative. Alternative D would result in greater impacts on the physical and biological environment than actions proposed under Alternatives B, C, or E.

Alternative E would be the same as Alternative B, except 582,360 acres of non WSA lands with wilderness characteristics would be managed to maintain their wilderness characteristics. This alternative would be the most restrictive for access and resource extraction. Some benefit to back country recreation would be realized.

See Table 2.2 at the end of Chapter 2 for a summary of potential impacts by alternative. Detailed descriptions of impacts of the five alternatives are provided in Chapter 4, along with a discussion of the cumulative impacts, irretrievable and irreversible commitments of resources, and unavoidable adverse impacts of the alternatives.

ES.8 PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative C is identified as the preferred alternative based on examination of the following factors:

- Balance of use and protection of resources
- Extent of the environmental impacts

This alternative was chosen because it best resolves the major issues while providing for common ground among conflicting opinions as well as multiple uses of public lands in a sustainable fashion. In the opinion of BLM, it provides the best balance of resource protection and use.

ES.9 NEXT STEPS

The comment period on this Draft RMP/EIS will extend for 90 days following publication of the EPA's Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. After comments are received they will be evaluated. Substantive comments could lead to changes in one or more of the alternatives, or in the analysis of environmental consequences. A Proposed RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement will then be completed and released. If protests are received on the Proposed RMP/FEIS, they will be reviewed and addressed by the Director of the BLM before a Record of Decision and Approved Plan is released.

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