

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office  
Craters of the Moon National Monument  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, ID 83352

**Scoping Information Package  
Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve Management Plan  
Amendment**

DOI-BLM-ID-T031-2013-0001-EIS

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to prepare a Land Use Plan amendment (Plan amendment) with an associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve (Craters of the Moon) in accordance with the Craters of the Moon Management Plan. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this package is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an EIS with an estimated completion date of November 2016. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

**Purpose and Need for Action**

The BLM completed the Craters of the Moon Management Plan in 2006. In 2008, Western Watersheds Project (WWP) filed a complaint in the United States District Court for the District of Idaho (Court) alleging the Secretary of the Interior and the BLM violated NEPA and FLPMA when the BLM issued Records of Decision on 16 Resource Management Plans (RMP) between 2004 and 2008, including the Craters of the Moon Management Plan. In 2011, after briefing and oral argument, the Court noted that "...although grazing was deemed by the agency to be a major contributing factor to the decline of sage-grouse habitat, the RMP/EIS failed to adequately address the best science and the agency's own policies designed to protect that habitat. Moreover, the RMP/EIS failed to discuss alternatives to the status quo regarding grazing." Specifically, the Court found that the EIS supporting the Management Plan violated NEPA and FLPMA by (1) failing to consider a no-grazing alternative; (2) failing to consider the recommendations for greater sage-grouse conservation contained within a 2004 Nature Conservancy Report and the 2004 Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Conservation Assessment; (3) failing to fully discuss the agency's Special Status

Species Policy and National Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy; and (4) failing to consider any alternative that would have reduced grazing levels. In November 2012, the Court ordered the BLM to complete a Plan amendment with an associated EIS for the Craters of the Moon Management Plan to analyze a no-grazing alternative and reduced grazing alternative(s) for BLM managed lands within the Craters of the Moon, and develop measures for greater sage-grouse conservation within the Craters of the Moon.

It is important to note that the 2012 Court order did not vacate the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan; management direction found in the existing plan will remain in effect until the amendment is completed. As such, alternatives developed for this planning effort will be consistent with the management objectives found in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan.

The Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage Grouse Amendment will address a number of deficiencies found by the Court with regard to greater sage-grouse conservation in the Craters of the Moon and across priority habitat. The scope of this planning effort will be limited to curing the remaining deficiencies identified by the Court in 2011. The BLM will focus on analyzing a range of reasonable alternatives for grazing, including no grazing.

The purpose of this Plan amendment is to consider a range of reasonable alternatives for livestock grazing, including no grazing and reduced grazing alternatives. The BLM will analyze grazing management alternatives consistent with the goals for greater sage-grouse outlined in the BLM's current policies for greater sage-grouse, the existing objectives for vegetation and wildlife resource management as identified in the Desired Future Conditions (DFC's) in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan, Idaho's Standards for Rangeland Health, as well as other relevant agency policies and guidance.

The need for this planning effort is to cure deficiencies identified by the District Court. The Court found that BLM failed to adequately address the current science and the agency's own policies designed to protect greater sage-grouse habitat, primarily with regard to managing livestock grazing in the Craters of the Moon. The Court also found that BLM failed to consider a range of alternatives related to livestock grazing, including consideration of a no-grazing alternative or any alternative that reduced grazing.

### **Existing Condition**

The Craters of the Moon is a component of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (National Conservation Lands). The mission of the National Conservation Lands is to conserve, protect, and restore these nationally significant landscapes that are recognized for their outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values.

National Conservation Lands are part of an active, vibrant landscape where people live, work and play. They offer exceptional opportunities for recreation, solitude, wildlife viewing, exploring history, scientific research, and a wide range of traditional uses. These are places that spark the imagination. Their spacious beauty has drawn people to the West for generations.

The National Conservation Lands sustain for the future - and for everyone - these remarkable landscapes of the American spirit.

Presidential Proclamation 7373 expanded the Craters of the Moon National Monument in 2001 from approximately 50,000 acres to nearly 750,000 acres. The Craters of the Moon is a geologic wonder cast in a wild and remote landscape. Its central focus is the Great Rift, a 62-mile long crack in the earth's crust. The Great Rift is the source of a remarkably preserved volcanic landscape with an array of exceptional features. Craters, cinder cones, lava tubes, deep cracks, and vast lava fields form a strangely beautiful volcanic sea on central Idaho's Snake River Plain.

Young (dominantly Holocene) lava flows and other features cover about 450,000 acres of the Craters of the Moon. The remaining 300,000 acres in the Craters of the Moon are also volcanic in origin, but older in age and covered with a thicker mantle of soil. This older terrain supports a sagebrush steppe ecosystem consisting of diverse communities of grasses, sagebrush, and other shrubs and provides habitat for a variety of wildlife, including several BLM Sensitive Species, such as the greater sage-grouse.

Key management objectives were identified in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan. Specific management objectives related to this planning effort include:

- Proactively protect and restore sagebrush steppe communities.
- Emphasize protection of vegetation resources in North Laidlaw Park.
- Maintain a road network suitable for aggressive fire management within the Craters of the Moon. Support a large and proactive integrated weed management program.

### **Greater Sage-Grouse**

The most common threats to the greater sage-grouse habitat in the Craters of the Moon include wildfires (resulting in a lack of mature sage brush and expansion of invasive annual grasses and noxious weeds), infrastructure (mainly fences and roads), and improper livestock grazing. Over the past two years the BLM has conducted greater sage-grouse habitat assessment in the Craters of the Moon. This assessment included collecting data about vegetation characteristics as they relate to the various lifecycle needs for greater sage-grouse, including vegetation structure, height, and cover composition. Breeding, summer, and winter habitat suitability was determined using this information. These suitability classifications are intended to help portray the status of greater sage-grouse habitat across the Craters of the Moon.

### **Proposed Action**

The action proposed by the BLM in the Craters of the Moon to meet the purpose and need is to consider a range of reasonable alternatives for grazing on the BLM lands in the Craters of the Moon. Habitat for greater sage-grouse will be assessed in the Craters of the Moon Plan Amendment/EIS, in particular priority habitat will be a critical component of all of the alternatives. These alternatives will identify lands available or unavailable for grazing in the Craters of the Moon while considering: other land uses; terrain; soil, vegetation, and watershed characteristics; presence of undesirable vegetation; and, the presence of other resources requiring

special management. Alternatives may also identify the amount of forage available (Animal Unit Month (AUM)), potential future amount of forage available, criteria for adjustment of AUMs, management practices, seasons of use, range improvements, and/or stocking rates.

## **Preliminary Issues**

The remand of the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan to the BLM in 2012 to remedy the deficiencies identified in the 2011 Court decision limits the scope of this planning effort. The Court found that although livestock grazing was deemed by the agency to be a major contributing factor to the decline of greater sage-grouse habitat in the Craters of the Moon, the Management Plan/EIS failed to adequately address the best science and agency policies designed to protect that habitat. Moreover, the Management Plan/EIS failed to discuss alternatives to the status quo regarding livestock grazing in Craters of the Moon. This EIS will include grazing alternatives that insure protection of greater sage-grouse habitat.

The following list summarizes preliminary issues that have been identified for this effort.

### **Soil and Water**

*How will riparian areas be managed?*

Riparian areas not meeting proper functioning condition (PFC), with livestock use a contributing factor, were identified in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan. Should this effort consider additional management actions that will improve greater sage-grouse habitat in riparian areas?

*Will changes to grazing affect wet soils (compaction)?*

*How will playas be managed?*

Language regarding management of playas in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan is ambiguous. Potential benefits of playas to greater sage grouse may result in clarification of which, how many, and how often playas may be modified or maintained as livestock water sources.

### **Special Status Species**

*How will certain deficiencies related to greater sage-grouse be addressed throughout the Plan Amendment process as well as in the Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage Grouse Amendment?*

The September 28, 2011 Court order stated that the Craters of the Moon Management Plan failed to address the BLM's Special Status Species Policy, localized studies, and best available science. The best available science at the time of the Plan ROD included the National Strategy and the WAFWA Conservation Assessment.

### **Cultural Resources**

*How will cultural resources be protected in the Craters of the Moon Management Plan?*

Changes to grazing that could affect cultural resources were not considered in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Management Plan.

## **Livestock Grazing**

*How will trailing be managed?*

*What lands will be allocated as available for livestock grazing?*

*How will AUMs for the Craters of the Moon be determined?*

*How will stocking rates be adjusted in the future based on vegetation condition?*

*Are there allotment boundaries that need to be adjusted?*

*How will conversion in kind of livestock be addressed?*

## **Comprehensive Trails and Travel Management**

*How will roads that could potentially become unnecessary due to changes to grazing be treated?*

The Craters of the Moon Comprehensive Travel Management Plan designated roads, primitive roads, and trails in the Craters of the Moon. Five hundred and sixty-eight miles of primitive roads were designated, mainly for administration of grazing in the Craters of the Moon. If grazing allocations change, there may be a need to close unnecessary roads to reduce fragmentation and benefit greater sage-grouse and other sensitive species.

## **Preliminary Planning Criteria**

- (1) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment will comply with NEPA, FLPMA, and all other applicable laws, regulations, and policies;
- (2) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment will comply with the Court's November 2012 order.
- (3) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment will consider reasonable alternatives in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR part 1610 and 40 CFR part 1500;
- (4) Decisions in the Craters of the Moon RMP Amendment will only apply to public lands and the mineral estate managed by the BLM in the Craters of the Moon;
- (5) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will follow the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1 and the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 where appropriate;
- (6) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will comply with guidance found in the BLM Manual 6220- National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, and Similar Designations;
- (7) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will comply with guidance found in the BLM Manual 6840 – Special Status Species Management and other policies related to Special Status Species;
- (8) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment planning process will include broad-based public participation;
- (9) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will include coordination with state, local, and tribal governments to ensure that BLM considers provisions of pertinent plans, seeks to resolve any inconsistencies among state, local and tribal plans, and provides ample opportunities for state, local and tribal governments to comment on the development of the Plan amendment;
- (10) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will rely on available inventories of the lands and resources as well as data gathered during the planning process, including but not limited to Habitat Assessment Framework data collected in 2012 and 2013;

- (11) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will follow requirements to address Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and conservation as outlined in the National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy;
- (12) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment will only consider actions that will ensure BLM lands in the Craters of the Moon meet or make significant progress toward meeting Idaho's Standards for Rangeland Health;
- (13) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will use Geographic Information Systems and incorporate geospatial data to the extent practicable and Federal Geographic Data Committee standards and other applicable BLM data standards will be followed;
- (14) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment will incorporate and observe the principles of multiple use and sustained yield;
- (15) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment process will involve consultation with Native American tribal governments;
- (16) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment will recognize valid existing rights; and
- (17) The Craters of the Moon Management Plan Amendment and EIS will use analysis in the 2006 Craters of the Moon Final EIS to the extent possible and practicable.

## **Preliminary Alternative Development**

The BLM Shoshone Field Office is preparing to analyze a range of reasonable alternatives for livestock grazing in the Craters of the Moon. The scope of this planning effort is limited; preliminary alternatives have been provided to help you with your comments and may or may not be analyzed in the Draft.

### **Common to All Alternatives**

- National policies and guidance would be followed on all SSS including Section 7 Consultation as appropriate.
- The Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage Grouse Amendment decisions would be incorporated in all alternatives.
- Vegetation conditions would be the primary management priority.

### **Alternative 1 – No Action**

This alternative retains existing guidance in the Craters of the Moon Management Plan for vegetation management and livestock grazing use and authorizations.

### **Alternative 2**

Generally, this alternative includes:

- An active restoration program would be implemented in riparian areas not meeting PFC, due to livestock grazing (i.e. plantings, livestock/OHV exclosures, and re-engineering stream channels, etc).
- All modified playas would be identified and restored, not exclusive of those modified for livestock use, but including all in poor condition.
- Intensive grazing of seedings would be considered for sagebrush recovery (prescriptive grazing).

- Human-made fragmenting features would be analyzed and prioritized for removal, consolidation, or modification to maintain and improve intact habitats. This includes grazing infrastructure, access roads, or roads deemed unnecessary.
- Prescribed grazing or mowing would be considered to create strategic fuel breaks.
- Trailing routes through the Craters of the Moon would only be authorized in areas where they meet vegetation objectives.
- The North Pasture of Laidlaw Park Allotment and the North Pasture of Bowl Crater Allotment would be unavailable for livestock use.
- Native areas with potential for natural recovery to the highest ecological site potential with removal of livestock grazing would be unavailable for livestock use.
- Non-native perennial seedings would be the priority for grazing availability.
- Voluntary retirement of permits would result in the affected lands becoming unavailable to grazing.
- AUMs would be determined by a conservative allocation (light utilization) of forage depending on the existing vegetation condition and desired plant community. Stocking rates would be adjusted based on current vegetation conditions. Key forage species will be identified based on existing vegetation information and could vary by use area.
- Livestock conversion policies would be based on goals for greater sage-grouse habitat.

### **Alternative 3**

Generally, this alternative includes:

- No additional playas would be developed. Existing developed playas could be maintained for livestock water, but all would be evaluated for restoration on a case by case basis.
- All human-made fragmenting features would be analyzed for potential removal, modification, decommissioning, or consolidation. These would be prioritized by allotment at the time of permit renewal.
- Fence marking in Class II VRM areas would be temporarily (less than 5 years) allowed in the Craters of the Moon.
- Opportunities to utilize trailing routes to benefit greater sage-grouse habitat restoration objectives and enhance land health would be pursued.
- Livestock grazing will be managed according to the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management and the goals for greater sage-grouse habitat.
- Where Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and the goals for greater sage-grouse habitat are not being met or progress is not being made as a result of current grazing management, changes will be made to ensure that rangeland within the Craters of the Moon is meeting standards and the goals for greater sage-grouse habitat or making progress towards meeting standards and the goals for greater sage-grouse habitat. Actions may include, but aren't limited to: changing season(s) of use, reducing AUMs, changing numbers and/or class of livestock.
- AUMs will be determined by a moderate allocation of forage depending on the existing condition and desired plant community. Stocking rates would be adjusted based on current vegetation conditions. Key forage species will be identified based on existing vegetation information and could vary by use area.
- Livestock conversion policies would be based on goals for greater sage-grouse habitat.

#### **Alternative 4 – Reduced grazing**

Generally, this alternative is similar to Alternative 3 except for AUM allocation method.

- AUMs would be determined by average actual use and billed use over the last 10 years where actual use is not available.

#### **Alternative 5 – No Livestock Use**

Based on the Court's remedies for the FLPMA and NEPA violations, a no grazing alternative would be considered. Generally, this alternative includes:

- No livestock use within the Craters of the Moon, including trailing. 0 AUMs would be available in the Craters of the Moon.
- Priorities for land health assessments and monitoring would be changed throughout the Craters of the Moon.
- Infrastructure coincident to livestock grazing management would be removed or decommissioned.
- Allotment boundaries would be changed to remove lands within the Craters of the Moon from grazing.

### **Decision to be Made**

The BLM Idaho State Director is the deciding official responsible for approving this land use plan amendment. Given the purpose and need for the action, the deciding official will review the proposed action, the alternatives, and the environmental consequences in order to make the decision of whether and how to amend the Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve Management Plan in such a way as to comply with the Court's November 2012 order.

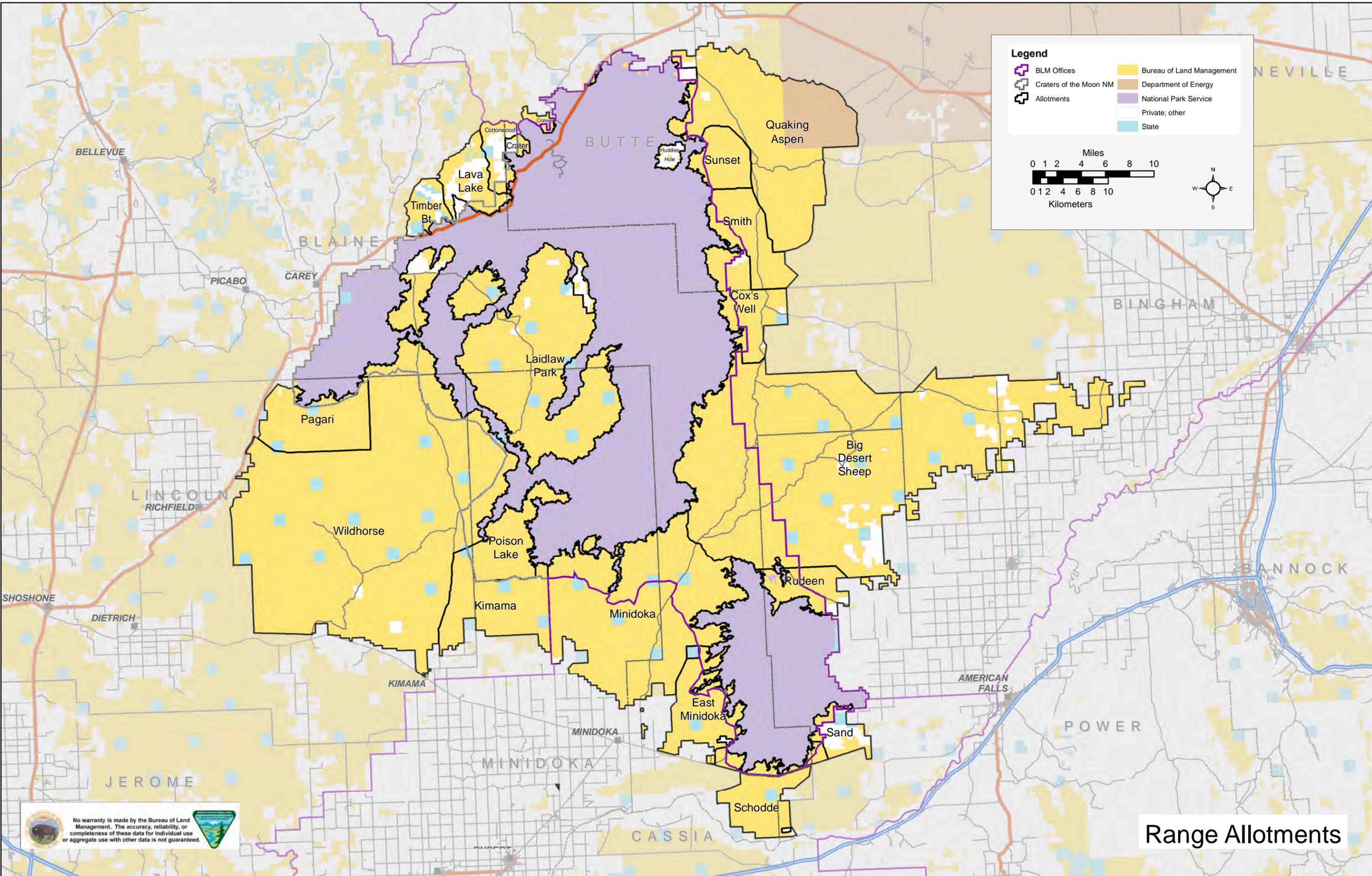
### **Public Input Needed**

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by August 23, 2013 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EIS.

Written comments must be submitted to Holly Crawford, Monument Manager. The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 am – 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf) to BLM\_ID\_CRMO@blm.gov. Emails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. To be most helpful, comments sent electronically should include the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Holly Crawford, Craters of the Moon BLM Monument Manager, [BLM\\_ID\\_CRMO@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_ID_CRMO@blm.gov).



**Legend**

- BLM Offices
- Craters of the Moon NM
- Allotments
- Bureau of Land Management
- Department of Energy
- National Park Service
- Private; other
- State

Miles: 0 1 2 4 6 8 10  
 Kilometers: 0 1 2 4 6 8 10

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**Range Allotments**