



In Reply To:

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Butte Field Office
106 North Parkmont
Butte, Montana 59701
406-533-7600
<http://www.blm.gov/mt>



9200 (070)

January 9, 2015

Dear Reader,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) - Butte Field Office is in the initial stages of identifying issues in the Park/Gallatin and Broadwater County South Planning Area, and is inviting the public to submit scoping comments. The planning area consists of approximately 32,859 acres of public land administered by BLM, as shown on the enclosed map.

The BLM intends to complete Land Health Assessments (LHAs) in the Park/Gallatin and Broadwater County South Planning Area the summer and fall of 2015, with completion of an Environmental Assessment (EA) to follow. The EA will evaluate a variety of resource issues and develop a range of management actions to address those issues. To date, the preliminary issues identified include:

- Access and travel planning.
- Increased recreational opportunities.
- Grazing permit renewals for forty-two (42) different grazing allotments.
- Grazing permit renewal in the Limestone Hills Military Training Area
- Fence Modifications for Wildlife.
- Vegetation treatments to return uplands to more historic conditions, and riparian treatments to restore more healthy and historic conditions to streams and wetlands.
- Timber harvest to promote forest health, strengthen stand resistance and resiliency, and provide timber products.
- Treatment of nonnative and noxious plant infestations.
- Hazardous fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface.
- Implementing Food Storage Orders in the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Access and Travel Planning: A travel management plan for the area is needed to fulfill directives established by BLM policy using the criteria identified at 43 CFR 8340-8342 and the Butte Resource Management Plan. The travel management plan will determine which routes on public land are open, limited, or closed to motorized travel.

Increased Recreational Opportunities: Members of the public have suggested that BLM provide additional opportunities for non-motorized recreation in the planning area. It is anticipated that a nearby mountain bike club will be submitting a proposal for a non-motorized trail system in the Copper City area. If such a proposal is received it will be considered during the planning process.

Livestock Grazing: Grazing permit/lease renewals are needed for the following forty-two (42) allotments: Toston Canal, Iverson, Wall Mountain, Missouri, High Peak, Devils Bottom, Cable Gulch, Milligan Common, Bald Hills Segregated, Copper City, Sixmile, Airport, Antelope Butte, West Dexter Point, Gold Run Creek, Suce Creek, North Fork, Gaging Station, McAdows Canyon, Emigrant Creek, Dunbar Springs, Roy Gulch, Madison Buffalo Jump, Garden Gulch, Pole Gulch, Hilltop, East Trident, Maudlow, Mountain Range, Slaughterhouse, Chuck Reid, Ellis Basin, Yellowstone, Poison, Donald Wood, Hot Springs, Carbella, Flatland, Buffalo Hump, Limestone East, Riverside School, and Smith Individual. Some adjustments to grazing practices in these allotments and range improvement projects,

such as water developments and fencing, may be considered to improve land health depending upon the results of the Land Health Assessments conducted during 2015.

Grazing Permit Renewal, Limestone Hills Military Training Area: In December 2013, Congress withdrew this area from the public domain for military training use until 2039. The legislation transfers all management of the land to the military except for livestock grazing administration and mining regulation, both of which would remain under current BLM management. The training area is used for maneuvers and live fire training for infantry, armored, artillery, engineer, aviation, and special operations units. One grazing allotment, Limestone East, within the training/withdrawal area will be analyzed for grazing permit renewal in the Park/Gallatin and Broadwater County South Planning Area EA.

Fence Modifications for Wildlife: Existing fences may warrant modifications to make them more wildlife friendly while remaining effective for livestock management. Modifications, such as adjusting the heights of the bottom and top wires and replacing bottom wires with smooth wire, would be considered. Fences, throughout this planning area, will be inventoried to identify where modifications are needed.

Vegetation Restoration Treatments: Preliminary assessments indicate that overall, upland vegetation communities in the project area are in good condition. However, both upland and riparian treatments may be necessary to return altered areas to more healthy and historic conditions. Portions of grassland and shrubland habitats have undergone colonization or encroachment by conifers due to the interruption of the natural disturbance regime by long-term fire suppression. In addition, conifer densities have increased within many of the forested stands in the planning area. Recent droughts and increased timber densities have resulted in susceptibility to insect and/or disease infestations and subsequent mortality within forested habitats. As a result, these acres are outside the expected historic range of natural variability associated with the pre-settlement mid-severity fire regime. In their current condition, they are less stable and more susceptible to damage from disturbance events like severe or uncharacteristically large-scale wildland fire, insect infestations, and weed species establishment. The Butte Resource Management Plan provides direction to restore current altered vegetative conditions to more historic types. Treatments could include prescribed burning, hand cutting, and mastication.

Timber Harvest: Preliminary assessment of forest stands throughout the planning area have noted that many of the timber stands are experiencing mortality from insects and disease, along with other forest health issues such as overstocking and loss of stand diversity. In order to reduce the effects of insects and disease, increase timber stand resistance and resiliency, promote forest health, and provide timber products, the BLM will be looking for opportunities for timber treatment and harvest projects.

Treatment of Noxious and Invasive Species: Noxious and invasive species such as spotted knapweed, Dalmatian toadflax, yellow toadflax, common mullein, Canada thistle, whitetop, houndstongue, leafy spurge, black henbane, and cheatgrass are common in some parts of the planning area, affecting native vegetation communities. Most infestations are found along roadways, corridors, and in disturbed sites. Management actions to prevent and reduce weed infestations would be considered.

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI): Hazardous fuels conditions will be assessed in the WUI areas identified by the Counties' Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). Management actions to reduce hazardous fuels to provide for increased public and firefighter safety in the event of a wildland fire would be considered in the planning area analysis.

Yellowstone Ecosystem Food Storage Orders: Grizzly Bear Recovery Plans in the Yellowstone Ecosystem include implementing mandatory food storage orders on BLM lands. Implementation of Specific food storage requirements has been identified as a management action to be considered in the Park/Gallatin and Broadwater County South planning area.

Commenting

At this time, we would like to hear your scoping comments on any additional issues, concerns, or alternatives that should be evaluated by the BLM during this planning process. We will use your comments to develop specific proposed management actions which will be analyzed in an environmental assessment and made available for public review.

If you care to provide scoping comments, such as suggestions regarding resource issues, data sources, or alternatives to be considered in the environmental analysis please make your comments as specific as possible and send them to:

BLM Butte Field Office, 106 N. Parkmont, Butte, MT 59701, or by e-mail to Lacy Decker at lddecker@blm.gov.

Although comments will be accepted at any time throughout the process, comments submitted by **February 20, 2015**, would be most helpful in development of the proposed action and EA. To be considered, all comments must contain the name and address of the submitter. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware 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 your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you have questions regarding this project or if you would like to have your name removed from the mailing list, please contact Lacy Decker at the Butte Field Office at 406-533-7600 or e-mail her at lddecker@blm.gov.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Scott Haight
Field Manager

Enclosure: Map- Park/Gallatin and Broadwater County South Planning Areas