DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

CASSIA

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

PREPARED BY

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DATE: JANUARY 24, 1985

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Need:

The public lands in the RMP Area contain abundant natural resources and provide multiple benefits to the people of the United States: watershed, habitat of fish and wildlife, forage for domestic livestock, cultural resources, scenic and open space resources, opportunities for a wide variety of recreational activities, timber, minerals and possibly energy resources. The public lands also serve needs of local communities under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, provide rights-of-way for public utilities, and may be available for agricultural development, as well as sales and exchanges in the national interest.

Growing populations, advancing technology and expanding economic demands are focusing increasing pressures on the public lands. Recognizing the need to respond to these pressures, Congress enacted the Federal Land Policy Act of 1976 (FLPMA) directing BLM to develop comprehensive land use plans for the management, use and protection of the public lands.

The basic purpose of this plan is to ensure that public lands will be managed in accordance with FLPMA, under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

Appendix "H" of this document constitutes the Rangeland Program Summary (RPS) which is required by the BLM to set the course of action for grazing management programs in the Resource Management Plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Introduction	I
General Description	1
Resource Management Guidelines	3
Plan By Management Area	13
Required Action Table	49
Glossary	50
Appendices	
Resource Monitoring and Evaluation Plan . (Appendix A)	56
Species Specific Wildlife Resource Guidelines . (Appendix B)	66
Proposed Forage Use . (Appendix C)	71
Proposed Wildlife Forage Use. .(Appendix D)	78
Class of Livestock and Season of Use. .(Appendix E)	83
Benefit Cost Ration by Allotment. .(Appendix F)	87
Allotment Acreage Summary . (Appendix G)	90
Rangeland Program Summary . (Appendix H)	94
Introduction	94
Background	94
Public Involvement	96
Rangeland Decisions	96
Implementation	97
Resource Monitoring and Evaluation	98
Alternatives	99
Key to Allotments . (Appendix I)	103

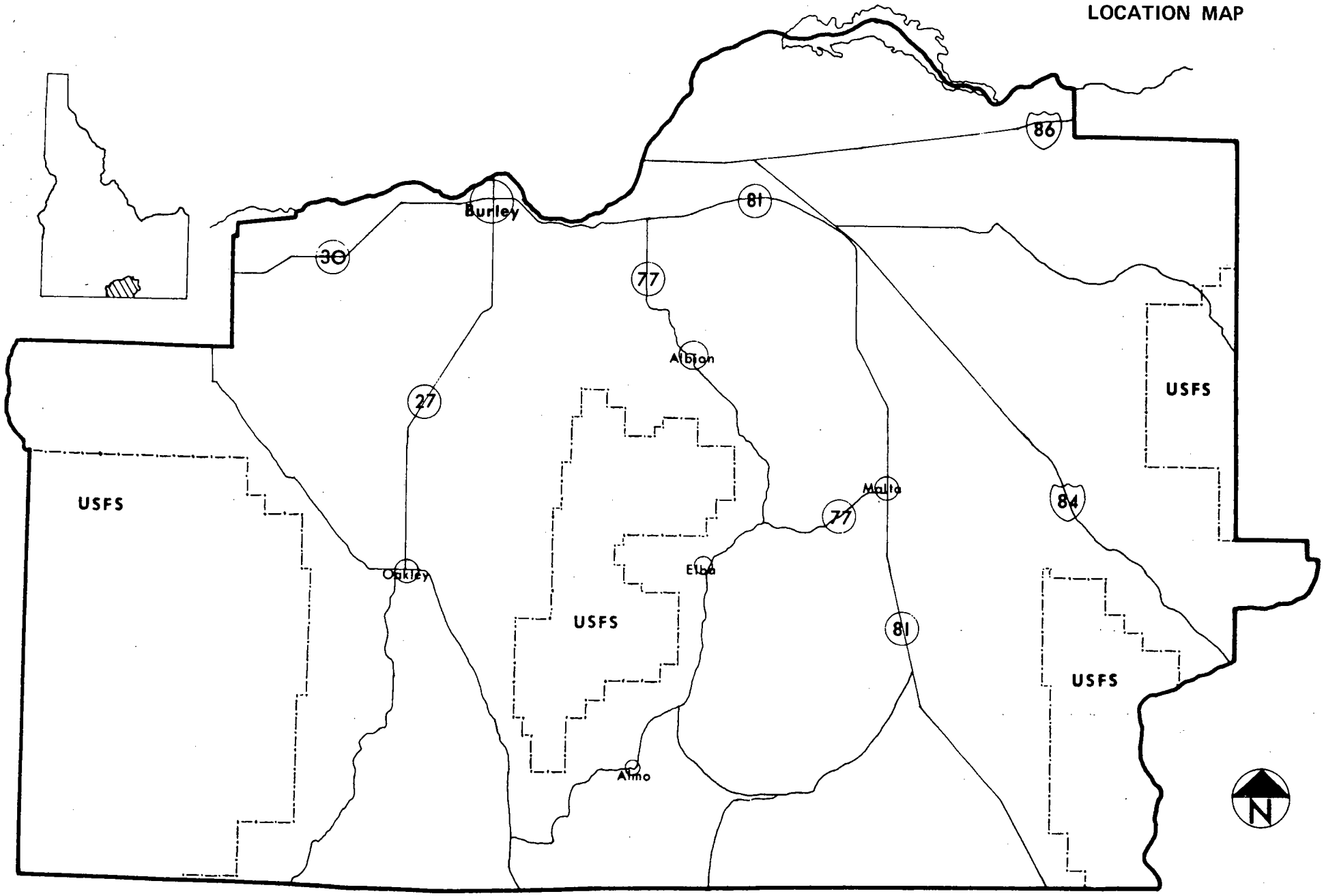
LIST OF MAPS

Map Number		Page Number
1	General Location Map.	IV
	Maps are located in pocket at the back of the document.	
2	Management Area 1	
3	Management Area 2	
4	Management Area 3	
5	Management Area 4	
6	Sub Area 4a	
7	Management Area 6	
8	Management Area 7	
9	Management Area 8	
10	Sub Area 8a & 8b	
11	Management Area 9	
12	Sub Area 9a	
13	Management Area 10	
14	Management Area 11	
15	Management Area 12	
16	Management Area 13	
17	Management Area 14	
18	Land Status and Allotment Boundaries	
19	Transfer Areas	

CASSIA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

MAP 1

LOCATION MAP



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Cassia RMP area encompasses 1,629,472 acres located in southcentral Idaho. Approximately 97 percent of this acreage is within Cassia County, two percent in Oneida County, and less than one percent in each of Twin Falls and Power Counties. The area is bordered on the north by the Snake River; on the west by Twin Falls County and the South Hills Division of the Sawtooth National Forest; on the south by the Elko, Nevada BLM District and the Salt Lake, Utah BLM District; and on the east by Power and Oneida Counties and the Sublett Division of the Sawtooth National Forest. Of the 1,629,472 acres, 29 percent is public land administered by BLM, 44 percent is privately owned, 21 percent is administered by the U.S. Forest Service, five percent is State land, and one percent is administered by other federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Reclamation.

The area planned lies partly on a small section of the Snake River Plain and partly in the Basin and Range Province of the Upper Snake River subregion of the Columbia River Drainage. The plain consists largely of a 1 to 12 mile wide belt of flat to gently rolling land. The Basin and Range Province is a group of partly desert faultblock mountains separated by downfaulted basins.

The largest cities in the RMP are: Burley, Declo and Oakley. Smaller communities are: Malta, Albion, Almo, Elba, Raft River and Naf.

Main travel arteries within the RMP are Interstate 84 which runs from Salt Lake City, Utah, north and west across the unit; and Interstate 86 which runs east and west in the unit and joins with Interstate 84 North in the northeast part of the planning unit.

The general vegetative types include sagebrush, grasslands and some pinyon pine and junipers. Much of the grassland is crested wheat grass seedings. Yearly precipitation varies from 9 inches in the low valley areas to 24 inches in the higher elevations. Elevation varies from 4,100 feet in the valley bottoms where the topography is flat or gently rolling to 8,048 feet in the mountain areas which are characterized by steep slopes and narrow canyons.

The planning area economy is based on agriculture and agricultural-supporting industries. Domestic livestock grazing is the area's primary agricultural use involving nearly all of the public lands in the unit. Much of the public land grazing is carried out in conjunction with ranch operations based in the irrigated farming areas. Generally, livestock raised in Cassia County winter on forage grown on private farms and graze on public land and national forest land during spring, summer and fall.

Tourism plays a limited role in the economic base of the planning area. The tourist trade is generally associated with people traveling on Interstate 84 North and Interstate 86. Recreational uses such as hunting and fishing on BLM managed land also contribute to the economy of the area.

Map 1 shows the location of the Cassia RMP area while color status Map 18 shows the land ownership pattern. The Cassia RMP is divided into 14 management areas for purposes of organizing and presenting the planning decisions. A management area generally contains lands having similar resource

features and characteristics, that can effectively be managed as a unit.

Each of the 14 management areas is defined in terms of its description, natural resource management objectives, and required actions. The description identifies the major natural, physical, and cultural resources of the management area. The resource management objectives set priorities for managing the various resources in the area. Required actions identify the management actions, limitations, and other provisions which are needed to accomplish the objectives.

The management areas are described in detail beginning on page 13 and delineated on maps following each management plan.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

There are a number of Resource Management guidelines that direct BLM management actions on public lands in Idaho. These guidelines provide management direction and minimum standards for managing the resources found on the public lands. These guidelines are divided into two groups, those dealing primarily with procedures and policy and those dealing with the management of specific resources. The following are the management guidelines for the Cassia RMP.

Procedures/ Policy Guidelines:

Allowable Uses

The public lands will be managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield as required by FLPMA. Any valid use, occupancy, and development of the public lands, including but not limited to those requiring rights-of-way, leases and licenses will be considered, subject to applicable environmental review procedures, unless specifically excluded in the plan. In some areas, however, environmental values, hazards or manageability considerations may require limitations on either the type or intensity of use, or both. Those limitations are identified in the plan's land use allocations and management objectives for specific areas within the public lands. BLM will include stipulations and special conditions as necessary in leases, licenses and permits to ensure the protection and preservation of resources.

Coordination with Other Agencies, State and Local Governments and Indian Tribes

BLM will coordinate its review of detailed management plans and individual projects prepared in conjunction with the RMP to ensure consistency with officially adopted and approved plans, policies and programs of other agencies, State and local governments and Indian tribes. Cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding will be developed, as necessary, to promote close cooperation between BLM and other federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes.

Detailed Management Plans

The RMP provides general guidance for the resource area. More detailed management plans called activity plans, however, will be prepared to deal with areas where a greater level of detail is required. Activity plans will indicate specific management practices, improvements, allocations and other information for

a particular site or area. They will be prepared for most major BLM programs such as range (allotment management plans), recreation (recreation area management plans), wildlife(habitat management plans), cultural resources (cultural resources activity plans). Where two or more activities have activity needs in the same general area, a single consolidated activity plan may be prepared. Coordination, consultation and public involvement are integral parts in the formulation of activity plans.

Environmental Reviews

An environmental analysis will be undertaken prior to approval of any project involving public lands. If no significant impact is identified, the analysis will be documented as an Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. If the analysis suggests a major federal action which would significantly affect the human environment, an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared upon State Director's direction.

Land Tenure Adjustment

The public lands will be retained in federal ownership and managed by BLM according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, except those lands specifically identified in the plan or amendment as transfer areas. Transfer areas are those public lands identified through the planning process which are not needed for Bureau programs and are considered more valuable for other purposes.

Transfer of public lands within a transfer area may be accomplished by any means authorized by law. Final transfer from BLM jurisdiction, however, is subject to a decision by the authorized officer, based on detailed analysis and such documentation as prescribed by law or regulation.

Lands may be acquired by BLM as authorized by law, but only within retention areas (multiple use areas). Objectives for acquiring lands in connection with BLM programs may be established in the RMP.

BLM will manage transfer areas until transfer of title occurs. Management actions will be taken as necessary to meet resource or user needs. Public investments in transfer areas will be kept to a minimum.

Air Quality

Under the Clean Air Act (as amended, 1977), BLM administered lands were given Class II air quality classification, which

allows moderate deterioration associated with moderate, well-controlled industrial and population growth. BLM will manage all public lands as Class II unless they are reclassified by the State as a result of their procedures prescribed in the Clean Air Act (as amended, 1977). Administrative actions on the public lands will comply with the air quality classification for that specific area.

Cultural Resources

BLM will manage cultural resources so that representative samples of the full array of scientific and socio-cultural values are maintained or enhanced consistent with State and federal laws.

Economic and Social Considerations

BLM will ensure that any management action undertaken in connection with this plan is cost-effective and takes into account local social and economic factors. Cost-effectiveness may be determined by any method deemed appropriate by the Bureau for the specific management action involved.

Fire Management

Fire will be used as a resource management tool to protect and enhance the resources of the public lands. Wildfires on public lands will be met with maximum suppression action unless limited suppression is identified for the specific area. Prescribed burning may be used as a management tool if identified in the plan.

Fish and Wildlife

BLM will manage fish and wildlife habitat on the public lands. A variety of methods may be employed, including management actions designed to maintain or improve wildlife habitat, inclusion of stipulations or conditions in BLM leases, licenses and permits, and development of detailed plans for fish and wildlife habitat management. Priority will be given to threatened or endangered species habitat. All BLM management actions will comply with federal and State laws concerning fish and wildlife.

Forest Management

Generally, public lands containing commercial timber or other forest products such as firewood, posts and poles, and Christmas trees may be considered for harvest except where expressly closed by law or regulation. Some areas may also be subject to special restrictions to protect resources.

Geology, Energy and Minerals

A. Geology, Energy and Minerals Management

BLM will manage geological, energy and minerals resources on the public lands. Geological resources will be managed so that significant scientific, recreational and educational values will be maintained or enhanced. Generally, the public lands are available for exploration and development, subject to applicable regulations and federal and State law.

B. Location of Mining Claims

Location of mining claims in accordance with the mining law is nondiscretionary. The public lands are available for location of mining claims unless withdrawn. Recommendations by BLM for withdrawal are subject to final consideration by the Secretary of the Department of Interior.

C. Leasing and Sale

Energy and minerals leasing/sale is discretionary. Approval of an application for lease or sale is subject to an environmental analysis and may include stipulations to protect other resources. Generally, the public lands may be considered for energy and minerals leasing/sale.

Motorized Vehicle Access and Use

Where control of ORV's is required, public lands are placed in one of three categories for purposes of controlling motorized vehicle access: open, limited and closed. Guidelines for these categories are as follows:

A. Open

Motorized vehicles may travel anywhere.

B. Limited

Motorized vehicles are permitted subject to specified conditions such as seasonal limitations, speed limits and designated routes of travel as developed during subsequent activity planning.

C. Closed

Motorized vehicles are prohibited.

Public Utilities

Generally, public lands may be considered for the installation of public utilities, except where expressly closed by law or regulation. Project approval will be subject to preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. BLM will work closely with Idaho Public Utilities Commission, other State and federal agencies, local governments, utility companies and other interested parties to determine appropriate locations and environmental safeguards for public utilities involving public lands.

Rangeland Management

A. Forage Allocations

Within each grazing allotment or group of allotments the available forage is allocated among domestic livestock, wildlife, and wild horses and burros. Sufficient vegetation is reserved for purposes of maintaining plant vigor, stabilizing soil, providing cover for wildlife and other nonconsumptive uses.

Grazing decisions will be issued for those allotments where adequate information exists. In the other allotments, where there is inadequate information, an initial decision will be made which will outline a process and schedule for gathering the necessary information. An initial stocking rate will also be established which may be adjusted upwards or downwards in the final decision as a result of monitoring. All grazing decisions will be issued in accordance with applicable BLM regulations.

B. Range Improvements, Grazing Systems, Other Range Management Practices

A variety of range improvements, grazing systems and other range management practices will be considered in conjunction with livestock management on individual allotments. Such practices will be based on the range management category (maintain, improve, custodial) in which the allotment has been placed and will be formulated in consultation, coordination and cooperation with livestock operators and other interested parties.

C. Wild Horses and Burros

Viable, healthy populations of wild horses and burros will be maintained in accordance with federal law. Where levels are to be adjusted, sufficient forage will be maintained for existing animals while animals are being collected for adoption or

removed by other appropriate means. Adopted animals will be monitored until title is transferred.

Recreation

A. Recreation Management

BLM will manage recreation on the public lands. A variety of means to maintain or improve recreation opportunities will be considered. Some areas may be subject to special restrictions to protect resources or eliminate or reduce conflicts among uses.

B. Recreation Facilities

BLM may develop and maintain various recreation facilities on public lands, including camp grounds, picnic areas, boat launches, etc. Those recreation facilities are provided to meet existing or anticipated demand.

C. Potential National Rivers

Federal land management agencies are responsible for evaluating the rivers included on the National River Inventory to determine if they are suitable for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. If they are determined to be suitable, the agencies will provide protection either by preparing recommendations to have them designated or by taking immediate action to protect them. Prior to the time they have been evaluated and when determined to be suitable, the rivers will be treated as though they were components of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Transportation

Bureau roads are for use, development, protection and administration of public lands and resources. Although public use is generally allowed, roads may be closed or use restricted to fulfill management objectives, protect public health and safety, or preserve resources. Easements required to provide access to public lands will be acquired when a substantial public need is documented or the access is needed to achieve resource management objectives or best management practices.

Visual Resource Management

Consideration of scenic values will be included in the analysis of all activities involving alteration of the natural character of the landscape. The degree of alteration allowed is determined through an inventory process which results in the classification of all public lands into one of five Visual Resource Management classes, each class allowing for a

different degree of modification.

Watershed

A. Watershed Management

A variety of methods may be employed to maintain, improve, protect and restore watershed conditions. Priority will be given to meeting emergency watershed needs due to flooding, severe drough or fire.

B. Water Improvements

Facilities and structures designed to maintain or improve existing water resources, provide new water sources, control water level or flow characteristics, or maintain or improve water quality may be developed subject to preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. BLM will work closely with the Idaho Department of Water Resources, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other local, State, and federal agencies to determine appropriate location and designs for such projects.

C. Water Rights

Water rights are administered by the Idaho Department of Water Resources. The Bureau complies with all State of Idaho water laws.

Multiple Use and Transfer Class

Each management area in the Planning Area is assigned to one or more multiple use or transfer classes: Moderate Use Class, Limited Use Class, Intensive Use Class or Transfer Class. Multiple Use and Transfer Classes are general planning categories included in Idaho RMPs to provide statewide consistency and uniformity.

Multiple use and transfer classes serve two purposes in this plan. The first is to describe overall resource opportunities and constraints by indicating what level of resource production and use is appropriate, what intensity of management is needed, whether there are sensitive and significant resources which must be protected, and whether BLM would consider transfer of public lands from its jurisdiction. The second is to provide a basis for considering unexpected proposals by supplementing the detailed resource management objectives and required actions established for the management area with general purpose and policy statements. This feature is intended to help keep the plan responsive to demands and to reduce the number of future plan amendments that otherwise might be needed.