United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BOISE DISTRICT OFFICE
3948 DEVELOPMENT ROAD
BOISE, IDAHO 83705

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Dear Public Land User:

This document is the Record of Decision for the Cascade Resource Management Plan. The Cascade Resource Management Plan has been approved by the Idaho State Director. This land use plan will guide management of the resource values and uses within the Cascade Resource Area over the next ten to twenty years.

The approved plan is the same as the proposed plan which was published in August, 1987. Since no changes were made in the approved plan, it is summarized here rather than reproduced in detail and is incorporated by reference.

This plan will be maintained or updated as necessary to reflect minor changes in data. It will also be periodically reviewed to determine if land use objectives are being met and if required actions are being implemented. If necessary, it will be amended to modify resource objectives or management actions. Any such amendment would include public involvement and notification will be provided if we propose to amend any portion of the plan.

I appreciate the time and ideas that you have shared with us during this land use planning effort. With your help, I feel that we have prepared a workable and realistic land use plan to guide our actions in the Cascade Resource Area during the coming decade and beyond. Your input was very helpful and allowed us to prepare a plan which protects and enhances important resource values while providing for an appropriate level of resource use to occur.

I look forward to continuing to work with you as we develop specific activity plans and project proposals to implement the plan. If you have any questions concerning this plan, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff. Again, thank you for your participation in the land use planning process for the public lands in the Cascade Resource Area.

Sincerely yours,

J. David Brunner
District Manager

CASCADE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

RECORD OF DECISION

Prepared by

Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Boise District Office

Approved by

Idaho State Director, Bureau of Land Management

July 1, 1988
Date

RECORD OF DECISION

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents approval of the Cascade Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Cascade RMP is a land use plan that will guide resource management in the Cascade Resource Area for the next 15 to 20 years. The RMP was prepared under regulations (43 CFR 1600) for implementing the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). An environmental impact statement was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

The Cascade Resource Area encompasses approximately 2.77 million acres in south-central Idaho. It is bounded by the Snake River on the south and west, the Payette National Forest on the north, the Boise National Forest on the east, the Boise River/Mora Canal on the southeast, and the Ada-Canyon county line from the Mora Canal to the Snake River on the south. Within this area, approximately 18% (487,466 acres) is public land administered by BLM, 7% (183,000 acres) is state land, and 75% (2,100,000 acres) is private. The public lands are located in Ada, Adams, Boise, Canyon, Gem, Payette, Valley, and Washington counties.

The final environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Cascade RMP was released to the public and filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on August 13, 1987. This Record of Decision meets the requirements of 40 CFR 1505.2 pursuant to NEPA.

DECISION

The decision is to implement Alternative E, as described in the Cascade Proposed RMP/Final EIS. This alternative is the approved Resource Management Plan for the Cascade Resource Area.

This decision is based on the analysis of all input received including issues identified, proposals and alternatives, environmental consequences, public comments, and consistency with other federal, state, and local plans.

Plan Summary

At the end of five years, livestock forage will be provided for 68,000 animal unit months (AUMs), a 2% increase over current levels, with a 20 year objective of 70,108 AUMs, a 5% increase over current use. Proposed range improvements over 20 years include 15 miles of pipeline, 60 miles of fence, and 66 water developments. Vegetative treatments are planned for 24,279 acres. Vegetative treatments will be conducted with methods and seed mixtures of grasses, forbs, and shrubs that benefit both livestock and wildlife. Full fire suppression management will be applied to the entire resource area. The 4-Mile wild horse herd will be managed over 15,500 acres to support 20 wild horses at the end of 20 years.

Habitat improvement projects will be done on 23,912 acres to benefit wildlife and allow for population increases. Over 20 years, habitat will be managed so that mule deer populations could increase 33%, elk could increase 22%, antelope could increase to 175 animals from the current population of 50, and sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse populations could increase sightly. Long-billed curlew populations will likely remain the same.

Riparian habitat improvement projects will be initiated along 7 miles and aquatic habitat improvement projects will be initiated along 11 miles of streams.

For land tenure adjustment, 17,604 acres will be made available for transfer from federal ownership. Of this, 560 acres will be available for potential agricultural development under the Desert Land Act, 563 acres will be for sale, 10,107 acres will be for sale or exchange, and 6,374 acres will be available for exchange only. Utility rights-of-way (ROWs) will be restricted on 6,696 acres, mostly small scattered sites, to protect cultural and recreation values and sensitive plants.

Off-road-vehicle (ORV) use is designated as open on 244,118 acres, limited (to designated routes) on 241,215 acres, and closed on 2,113 acres. Six areas totaling 4,368 acres are designated as ORV play areas or cycle parks.

Eight cultural resource sites totaling 2,012 acres will be managed to protect identified cultural values and will be studied for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). One 40 acre site currently listed on the NRHP will continue to be managed to protect cultural values.

Thirteen sites totaling 2,535 acres will be managed to protect sensitive plant species by restricting surface disturbing activities. Five of these sites totaling 1,355 acres are designated as Research Natural Areas (RNAs).

Three areas will be managed as areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs). The Boise Front, encompassing 12,000 acres in the Boise foothills, will be managed to protect watershed, wildlife, recreation, and scenic values. The 4,200 acre Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Area north of Weiser will be managed to protect one of the last remaining populations of Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse in western Idaho. The Long-billed Curlew Habitat Area, encompassing 61,000 acres between Emmett and Parma, will be managed to protect the largest nesting population in the western United States of long-billed curlew, a federally protected migratory species.

Eight miles of the South Fork of the Payette River is recommended for study for possible inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (as a recreation river). Approximately 19,000 acres in the Payette River system is designated as a Special Recreation Management Area.

Approximately 94% of the resource area will be open to leasable mineral (oil and gas and geothermal) exploration and development and locatable mineral (gold, silver, etc.,) entry. The existing 31,177-acre withdrawal will remain in effect for leasable and locatable minerals. An additional eight acres will be withdrawn from locatable mineral entry.

Timber harvest plans identify an allowable cut level of approximately 1.7 million board feet annually. Timber management practices will be applied on 26,663 acres of commercial forest land. Limited firewood cutting will continue.

The 440 acre Box Creek wilderness study area (WSA) will be managed so as not to impair its suitability for preservation as wilderness under the provisions of the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review pending a final wilderness decision. The preliminary recommendation in a separate study effort and EIS is that all 440 acres of the Box Creek WSA are nonsuitable for designation as wilderness.

Additional details concerning the land use plan are contained in the Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement released in August 1987.

ALTERNATIVES

Five alternatives were developed and considered in detail during the planning process. One of these, Alternative E, was identified as the draft plan (preferred alternative) in the draft EIS. Based on comments received during the public review period, minor changes were incorporated into this alternative which was identified as the proposed plan (preferred alternative) in the final EIS. The proposed plan is now the approved plan as discussed in detail above. The five alternatives are summarized below.

Alternative A

This alternative reflects the continuation of present management practices and programs now occurring on the public lands in the Cascade Resource Area. Changes in livestock management, land transfers, and other programs would be handled as the need arises. This is the "no action" alternative.

Alternative B

The emphasis in this alternative is on an intermediate level of development and a higher intensity of management that the current management level. The objective of the alternative is to emphasize the use and development of public land resources, especially commodity resources such as livestock grazing, timber harvest and mineral and energy development. Management would favor higher livestock use levels, more range improvements, more timber harvest and other forest product offerings, increased land disposal for agricultural development, and increased transfer of isolated or difficult to manage parcels out of federal ownership.

Alternative C

The objective of this alternative is to emphasize the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. Preservation of natural systems and nonconsumptive resource uses would be favored. Management would comply with more stringent environmental protection standards. Wildlife values and dispersed and nonmotorized recreation use would be emphasized.

Alternative D

This alternative is based on a high investment management option. It would increase the intensity of management of both commodity and noncommodity resources. Grazing opportunities, timber production and developed recreation would receive major investments. Higher investments would also be made for improvement of wildlife habitat (terrestrial and riparian) and recreation opportunities of a dispersed nature.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

The objective of this alternative is to provide an optimum mixture of protection and enhancement of the natural environment with commodity resource utilization (renewable and nonrenewable). Preservation of significant natural resource features is provided for along with moderate increases in commodity resource uses.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

In terms of effects on the biological and physical components of the environment, Alternative C would be preferable. It would result in the greatest increase in wildlife populations and would have the least impact on soils and watershed. It would result in the most vegetation in good ecological condition and the greatest improvement in riparian and aquatic habitat conditions.

In terms of economic benefits, Alternative D would be preferable. It would generate the greatest increase in income and jobs for the Cascade planning area and would make the most land available for transfer to private ownership. The average soil erosion rate would be highest and wildlife populations would show the least overall improvement.

In terms of social benefits, no alternative is clearly preferable. Alternative C would protect the most high-density cultural resource occurrence areas from surface disturbance. Alternative D would have the highest level of grazing.

Alternative E is the approved Cascade Resource Management Plan. In comparison with the other alternatives considered, it would attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment while preserving important historic, cultural and natural values. The effects on the various resource uses and values would generally be between those of the other alternatives. Considering the overall effects of the alternative, including effects on biological and physical components on the environment, economic effects, and social effects, Alternative E is the environmentally preferable alternative in terms of the overall human environment.

MITIGATION

Appropriate mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design specifications of individual management actions and resource management guidelines for the resource management plan. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts from implementation of the plan have been adopted.

MONITORING

The decisions outlined in the Cascade RMP will be implemented over a period of ten to twenty years or more, depending on the availability of funding and workforce. The effects of implementation will be monitored and evaluated on a periodic basis over the life of the plan. The general purposes of this monitoring and evaluation will be:

(1) To determine if plan objectives are being met.

(2) To determine if an action is fulfilling the purpose and need for which it was designed, or if there is a need for modification or termination of an action.

(3) To discover unanticipated and/or unpredicted impacts.

(4) To determine if mitigation measures are working as prescribed.

(5) To ensure that decisions are being implemented as scheduled and in conformance with the RMP.

(6) To provide continuing evaluation of consistency with other federal, state, and local plans and programs

(7) To provide for continuing comparison of plan benefits versus costs, including social, economic, and environmental costs.

The data collected from the monitoring and evaluation process will be analyzed and fed back into the decision making process. This will provide information regarding the effects of the land use decisions and the adequacy of mitigation measures. If monitoring indicates that significant unexpected adverse impacts are occurring or the mitigating measures are not working as predicted, it may be necessary to amend or revise the RMP.

Specific monitoring plans will be prepared for the range, wildlife, and watershed programs. These plans will identify the study methods that will provide the information needed to issue and implement specific management decisions which effect range, wildlife, and watershed resources. For the range program, study types and priorities for monitoring grazing will be identified by allotment. The type of monitoring study for each allotment will be determined by the nature and severity of the resource conflicts that are present in the allotment. The majority of the monitoring efforts will generally focus on allotments in the Improve category. Methodologies will be used for monitoring actual use (livestock numbers and periods of grazing), forage utilization (herbaceous and browse), vegetative trend, and climate. The data collected from these studies will be used to evaluate stocking rates, schedule pasture moves for livestock, determine levels of forage competition, detect changes in plant communities, and identify patterns of forage use. If monitoring studies indicate that objectives are not being met, management actions will be taken accordingly. This may include adjusting seasons of use, stocking levels, or the grazing system being used.

Minimum monitoring standards have been adopted by the State of Idaho, Bureau of Land Management. They are included in the Minimum Monitoring Standards For BLM-Administered Rangelands in Idaho. Any new studies that may be conducted will be consistent with these minimum monitoring standards. More intensive or specialized studies may be used if a management need exists and funding is available.

For the wildlife program, monitoring will focus on forage use, cover, and wildlife use. The findings from these studies will be used to evaluate changes in habitat condition and trend; changes in forage availability, composition, and vigor; changes in cover and habitat effectiveness; and accomplishment of management objectives.

Monitoring for the watershed program will mainly involve monitoring soil erosion, although trend in streambank stability and water quality will be monitored for mining, forestry, and grazing activities. Water quality constituents to be monitored will be determined at the activity planning level on a site-specific basis.

Additional monitoring plans for other programs will be developed as the need arises.

CONSISTENCY

BLM's resource management plans must be consistent with officially approved or adopted resource related plans (or in their absence, policies or programs) of other federal agencies, state and local governments, and Indian tribes, so long as BLM's plans are also consistent with the purposes, programs and policies of federal law and regulations applicable to public lands. A special effort has been made to ensure that the Cascade Resource Management Plan is consistent with applicable approved plans. No inconsistencies have been identified by the Governor of the State of Idaho, other agencies, governments or Indian tribes.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The planning process began in November 1983 with publication of a Notice of Intent. Consultation and coordination with agencies, organizations and individuals occurred in a variety of ways throughout the planning process. The following summarizes the public participation which occurred during preparation of the Cascade RMP/EIS.

On November 25, 1983, a Notice of Intent to prepare a Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register. On January 26, 1984, mailouts were sent to over 400 agencies, organizations and individuals announcing the beginning of the planning process and soliciting the identification of issues and planning criteria. Approximately 90 responses were received in that effort. Public meetings were held during February 1984 in Cambridge, Emmett, Payette, Weiser, Boise and Caldwell for issue identification. Mailouts and news releases were issued on September 17, 1984, to announce the results of public input. The draft RPM/EIS was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and released to the public for a 90-day review and comment period on August 22, 1986. Nearly 1,000 copies of the document were mailed out and a total of 42 commentors responded during the review and comment period. All comments received during the comment period were considered during preparation of the final document. Minor revisions were incorporated into the final document as a result of public comment. On August 12, 1987, the Proposed RMP and Final EIS was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and released to the public for a 30-day protest period (and 60-day Governor's consistency review). One protest was received. Resolution of that protest did not result in any changes in the plan.