



Record of Decision for the

Owyhee Resource Management Plan



**Bureau of Land Management
Lower Snake River District
Boise, Idaho**

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Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) approves the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) plan to manage the public lands within the Owyhee Resource Area during the next 15 to 20 years and beyond. The Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP) is the same as the Owyhee Proposed Resource Management Plan (Alternative E) published in July 1999.

The Owyhee RMP is a general resource management plan for approximately 1,320,000 acres of BLM administered public lands in western Owyhee County, Idaho. The Owyhee RMP establishes guidance for managing a broad spectrum of land uses and allocations including livestock grazing management, wild horse management, land tenure adjustments, off-highway motorized vehicle (OHMV) designations, wild, scenic and recreational river designations, and areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs). The RMP contains resource objectives, land use allocations, management actions and direction needed to achieve program and multiple use goals. The Owyhee RMP replaces the BLM's existing land management guidance for the Owyhee Resource Area contained in the Owyhee MFP (1981).

Decision

The decision is to select Alternative E, the Proposed Owyhee RMP as presented in the Proposed Owyhee Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement issued July 1999, with associated Appendices and Maps, as the approved Owyhee RMP.

The following are the major components of the approved RMP:

Manage land uses and activities to ensure properly functioning watershed conditions.

Manage vegetation to achieve healthy rangelands

Meet State of Idaho water quality standards.

Provide habitat for special status plants and animals and habitat for a high diversity of wildlife.

Provide habitat for a wild horse herd appropriate management level of 192 wild horses.

Provide for a sustained level of livestock use. Initially allocate 135,116 livestock AUMs.

Manage livestock grazing activities so goals for rangeland health are achieved.

Use fire as a management tool to improve rangeland health.

Manage Douglas-fir communities to emphasize forest health.

Recommend and manage nine river segments (163 miles) as suitable for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Sixty (60) miles of eligible river segments were determined to be non-suitable and are released from further Wild and Scenic River consideration.

Designate 13 areas totaling 167,372 acres as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).

Continue management of 298,630 acres as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). 195,980 acres were previously recommended to Congress as suitable for Wilderness designation.

Designate off-highway motorized vehicle (OHMV) use as "Open" on 192 acres, "Limited" on 1,217,805 acres and "Closed" on 101,994 acres.

Identify 325,000 acres potentially available for disposal, subject to further review.

Alternatives Considered

The Owyhee RMP fulfills requirements of Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, which specifies the need for a comprehensive land use plan consistent with multiple-use and sustained yield objectives. The resource objectives, land use allocations, and other management actions (“decisions”) contained in the RMP are based upon approved planning criteria identified in the Owyhee RMP/EIS and were developed and analyzed consistent with BLM planning regulations (43 CFR 1600) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500). RMP decisions address issues and concerns identified during scoping and are projected to achieve the objectives as stated in the Final EIS.

The Owyhee Proposed RMP and Final EIS (July 1999) described and analyzed five alternatives addressing issues and management concerns. The alternatives addressed varied emphasis on commodity uses and values, non-commodity uses and values, and protection of natural values. The basic goal for developing alternatives for the RMP was to prepare different combinations of resource uses to address issues and management concerns, and to resolve identified conflicts. A range of resource management intensities and allocations was developed for those resources that were issue related. Non-issue related resource uses, which had only minor or no conflicts, had only small or no differences among the alternatives. Two working groups participated during the planning process by each developing an alternative; the Owyhee County Commissioners with the assistance of the Owyhee County Natural Resources Committee and the Desert Group, with membership representing the environmental and conservation oriented community.

Alternative A was the “Current Management” Alternative and the “No Action” Alternative under NEPA regulations. This alternative was based on implementation of the Owyhee Management Framework Plan (MFP) approved in 1981. This alternative generally satisfied most commodity demands of the public lands while mitigating impacts to sensitive resources on a limited basis. Alternative B was developed through BLM staff interpretation and analysis of information submitted by the Owyhee County Commissioners. This alternative emphasized commodity development while protecting most of the sensitive resources. Alternative C was developed by the BLM Lower Snake River District interdisciplinary planning team. This alternative emphasized improvement in ecological conditions and protection of most of the sensitive resources. Alternative D was developed through BLM staff interpretation and analysis of information submitted by the Desert Group. This alternative emphasized improvement in ecological conditions and protection of sensitive resources with limited opportunities for commodity development. Alternative E was the agency preferred alternative and the Proposed Plan in the Final EIS. It was developed by the BLM Lower Snake River District interdisciplinary planning team following review and consideration of public comments received on the draft document. This alternative emphasized improvement in ecological conditions and protection of most of the sensitive resources.

The environmentally preferable alternative, as required in 40 CFR 1505.2, is Alternative E as described in the Final EIS. This is the alternative selected and approved for the Owyhee RMP. This alternative is determined to be environmentally preferable when considering the human (social and economic) environment, the natural environment and the agency mission. This alternative is projected to improve and sustain healthy resource conditions while providing for economic needs and demands for resource commodities and values on a sustained basis.

Mitigation

Appropriate mitigation has been incorporated into the decisions for the Owyhee RMP including specifications for management actions and resource guidelines. All practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts from implementation of the Plan have been adopted. Mitigation is subject to change as new techniques become available.

Implementation

Implementation of the Owyhee RMP will begin upon signing of this Record of Decision (ROD). Some RMP decisions require immediate action and will become effective upon signature of this ROD. Other decisions do not require immediate action, but are identified for implementation during the life of the RMP. Some decisions will require action only when an activity is initiated.

RMP implementation will occur according to an Implementation Plan to be developed by the Owyhee Field Manager. The Implementation Plan serves as a link between BLM's planning and budgeting processes. Information in the Implementation Plan will help to; ensure that existing management and uses are brought into conformance with RMP decisions; establish priorities, time frames and costs for implementing RMP decisions; ensure that future management actions conform with the RMP; provide a basis for tracking and documenting progress in RMP implementation; and develop budget proposals.

Monitoring

The Owyhee RMP will be monitored and evaluated on an on-going basis in order to determine the effectiveness of the RMP and the need for Plan maintenance, amendment or revision as provided for in 43 CFR 1610.4-9, 1610.5-4, 1610.5-5 and 1610.5-6.

Decisions in the Owyhee RMP incorporate appropriate monitoring of resource conditions. This monitoring is subject to change contingent on funding, workforce and priorities, and as new methodologies and techniques are developed.

Public Involvement

Members of the general public and representatives of Indian tribes, organizations, public interest groups, and Federal, State and local agencies participated throughout the planning process for the Owyhee RMP, including scoping of issues, review of proposed planning criteria, Wild and Scenic Rivers eligibility evaluation, review of the Owyhee Draft RMP/EIS, and review of the Owyhee Proposed RMP/Final EIS. These entities were kept informed during RMP development through mailings, public meetings, media announcements, *Federal Register* notices, personal meetings, telephone conversations, briefings, and distribution of the Wild and Scenic Rivers eligibility evaluation documents. Owyhee Draft RMP/EIS, and Owyhee Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The BLM responded to comment letters on the Draft RMP/EIS, considered public comments when developing the Preferred Alternative and preparing the Proposed RMP, and considered protests of the Proposed RMP when developing the RMP approved by this Record of Decision. Public involvement will continue, as appropriate, throughout the life of the Plan during implementation.



Martha G. Hahn
Idaho State Director, Bureau of Land Management

December 30, 1999

Date