



**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
Bureau of Land Management

Shoshone Field Office  
Upper Snake River District  
Shoshone, Idaho

June 2002

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**Draft Amendments**  
to  
**Shoshone Field Office Land Use Plans**  
for  
**Land Tenure Adjustment**  
and  
**Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**

**Environmental Assessment**

**(EA #: ID-076-2002-0004)**



## United States Department of the Interior

### BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Shoshone Field Office  
400 West F Street PO Box 2-B  
Shoshone, Idaho 83352-1522

In Reply Refer To:  
1675

June 24, 2002

Dear Public Lands User:

Enclosed for your review and comment is a copy of the Shoshone Land Use Plans Draft Amendments and Environmental Assessment. Also enclosed is the Finding of No Significant Impact for the proposed action. The proposed action is to amend four of the Shoshone Field Office - BLM's current land use plans to (a) provide a consistent framework for evaluating and implementing land tenure adjustment and lands program actions, and (b) designate up to seven new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). These amendments would apply to approximately 1.44 million acres of public lands administered by the Shoshone Field Office in south-central Idaho and about 1,220 acres of contiguous public lands managed by the Four Rivers Field Office - BLM.

The proposed action would amend the following land use plans used by the Shoshone Field Office: the Magic Management Framework Plan (MFP), Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP, Sun Valley MFP, and Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP). Two of the proposed ACEC designations would also amend the Jarbidge RMP, which provides management guidance for public lands administered by the Four Rivers Field Office - BLM. Other management direction in these five existing land use plans would remain unchanged.

Three alternatives to existing management are described and analyzed in the enclosed document; the BLM's preferred alternative is Alternative 3. These alternatives were developed with extensive public, tribal, and agency input. Following a 60-day comment period which commences on June 28, 2002, the Shoshone Field Office will consider comments received on the EA and issue a proposed decision on the plan amendments. To receive the fullest consideration possible, comments on the Shoshone Land Use Plans Draft Amendments and Environmental Assessment should be submitted on or before August 28, 2002, either by mail (to my attention at the above street address) or by e-mail (at this site: [ID\\_Shoshone\\_LUPA@blm.gov](mailto:ID_Shoshone_LUPA@blm.gov)). During the 60-day comment period, the Shoshone Field Office will hold two "open house" style public information meetings to discuss the draft alternatives and receive public comments. These meetings are

scheduled for Tuesday, July 23, 2002, from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Shoshone Field Office Fire Conference Room, 400 West "F" Street in Shoshone, Idaho, and Wednesday, July 24, 2002, from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Hailey Courthouse, 206 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South in Hailey, Idaho.

Comments, including the names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the above address during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Monday through Friday, except holidays. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

For your convenience we have also made these documents available through the Idaho State Office BLM's web site: [www.id.blm.gov/planning/shoshone\\_lupa/index.htm](http://www.id.blm.gov/planning/shoshone_lupa/index.htm).

If you have questions about the draft amendments, please contact me by phone at (208) 732-7286 or by e-mail at [ID\\_Shoshone\\_LUPA@blm.gov](mailto:ID_Shoshone_LUPA@blm.gov). Thank you for your interest in public lands management.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Baker", written in a cursive style.

Bill Baker  
Field Manager

Enclosures

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)  
for the  
Shoshone Field Office - BLM  
Land Use Plan Amendments**

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Shoshone Field Office Land Use Plan Amendments (EA # ID-076-2002-0004). I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the effects of the proposed action and alternatives as disclosed in the Alternatives and Environmental Impacts sections of the EA. Implementing regulations for NEPA (40CFR 1598.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. Significant, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity.

**(a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):**

The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context. The planning area is limited in size and the activities limited in potential. Effects are local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

**(b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).**

*(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on a balance the effect will be beneficial.*

Impacts associated with the amendments are discussed in the Environmental Impacts section of the EA. Alternatives 2 through 4 are anticipated to have beneficial impacts, including balancing the public's and BLM's administrative needs by making lands available to communities, other entities, and the public; allowing the BLM to consolidate and protect lands including important habitats or watersheds; providing for the retention or acquisition of important public and tribal resources and values; and protecting ACEC values. Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, identifies site-specific actions that would result in adverse impacts. Alternative 1 does not provide direction to accomplish the actions and create the beneficial impacts described above in Alternatives 2 through 4.

The alternatives would not have significant impacts on other resources identified and described in the EA. The proposed amendment alternatives (Alternatives 2 through 4)

would have non-significant beneficial impacts and the existing management situation (Alternative 1) would have non-significant adverse impacts.

The effect of the decision to be made is not significant in the short and long term (EA, Alternatives and Environmental Impacts sections).

*(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects health or safety.*

The proposed activities would not significantly affect public health or safety. The purpose of the amendments is to establish new direction for land tenure adjustment within the Shoshone Field Office area; make lands available for public purposes, including city, county, State, and Tribal purposes; make decisions regarding ACECs nominations and management direction for newly designated ACECs; and provide for planning consistency within the BLM's Shoshone Field Office management area. Similar actions have not significantly affected public health or safety.

*(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

Unique historic and cultural resources of the area include remnants of the Oregon Trail, and the traditional Native American use areas of Camas Prairie and the Bennett Hills. Several streams are eligible for study under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Wetlands occur in the area, and while these are important resources, none is particularly unique. Ecologically critical areas include a number of caves, occupied habitat for special status species, and five existing ACECs. There are no park lands or prime farm lands within the planning area.

The effects of the proposed action on these unique characteristics are generally positive, as these areas and values are a high priority for retention and/or acquisition (EA, Appendix 1). In addition, the designation of three new ACECs would insure the protection of ecologically critical areas. While the proposed action would result in beneficial impacts to unique characteristics of the planning area, none of the anticipated impacts are considered to be significant (see b(1) above).

*(4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

Throughout the analysis process, public comments varied in their recommendations for how to best manage resources within the planning area. In consideration of this varied public input, the three action alternatives (Alternatives 2, 3, and 4) differ in how they address the various planning issues and concerns that were identified. None of the impacts are expected to be highly controversial, since the impacts under all three alternatives are predominantly beneficial and the alternatives propose management changes that respond to the public's concerns.

*(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

Scoping did not identify highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain nor do they involve unique or uncertain risks. The technical analyses conducted for determinations of the impacts to the resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgement. Impacts are within the limits that are considered thresholds of concern. Therefore, I conclude that there are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

*(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

These amendments are not setting a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Each individual land tenure action would be required to comply with direction in FLPMA, be within the amendments' guidelines for land tenure adjustment, meet the project area's zone definition and the Criteria for Land Ownership Adjustment (Appendix 1), and stand on its own merit through project level NEPA, public input, and review. The purpose of an ACEC designation is to focus management attention on special resources. These actions do not set precedent or represent a decision in principle about a future management consideration.

*(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.*

The EA analyzes all connected, cumulative, and similar actions within the scope of the analysis (pages 86-89 and 112 ). The cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions are considered and disclosed in the EA, Environmental Impacts section. The cumulative effects are not significant.

*(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant, cultural, or historical resources.*

The amendments state that lands specifically identified by the Shoshone-Bannock and/or Shoshone-Paiute Tribes as having special importance related to treaty and/or traditional use values would be a high priority for retention or acquisition. Other cultural and historic sites including sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and those eligible for listing are similarly protected as they are also high priority for acquisition or retention. The proposed management actions would increase the BLM's ability to acquire and manage these resources through private or State land exchanges. Increased emphasis on retaining and managing these resource values on public lands would help offset losses of the resource values from development on private or State lands.

*(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Population declines are often a direct result of competing land uses and habitat fragmentation. The proposed management would emphasize acquiring and/or consolidating lands with high habitat value for special status species; therefore, the likelihood of further population declines would be reduced.

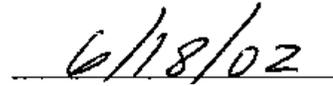
A Biological Assessment for ten special status species (EA, pages 19-21) determined that the amendments are "not likely to adversely affect." Based on the assessments and analyses, I find that the amendments would not adversely affect threatened or endangered species.

*(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The action does not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the actions analyzed for the Shoshone Field Office Land Use Plan Amendments are not a major federal action and that its implementation will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared for this project.

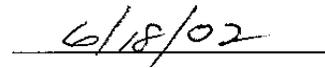
Recommended by:



Bill Baker,  
Shoshone Field Manager

Date

Approved by:



James E. May  
District Manager, Upper Snake River District

Date

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# Purpose and Need

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## Introduction

These land use plan amendments originated with the Bennett Hills Resource Management Plan (RMP) that was started in 1990. The Bennett Hills RMP would have replaced a portion of all the existing land use plans within what was then the Shoshone District - Bureau of Land Management (BLM). During the preparation period for that plan, numerous events occurred that led to a reconsideration of the scope of the Bennett Hills RMP. The BLM subsequently made a decision to amend all of the existing plans that direct management of the Upper Snake River District's Shoshone Field Office, but restrict the amendments to two issues: land tenure adjustment and Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designations.

The amendments planning process began with a "Notice of Intent to Prepare Land Use Plan Amendments," published in the *Federal Register* on December 15, 1999. Originally, the planning area contained the entire BLM Shoshone Field Office – approximately 1.8 million acres of public land. The recent expansion of Craters of the Moon National Monument on November 9, 2000, reduced the size of the planning area to 1.44 million acres. Future management of land now part of the Craters of the Moon National Monument, including the nominated Laidlaw Park ACEC, will be addressed in a separate land use plan being prepared by the BLM and the National Park Service (NPS).

## Proposed Action

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Upper Snake River District (USRD) proposes to amend four land use plans to consider land tenure adjustment criteria and new designations of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) within the USRD's Shoshone Field Office area (see Map 1). The proposed action would amend the Magic Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1975), Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP (1976), Sun Valley MFP (1982), and Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1985). [Note: As a result of administrative boundary reorganizations that occurred since completion of the Monument RMP, the eastern section of public lands administered under the Monument RMP are now managed by the Burley Field Office. The proposed amendments would only apply to the portion of the Monument RMP still within the management control of the Shoshone Field Office.] These four plans provide a framework for land use allocations and management of public lands within the 1.44 million-acre Shoshone Field Office area. The proposed amendments would replace existing land tenure adjustment decisions in those plans and make new ACEC designation and management decisions. Other management decisions in the current plans would remain unchanged.

Two actions proposed in the plan amendments (proposed designation of the Bennett Hills ACEC and the King Hill Creek ACEC/RNA) would also amend the Jarbidge RMP (BLM 1987). The Jarbidge RMP provides management direction for public lands administered by the Four Rivers Field Office, Lower Snake River District, BLM.

The proposed land use plan amendments are in accordance with the BLM's authorizing legislation, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA; 43 U.S.C. § 1701).

## Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

The purposes of and needs for this action are to:

- Establish new direction for land tenure adjustment within the Shoshone Field Office area.
- Make lands available for public purposes, including city, county, State, and Tribal purposes.
- Make decisions regarding ACECs nominations and management direction.
- Provide for planning consistency within the BLM's Shoshone Field Office management area.

## Planning Issues Addressed

During scoping, the public, Shoshone-Bannock and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, and BLM identified several areas of concern (see page 116 for a description of the public involvement process to date). The BLM took these concerns and fashioned them into statements (see below) which helped guide the development of the alternatives. The scope of the Shoshone plan amendments is limited to two planning issues: Criteria for land tenure adjustment and designation of new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Each of the three alternatives to existing management analyzed in this document seeks to address these planning issues while simultaneously satisfying the four purpose and need statements listed above.

**Land Tenure Adjustment:** The existing land use plans, completed in the 1970s and 1980s, provide for specific actions on specific lands; many of these actions have been implemented. Several circumstances have indicated the need to amend the Shoshone Field Office's plans in order to provide up-to-date management direction for land tenure adjustment:

- Most pending land tenure adjustment proposals were not included in the existing plans, and many more proposals have been brought before the BLM since the plans were approved.
- Cities and counties in the planning area have indicated they would like BLM properties to be made available to meet local needs without going through lengthy plan amendments for each individual proposal.
- Tribal governments are concerned that reserved treaty rights and/or cultural resource considerations are not properly emphasized in existing land use plans. Tribal governments also want to be included as possible partners in land tenure adjustments, especially when public lands are identified in their aboriginal territory.
- None of the existing plans provides for today's community growth and development, nor do they allow BLM managers the flexibility they need to respond to changes in natural resources or increased demand for access to public lands.

FLPMA allows land use plans to be amended, and authorizes a number of methods to make land tenure adjustments (land exchanges, Recreation & Public Purposes (R&PP) patents, acquisitions, and sales) if certain criteria are met. The Shoshone land use plan amendments would establish criteria for making land tenure decisions that improve the manageability of public lands.

The following areas of concern related to land tenure adjustment were identified during scoping for the plan amendments:

- Is there a need to: (1) consolidate scattered public land, (2) dispose of lower resource value and/or scattered parcels, and (3) acquire lands in high resource value areas? If so, which areas are most important, what method of disposal and acquisition should be used, and which non-Federal lands should be acquired?
- Where lands are proposed for either disposal or acquisition, what criteria should be used to determine the desirability of the proposal?
- There are approximately 285,000 acres of land where the Federal government owns the mineral rights or a portion thereof, and where the surface estate is privately-owned. This has created uncertainty regarding development of both the private surface and the Federal minerals. Should the BLM attempt to consolidate the surface and sub-surface estate? If so, what criteria should be applied?
- The planning area contains many small parcels of public lands, some of which are isolated by canals, highways, and private lands. Some uses on these parcels are unauthorized, and other uses were authorized for only short periods of time pending future disposal. There is a need to provide long-term direction for these parcels of land.

**Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC):** FLPMA defines an ACEC as an area “...*within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards (43 U.S.C. § 1702 (a)).*”

Ten areas were nominated for ACEC designation. A detailed description of each of these nominated ACECs is located in *Appendix 3 – Evaluation of Nominated ACECs* (see pages 128-172). The BLM considered each nomination based on an evaluation of the nominated area’s relevance and importance and need for special management. Seven of the nominated ACECs met the criteria for relevance and importance and have been included in the alternatives analyzed in this document. [**Note:** More information on the BLM’s designation process for ACECs is found in *BLM Manual § 1613.1.*]

The following areas of concern related to ACECs designation were identified during scoping for the plan amendments:

- Do the nominated areas meet the established criteria regarding relevance and importance?
- Is designating an area as an ACEC the most appropriate avenue to provide special management for the identified resources?
- How will the BLM manage any area designated as an ACEC?

## Consistency with Related Plans, Programs, and Policies

Federal regulations at 43 CFR § 1610.3-2 direct the BLM to develop plan amendments that are consistent with the officially approved and adopted resource-related plans, programs, and policies of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes. During scoping and coordination with representatives of tribal, local, State, and Federal government, the BLM identified the following concerns which will be considered throughout the amendments planning effort. More details on the interests of local, State, and tribal governments are found in the Affected Environment chapter (see pp. 5-11).

**Tribal Interests:** The BLM is responsible for maintaining a formal government-to-government relationship with Federally-recognized Native American tribes. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes have both rights to and cultural/historic affiliation with the lands in the planning area. The relationship between the Federal government and these Tribes focuses on ensuring the rights and/or interests of the Tribes are considered and protected, in accordance with relevant treaties, executive orders, legislation, and Federal policies. This includes consulting with Tribal representatives, identifying and protecting important archaeological, religious, and/or sacred sites, and providing Tribal members with appropriate access to these sites. The Tribes are also interested in the BLM acquiring lands which contain traditional cultural resources and are part of their aboriginal territory, as well as insuring that lands which go out of Federal ownership do not diminish their rights or traditional uses.

**State of Idaho Interests:** The State of Idaho is interested in land tenure adjustments that support the State's objectives. The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) administers State lands to promote maximum economic returns. The Idaho Department of Lands has 51,000 acres of State land within the planning area that the Department would like to eventually consolidate through land exchanges with and acquisitions from the BLM. The Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) would also like to acquire aquifer recharge sites. The Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG) has ongoing interests associated with management of public lands, particularly management of wildlife species and habitat.

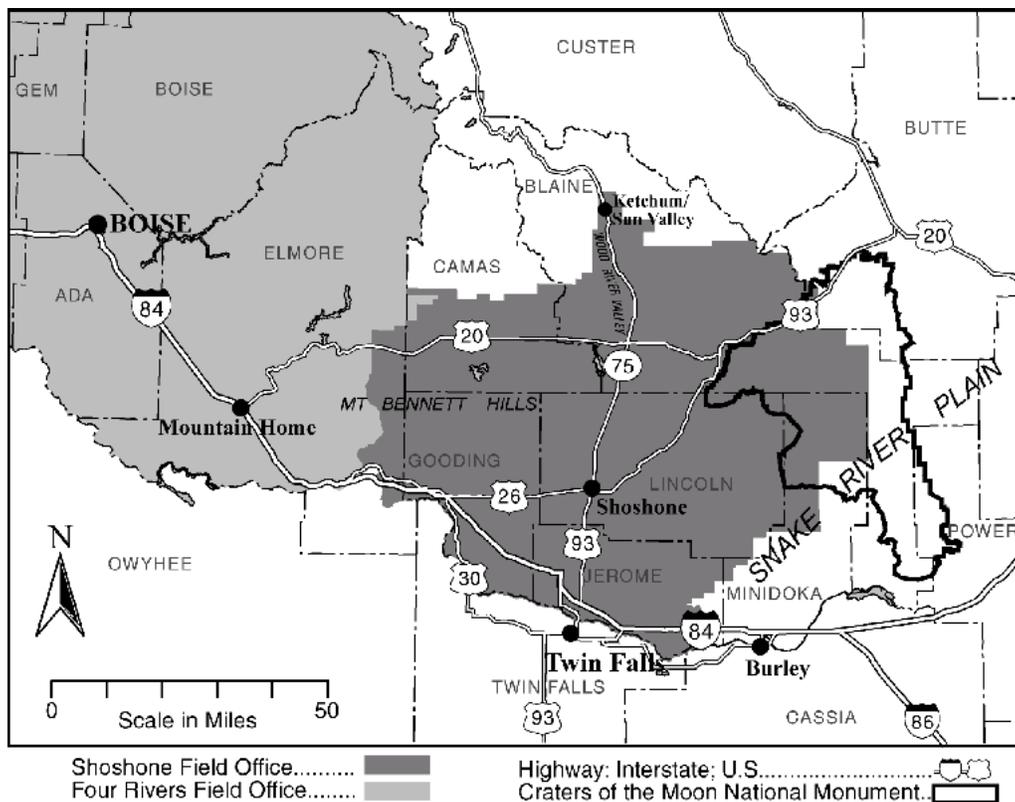
**City and County Land Use Plans and Zoning Ordinances:** In general, cities and counties within the planning area have management plans that encourage preservation of traditional multiple uses of natural resources, provide direction to strengthen economic development, and promote the orderly development of county resources. The BLM has many scattered parcels of land that the agency and local governments would like to see managed more efficiently, consistent to the extent possible with local planning and zoning ordinances.

# Affected Environment

## Project Area Description

The BLM’s Shoshone Field Office manages approximately 1.44 million acres of public lands in south-central Idaho (see map below and Map 2). Public lands comprise approximately 52% of the total land within the planning area, which lies within Blaine, Camas, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Elmore, and Minidoka counties. The 16 cities within the project area vary greatly in population, with permanent populations ranging from 150 persons in Dietrich, Idaho, to 7,780 persons in Jerome, Idaho (see *Appendix 4 - Population Information*, pp. 173-174). The planning area contains 20 areas with special management and/or designations that recognize nationally and locally important resources and values, including 14 Wilderness Study Areas comprising 159,506 acres, five ACECs totaling 18,963 acres, and four Land and Water Conservation Fund purchases totaling 943.01 acres. These designations total about 12.5% of the public lands managed by the BLM Shoshone Field Office. In addition, the planning area has nine eligible Wild and Scenic River segments totaling 88.3 stream miles.

Two actions proposed under Alternative 2 (proposed designation of the Bennett Hills ACEC and the King Hill Creek ACEC/RNA) would affect approximately 1,220 acres of public lands managed by the Four Rivers Field Office - BLM in the King Hill Creek area. Only part of this affected environment chapter pertains to those 1,220 acres -- namely, the paragraphs where the two nominated ACECs are discussed (including portions of Appendix 3). Resources and land uses in the Four Rivers Field Office portion of the nominated ACECs are essentially the same as those in the Shoshone Field Office portion.



## Social and Economic Environment

### Tribes Making Traditional Use of Public Lands in the Planning Area

Public lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office are the ancestral homelands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Reservation in Nevada, as well as some of the bands/tribes of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in southeastern Idaho. Federally-recognized Indian tribes, including the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes (the Tribes), have rights to and/or interests in public lands administered by the BLM. Both tribal groups are dependent upon the lands for a myriad of uses. The lands provide social and economic value to the American Indian people as well as spiritual and cultural uses. Through past discussions with the Tribes, the BLM is aware of their desire to capitalize on opportunities that maintain or enhance resources critical to the exercise of treaty rights, traditional customs, subsistence, and cultural use purposes. [Note: Whenever the term “the Tribes” is used in this document, it refers to both the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. If only one tribal group is meant, that group is specifically referred to by its entire name.]

The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes’ current reservation includes 294,242 acres in Idaho and Nevada. The reservation is headquartered in Owyhee, Nevada, and the Tribal government is housed there. The principal revenue sources of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes are farming and ranching. Business and land leases and grazing permits also provide income to the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. Like most reservation communities, the area is geographically isolated and economically depressed. The people are tied culturally and spiritually to the land, and they are very interested and involved in helping to shape how the land is managed by the BLM. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes are particularly concerned about cultural

resources on public land, as well as subsistence, spiritual, and traditional uses. In 1992, the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes reported approximately 1,700 members.



The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have reserved treaty rights under the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 which extend to unoccupied Federal lands off-reservation. Reserved treaty rights typically include hunting, fishing, pasturing of animals (grazing), erecting of curing structures, trapping, and gathering. Their current reservation includes 544,000 acres in southeast Idaho. The Tribal government is headquartered in Fort Hall, Idaho. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes derive income from leases (business and land), mineral rights, and some agriculture. There are a number of tribal industries, and grazing permits also provide income to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes are extremely interested in protection of the public lands and resources related to the exercise of their reserved treaty rights, as well as cultural resources, subsistence, spiritual, and traditional uses. In 1995, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes reported approximately 3,955 members; about 75 percent live on the reservation.



### **Local Economy and Society**

The planning area contains sharp contrasts in geologic features and land uses, varying in terrain from remote lava flows (covering about 15% of the area), the scenic Snake River canyon, and virtually undeveloped shrub and grasslands, to irrigated fields and the internationally acclaimed recreation area of Sun Valley. Until approximately the 1970's, most of the area would have been described as uniformly agricultural, reflecting the focus on both grazing and farming. Farming practices have changed from highly inefficient canals, ditches, and gravity-fed systems to highly mechanized systems that generally require somewhat square parcels to operate pivots. In some cases, private landowners rely on the BLM to support these farming practices by authorizing agricultural uses of public lands. Today, lands in the planning area are also used for recreation, energy production and transmission, and telecommunications. Grazing has been a major land use since the late 1800's, and much of the Bennett Hills retains the original character as productive, native shrub lands. However, the vegetation in some areas nearer communities has been

altered from historic vegetation as a result of excessive grazing in the past and changes in fire frequency and severity during the last 50 years.

**Demographics:** When the major irrigation canals (Milner-Gooding, Northside, and Twin Falls) were built in the early to mid 1900's, an emphasis was placed on settling the Magic Valley and developing the agricultural industry. The population of the five major counties (Blaine, Camas, Gooding, Jerome, and Lincoln) within the area has grown by 235% since 1920. From 1980 to 2000 the population of these five counties has grown an average of 35%; since the 1990 census the population growth of these counties has ranged between 21 and 40% (see *Appendix 4 - Population Information*, pp. 173-174). The Wood River Valley (Sun Valley, Ketchum, Hailey, and Bellevue, Idaho) continues to grow at a very high rate (40% since the 1990 census). This growth trend extends to southwestern Idaho, where the population of nearby Ada County (Boise, Idaho area) has grown at a rate of 46% since 1990. In contrast, the projected growth for the entire State of Idaho is 25% by 2015. Despite this regional population growth, most of the planning area is still rural, with approximately half of the population living outside cities (an exception is Blaine County, which contains a large population center within the Wood River Valley). Two counties that lie adjacent to or nearby the Shoshone Field Office area (Twin Falls County and Ada County) have large urban populations; these population centers have a definite influence on the economy and recreation uses of planning area.

**Relationship of Demographic Changes to the Economy of the Planning Area:** Population growth and advances in agricultural practices have contributed to today's private/public land ownership issues and the current land ownership pattern. Not only is the area growing in the number of residents, it has also become an international tourism and recreation destination. Just across the southern border of the planning area lies the rapidly growing community of Twin Falls, Idaho's seventh largest community. Twin Falls residents are increasingly using the public lands in the planning area as an outlet for a wide range of recreational and commercial pursuits. The result is an elevated interest in public lands use and access.

## Land Tenure

Land ownership in the planning area is mixed, with State and private lands interspersed among the public lands (see Map 2). Lands administered by the Shoshone Field Office total 1.44 million acres, or 52% of the 2.77 million acres within the planning area boundary. Private lands account for approximately 1.2 million acres or 43% of the area, while State lands total 144,000 acres or 5%.

The three action alternatives described and analyzed in this Environmental Assessment (Alternatives 2, 3, and 4) address several land tenure considerations, including State of Idaho interests (ownership consolidation through land exchanges, acquisition of aquifer recharge sites, future management of the Isolated Wildlife Tract Program), resolution of split mineral estate situations, resolution of future and long-standing unauthorized use cases, water rights, acquisition of access, and public lands available for potential disposal. The following paragraphs summarize the existing situation related to each of those concerns.

### *State of Idaho Interests:*

**Land Exchanges with the BLM** - The BLM has been working with the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) for several years to consolidate lands that mutually meet both agencies' needs. IDL has identified three acquisition priorities: communication sites in general, and two areas, one near Wendell, Idaho, and the other near Sid Butte in the vicinity of Kimama, Idaho. The area near Wendell is referred to locally as "Wendell Phase II" and would add to IDL's present block of land acquired in 1992 that was then referred to locally as "Wendell Phase I." The second acquisition priority area, near Sid Butte, is an estimated 4,500-acre area of public land mostly surrounded by private property. In both cases, IDL has indicated its interest in first offering isolated State sections within BLM retention areas (i.e., large blocks of existing public lands) in exchange for parcels near Wendell and Sid Butte. State exchange parcels have also been identified along the I.B. Perrine Bridge (northern access into the City of Twin Falls along Highway 93) and a 40-acre State parcel along the Snake River (T.10S., R.19E., Section 36, NENE). The Idaho Department of Lands would also like to divest itself of some parcels of State land in the Wood River Valley. If additional public lands are required to complete this land exchange, they may be made available from within the planning area where they have been identified for disposal through these plan amendments.

**Aquifer Recharge Sites** - The Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) completed a "Feasibility of Large-Scale Managed Recharge of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer System" in December of 1999. This study described the potential of a managed aquifer recharge program to enhance management of water resources in the Upper Snake River Plain. Existing aquifer recharge sites within the planning area occur primarily on private land along major canals or rivers; the sites are recharged by floodwaters or surplus waters that flow in the fall after the farming season and before freezing temperatures begin. IDWR has identified numerous locations throughout Idaho they would like to utilize as recharge sites in addition to the sites that are already in use; some of these potential sites are on public lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office. IDWR would like to acquire these public lands sites, rather than requesting long-term right-of-way grants from the BLM. The BLM would also like to dispose of these sites, rather than requiring IDWR to have long-term right-of-way grants. The Shoshone Field Office BLM currently authorizes one such use (through a Cooperative Agreement) on an existing recharge site in the Shoshone Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

IDWR's proposal for an aquifer recharge right-of-way (IDI-32771) on public lands along the Milner-Gooding canal has been analyzed in an environmental assessment (EA # ID076-2001-0021). A decision notice issued on 8/2/00 documented the BLM's acceptance of IDWR's proposal; however, final approval of this recharge site is pending an agreement between the Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Idaho Department of Water Resources.

**Isolated Wildlife Tract Program** - Before agricultural development, the Snake River Plain of south-central Idaho provided extensive habitat to support a variety of native wildlife. Due to the loss of native habitat as a result of agricultural development during the early to mid 1900s, the remaining wildlife tracts are crucial to the survival of upland native and non-native game birds, waterfowl, big game, and watchable wildlife. The BLM and IDFG recognized the importance of these remaining tracts and formed a Cooperative Wildlife Management Program (CWMP) through the Sikes Act of 1960 (P.L. 93-452) for the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat. The Shoshone Field Office presently has 88 tracts being cooperatively managed between BLM and IDFG under the Isolated Wildlife Tract Program.

***Split Estate Mineral Values:*** Approximately 20% of the public lands within the Shoshone Field Office area involves split estate mineral values. Through various acts, the federal government has retained mineral values, while encouraging settlement. As late as the 1980's, BLM policy concerning mineral estate was to reserve all oil and gas rights as well as any other mineral values. Current BLM policy is to not split estates when completing a land tenure transaction. As a result, there are currently 285,000 acres of split estate, which involves everything from a reservation for all minerals, to oil and gas only, with private surface ownership. The management of the existing split estate has been, and continues to be, a challenge. Many of the private surface owners have requested that the sub-surface minerals be sold or transferred into their ownership.

***Authorized and Unauthorized Land Uses:*** When the Bennett Hills RMP was initiated in 1990, more than 200 temporary land use permits were authorized for various agricultural uses until the RMP could be completed and the lands evaluated for disposal. The permits were originally written for a five year period. About 45 land use permits have been renewed and still exist today, waiting for the outcome of this current planning effort. Another 21 applications through the Desert Land Entry and Carey Acts await processing. Approximately 200 recorded unauthorized uses, and a similar number of known un-recorded unauthorized uses, await resolution. The BLM expects a large number of cases are as yet unknown where land is being used without BLM authorization. Workload priorities and limited staffing usually require these types of cases to go unresolved until they can be included in additional activities on the same parcel, unless the unauthorized use is causing or has the potential to cause a public safety issue or resource damage. Many of these cases date back to a time before the BLM existed. Most unauthorized uses are unintentional and many of the affected areas have little, if any, public resource values left after so many years. Therefore, it would be beneficial to resolve these cases for the benefit of the BLM, the public, and the long-time users.

***Water Rights Policy:*** The Idaho BLM’s water rights policy has been changing and continues to change with the on-going process of the Snake River Basin Adjudication effort. All future actions involving water rights shall adhere to the State of Idaho and BLM State-wide water rights policies. (Older existing permits are silent on the water rights issue; as new applications are received and old permits are renewed, language implementing current Idaho water rights policy is included.)

***Access:*** Currently, access needs are prioritized and subsequently worked on when there are landowners who are willing to participate in the acquisition. Sometimes access acquisition can take more than ten years to complete. Blaine County (more specifically, within the Wood River Valley) is actively seeking to acquire and ensure public access through a variety of avenues, but usually through private land development plans and BLM land exchange efforts. Today, the BLM’s acquisition priorities are in the areas of the Wood River Valley, Camas Prairie, and Magic Reservoir. However, it has not been a priority for the Shoshone Field Office to develop access opportunities, implement physical access after legal access is acquired, or monitor use impacts in newly accessible areas.

***Lands Available for Potential Disposal:*** The public lands that are currently available and identified for potential disposal in the existing planning documents (approximately 49,000 acres) are shown on Map 2 and listed in *Appendix 6* (see pages 177-187). Many of the lands still identified for disposal appear to be from individual requests for parcels that were made many years ago. Many of these parcels will not meet the needs of the public today or improve management of the public lands. In fact, some would produce isolated tracts. These amendments will reconsider all of the existing lands currently identified for disposal.

On July 25, 2000, Congress passed the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA), PL 106-248. Lands identified for disposal in land use plans as of that date may be sold or exchanged under FLTFA, and the monies received from sales or exchanges will be retained in an account and can be used by the BLM and other Federal agencies to purchase additional lands; they are not deposited in the General Treasury. All of the lands identified for disposal in the current Shoshone Field Office land use plans are eligible under FLTFA (see Appendix 6 and Map 2).

## Nominated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

Ten ACECs totaling 385,235 acres and including 15.3 miles of streams were nominated for consideration in this planning effort. An ACEC designation must meet stringent criteria of relevance and importance and the need for special management attention, as established in 43 CFR 1610.7-2. These criteria are described in the “Alternatives” section of this Environmental Assessment (see pages 32-33), and a complete evaluation of each nominated ACEC is provided in Appendix 3 (see pages 128-172). A summary of the resource values for each ACEC, *as identified by the nominator*, is shown below in Table 1. Appendix 3 contains a detailed description of each nominated ACEC.

**Table 1: Summary of ACEC Nominations**

<i>ACEC Name</i>	<i>Nominating Entity</i>	<i>ACEC Size</i>	<i>Resource Values Cited in the Nomination</i>
Bennett Hills	Committee for Idaho’s High Desert	381,471 acres	Geology, scenic, cultural, recreational, critical habitats, redband trout.
Big Wood/ Warm Springs	City of Ketchum	236 acres	Scenic, fish, wildlife, and protective management from proposed development.
Camas Creek	BLM*	420 acres, including 1.5 miles of stream reaches	Low elevation riparian reference area.
Coyote Hills	BLM*	49,062 acres	Cultural resources and associated settings.
Dry Creek	Idaho Natural Area Coordinating Committee	869 acres, including 3.8 miles of stream reaches	Riparian habitat.
Fir Grove	The Nature Conservancy	45 acres	Isolated Douglas-fir community.
King’s Crown	The Nature Conservancy, Idaho Natural Heritage Program	10 acres	Undisturbed plant community.
King Hill Creek	BLM*	2,880 acres, including 10 miles of stream reaches	Redband trout and riparian habitat.
McKinney Butte	BLM*	3,764 acres	Scenic, crucial bat habitat, geologic, fragile and pristine cave environment.
Tee-Maze	BLM*	10,762 acres	Scenic, crucial bat habitat, geologic, fragile and pristine cave environment.

\* All of the BLM nominations were initially made during the Bennett Hills RMP planning effort.

## **Other Affected Programs and Resources**

### **Archaeological, Historical, and Ethnographic Resources**

The BLM is responsible for identifying, protecting, managing, and enhancing archaeological, historic, architectural, and traditional lifeway values located on BLM public lands, as well as those that might be affected by BLM undertakings on non-Federal lands. The BLM manages archaeological remains, historic values, and traditional lifeway values important to Native American groups.

Some of the legislation and implementing regulations governing cultural resource management include the following: the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), as amended; the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA), as amended; the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (AIRFA); and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA). The Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) states that public lands will be managed in a manner “that will protect the quality of...historical...and archaeological values”; the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and NHPA provide the objective to coordinate plans and functional programs and resources so as to preserve and protect important cultural resources early in the project planning process. Traditional lifeway values are usually identified through consultation with tribal officials. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), NHPA, and certain treaty rights guarantee access, use, and protection of traditional cultural properties, religious sites, and sacred objects.

#### *Cultural Resource Inventories*

Cultural resources are generally identified through field inventories conducted by qualified professionals in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). Informant information and historical records are also used to identify archaeological, historical, and traditional lifeway values.

Three types of inventories - Class I, II, and III - have been conducted to identify and assess cultural values on BLM lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office. A Class I inventory (literature review) was completed in 1982 as part of a larger study that included the Boise and Shoshone management areas. A Class II sample design inventory was conducted in the Bennett Hills in 1974 and 1975 by Idaho State University archaeologists. Approximately 94,720 acres were inventoried during this effort. Several smaller Class III, intensive inventories have been completed to fulfil Section 106 responsibilities. These inventories were associated with project activities where sites needed to be identified and evaluated in order to protect significant values and minimize effects on those values. Over the years, several different universities have also conducted Class III inventories that were not associated with any specific project, thus expanding the Shoshone Field Office’s information base. It is estimated that roughly 4% (57,600 acres) of the public lands within the Shoshone Field Office have been intensively inventoried for cultural resources.

#### *Prehistoric and Historic Sites*

There are approximately 1,300 known, recorded cultural resources sites within the Shoshone Field Office area, representing a variety of types and chronological periods, dating from at least 9,000 years old to the present. Identified prehistoric sites include lithic scatters, quarries, rockshelters, rock structures and piles, and pictographs/petroglyphs.

Historic sites within the Field Office include portions of the North Side Alternate National Historic Trail and Goodale's Cutoff National Historic Trail, both alternative routes of the Oregon Trail, as well as shepherd camps, cairns, and dumps. A few stock-raising homestead claims were filed in the 1890's and early 1900's, but the environment proved too harsh for many of them to succeed so most were canceled. During the early days of Euro-American settlement in southern Idaho, sheep and cattle grazing were the predominate economic pursuit in this area. During the 1880's, silver, gold, and lead mining also took place in the Wood River Valley and the mountains just north of the Field Office management area on Sawtooth National Forest lands.

### *Native American Traditional Values*

Native American Indians subsisted on the lands within the Shoshone Field Office for thousands of years. Existing ethnographic information generally suggests that aboriginal populations constantly traversed the Snake River Plain during their seasonal subsistence rounds, moving to the Camas Prairie in the spring and then further into the mountains for the summer. In the fall, they would return to the Snake River for the winter (Steward 1938). The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes still hunt game and gather on BLM lands today. They continue to ascribe cultural value to the Snake River corridor and the Camas Prairie.

### *Cultural Resources Condition and Trend*

Cultural resources condition and trend within the Shoshone Field Office varies considerably due to the variability of terrain and geomorphology, access and visibility, and past and current land use. Exposed artifacts and features on the ground surface can be disturbed by elements such as wind and water erosion, animal and human intrusion, and development and maintenance activities. Based on limited site visitation and site form documentation, the trend of site condition within the Shoshone Field Office is considered stable in most areas. Vandalism and unauthorized collection at sites constitutes the main source of cultural resource degradation.

Looting of archaeological sites has been occurring for some time, especially in the remote, hard to reach regions and poor condition public lands with predominately annual grass cover, especially right after a wildfire. With the advent of Internet auctions, illegal artifact collection is becoming more profitable than ever. As long as there is a market for such items, looting will continue to be problematic.

### **Cave Resources**

The Upper Snake River District (USRD), BLM, contains the largest known concentration of caves in the State of Idaho and one of the largest concentrations of caves within the BLM's national jurisdiction. USRD caves are predominantly lava tubes, blisters, shelters, or fissures formed in basaltic lava fields. Because of unique physical and environmental conditions, caves are one of the District's most sensitive and unusual resources. All of these resources are recognized as fragile, and some are considered non-renewable. For example, fragile resources in area caves include ground water hydrologic systems, Townsend's big-eared bat colonies, and cave-adapted invertebrates. Non-renewable resources include paleontological deposits, cave formations, and cultural resources. USRD caves have suffered degradation of fragile resources and loss of non-renewable resources from intentional or unintentional human actions such as disturbance of bat habitat, toxic material dumping, and damage to cave formations.

There are 90 known caves on public lands within the planning area. A total of 70 of these caves have been found to possess the values, characteristics, or features to be designated as “significant” based on the criteria contained in Federal cave management regulations (43 CFR 37). A significant determination is an internal administrative action guided, in part, by comments and information provided by interested and affected members of the public. The 1988 Federal Cave Resources Protection Act, the Federal cave regulations, and BLM cave management policy (Manual Section 6380) provide guidance for cave resources management and protection. The recently completed Upper Snake River District Cave Resources Management Plan (USDI - BLM, 1999) further describes the BLM’s management focus for caves originating on public lands in the District. In conformance with the appropriate Federal regulations and policies, all caves within special management areas designated wholly or in part due to cave resources shall be determined to be significant. [Note: A copy of the Cave Resources Management Plan is available upon request by contacting the Shoshone Field Office - BLM.]

## **Forest Resources**

Forest lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office include 15,200 acres classified as commercial forest land (land capable of producing at least 20 cubic feet of wood/acre/year) and an additional 1,300 acres of woodland (aspen, juniper, etc.). These stands range in size from 5 acres to 570 acres. Species represented are Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, quaking aspen, juniper, and cottonwood. The average stand age is approximately 100 years. In general, the conifers occur in the northern half of the planning area and usually on north and northeast facing slopes where it is cooler and more moist. The deciduous stands occur throughout the planning area where more moisture occurs such as riparian zones, seeps, or springs.

Because forest vegetation comprises only a small portion of habitats in the Field Office area (about one percent of the 1.44 million public acres in the planning area), these resources are not harvested extensively for commercial purposes. However, from 1948 to 2000 there were 11 forest product (poles, sawlogs, and house logs) sales ranging in size from 5 acres to 180 acres (total of 600 acres harvested). In September 2001 a helicopter thinning sale in Martin Canyon was sold; this sale will treat a total of 663 acres in four separate harvest units and was done in cooperation with the fuels management and wildlife management programs. The purposes of the Martin Canyon sale are to increase tree health and vigor; preserve and protect the integrity of old growth structure; increase the aspen, willow and maple components of the stand; reduce competition for water, nutrients, and light; reduce the opportunity for the epidemic spread of insects, disease, and catastrophic fire; provide forest products to the market place; and improve elk, deer, and ruffed and blue grouse habitat.

A healthy forest plant community supports a variety of wildlife. Forest vegetation also provides important thermal and security habitat for big game species (primarily mule deer and elk). Mule deer and elk utilize forest habitats extensively for fawning and calving in the spring. Many of the north-facing timber areas are interspersed with crucial big game winter ranges on south-facing slopes. The forested areas provide important thermal cover during winter months.

Blue grouse, an upland game bird, also utilize forested habitats in the planning area. The conifer forest is particularly important to these birds during the winter. Blue grouse roost in the conifers and feed primarily upon conifer needles during the winter. During the summer, blue grouse prefer aspen communities, forest openings, and riparian areas that are vegetated with grasses, forbs, and shrubs. There they nest, raise their broods, and feed upon insects, fruits, and leaves.

## **Livestock Grazing**

The Shoshone Field Office manages livestock grazing use on 206 allotments. Eighty allotments (approximately 39%) also contain State lands. Grazing use is authorized for 222 permittees and a total of 206,952 AUMs. Grazing use is permitted for 44,789 cattle (134,971 AUMs or 65.2% of total permitted use), 102,685 sheep (71,513 AUMs or 34.5% of total permitted use), and 129 horses (468 AUMs or .3% of total permitted use).

## **Minerals (Leasable, Locatable, Saleable)**

The following discussion of minerals resources is limited to those areas proposed for ACEC designation under one or more alternatives, since the ACEC designations would be accompanied by management actions restricting future minerals exploration and development. Minerals concerns related to land tenure adjustments and other lands actions would be addressed at the project level.

***Bennett Hills ACEC:*** Locatable Minerals - The locatable mineral potential is very high due to the existence of known locatable mineral deposits (platy lava rock of Black Butte, diatomaceous earth of Clover Creek, and pumice from pre-1955 claims adjacent to State Highway 20 east of Moonstone Ranch). The likelihood that there is a significantly large deposit of locatable minerals in the proposed ACEC is very low because the rock types and geology are not conducive to the formation of typical locatable minerals such as gold and silver. Leasable Minerals - There are no mineral leases in the proposed ACEC. The potential for oil, natural gas, and coal is very low due to unfavorable rock types and geology. The northeast portion of the proposed ACEC includes acreage that is within the Camas Prairie Known Geothermal Resource Area and also includes a geothermal well and hot springs at Hot Springs Landing on the north end of Magic Reservoir. The western portion of the proposed ACEC includes one hot spring located on Hot Creek west of State Highway 46. The potential for hot springs within the proposed ACEC is very high due to the existence of two known hot springs and the close proximity to the Camas Prairie Known Geothermal Resource Area on the north and the hot springs on the White Arrow Ranch to the south. The potential for geothermal wells is also very high due to the existing geothermal well at Hot Springs Landing on the north side of Magic Reservoir, the presence of the Camas Prairie Known Geothermal Area to the north, the hot spring on Hot Creek west of State Highway 46, and the geothermal activity at White Arrow Ranch adjacent to the ACEC to the south. Saleable Minerals - The proposed ACEC includes one community pit for decorative platy lava rock, one community pit for river rock, one community pit for decomposed granite, one common use area for decomposed granite, one common use area for rip rap, one common use area for stackable blocky lava rock, one common use area for landscape rock, one exclusive mineral material sale site for stackable blocky lava rock, a free use permit for river gravel, four free use permits for gravel, one free use permit for decomposed granite, and a pumice deposit that is now considered to be a saleable mineral. The potential for saleable minerals within the ACEC is very high due to the numerous existing sites, favorable rock types and geology.

***Camas Creek ACEC/RNA:*** Locatable Minerals - The proposed ACEC area has four active placer mining claims, but no existing mine at the claim sites. There is medium potential for locatable minerals due to the presence of active mining claims and the proximity of the Hailey Gold Belt to the north. However, there is no known history of mining in the proposed ACEC area. Leasable Minerals - There are no mineral leases in the proposed ACEC. The potential for oil, natural gas, and coal is very low due to unfavorable rock types and geology. There are no known geothermal wells or springs in the proposed ACEC. However, the potential for geothermal water in wells is high because the site falls within the boundary of the Camas Prairie Geothermal Area and is in close proximity to surface hot springs. Saleable

Minerals - The BLM has no community pits, common use areas, free use permits, or exclusive mineral material sale sites in the proposed ACEC. The potential for salable minerals is high due to favorable rock types and geology; however due to the small size of the proposed ACEC and the vast amount of BLM land nearby, any mineral material actions could be conducted from nearby BLM land outside the proposed ACEC.

***Coyote Hills ACEC:*** Locatable Minerals - Due to the absence of active mining claims, the lack of history of mining activity, and the unfavorable rock types and geology there is a low potential for locatable minerals in the proposed ACEC. Leasable Minerals - There are no mineral leases in the proposed ACEC. The potential for oil, natural gas, and coal is very low due to unfavorable rock types and geology. There are no known geothermal wells or springs in the ACEC area. The eastern section has low potential for geothermal activity, while the western portion has medium potential for geothermal water due to its proximity to known geothermal hot springs and wells. Saleable Minerals - The proposed ACEC area has two free use permits for gravel and a common use area for the sale of landscape boulders. The potential for saleable minerals within the proposed ACEC is very high due to the known surface deposits, favorable rock types, and geology. Any likely future development would be adjacent to an existing road. Many areas within the proposed ACEC will likely not be exploited due to the remoteness of most locations and the lack of access to a local market.

***Dry Creek ACEC/RNA, King Hill Creek ACEC/RNA, McKinney Butte ACEC/RNA:*** Locatable Minerals - Due to the absence of active mining claims, lack of history of mining activity, and the unfavorable rock types and geology, there is a low potential for locatable minerals in these proposed ACEC areas. Leasable Minerals - There are no mineral leases in the proposed ACEC areas. The potential for oil, natural gas, and coal is very low due to unfavorable rock types and geology. There are no known hot springs or geothermal wells in the proposed ACEC areas. The potential for hot springs is low because of the absence of known hot springs on the surface. The potential for the occurrence of geothermal wells is medium because the ACEC areas are located between known geothermal resource areas. Saleable Minerals - The BLM has no mineral material sites in the proposed ACEC areas. The potential for salable minerals is high due to favorable rock types and geology. However, due to the large amount of nearby BLM land, any proposed sales or permits could be conducted from similar sites on adjacent BLM lands.

***Tee-Maze ACEC/RNA:*** Locatable Minerals - Although there are mining claims within the proposed ACEC and mining claims on three sides of the proposed ACEC, there is probably no viable locatable mineral within the boundary of the proposed ACEC. The potential for locatable minerals in the proposed ACEC is low because the rock type and geology is not conducive to the formation of locatable minerals. Leasable Minerals - There are no mineral leases within the proposed ACEC. The potential for oil, natural gas, and coal is very low due to unfavorable rock types and geology. There are no known hot springs or geothermal wells within the proposed ACEC. The potential for hot springs is very low because none are known to exist on the surface, and the potential for geothermal water from a drilled well is low because the site is not close to or within a known geothermal area. Saleable Minerals - The proposed ACEC area has one mineral material sale site and one common use sale area - both for surface removal of stackable blocky lava rock. The potential for saleable minerals is very high due to known existing sites and favorable rock types and geology.

## **Off-highway Vehicle Use**

This discussion focuses on existing OHV use within areas proposed for ACEC designation, because the plan amendments only propose changes to OHV use within those areas.

All public lands within the seven ACECs proposed in these plan amendments (Bennett Hills, Camas Creek, Coyote Hills, Dry Creek, King Hill Creek, McKinney Butte, and Tee-Maze) are presently managed under the Bennett Hills/Timmerman MFP (see Maps 1 and 4). Existing management allows cross-country motorized vehicle use throughout the Bennett Hills planning unit, except within designated Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). OHV use in the WSAs is limited to roads, vehicle ways, and trails that existed at the time of wilderness inventory. The proposed ACECs would include public lands within the following WSAs: King Hill Creek, Deer Creek, Gooding City of Rocks West, Gooding City of Rocks East, Black Canyon, Little City of Rocks, and Black Butte. A very small, unquantifiable amount of cross country OHV use occurs in the Bennett Hills area. This use is primarily associated with all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) used for big game hunting (including game retrieval) and horn (antler) hunting. A negligible amount of snowmobile use also occurs in the area.

## **Paleontological Resources**

There is no legislative or regulatory direction for the management of paleontological resources, but BLM policy is set forth in Manual 8270, Paleontological Resource Management, and the associated handbook H-8270-1. Additional authorities governing management of paleontological resources are provided by NEPA, FLPMA, various CFR sections, and other authorities. NEPA requires that all resources, including paleontological resources, be given full consideration in the environmental assessment and planning process. FLPMA requires that the public lands be managed to protect scientific and other values, and allows for the issuance of permits for collection of paleontological resources.

No systematic paleontologic inventories have been conducted in the planning area. However, the value of paleontologic resources in USRD caves is considered highly significant (McDonald and McGrady, 1999). The only known fossil records from the central Snake River Plain are from lava tube caves and pits. Random discoveries and isolated scientific excavations have documented extinct or extirpated species from the Pleistocene (1.8 million years ago to 8,000 years ago) through the Holocene (8,000 years ago to the present) epochs. A partial listing of the animal remains which have been identified include camel, mammoth, bison, short-faced bear, dire wolf, grizzly bear, muskox, wolverine, pine martin, lynx, black-footed ferret, and lemming (White *et. al.*, 1984). The skeletal remains of many of these animals have been found on public lands in the planning area.

## **Recreation and Visitor Access**

Recreation visitor days within the area exceed 900,000 days annually. An additional 435,000 visitors per year are expected to travel through the planning area to other recreation destinations outside the area (see *Appendix 5 - Recreation Data*, p. 176).

Access to public lands in the Wood River Valley is an important issue, and maintaining or adding access to BLM or National Forest lands is of great interest to local residents. The BLM and Forest Service jointly manage the Bald Mountain Ski Area, which is an integral part of the skiing infrastructure of the Sun Valley area. Public lands are a gateway to, and provide overflow capacity for, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Sawtooth National Forest lands during all seasons. Recreation activities on lands in the Wood River Valley include hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross country skiing, hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling. The area receives about 338,000 visitor days annually (see *Appendix 5 - Recreation Data*). Residents and local governments have a strong interest in protecting the existing public lands, and in the potential to potentially add public lands to that base through acquisitions, easements, and land exchanges. Local governments also have an interest in acquiring public lands for local community use through the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act.

Craters of the Moon National Monument, another regional attraction, has grown in popularity. Even before the Monument was expanded from 54,000 to 715,000 acres, the area received more than 250,000 visitors a year. The Monument now encompasses the Great Rift, one of two geologic rift formations in the world, and has received recent recognition from international visitors through local tourism efforts. With the expansion, the BLM and National Park Service can now expect an increase in international recognition of the exceptional geologic and biological values this monument has to offer.

The planning area has recorded large numbers of in-state and out-of-state visitors for recreational adventures. Magic Reservoir, with 135,000 visitor days annually (see *Appendix 5 - Recreation Data*), is the fifth-highest recreational use reservoir in Idaho. The Bennett Hills supports a very large number of mule deer, which attract many hunters. Other attractions within the planning area include Shoshone Falls and the Class II to V rapids on the Mid-Snake River (Murtaugh Reach is regarded as one of the premier white-water day trips in the Pacific Northwest), the internationally-recognized fisheries of Silver Creek, and segments of the Oregon National Historic Trail. The recreation use and tourism of these and other attractions are largely supported by population centers outside the area in addition to local residents. The largest concentrated population base within the planning area is the Wood River Valley. Larger cities such as Twin Falls and Boise, Idaho, and Salt Lake City, Utah, fall outside the planning area boundary; however, residents of these cities utilize the opportunities offered here and provide a major economic contribution.

## **Special Status Species**

Appendix 7 (pp. 188-192) contains the most recent list of special status plant and animal species known or suspected to occur in the Shoshone Field Office area. [**Note:** This species list is dynamic, since species are added to or dropped from special status periodically as new information becomes available. Any statements in this document referring to the term “special status species” would include all species on the *most current* special status species list for the Shoshone Field Office area.]

The following species are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act:

*Gray Wolf* - The gray wolf once occurred throughout much of Idaho. However, it was listed in Idaho and other states as Endangered in 1978 and re-introduced in central Idaho in 1994. The most recent sighting in the Shoshone Field Office area was when a wolf was killed in the winter of 2001/2002 about five miles east of King Hill Creek. The successful translocation of wolves in central Idaho coupled with recent sightings of a pack of wolves in the Stanley Basin makes it more likely that wolves may occur in the Shoshone Field Office area in the future.

*Canada Lynx* - The Canada lynx was listed as Threatened in Idaho and other states in 2000. BLM-managed lands north of Highway 20, especially those in close proximity to National Forest Lands, may contain habitat conditions suitable for Canada lynx denning, foraging, movement, and dispersal activities. The most recent sightings occurred in 1984 in the general vicinity of Bellevue, Idaho.

*Bald Eagle* - The bald eagle was listed as Endangered in 1978 and downgraded to Threatened status in 1995. The bald eagle is a common winter visitor to the Shoshone Field Office area, being associated primarily with the Snake River and to a lesser extent to some of the Snake River's principal tributaries such as the Clover Creek and Big Wood River drainages.

*Bull Trout* - The bull trout was listed as Threatened in Idaho and other states in 1998. Bull trout currently inhabit portions of the South Fork of the Boise River watershed. Lime Creek and its tributaries are considered historic bull trout habitat. However, recent field surveys by the BLM, USFS, and IDFG have failed to collect any bull trout in the Lime Creek watershed.

*Bliss Rapids Snail* - The Bliss Rapids snail was listed as Threatened in 1992. Known river populations only occur in spring-influenced habitat near the edge of mainstem rapids. At present, the Bliss Rapids snail exists as a discontinuously distributed population along 204 miles of the Snake River. Most individuals occur in the Hagerman reach, in the tailwaters of Bliss and Lower Salmon Falls dams.

*Idaho Springsnail* - The Idaho springsnail was listed as Endangered in 1992. At present, this snail only occurs as a discontinuously distributed population in permanent, flowing waters of the mainstem Snake River, from the headwaters of C.J. Strike Reservoir at mile 518, upstream to approximately river mile 553 (Bancroft Springs).

*Utah Valvata Snail* - The Utah Valvata snail was listed as Endangered in 1992. The snail lives in deep pools adjacent to rapids or in perennial flowing waters associated with large spring complexes. At present, the snail occurs in the Shoshone Field Office area within a few springs and at mainstem Snake River sites in the Hagerman Valley.

*Snake River Physa Snail* - The Snake River Physa snail was listed as Endangered in 1992. The snail is found mainly in Gooding County, Idaho, along the Snake River. It is believed that much of the habitat for the species is in deep water beyond the range of routine sampling. The snail remains at only a few locations in the Hagerman and King Hill reaches of the Snake River.

*Banbury Springs Limpet (Lanx)* - The Banbury Springs limpet (lanx) was listed as Endangered in 1992. The limpet has only been found in spring-run habitats with well-oxygenated, clear, cold waters on boulder or cobble substratum, with relatively swift currents. At present, the limpet is only known to occur in three,

minimally disturbed spring habitats at Banbury Springs, Box Canyon Springs, and Thousand Springs between Snake River miles 584.8 and 589.4.

*Ute Ladies Tresses* - The Ute ladies tresses was listed as Endangered in 1992. Since 1996, extensive field surveys have been conducted throughout most of Idaho, with no documented occurrences in the Shoshone Field Office area.

Two of the BLM Sensitive species listed in Appendix 7 (Interior redband trout and Townsend’s Western big-eared bat) are specifically identified for special management attention through the King Hill Creek, McKinney Butte, and Tee-Maze ACEC/RNA designations proposed in these plan amendments.

The following table summarizes the general habitat preferences of many of the BLM Sensitive bird species known or suspected to occur in the Shoshone Field Office area.

<b>General Habitats of BLM Sensitive Bird Species</b>				
<b>Sagebrush</b>	<b>Grassland</b>	<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Riparian</b>	<b>Forest</b>
Ferruginous hawk Peregrine falcon Sage grouse * Loggerhead shrike * Brewer’s sparrow * Sage sparrow * Sharp-tailed grouse	Ferruginous hawk Sharp-tailed grouse	White-faced Ibis Bald eagle * Peregrine falcon Trumpeter swan	White-faced Ibis Bald eagle * Sage grouse * Black tern Willow flycatcher * Virginia’s warbler	Bald eagle * Northern goshawk Peregrine falcon White-headed woodpecker Willow flycatcher Mtn. quail (brush)
* Species most likely to be encountered on public lands in the Shoshone Field Office area. This list does not include “watch species,” which are species for which there is insufficient information to justify listing them as BLM Sensitive.				

These associations represent only the most likely habitats in which the above-listed BLM Sensitive species may be found. They may breed in, or otherwise require, more specialized micro-habitats. BLM Sensitive mammals in the planning area require forest habitats, except for the pygmy rabbit and kit fox (which are both sagebrush or desert dwellers and are at the extreme edge of their range in the planning area) and bats species (which are often associated with caves). The habitat requirements of BLM Sensitive aquatic and amphibian species should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

**Wild and Scenic Rivers**

No designated Wild and Scenic Rivers lie within the planning area. However, nine stream segments managed by the Shoshone Field Office have been found eligible for future suitability study to see if they are suitable for addition to the Nationwide Wild and Scenic Rivers system (USDI - BLM, 1994). The eligible Wild and Scenic River (WSR) segments and their mileage, tentative classifications as “Wild (W),” “Scenic (S),” or “Recreational (R),” and outstandingly remarkable values are as follows:

Big Wood River (2.1 miles; “R”; scenic and geologic)  
Box Canyon (1.2 miles; “R”; fish and wildlife, natural features, recreational opportunities)  
Dry Creek (4.6 miles; “W”; scenic, ecological, recreational qualities)  
King Hill Creek (10 miles; “W”; fish and wildlife, scenic, ecological qualities)  
Snake River - Miler Section (8.5 miles; “S”; scenic, recreational, historical)  
Snake River - Murtaugh Section (13 miles; “S”; scenic, recreational)  
Snake River - Hagerman Section (7.2 miles; “R”; recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historical)  
Snake River - King Hill Section (12.8 miles; “R”; recreation, fish, wildlife, geologic)  
Vineyard Lake (0.5 miles; “S”; scenic and ecological).

Until the suitability study is completed, all of these eligible WSR are being managed to (a) protect the streams’ free-flowing character, (b) maintain the level of development that resulted in the segments’ tentative classifications as “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational”; and (c) protect the outstandingly remarkable values which qualified the stream segments as eligible for further study. [**Note:** Two of these eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers (Dry Creek and King Hill Creek) are proposed for designation as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in these plan amendments. The Box Canyon and Vineyard Lake eligible river segments lie within existing ACECs of the same name.]