

Summary of Alternatives Considered

The Draft Amendments/Environmental Assessment described and analyzed three alternative amendments to existing management (Alternatives 2, 3, and 4) in order to address the two planning issues: land tenure adjustment and new ACEC designations. The option of continuing existing management was also described and analyzed. Alternative 3 was identified as the BLM's preferred alternative.

Land Tenure Adjustment

Land tenure adjustment of public lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office is presently limited to those parcels specifically identified in the Field Office's four land use plans. The Field Office currently has more than 100 land exchange and sales proposals on file that do not meet the disposal decisions in the land use plans and can only be considered for disposal after the disposal tracts are identified in a plan amendment. The action alternatives identified direction for land tenure adjustment that would make public lands available for disposal in response to the public's changing priorities, improve the BLM's ability to manage the existing land base and present resource values, and help meet other objectives of the existing land use plans. The alternatives also addressed many specific land tenure considerations, including State of Idaho interests (such as 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.

Although all of the action alternatives addressed the above land tenure considerations, each alternative differed in its overall emphasis. Alternative 2 emphasized State land exchanges in order to consolidate large parcels of land through a minimum number of land tenure adjustments. Private land exchanges were be a low priority under Alternative 2, with the result that few private exchanges would likely be completed to resolve private landowners' concerns or acquire lands with important resource values. Alternative 3 (preferred alternative) sought to achieve public lands consolidation, management efficiency, and resource acquisition through both private and State land exchanges by using a "pooled lands" approach in priority watersheds. This emphasis would enable the BLM to address the concerns of many landowners (State, private, local government) and improve public lands management and resources. Alternative 4 focused on private land exchanges in order to resolve long-standing unauthorized uses. This emphasis was expected to decrease the number of other types of land tenure adjustments that could be completed (such as State land exchanges) and result in a high number of small, individual transactions.

ACEC Designations

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. Ten ACECs totaling 385,235 acres and including 15.3 miles of streams were nominated for consideration during the amendments planning process. The BLM used a consistent screening process (based on guidance provided by 43 CFR 1610.7-2 and BLM Manual Section 1613) as an initial evaluation to determine if a nominated area met basic relevance and importance criteria for designation. From three to seven ACECs were proposed for designation in the Draft Amendments/Environmental Assessment, depending on the alternative. The ACEC nominations and Draft Amendments' proposed designations are summarized in Table 1 below. The proposed amendments' ACEC designations are the same as Alternative 3, except for a change in the boundary of the King Hill Creek ACEC.

Table 1: Summary of ACEC Nominations and Draft Amendments' Designations

(Note: Acres are approximate)

Nominated ACEC (acres; relevant/important values)	Not Proposed	Proposed for Designation		
		Alternative 2	Alternative 3 (BLM Preferred)	Alternative 4
Bennett Hills - 381,471 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> cultural		X		
Big Wood/Warm Springs - 236 acres	X ²			
Camas Creek - 420 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> scenic, natural system or process		X		
Coyote Hills - 49,062 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> cultural		X		
Dry Creek - 869 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> scenic, natural system or process		X		
Fir Grove - 45 acres	X ¹			
King's Crown - 10 acres	X ²			
King Hill Creek - 2,880 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> scenic, fish resource, natural system or process		X	X	X
McKinney Butte - 3,764 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> scenic, wildlife resource, natural system or process		X	X	X
Tee-Maze - 10,762 acres <i>ACEC values:</i> scenic, wildlife resource, natural system or process		X	X	X
Total Acres Proposed for Designation		385,235 acres³	17,406 acres	17,406 acres

- ¹ The Fir Grove nominated ACEC did not meet required relevance and importance criteria for ACEC designation.
- ² The Big Wood/Warm Springs and King's Crown nominated ACECs met relevance criteria for ACEC designation, but did not meet importance criteria.
- ³ The total acres for Alternative 2 take into account that five of the proposed ACECs (Camas Creek, Coyote Hills, Dry Creek, King Hill Creek, and Tee-Maze) would lie within the boundaries of the Bennett Hills ACEC.

Alternatives Considered, but not Analyzed in Detail

Three alternatives were considered by the Shoshone Field Office, but not analyzed in detail.

Land Tenure:

Identification of Specific Adjustment Parcels Rather than a “Zones” Management Approach: Prior to recent changes in the BLM - Idaho’s management direction for future land tenure adjustment planning efforts, specific parcels would have to be identified for potential disposal at the time a land use plan was written. Any lands not identified in the plans for potential disposal would require a time consuming and costly plan amendment to be considered. The specific adjustment parcels currently identified in the Shoshone land use plans are not satisfying the needs of constituents at present or over the long term, and disposal of some of the identified parcels would create even more management inefficiencies than presently. In addition, a “specific parcel” approach cannot possibly foresee all the land tenure adjustment proposals that might be considered in the future; this approach would very likely result in the need for future time-consuming and costly plan amendments in order to consider land tenure adjustment proposals outside the identified parcels. In contrast, a zone approach to identifying management (retention) and adjustment areas provides flexibility to the BLM, a long-term capability to meet public needs, consistent criteria for evaluating land tenure adjustment proposals, and a reduced need for future plan amendments related to land tenure adjustment.

No Disposal of Public Lands: The BLM’s current planning guidance requires the BLM to identify potential disposal areas during the land use planning process. Disposal of some public lands in the planning area (through sale, exchange, or R&PP patent) would benefit the American public. A “no disposal” alternative would preclude the BLM from considering land tenure adjustment proposals that would improve public lands resources and management efficiency and/or otherwise benefit the public.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs):

ACECs Nominated, but Not Proposed for Designation: Three ACECs were nominated, but not included in the land use plan amendments alternatives, because they did not meet the required relevance and importance criteria for designation as an ACEC: Big Wood/Warm Springs (236 acres, nominated for scenic values), Fir Grove (45 acres, nominated as an isolated stand of Douglas-fir), and King’s Crown (10 acres, nominated for unique and rare plant species).

Summary of Environmental Impacts

The Environmental Assessment for the Draft Amendments described the environmental impacts of existing management and the three amendment alternatives. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), signed by the Upper Snake River District Manager on June 18, 2002, was distributed with the Draft Amendments/Environmental Assessment. The FONSI weighed the impacts described in the EA against the criteria for determining significance found in the NEPA implementing regulations (40 CFR 1508.27). The FONSI concluded that the impacts of all four alternatives are local in extent and not significant in terms of intensity. The following summaries explain the minor adverse or beneficial impacts which were anticipated under each alternative.

Alternative 1 (Continuation of Existing Management) - Land Tenure Adjustment: The BLM would continue to have limited ability to complete land tenure adjustments to acquire public access; acquire lands with high resource values; consolidate public lands to improve management efficiency; resolve long-standing use authorizations; provide public lands for disposal to State, county, or local governments (in order to meet the objectives of those governments and the citizens they serve); complete the transfer of lands qualified for disposal under the Desert Land Entry Act or Carey Act; resolve split mineral estate situations; authorize aquifer recharge sites; or consolidate land ownership in order to improve management efficiency, watershed values, and wildlife habitat. Most land tenure adjustments would require a costly and time-consuming land use plan amendment before the proposal could be considered. **ACEC Designations:** None of the nominated ACECs would be designated under existing management. Existing management is expected to adequately manage the resources and values within four of the seven nominated ACEC areas that were proposed for designation under an action alternative (Bennett Hills, Camas Creek, Coyote Hills, Dry Creek). Existing management is expected to adversely affect resources within three of the seven ACEC areas that were proposed for designation under an action alternative: (a) native redband trout species in the nominated King Hill Creek ACEC area would continue to be at risk of becoming hybridized with non-native trout, resulting in loss of the distinct genetic composition of this redband trout population; and (b) there would continue to be potential for irretrievable loss of physical, scenic, and biological cave and paleontological resources in the nominated McKinney Butte ACEC and Tee-Maze ACEC areas.

Alternative 2 - Land Tenure Adjustment: Unique historic, cultural, and natural resources would be identified as a high priority for retention and acquisition. Over time, the quality and quantity of high value resources would be expected to increase. Limiting acquisition of public access to the minimum number of sites needed to access large blocks of public lands would likely mean that the demand for public access would continue to exceed the supply. Although more public lands would be available for potential disposal than at present, Alternative 2's emphasis on State land exchanges would limit the number of land tenure adjustments that could be completed to address private land owners' or local communities' needs. On the other hand, focusing on State land exchanges would be an economical and cost efficient land tenure adjustment process since a minimum number of actions would result in large exchanges of property. **ACEC Designations:** Five of the seven proposed ACEC designations would help maintain resource values in ecologically critical areas (Camas Creek, Dry Creek, King Hill Creek, McKinney Butte, Tee-Maze). The Bennett Hills ACEC and Coyote Hills ACEC proposed designations would not necessarily protect the identified ACEC values, since highlighting the areas' cultural values would increase public knowledge of the cultural resource locations and thereby increase the potential for vandalism or unauthorized excavation and collection.

Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative) - Land Tenure Adjustment: Unique historic, cultural, and natural resources would be identified as a high priority for retention and acquisition. Over time, the quality and quantity of high value resources would be expected to increase. Alternative 3's emphasis on consolidating public lands through pooled land exchanges, accommodating needs for community expansion, and resolving long-standing unauthorized uses would give the BLM flexibility to use land tenure adjustments to improve public lands management and resources while also addressing the needs of local communities and private land owners. **ACEC Designations:** The designation of three new ACECs would insure the protection of those ecologically critical areas.

Alternative 4 - Land Tenure Adjustment: Alternative 4's emphasis on disposal of isolated, unmanageable parcels of public lands, would primarily address the BLM's management efficiency and the needs of private landowners. High resource value lands would not necessarily be retained or acquired, and the land tenure adjustment needs of local communities, the State, and members of the general public would only be addressed if workload priorities allowed. Public lands would not be consolidated to any great extent and little improvement in management efficiency would occur. ***ACEC Designations:*** The designation of three new ACECs would insure the protection of those ecologically critical areas.

Proposed Amendments

The proposed amendments are described in text and table format on pages 9 through 37. Proposed land tenure adjustment management direction is discussed first, followed by the proposed ACEC designations, which begin on page 26.

Land Tenure Adjustment

The proposed amendments identify land tenure adjustment availability and priorities for large land areas called "zones" (areas that contain common issues or planned actions) instead of identifying specific parcels by legal description. The proposed amendments also establish new land tenure adjustment review criteria. The result is a flexible, dynamic mechanism whereby the BLM and a proponent can evaluate the merits of a proposal by considering factors that include (a) the zone's emphasis on retention or land tenure adjustment (see zone descriptions on pages 11-16 below), (b) specific criteria for land ownership adjustment (see pages 16-17), and any other applicable management actions that are listed in Table 3 (pp. 18-25). Once the Shoshone Field Office determines that a land tenure adjustment proposal is consistent with requirements of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA), the project area's zone definition, and the amendments' criteria for land ownership adjustment, the BLM will consider the likelihood that the proposal will have public support. If the proposal appears to have public support, the BLM will assess current and anticipated workloads, priorities, staff, and funding, and set a priority for the proposal to be evaluated through appropriate NEPA documentation. Each individual 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, and stand on its own merit through public input and review. All disposals, whether by sale, exchange, or other authority, are subject to a decision by the authorized officer which would be based on detailed NEPA analysis and documentation as prescribed by law or regulation.

The following example illustrates how a proposal would be considered according to the proposed amendments' land tenure adjustment framework:

Step 1: Land Tenure Adjustment Proposal Submitted

Does the proposal meet the intent of FLPMA? Is there a Federal interest (i.e., public benefit) to implementing the proposal? If the proposal is a land exchange, are the monetary values of the offered and selected lands relatively similar?

YES - Continue to step 2.

NO - No further consideration of the action as presently proposed.

Step 2: Proposal Screened by Zone Definition

Does the proposal fit within the guidelines of the affected area's zone definition for the selected amendment?

YES - Continue to step 3.

NO - No further consideration of the action as presently proposed.

Step 3: Proposal Screened by Land Ownership Adjustment Criteria

Is the proposed action a high priority based on the land ownership adjustment criteria?

YES - Continue to step 4.

NO - No further consideration of the action as presently proposed.

Step 4: Likelihood of Proposal Receiving Public Support

Is it likely the proposal will receive public support during the NEPA process?

YES - Continue to step 5.

NO - No further consideration of the action as presently proposed.

Step 5: Scheduling the Proposal for Appropriate Public Involvement and NEPA

Given established and future priorities, current and anticipated public and private funding and staffing, and the extent to which the proposal will benefit the American public, what should be the priority for completing the NEPA work on this proposal?

Lands Status and Management Zones

The proposed amendments identify five land management zones, as shown on Map 3 and defined below.

The approximate acreage of each zone is shown in Table 2. All acres and percentages cited in the zone definitions are based upon the information in this table.

Table 2: Land Status Within Each Lands Management Zone

Note: Acres and percentages are approximate.

Zone	Private (acres)	State (acres)	BLM (acres)	Total	
				acres	%
1	7,000	7,000	180,000	194,000	7
2	92,000	44,000	950,000	1,086,000	39
3	359,000	48,000	127,000	534,000	19
4	573,000	25,000	62,000	660,000	24
5	156,000	20,000	121,000	297,000	11
Total	1,187,000	144,000	1,440,000	2,771,000	100

Retention Areas (Zone 1 and Zone 2):

Retention areas are those regions of public lands that would be retained in public ownership.

Zone 1 lands are public lands with special designations because of significant resource values; all Zone 1 lands shall be retained in public ownership. Examples of Zone 1 lands include Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), National Monuments, National Trails, eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers (W&SR), Natural Conservation Areas (NCAs), and ACECs. Zone 1 lands also include public lands acquired through means, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, that require such lands to remain in Federal ownership. In the future, as lands receive a special designation, they will automatically be added to this zone. At present, Zone 1 contains about 180,000 acres of public lands, or 12.5% of public lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office. The zone has few private or State inholdings (14,000 acres or 7% of lands in the zone). The BLM's acquisition priority for Zone 1 is to seek to acquire all private and State land in-holdings. **Public access will be considered in all land tenure actions.**

Zone 2 lands are public lands that have a fairly well-consolidated ownership pattern and contain potentially high values for resources and land uses such as minerals, recreation, range, riparian, cultural resources, and wildlife habitat. Zone 2 is the largest management zone proposed, and includes **950,000** acres of public lands, or 66% of the public lands managed by the Shoshone Field Office. Zone 2 has a well consolidated ownership pattern, with only 12% of the zone (136,000 acres) in private or State ownership. The BLM's priorities for Zone 2 lands are to: