

NCA RMP – Alternatives Write-Up Chapter 2– June 25, 2004
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Note to ID Team: Look for highlighted text for instructions and clarification
Questions/concerns/uncertainties/comments or incomplete

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This would be a good place to insert photographs

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Chapter 2 – Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

Note to Readers: The **Green Highlights** are from the Shipley book and are things that need to be included. Read this information prior to completing edits.

The **yellow highlights** are questions or concerns noted by Mary or Mike and need to be addressed.

When editing please use a color so edits can be tracked and put a date at the beginning of your. Place markers for date have been included. If you review/edit the work of others please include your name and date.

This is still a very preliminary draft and won't be complete until reviews by the Tribes/ICG/RAC/County and Public have been completed and appropriate changes are made.

This document will be put in 2 columns once edits are complete

Explain that this chapter both describes the alternatives (potential actions) and compares the alternatives in terms of their environmental impacts (from Section 1.6) and their achievement of objectives (from Section 1.3)

- € Remind readers that this chapter does more than merely describe the alternatives. As the CEQ guidance in Section 1502.14 emphasizes, the heart of this chapter is to sharply define the differences between the alternatives, especially how their environmental impacts differ.
- € Refer to the interdisciplinary nature of the alternatives and to the role of the interdisciplinary approach throughout this critical step in the NEPA process.

Explain the process you used to generate the alternatives and provide a rationale for your belief that the alternatives represent a range of reasonable alternatives. As appropriate, briefly describe alternatives eliminated from detailed study and explain why they were eliminated.

Review for readers the conceptual linkage between the need and the project objectives (the purpose), the relevant (significant) environmental issues; and the range of reasonable alternatives to be presented.

Briefly discuss how the ID team arrived at decisions about what constitutes reasonable alternatives. As part of this discussion, describe alternatives discarded during the analysis process. If necessary, provide detailed information in a separate appendix and be sure to retain documentation of such decisions in your analysis file.

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A range of alternatives is a key legal requirement, so failing to describe the range can be a critical omission. **Reasonable alternatives are those that are technically implementable, whether by your agency or by other agencies or private groups.**

Compare the alternatives by summarizing how they differ in regard to both their resource impacts (from Chapter 4) and their achievement of objectives. This comparison of the alternatives is the most important section of Chapter 2. As CEQ Regulations Section 1502.14 emphasizes, this comparison should clearly display the potential impacts, especially impacts that would help readers understand project and resource tradeoffs within each alternative.

Identify your agency's preferred alternative. Do not give the rationale for your choice.

For a Draft EIS, identify your agency's preferred alternative, unless another law prohibits such identification. The purpose is to tell readers of the Draft EIS what the agency is currently planning to do. This identification allows readers to comment substantively on the agency's likely choice. The agency must respond to these comments when it issues its Final EIS.

Do not include the rationale for the chosen, selected, or preferred alternative. The rationale belongs, instead, in the Record of Decision. If the EIS is carefully written, the decision maker can choose any one of the alternatives without requiring a change in the document.. For an EIS, only the single sentence identifying the preferred alternative would change.

Development of alternatives for the Draft NCA Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (NCA RMP/EIS) was guided by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resource management planning regulations. The basic goal for developing alternatives is to prepare different combinations of resource emphasis and management actions to address identified issues management concerns, and conflicts. All alternatives must make progress toward achieving the desired future condition (DFC) and meet the purpose and need for developing the RMP. A range of objectives and management actions were developed for resources related to issues identified during the public scoping process. There are only small differences among alternatives in regard to resource uses not tied to issues. Decisions from the existing land use plans that are still valid and not affected by the issues have been carried forward.

Each alternative in the Draft NCA RMP/EIS addresses these DFCs to some degree and in varying amounts of time; not all will meet the goals equally. Each alternative meets criteria outlined in BLMs land use planning regulations, which require that each alternative be a complete Resource Management Plan for the public land. In addition, alternatives must:

- ↓ be reasonable;
- ↓ provide for a mix of resource protection, management use, and development;
- ↓ be responsible to the issues (each issue must be addressed in at least one alternative);
- ↓ meet BLM specific program requirements for the range of alternatives; and
- ↓ be consistent with the planning criteria.

The DFCs portray the land, resource, or social and economic conditions that are expected in 20+ years if management objectives are achieved. This is a vision of the long-term condition of the ecosystem. Since not all areas of the NCA will meet the DFCs in the same way and in the same time-frame, the area has been divided into three management areas. Management Area 1 incorporates the part of the NCA that has sustained the least amount of wildfire, retains the highest amount of remnant shrub cover, and supports the highest amount of visitor use. Management Area 2 has sustained a moderate amount of wildfire, and incorporates more disturbed areas along the Snake River that may be more difficult to rehabilitate because

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of their lower precipitation. Management Area 3 incorporates the most disturbed areas of the NCA, including the OTA Impact Area and the areas east of Simco Road that have sustained the highest amount of vegetation community change as a result of repeated wildfire.

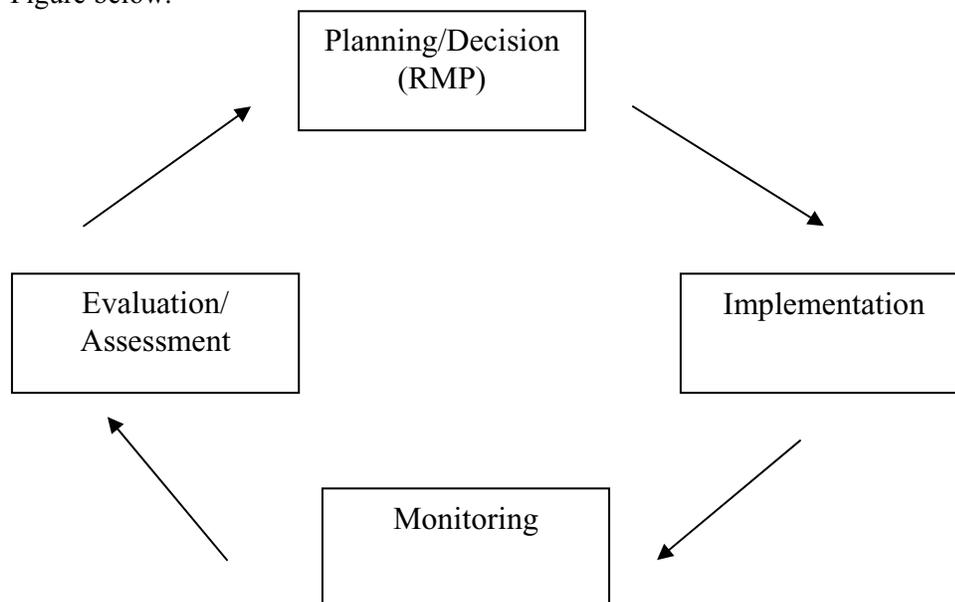
The objectives and management actions may vary across the alternatives but all have the ultimate goal of meeting the DFCs. A complete list of the Desired Future Conditions for the NCA can be found in Chapter 1.

2.2 Implementation through Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is a continuing process of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to adjust management strategies to meet DFC and objectives. A continual feedback loop allows for mid-course correction in management to meet planned objectives. It also provides a model for adjusting management actions as new information develops and public desires change.

The concept of adaptive management uses the latest scientific information and professional judgment and a structured monitoring strategy to select the management that will most likely meet DFCs and objectives. The concept acknowledges the need to manage resources under circumstances that contain varying degrees of uncertainty and the need to adjust to new information.

Adaptive management is a flow of actions that can be depicted as the continuous circle shown in the Figure below.



The following briefly describes the four parts of adaptive management:

1. **Planning/Decision (RMP):** Plan development or revision is the process leading to decision making. It starts with issue identification and DFC development. The next step is to gather information necessary to develop alternatives for management direction that address the issues and DFCs. The final stage of planning is to develop alternative management strategies to address issues and meet objectives, analyze the consequences of the alternatives, and choose a preferred alternative for implementation.

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Objectives are defined as indicators used to measure progress toward attainment of goals. They address short and long-term actions taken to meet goals and the DFCs. Unless otherwise stated, all objectives listed here are assumed to be implemented within 20 years.

2. **Implementation:** The process of putting plans and decisions into effect. See Chapter 8 Monitoring and Implementation. Following the adoption of the RMP, many of the actions identified will require implementation plans such as a management plan for an ACEC or special recreation management area. These plans will provide the site specific management emphasis necessary to fully achieve the RMP objectives for that area.
3. **Monitoring:** Should detect trend early enough so management activities can be modified to work toward achieving DFCs and objectives should this be necessary. Monitoring data provide information on the condition and trend of the ecosystem and indicate if DFC and objectives are being met. They can identify management strategies that appear to be working in the short term and help identify long-term strategies. .
4. **Evaluation/Assessment:** The point where plans and monitoring data are reviewed. This phase of adaptive management is used to judge the success of existing actions in meeting objectives and making progress toward achieving the DFC; makes recommendations for mid-course corrections; and helps set priorities for management. The understanding gained through a comprehensive review of all the monitoring data is critical to managing sustainable, healthy, and productive ecosystems.

Minor changes, refinements, or clarifications in the plan are maintenance actions that incorporate data changes. Plan maintenance actions will not expand the scope of resource uses or restrictions or change the terms, conditions, or decisions of the approved NCA RMP/EIUS. Maintenance actions are not considered plan amendments and do not require formal public involvement and interagency coordination.

2.3 Profile of the Four Alternatives

Note to Reader: If you make changes to this section they will NOT show up on the individual write-ups prepared earlier ... Please make changes in color so they can be tracked. The individual write-ups will no longer be used – all changes will be made here.

These profiles should summarize actions, outputs, and all required mitigations (Note: Under No Action, summarize relevant past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. This summary prepares readers for possible cumulative impacts.

≠ Make your profiles as site-specific as possible. Your goal is to show to the decision maker and readers exactly what would happen on the ground if a particular alternative were implemented.

≠ Describe each alternative as it would be. **Do not use will**

The Draft EIS analyzed four alternatives that were determined to address the range of reasonable alternatives meeting or making significant progress toward achieving the DFC. Each alternative consists of three key elements. The first is the theme, ranging from an emphasis on commodity uses with a slower level of habitat restoration to an emphasis on habitat restoration being the highest priority. All the alternative themes are consistent with the purposes for which the NCA was created.

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The second element is the objectives. These are the measurable intermediate step used to determine progress toward achieving the DFC. Many of the objectives are fully integrated and address multiple resource values.

The third element is the management action. These are specific actions to be taken to achieve the objective. The management actions are resources or activity specific and when looked at in total, represent the integrated actions to be taken to achieve the objective. All three elements may vary between the alternatives. The overall themes determine the type of management actions to be used in each alternative.

All the alternatives generally achieve the DFC. However, there are differences in how fast the DFC and objectives are being met, the priorities within the objective, and the emphasis placed on different activities.

The DFC and many of the objectives may not be completely met over the life of the plan (up to 20 years). Funding and staff levels, changes in technology and changes in natural conditions such as drought will affect rates of improvement or change.

The alternatives are presented here in two formats. The first is the narrative write-up organized by resource program and discusses each of the alternatives based on that program. This discussion provides the rationale for the objectives and management actions. The second section is a table that provides a comparison of the alternatives by objective and management action. This section helps the reader to see the overall differences between the alternatives. There is also a table showing the summary of anticipated impacts to resources of each alternative. The detailed discussion of the environmental and socio-economic impacts of each alternative is presented in Chapter 4.

2.4 Objectives for the NCA RMP

Objectives are meant to address the desired future condition for the various resources, are based on law and regulation, and reflect the direction that future public land management is projected to follow. Objectives play a major role in alternative development and identify specific desired resource conditions for a given area. Objectives generally have established time frames, as appropriate, for achievement and are usually quantifiable and measurable. (SMART = Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Trackable)

The following table shows the objectives identified under each alternative to achieve the DFC. Remember, all alternatives are intended to achieve the DFC, the difference is in the emphasis on the use of resources resulting in different time frames for fully achieving the DFC.

Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
Current Management	Protect and Maintain existing Resources with Moderate Restoration	Emphasis on Aggressive Resource Protection and Habitat Restoration	Moderate habitat restoration that Accommodates Traditional Uses.
Objectives Common to All Alternatives:			
To maintain or improve the current functioning condition of riparian areas along the NCA’s existing 101 miles of reservoir and stream shoreline.			
Increase raptor populations by increasing raptor nesting, perching, feeding and roosting opportunities.			
In accordance with planning criteria and the Clean Air Act, meet or exceed the National Ambient Air			

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Alternative A Current Management	Alternative B Protect and Maintain existing Resources with Moderate Restoration	Alternative C Emphasis on Aggressive Resource Protection and Habitat Restoration	Alternative D Moderate habitat restoration that Accommodates Traditional Uses.
Quality Standards and the Prevention of Significant Deterioration regulations with all authorized actions.			
Land uses will be authorized and managed so as to reduce the occurrence and severity of hazardous material incidences on public lands and to minimize human health threats and natural resource risks from hazardous material contamination and associated actions.			
Provide a diversity of quality, resource based recreational opportunities while protecting resource values, minimizing user conflicts, and promoting public safety.			
Objective 1: Cultural & Tribal Resources			
Protect cultural resources from adverse impacts or mitigate the adverse impacts.	Manage cultural resources by emphasizing mitigation and public interpretation.	Protect (in place) cultural resources from adverse impacts or through mitigation.	Same as Alternative B.
Objective 2: Fish and Wildlife			
Emphasize maintenance and protection of raptor prey and other wildlife populations and habitats.	Emphasize protection and enhancement of raptor prey and other wildlife populations and habitats and expand areas useable by raptor prey and big game.		
Objective 3: Special Status Species (Plants and Animals)			
Minimize human impacts to special status species.	Special status plant and animal habitat would be in good condition where potential allows, and human uses would be compatible.		Same as Alternative A
Objective 4: Soil			
Prevent the potential for future localized soil erosion processes on all soils with a moderate to very high soil erosion potential (See Map Soil-1).	Stabilize the current and prevent the potential for future localized soil erosion processes on all soils with a moderate to very high soil erosion potential (See Map Soil-1).		Same as Alternative A
Objective 5: Vegetation			
Limit further loss of existing native shrub habitat to no more than 50,000 acres and restore degraded habitat as opportunities allow (See Vegetation Map 2).	Limit further loss of existing native shrub habitat to no more than 30,000 acres, and increase the acres of restored shrub habitat, (See Vegetation Map 2).	Limit further loss of existing native shrub habitat to no more than 15,000 acres, and maximize the acres of restored shrub habitat, (See Vegetation Map 2).	Same as Alternative B
Objective 6: Fire and Fuels			
Wildfires would be kept to less than the maximum allowable average size of 50 acres	Ninety percent (90%) of all wildfires occurring within the Kuna, Mountain Home, and	Ninety percent (90%) of all wildfires occurring within the Kuna, Mountain Home, and	Same as Alternative B

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Alternative A Current Management	Alternative B Protect and Maintain existing Resources with Moderate Restoration	Alternative C Emphasis on Aggressive Resource Protection and Habitat Restoration	Alternative D Moderate habitat restoration that Accommodates Traditional Uses.
north of the Snake River. Fires occurring in the portion of the NCA historically located in the Owyhee Field Office would be kept to 200 acres or less; and fires occurring in other areas south of the Snake River would be kept to 500 acres or less. (See Fire and Fuels Map 2).	Glenns Ferry slickspot peppergrass management areas (see Vegetation Map 5) would be kept to 100 acres or less. Ninety percent (90%) of wildfires in the rest of the NCA would be kept to 200 acres or less. Restore the historic role of fire on up to 2,000 acres, emphasizing areas of higher risk.	Glenns Ferry slickspot peppergrass management areas (see Vegetation Map 5) would be kept to 100 acres or less. Ninety percent (90%) of wildfires in the rest of the NCA would be kept to 200 acres or less. Restore the historic role of fire on up to 8,000 acres, emphasizing areas of higher risk.	
Objective 7: Visual (Scenic) Resources (VRM)			
Minimize additional impacts to the current visual resources of the NCA.	Protect the visual resources in important cultural, historic, scenic, and recreation areas.	Emphasize protecting the visual resources of the Snake River canyon, cultural, historic, and recreation areas.	Emphasize protecting the visual resources of historic areas with a secondary emphasis on the Snake River canyon.
Objective 8: Idaho Army National Guard			
Current types, levels, seasons, locations, etc. of military training would be authorized within the existing OTA boundary.	Continue authorization of the OTA for military training in a manner that minimizes impacts to existing shrub habitats, supports shrub maintenance projects, and provides modified and/or new training areas to enhance military training opportunities.	Accommodate military training within the existing OTA boundary only to the extent that it meets resource restoration and protection requirements.	Continue current types, levels, seasons, locations, etc. of military training within the existing OTA boundary, and provide modified and/or new areas to maximize military training opportunities.
Objective 9: Lands and Realty			
As opportunities arise, public land ownership would be consolidated within the existing NCA boundary to facilitate administration.		Consolidate public land ownership and realign portions of the NCA boundary to enhance administration and improve resource management.	
Objective 10: Livestock Grazing			
Annual livestock grazing licenses would be based on annual forage availability and would not exceed the preference.	Annual livestock grazing licenses would be based on forage that is excess to the needs of wildlife and watershed protection.		

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Alternative A Current Management	Alternative B Protect and Maintain existing Resources with Moderate Restoration	Alternative C Emphasis on Aggressive Resource Protection and Habitat Restoration	Alternative D Moderate habitat restoration that Accommodates Traditional Uses.
Objective 11: Recreation			
Special Recreation Management Areas Objective			
Provide special recreation management attention throughout the NCA.	Provide special management attention to public lands with special recreational, scenic and cultural values where current and projected recreational demand warrants intensive management.	Provide special management attention to public lands with educational and interpretive values where current and projected educational demand warrants intensive management.	Same as Alternative B
Environmental Education and Interpretation Objectives			
Increase public awareness and appreciation of raptors and other resource values, as well as reduce resource impacts, and minimize user conflicts.			
Travel Management Objectives			
Provide motorized access to the majority of the NCA with limited non-motorized opportunities.	Provide motorized access to the majority of the NCA while reducing the number of unnecessary routes, and increasing non-motorized opportunities.	Provide motorized access to the majority of the NCA while minimizing unnecessary routes and providing a diversity of non-motorized opportunities.	Same as Alternative B
Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Objectives			
Provide a range of developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities by maintaining existing amenities.	Provide a range of developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities with existing and new amenities; and provide new opportunities for non-motorized and unrestricted motorized activities in a semi-primitive setting.	Provide a range of developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities with existing and new amenities; and provide increased opportunities for non-motorized activities, as well as unrestricted motorized activities in a semi-primitive setting.	Provide a range of developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities with existing and new amenities, while emphasizing motorized activities.
Objective 12: Special Designations			
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Objectives			
Protect special or unique natural, historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational values.			Eliminate designations that do not provide additional protection

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Alternative A Current Management	Alternative B Protect and Maintain existing Resources with Moderate Restoration	Alternative C Emphasis on Aggressive Resource Protection and Habitat Restoration	Alternative D Moderate habitat restoration that Accommodates Traditional Uses.
Wild and Scenic Rivers Objectives			
Protect outstandingly remarkable values associated with rivers and streams.	Determine the suitability of eligible rivers and stream segments for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.		

2.5 Alternatives Considered

Alternative A – This alternative represents current management, or the “no action” alternative required by NEPA regulations. It is based on the implementation of the NCA Management Plan as amended and modified to reflect current policy and guidance.

Alternative B – This alternative puts an emphasis on keeping fire out of shrub communities, being more proactive about habitat restoration, and enhancing raptor and raptor prey populations.

Alternative C – This alternative places a heavy emphasis on resource protection and habitat restoration, with reductions and/or restrictions on some traditional uses, including recreation, military training, and livestock grazing.

Alternative D – This alternative provides for a moderate amount of habitat protection and restoration that accommodates traditional uses and enhances local economies.

2.6 Alternatives Considered but Dropped

- ↓ No Livestock Grazing – Section 4(f) of the NCA-enabling legislation specifically provides for continued livestock grazing within the NCA so long as such use is compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established. BLM has no data to support a contention that removal of all livestock grazing is required to maintain and/or improve the raptor and raptor prey habitat in the NCA. In fact, some would contend that complete removal of livestock grazing would further jeopardize the habitat in the NCA by allowing flammable fuels to increase unchecked. As such, there is no supportable basis for a “no grazing” alternative, and none will be analyzed.
- ↓ No Military Training – Section 4(e) of the NCA-enabling legislation specifically provides for continued National Guard military training in the NCA unless the Secretary of Interior determines such use is incompatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established. BLM has no data to support a contention that military training, as a whole, is incompatible with the purposes of the NCA. Rather, the compatibility issue revolves around the types, levels, locations, and seasons of training. As such, a wholesale determination of incompatibility is currently unsupported, and a “no military training” alternative will not be analyzed.
- ↓ Complete Withdrawal of the OTA - Some have asked why BLM is not analyzing an alternative that proposes a withdrawal of the entire OTA to the Department of Defense. The Secretary of Interior, acting through the BLM, is delegated the authority to manage the public lands on which the NCA is located. The NCA-enabling legislation underscores BLM’s management authority and responsibility by mandating that BLM manage the lands in a fashion that ensures the long-term viability of the raptor populations and habitats for which the NCA was established. Since the Department of Defense

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has no public land management mandate, the only purpose for withdrawing all or a portion of the OTA to the Department of Defense would be to mitigate health or safety hazards associated with military training. Since no current public health or safety hazards exist outside of the Impact Area, no public interest would be served by withdrawing the entire OTA. As such, this alternative was dropped from further consideration.

2.7 Alternative Discussion

2.7.1 Air Quality

Common to All Alternatives:

The air resource program would be managed in the same general manner in all alternatives in accordance with policies, laws, and regulations with the goal of meeting current standards. Consequently, the management of air resources will not be addressed again in other alternatives.

Objective: In accordance with the planning criteria and the Clean Air Act, all authorized actions would meet or exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards and the Prevention of Significant Deterioration regulations.

Description and Rationale:

The “Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires” issued by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency on April 23, 1998 directs public land managers to protect public health and welfare by mitigating the impacts of air pollutant emissions on air quality and visibility for all wildland and prescribed fires managed to achieve resource values.

Management common to all alternatives: Prior to the actual ignition of any prescribed fire, an approved prescribed burn plan would be in place and adhered to throughout the project. The burn plan would include information and techniques used to reduce or alter smoke emission levels. Information (including resource objectives, acres to be burned, fuel types, fuel moisture, fuel loading, fuel continuity, topography, locations of population centers and Class 1 air sheds) assists fire managers in determining what weather conditions, firing methods, and mop-up standards should be used to minimize impacts. The majority of fuel types in the planning area do not allow for opportunities to reduce emissions; therefore, emissions would be managed by timing and atmospheric dispersal. All prescribed fire actions would be coordinated with other affected agencies.

Emissions from point and nonpoint sources would be limited by requiring and implementing mitigation measures and Standard Operating Practices (SOPs). An example of a point source would be emissions from a smoke stack. Many point sources are specifically regulated by State agencies. Examples of nonpoint sources are the dust from a haul road and an SOP for that scenario could be to apply water or limit the number of runs per day or the speed limit.

2.7.2 Cultural and Tribal Resources

Federal Cultural Resource Management has been evolving for the past 30 years, and is guided by many laws, executive orders, regulations and policies. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires that a mandatory compliance process be carried out prior to implementing any federally funded or authorized ground disturbing activity.

Description and Rationale:

Common to All Alternatives:

Since all the RMP Alternatives must meet this minimum level of compliance, the Alternatives are differentiated by varying levels of proactive cultural resource management that would occur, such as

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additional cultural resource surveys, additional site impact monitoring, stabilization of sites, protection of or salvage of impacted sites, research conducted at appropriate sites, and the creation of interpretive projects that would extend beyond the minimum Section 106 compliance actions.

In addition to BLM's cultural resource management program, the IDARNG manages and protects cultural and historic sites within the OTA under the requirements of an Integrated Cultural Resource Management Plan (ICRMP), which is an addendum to the OTA Memorandum of Understanding. Part of IDARNG's responsibility under the ICRMP is to annually monitor known cultural and historic sites in the OTA to ensure that impacts have not occurred from military use.

All known cultural resources and any cultural resources discovered in the future would be assigned one of the following Cultural Resource Use categories. The categories help define the type and level of future management that would be applied to specific resources or sites.

- ☒ Scientific Use,
- ☒ Conservation for Future Use,
- ☒ Traditional Use,
- ☒ Public Use,
- ☒ Experimental Use, and
- ☒ Discharged from Management.

Alternative A: The No Action Alternative would meet minimum legal and regulatory requirements, and policy mandates that apply to cultural resource management. Some proactive cultural resource management actions would be implemented, including environmental education and interpretive programs to heighten public awareness of the value of cultural resources. The Guffey Butte-Black Butte (GBBB) Archaeological District ([Cultural Map 1](#)) would continue to be managed as an ACEC to recognize the value of this area that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 7,800 acre Oregon Trail SRMA would continue to be managed according to the 1984 Oregon Trail Management Plan.

Adverse impacts to cultural resources would be mitigated with site avoidance, fencing, limited archaeological testing, and other low-impact choices. Impacts from braided roads and trails in the canyon that were created by unmanaged vehicle use have been mitigated somewhat by the improvement of a major road leading downstream from Swan Falls Dam. During this process, extraneous trails were rehabilitated. However, specific route designations have yet to be completed. Therefore, although most users stay on the main improved road because it is in the best condition, BLM has no legally enforceable provision to ensure that vehicles stay off of other roads and trails.

Alternative B: Alternative B would provide the most protection, preservation and interpretation for the scarce and non-renewable cultural resources within the NCA. BLM would manage cultural resources as noted in Alternative A, with additional proactive cultural resource surveys, cultural resource site monitoring, cultural resource interpretation, and public outreach projects. The Oregon Trail SRMA would be enlarged to 10,000 acres to incorporate those portions of the Oregon Trail that are currently not managed under an SRMA designation (See [Recreation Map 8](#)). Heightened emphasis would include restrictions on surface disturbing activities and potentially increased monitoring and law enforcement.

The GBBB Archaeological District ([Cultural Map 1](#)) would continue to be managed as an ACEC, to protect the resources in this area that has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. To mitigate potential vehicle-related impacts to cultural resources, a route designation process would be

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completed, and motorized vehicles would be restricted to designated routes in the GBBB Archaeological District

Adverse impacts to cultural resources would be mitigated through a combination of limited or full artifact collections, salvage archaeology, and full data recovery archaeological excavations

Alternative C: Under this alternative, the GBBB Archaeological District and the Oregon Trail SRMA would be managed as discussed in Alternative B. This alternative, however, provides for a higher level of resource protection by ensuring that the public is least aware of the presence of cultural resources. Although cultural resources would be managed under minimum Section 106 requirements, they would not be interpreted or highlighted. Also, proactive cultural resource surveys, cultural resource site monitoring, cultural resource interpretation and public outreach would *not be* implemented

Where no options exist for minimizing potential impacts to cultural resources through in-place protection, adverse impacts would be mitigated through a combination of limited or full artifact collections, , salvage archaeology, and full data recovery archaeological excavations.

Alternative D: Alternative D would be the same as Alternative B, with the exception that the ACEC designation for the GBBB Archaeological District would be revoked, and the Archaeological District would be managed under the protection provided by the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area withdrawal. The GBBB Archaeological District ACEC withdrawal and the NCA legislative withdrawal provide exactly the same, but overlapping protection against acquisitions or entries that may be filed under the lands and mineral laws. As such, elimination of the ACEC designation would not reduce protection provided by the designation, since the protections would continue under the NCA legislative withdrawal. The elimination of the ACEC withdrawal would simply remove one redundant layer of protection.

2.7.3 Fish and Wildlife

Pursuant to Section 3(a)(2) of the NCA-enabling legislation (Public Law 103-64 BLM is required to manage the NCA to "...provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats and the natural and environmental resources and values associated therewith, and of the scientific, cultural, and educational resources and values of the public lands in the conservation area." Section 2 (4) of the Act defines the term "raptor habitat" as including the habitat of the raptor prey base as well as the nesting and hunting habitat of raptors within the conservation area.

Over 300,000 acres of shrub communities have been lost in the past 30 years due, in large part, to repeated wildfires. Upland shrub and riparian communities constitute important habitat for small mammals that are the principle prey for the 25 raptor species that spend all or a portion of their year in the NCA. These communities also support a myriad of other wildlife species. Shrub communities affected by wildfire, soil erosion, and exotic plant invasion are unable to support the more stable small mammal prey populations that are found in less degraded communities. Anything that compromises the population dynamics of raptors is of special concern. Therefore, a prime consideration for wildlife management in the NCA is to improve existing habitat conditions.

Description and Rationale:

Common to All Alternatives

To stabilize and increase the raptor prey base, remnant native shrub habitat must be preserved, interconnected, and expanded. Degraded areas must be restored to shrub/bunchgrass habitat with a forb component and biological soil crust to provide additional habitat for invertebrates, lizards, snakes, birds and small mammals whose populations are currently unstable or limited in distribution by the current decline in shrub/bunchgrass habitat.

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Pheasants, quail and partridge would have nesting and escape cover if shrub/bunchgrass habitat adjoined agricultural sites. Good shrub/bunchgrass habitat and additional surface water would also make more of the NCA available to pronghorn and mule deer.

Improving riparian and woodland habitat would provide nest/perch/roost sites for raptors, and nest/perch/feed/cover sites for many species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. Additional cover and feeding areas would especially benefit migratory songbirds in the spring. Additional riparian habitat would provide food for migrant shorebirds, and would also provide feeding and resting sites for many other bird species, breeding areas for amphibians, and temporary food and cover for mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.

Alternatives A through D provide ways of achieving varying levels of the above-discussed habitat improvements.

- € One to 30 miles of riparian habitat would be improved.
- € Wildlife watering sites would be available from guzzlers throughout the area
- € Fast growing trees would be planted in riparian and upland areas for roosting and nesting purposes.
- € In Alternatives B and C, livestock grazing on winterfat and Sandberg's bluegrass would be reduced to enhance its benefits for wildlife food and cover.

The above statements are not common to all, but rather a description of ranges of actions that would be incorporated across various alternatives to improve wildlife habitat.

Alternative A: Alternative A would continue the existing wildlife management program. Habitat improvement projects have historically been tied almost exclusively to emergency fire rehabilitation funding. As such, rehabilitation projects have, for the most part, been limited to areas that burn, rather than the restoration of those degraded areas that would provide the most benefit to raptors and their prey. Also, burned areas are not always rehabilitated because of lack of funding, or because the burned area has a low probability of being successfully restored. While this provides for limited habitat improvement, the ongoing habitat degradation and loss greatly outpaces BLM's ability to restore the damaged habitat.

Man-made nest sites are utilized by several species of raptors when natural sites are not available across the landscape. Water sites (guzzlers) will expand the area in the NCA available for use by pronghorns and mule deer. Trees planted at these sites will provide additional nest sites across the desert. Russian olive and tamarisk have dominated some riparian areas. Neither of these species provides prey for migrant and resident birds during the spring and summer. By replacing these plants with native species riparian habitat will again be utilized by native species. Noxious weeds replace native plants, creating monocultures and destroying the diverse assemblage of native plants and the animals that depend on them.

Management Actions:

- € Man-made raptor nest sites would be installed for osprey, red-tailed, ferruginous, and Swainson's hawks, and western burrowing owls, which are sensitive species. (Assume an average of 4 per year). Additional elevated nest sites in areas devoid of trees or other natural elevated nest sites provide more protection for these birds, and as a result, they are able to fledge more offspring. **NOTE: The 4/year reflects the average number that we have been able to construct over the past few years.**
- € Guzzlers would be built along the west and south portion of the NCA, north of the Snake River, to provide water for pronghorn and mule deer. (assume up to 9 guzzlers). Trees would be planted

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adjacent to the guzzlers to provide perching and nesting sites for raptors and some songbirds and shade for other wildlife.

- € Degraded habitat would be rehabilitated as opportunities arise.
- € Livestock utilization of winterfat would not exceed 50% of the current year's growth.
- € Up to one mile of riparian/wetland habitat would be improved for raptor perching, roosting, and nesting, and songbird nesting, feeding and cover by planting cottonwoods, willows, and other desirable trees and removing Russian olive and tamarisk.
- € Noxious and invasive weeds would be controlled by physical, chemical, or biological means. Assume that about 600 acres would be treated annually.

Alternative B: Alternative B provides for an increased level of habitat restoration, averaging about 1,000 acres per year, whether or not any fires burn in a given year. This assumes that habitat will be restored where it is most needed, rather than being limited to currently burned areas. As such, the overall benefit to raptors and their prey would be enhanced.

There would be more nest structures installed to increase the populations of nesting raptors that use these structures. Woodlands would be planted to provide nesting habitat for yellow-billed cuckoo's and other birds and mammals that benefit from sylvan areas. Yellow-billed cuckoos need about 25 acres of good woodland habitat for breeding per pair. Guzzlers will be places approximately 4 miles apart (the distance recommended for big game animals especially pronghorns). Nine guzzlers will fulfill the need for watering areas along the southwestern portion of the NCA north of the Snake River. Riparian habitat dominated by Russian olive and tamarisk is nearly devoid of animals during the spring and summer. It appears that these plants do not produce insects like native trees and shrubs, therefore the do not benefit migratory or breeding bird populations. The 20 acre pond at the Ted Trueblood WMA would be managed to provide habitat for migrant shorebirds.

Management Actions:

- € Man-made nest structures would be installed in the NCA each year for the life of the plan (assume an average of 5 per year) **NOTE: The MA Table says 5/year. Which is correct?**
- € The BLM would plant about 100 acres of woodland in blocks of about 25 acres over the life of the plan.
- € Guzzlers would be built (assume up to 9).
- € Up to 1000 acres of depleted rangeland would be rehabilitated each year by controlling annual exotic plants and planting shrubs, bunchgrasses, forbs and biological soil crusts, for a total of about 20,000 acres.
- € Livestock utilization of winterfat would not exceed 40% of the current years growth providing more food and cover for Piute ground squirrels an important prey species for many animals.
- € Livestock grazing would be scheduled to minimize the use of Sandberg's bluegrass to provide more forage for Piute ground squirrels.
- € Up to one mile of riparian/wetland habitat would be improved by removing unwanted exotic species like Russian olive and tamarisk and planting cottonwoods, willows, and other desirable trees to provide roosting, perching, nesting and cover for raptors and other birds, mammals, and reptiles.
- € Noxious and invasive weeds would be treated each year by physical chemical, or biological means. (assume an average of 2,500 acres)
- € An approximate 20 acre pond would be constructed in the Trueblood Wildlife Area, and would be managed to provide food for migrant shorebirds. (Where would this pond be constructed and does 20 acres mean anything special).

Alternative C: Alternative C is the most aggressive habitat protection and restoration alternative, under which an average of 5000 acres of habitat would be annually restored. As with Alternative B, this

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assumes that habitat will be restored where it is needed most, rather than being limited to currently burned areas. As such, the overall benefit to raptors and their prey is maximized. Additional guzzlers would be placed at the east end of the NCA and/or on the south side of the river. The increase in miles of riparian vegetation and acres of woodlands would more rapidly provide habitat for target species.

Management Actions:

- € Man-made nest sites (platforms and burrows) would be built annually for osprey, and ferruginous and Swainson's hawks and burrowing owls. (assume up to 5 man-made sites)
- € Guzzlers would be built in the NCA (assume up to 11)
- € Trees would be planted at the guzzler sites to provide nest sites for raptors and song birds
- € Livestock utilization of winterfat would not exceed 30% of the current year's growth to increase the size and productivity of winterfat plants and to provide more food and cover for wildlife, including Piute ground squirrels that survive on winterfat during drought years.
- € Livestock utilization of Sandberg's bluegrass would be limited to the dormant season.
- € Up to 30 miles of riparian/wetland habitat would be improved by removing exotic species, such as Russian olive and tamarisk, and planting desirable trees like cottonwoods and willows.
- € Noxious weeds would be treated each year (assume 45 acres).
- € An additional 20 acre pond would be built at the Trueblood WMA
- € Up to 100,000 acres of shrub/bunchgrass habitat would be restored
- € Up to 30 acres of woodlands would be created

Alternative D: Under this alternative, BLM would accomplish habitat restoration projects in a manner that best preserves traditional uses and provides the greatest return to local economies.

Management Actions:

- € Man-made nest structures would be built each year (assume up to 4)
- € Trees would be planted on upland sites associated with water catchments (assume up to 15)
- € Up to 100 acres of woodland would be planted over the life of the plan
- € Guzzlers would be constructed outside the OTA (assume up to 9)
- € Up to 5000 acres of depleted rangeland would be rehabilitated annually.
- € Livestock utilization of winterfat would not exceed 50% of the current year's growth.
- € Livestock utilization of Sandberg's bluegrass would not be limited seasonally.
- € Up to one and one-half miles of riparian habitat would be improved each year.
- € Noxious weeds would be treated each year (assume up to 45 acres).
- € An additional 20 acre pond would be built at the Trueblood WMA to provide food for migrant shorebirds.
- € Up to 100,000 acres of shrub/bunchgrass habitat would be restored

2.7.4 Geology

According to Bob Mallis there will be no alternative write-up for this section. Make sure this has been addressed and dismissed through the Affected Environment.

2.7.5 Paleontology

According to Bob Mallis there will be no alternative write-up for this section. Make sure this has been addressed and dismissed through the Affected Environment.

2.7.6 Special Status Species

2.7.6.1 Special Status Animals

Description and Rationale:

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Common to All Alternatives:

To carry out mandates for endangered, threatened, and sensitive animal and plant species, BLM would endeavor, under all alternatives, to minimize the future loss of native habitat and restore a significant amount of degraded riparian and upland habitat. Shrub/perennial bunchgrass habitat would be rehabilitated to benefit Piute ground squirrel, prairie falcon, goshawk, ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, Brewer's and sage sparrow, longnose snake, and western and Woodhouse's toad.

Invasive and noxious weeds would be treated and exotic trees and would be controlled. Desirable trees and shrubs would then be planted along riparian areas to benefit bald eagle, spotted bat, peregrine falcon, goshawk, Swainson's hawk, Lewis' woodpecker, willow and olive-sided flycatcher, garter snake, Mojave Black-collard Lizard, and western and Woodhouse's toad.

Special plantings and developments, including an additional pond at Ted Trueblood Wildlife Management Area may benefit some sensitive species, including the American white pelican, trumpeter swan, spotted bat, yellow-billed cuckoo, peregrine falcon, black tern, and western and Woodhouse's toad.

Most BLM authorized activities are unlikely to harm the Idaho springsnail. However, because the habitat needs of the snail are not well understood, BLM has little management direction other than to ensure that its management actions either improve or at least do not adversely impact the existing water quality in streams or impoundments on public land.

The alternatives and the management actions that benefit special status animals, as well as the rationale behind them, are the same as those that were previously discussed in the Fish and Wildlife Section 2.7.3. Therefore, they will not be reiterated here.

Also see Fish and Wildlife section

2.7.6.2 Special Status Plant

The loss of native plants communities in general and the sagebrush steppe community in particular has lead to a serious decline in suitable habitat for many native and endemic plant species. Slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*), a BLM sensitive plant, and an endemic species, was proposed for listing as endangered species in July of 2002 under the Endangered Species Act.

The BLM manual, section 6840 (Special Status Species Management) provides overall policy direction to BLM managers to conserve listed, threatened, or endangered species on BLM administered land, and to ensure actions authorized on BLM administered lands do not contribute to the need to list federal, candidate, state-listed, or BLM sensitive species.

Frequent fires over the past 25 years have greatly reduced the amount of suitable habitat for this species and at least 17 other BLM sensitive plant species known to historically occupy the Snake River Plain. The NCA contains several thousand acres that are either suitable ~~habitat~~ or occupied habitat for many of these species, including slickspot peppergrass. In lieu of listing slickspot peppergrass as endangered, the BLM, the Office of Species Conservation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Army National Guard, and several non-governmental Cooperators (local ranchers) entered into a Conservation Agreement (January 2004) that would implement a specific set of management actions designed to slow or prevent the decline of this species. Some of these management actions are specific to slickspot peppergrass, but many others have wide ranging implications that are beneficial to plant communities in general and sensitive plants in particular.

For a list of special status plants found in the NCA see Appendix XXX.

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Common to All Alternatives:

Management, Rationale, & Assumptions:

- € Since the NCA contains both suitable and occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat, management actions specified in the slickspot peppergrass candidate conservation agreement would be implemented where appropriate throughout the NCA under all alternatives.

The following management actions vary from one alternative to another.

- € Slickspot peppergrass is both an annual and a biennial plant that relies heavily on yearly seed production to persist from one year to the next. Heavy spring grazing can interfere with this seed production. Trampling by livestock may actually represent more of a threat to the species than actual grazing. Restricting spring grazing may prove beneficial to the species by allowing more plants to reach maturity and increase seed production. Restricted spring grazing (Alternatives A, B, & D) is currently being implemented on a limited basis within the NCA. Alternative C would completely eliminate spring grazing from pastures containing occupied special status plant habitat.
- € The most serious threat to the loss of special status plants is the loss of habitat. Fires have destroyed a significant amount of special status plant habitat within the NCA. Alternative A would maintain the status quo. Alternative B would implement the management actions outlined in the slickspot peppergrass CCA and would keep 90% of the wildfires within those slickspot peppergrass Management Areas that occur within the NCA, to 100 acres. It would also strive to keep 90% of wildfires in the rest of the NCA to 200 acres or less.
- € Limited attempts have been made to reseed special plant habitat. Alternative A would continue the status quo and degraded habitat would be reseeded as opportunities and funding becomes available. Alternatives B and C and D would increase the level of commitment for improving degraded special status plant habitat by establishing a definitive number of acres to be reseeded on an annual basis. Alternative D would be the same as Alternative C and would allow for an increased level of economic development by providing potential employment to the local community.
- € No attempts have been made to seed or transplant BLM special status plants within the NCA. Under Alternative A, the status quo would be maintained and no seeding or transplantation of BLM special status plants would occur. Alternative B and Alternative C would both make a commitment to seed or transplant special status plants within the NCA. The difference between the two alternatives is the level of commitment addressed by each alternative. Alternative C would establish a definitive time frame and a set number of acres for restoration while Alternative B makes no such commitment. Alternative D would be the same as Alternative C.

2.7.7 Soil

Common to All Alternatives:

Objectives:

- € Watersheds would have stable vegetative communities that provide for proper hydrologic function, nutrient cycling, energy flow, and soil stability.
- € Soil productivity would be maintained and enhanced. Accelerated soil erosion caused by human activities would be minimal.

Rationale: The BLM is required to comply with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the Clean Water Act, Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, and other related federal and state laws and regulations regarding watershed health, soil stability, and water quality. Improving and maintaining healthy and properly functioning watersheds benefit livestock grazing, wildlife, fisheries, water quality, and recreation programs.

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Management Common to All Alternatives: Grazing allotments would be required to meet the Standards for Rangeland Health or be making significant progress toward meeting the standards where appropriate. **NOTE: I did not see this Common to All MA in the Table. It actually is policy and should be common to all and in the table I suppose – that is if there is a place for it?**

Alternative A:

Rationale and Description of Alternative:

Objective: Prevent the potential for future localized soil erosion processes on all soils with a moderate to very high soil erosion potential. (See [Map Soil-1](#))

General Management Guidelines:

General Planning Unit improvements would be implemented and realized over a longer time frame (life of the plan) with most watershed improvement being of a slight nature and more dependent on management controls (i.e., implementation of grazing systems) with less active restoration or rehabilitation planned. Watersheds and soils would continue to be managed for improved productivity, health and function. In Area 1, general watershed health would be maintained or improved. In Areas 2 and 3 general watershed health would be maintained in some portions and decline in others. Declines in watershed health would be primarily related to species compositional changes (transition to less desirable species due mainly to wildfire), increased OHV activity, and climatic factors.

Livestock grazing would continue in a manner that maintains or improves watershed health depending on the existing conditions of the allotment. Grazing management actions, consistent with current regulations and policies, would be implemented to maintain or make significant progress toward the Standards for Rangeland Health. Where these standards are not being met and current livestock management is found to be a significant factor, changes in management would be implemented through allotment specific grazing decisions in order to make significant progress toward meeting the standard. Livestock grazing would be managed to provide periodic rest and/or deferment during critical growth stages to meet the phenological needs of key plant species. Grazing and other land management actions would also be managed to provide for adequate amounts of vegetative ground cover and litter (determined on an ecological site basis) to support infiltration, soil stability, and to maintain site productivity.

Mechanical impacts to soil surfaces and biological crusts would be minimized through proper timing with regard to soil type, soil moisture content and type and duration of use. Undue erosion from surface disturbing activities would be prevented or minimized by applying appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and/or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in conjunction with site specific monitoring.

Alternative B:

Rationale and Description of Alternative:

Objective: Stabilize the current and prevent the potential for future localized soil erosion processes on all soils with a moderate to very high soil erosion potential. (See [Map Soil-1](#))

General Management Guidelines:

General Planning Unit improvements would be implemented under the same time frames as Alternative A, with watershed improvement being more of a slight to moderate nature. Watersheds and soils would continue to be managed for improved productivity, health and function. Improvements would result from better management controls (i.e., implementation of grazing systems, recreational trail designation); vegetative restoration and rehabilitation (seeding of desirable grass, forbs, and shrubs); and vegetative

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control measures (use of herbicides, and other tools to control undesirable species). In Area 1, general watershed health would be maintained or improved. In Areas 2 and 3, general watershed health would be improved in small areas (treatments), maintained in some portions, and decline in others. Declines in watershed health would be primarily related to species compositional changes (transition to less desirable species due mainly to wildfire), increased OHV activity, and climatic factors that are out of BLM's control.

Grazing of livestock on public lands would continue in a manner that maintains or improves watershed health depending on the existing conditions of the allotment. Grazing management actions, consistent with current regulations and policies, would be implemented to maintain or make significant progress toward the Standards for Rangeland Health. Where these standards are not being met and current livestock management is found to be a significant factor, changes in management would be implemented through allotment specific grazing decisions in order to make significant progress toward meeting the standard. Livestock grazing would be managed to provide periodic rest and/or deferment during critical growth stages to meet the phenological needs of key plant species. Grazing and other land management actions would be managed to provide for adequate amounts of vegetative ground cover and litter (determined on an ecological site basis) to support infiltration, soil stability, and to maintain site productivity.

Undue erosion from surface disturbing activities would be prevented or minimized by applying appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and/or Standard Operating Practices (SOPs) in conjunction with site specific monitoring. Mechanical impacts to the soil surface and biological soil crusts would be minimized through proper timing and duration for the type of use with regard to soil type, soil moisture content, and biological soil crust vulnerability.

Areas affected by current active erosional processes would be documented, prioritized, and procedures implemented for stabilization of these processes. These procedures may range from changes in management (i.e., grazing, recreation) to allow for natural stabilization, or more active measures, such as seeding, physical structures, and mechanical alterations.

Maintenance and monitoring programs would be implemented on trails and roads that are high priority or high profile. Trail having a high erosion potential would be an example of a high priority system. Trail maintenance could include grading, cleaning out and maintaining erosion control devices (waterbars), surfacing, and other actions that maintain the integrity of the trails and prevent undue erosion.

Alternative C:

Objective: Same as Alternative B.

General Management Guidelines:

General Planning Unit improvements would be implemented and realized over a shorter time frame with most watershed improvement being of a slight to moderate nature. Watersheds and soils would continue to be managed for improved productivity, health and function. Improvements would result from better management controls (i.e., implementation of grazing systems, recreational trail designation); vegetative restoration and rehabilitation (seeding of desirable grass, forbs, and shrubs); and vegetative control measures (use of fire, herbicides, and other tools for control of undesirable species). In Area 1, general watershed health would be maintained or improved. In Areas 2 and 3, general watershed health would be improved in some areas (treatments), maintained in some portions, and would decline in others. Declines in watershed health would be primarily related to species compositional changes (transition to less desirable species due mainly to wildfire), increased OHV activity, and climatic factors that are out of BLM's control.

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Grazing of livestock on public lands would continue in a manner that maintains or improves watershed health depending on the existing conditions of the allotment. Grazing management actions, consistent with current regulations and policies, would be implemented to maintain or make significant progress toward the Standards for Rangeland Health. Where these standards are not being met and current livestock management is found to be a significant factor, changes in management would be implemented through allotment specific grazing decisions in order to make significant progress toward meeting the standard. Livestock grazing would be managed to provide periodic rest and/or deferment during critical growth stages to meet the phenological needs of key plant species. Grazing and other land management actions would also be managed to provide for adequate amounts of vegetative ground cover and litter (determined on an ecological site basis) to support infiltration, soil stability, and maintain site productivity.

Undue erosion from surface-disturbing activities would be prevented or minimized by applying appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and/or Standard Operating Practices (SOPs) in conjunction with site specific monitoring. Mechanical impacts to the soil surface and biological soil crusts would be minimized through proper timing and duration for the type of use with regard to soil type, soil moisture content, and biological soil crust vulnerability.

Areas affected by current active erosional processes would be documented, prioritized, and procedures implemented for stabilization of these processes. These procedures may range from changes in management (i.e., grazing, recreation) to allow for natural stabilization or more active procedures, such as seeding, physical structures, and mechanical alterations.

A maintenance and monitoring program would be implemented and maintained on trails and roads that are high priority or high profile. Trail systems having a high erosion potential rating would be an example of a high priority system. Trail maintenance could include grading, cleaning out and maintaining erosion control devices (waterbars), surfacing, and other actions that maintain the integrity of the trails and prevent undue erosion.

Alternative D:

Objective: Same as Alternative A.

General Management Guidelines:

General Planning Unit improvements would be implemented and realized over a longer time frame with most watershed improvement being of a slight nature and more dependent on management controls (i.e., implementation of grazing systems) with less active restoration or rehabilitation planned. Watersheds and soils would continue to be managed for improved productivity, health and function. In Area 1, general watershed health would be maintained or improved. In Areas 2 and 3, general watershed health would be maintained in some portions and decline in others. Declines in watershed health would primarily be related to species compositional changes (transition to less desirable species due mainly to wild fire), increased OHV activity, and climatic factors that are out of our control.

Grazing of livestock on public lands would continue in a manner that maintains or improves watershed health depending on the existing conditions of the allotment. Grazing management actions, consistent with current regulations and policies, would be implemented to maintain or make significant progress toward the Standards for Rangeland Health. Where these standards are not being met and current livestock management is found to be a significant factor, changes in management would be implemented through allotment specific grazing decisions in order to make significant progress toward meeting the standard. Livestock grazing would be managed to provide periodic rest and/or deferment during critical growth stages to meet the phenological needs of key plant species. Grazing and other land management actions would also be managed to provide for adequate amounts of vegetative ground cover and litter

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(determined on an ecological site basis) to support infiltration, soil stability, and maintain site productivity.

Undue erosion from surface disturbing activities would be prevented or minimized by applying appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and/or Standard Operating Practices (SOPs) in conjunction with site specific monitoring. Mechanical impacts to the soil surface and biological soil crusts would be minimized through proper timing and duration for the type of use with regard to soil type, soil moisture content, and biological soil crust vulnerability.

2.7.8 Vegetation

2.7.8.1 Upland Vegetation

Common to All Alternatives:

Rationale, Management & Assumptions:

Public Law 103-64 established the NCA to "...provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of raptor populations and habitats and the natural and environmental resources and values associated therewith..." Section 2(4) of the NCA-enabling legislation defines "raptor habitat" as including the habitat of the raptor prey base as well as the nesting and hunting habitat of raptors within the conservation area.

The management of Idaho's rangelands is outlined in BLM's Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing and Management. Standard 4 (Native Plant Communities), Standard 5 (Seedings), and Standard 6 (Exotic Plant Communities Other than Seedings) represent the standards against which the bulk of the NCA's rangelands are measured. These standards can be found in appendix XXX.

Every fire that occurs within the NCA would be evaluated for possible rehabilitation. Objectives include reestablishment of shrub and herbaceous species to maintain and improve raptor prey habitat, and establishment of perennial species to minimize soil erosion and invasion by annual plant species (NCA Management Plan 1995).

"Greenstrips are areas of fire resistant vegetation that are usually created along major roads and other locations to slow fire spread and facilitate fire suppression efforts, thereby reducing the rate of loss of important shrub communities and other high-value resources. Although the greenstripping program has been largely unsuccessful, future efforts and continued research in improving the program would be emphasized.

The alternatives for upland vegetation were developed with the intent of implementing standards and guidelines, and represent a range of management actions designed to restore severely degraded habitat to a condition more in line with the standards for rangeland health.

Alternative A: Alternative A would continue the existing vegetation management, which would include an expected average annual loss of approximately 3% of existing shrub habitat from wildfires. Vegetation rehabilitation would continue to occur on an opportunity basis following fires. In addition, up 10,000 acres of degraded habitat would be reseeded over the life of the plan. There would be a continuing risk of wildfire associated with recreational activities and live-fire military training.

The risk of wildfires would be reduced through physical, biological, or chemical hazardous fuels treatments on about 500 acres annually. In addition, about 3,300 acres of existing greenstrips would be maintained to help reduce the size of wildfires.

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Fires would continue to be suppressed with the goals of protecting life and property, and minimizing acreage lost in shrub communities and slickspot peppergrass management areas. Greenstrips would be strategically placed and fire managers would be knowledgeable when considering where to prioritize suppression resources.

Soils and vegetation would also continue to be impacted by off-highway motorized vehicle use, improper livestock grazing, and National Guard maneuver training.

Alternative B: Under this alternative some moderate loss of habitat would continue from wildfires, but a greater emphasis would be placed on the protection of existing shrub communities. This alternative would also emphasize the restoration of up to 20,000 acres of degraded habitat. Therefore, actions would be taken to, not only, improve habitat, but to protect existing shrub habitat from further degradation. Hazardous fuels would annually be reduced on an average of 1,000 acres through a combination of prescribed fire, chemical, biological, and mechanical treatments. About 200 acres of new greenstrips would be constructed to aid in fire control. In addition, open fires would be restricted to improved camp sites or metal pans.

Grazing restrictions proposed to improve winterfat and Sandberg's bluegrass communities, and to reduce competition with Piute ground squirrels, would be mitigated somewhat by opportunities for intensive grazing of up to 30,000 acres in those years when it is warranted to reduce accumulations of hazardous fuels.

Motorized vehicles would be limited to designated roads or trails throughout most of the NCA to reduce vehicle impacts to vegetation and soils.

National Guard maneuver activity would also be restricted to designated routes on about 22,000 acres to reduce impacts to remnant shrub habitat. Although National Guard maneuver activity would continue where currently authorized, an additional maneuver area would be provided to the east of the OTA on lands that have been repeatedly impacted by wildfires. As such, National Guard impacts on remnant shrub habitat in the OTA Maneuver Area would be reduced.

The historic fire regime would be returned to much of the 20,000 acres of habitat being restored and protected. Fires would not cause as much habitat loss to important plant communities, fires would be less widespread, and the restored plant communities would be more resilient to fire disturbance.

Noxious and invasive weeds would be treated on up to 2,500 acres annually.

Alternative C: This alternative would put the greatest emphasis on protection of remnant shrub habitat, and would focus on the restoration of up to 100,000 acres of degraded habitat.

The historic fire regime would be returned to much of the 100,000 acres of vegetation being restored and protected under this alternative. Fires would not cause as much habitat loss to important plant communities, would be less widespread, and the restored plant communities would be more resilient to fire disturbance.

Hazardous fuels would annually be reduced on up to 3,000 acres through a combination of prescribed fire, chemical, biological, and mechanical treatments. About 300 acres of new greenstrips would be constructed to aid in fire control. In addition, open fires would be restricted to improved camp sites or metal pans.

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Grazing restrictions proposed to improve winterfat and Sandberg's bluegrass communities, and to reduce competition with Piute ground squirrels, would be mitigated somewhat by opportunities for intensive grazing of up to 31,000 acres in those years when it is warranted to reduce accumulations of hazardous fuels. Motorized vehicles would be limited to designated roads or trails throughout most of the NCA to reduce vehicle impacts to vegetation and soils. National Guard maneuver activity would be eliminated from about 22,000 acres of the OTA.

Noxious and invasive weeds would be treated on up to 4000 acres annually.

Alternative D: Under this alternative, most of the management actions included in Alternative C would be incorporated to protect and increase shrub habitat, including the restoration of up to 100,000 acres of degraded habitat over the life of the plan. Hazardous fuels would annually be reduced on up to 3,000 acres through a combination of prescribed fire, chemical, biological, and mechanical treatments. About 300 acres of new greenstrips would be constructed to aid in fire control. In addition, open fires would be restricted to improved camp sites or metal pans.

Opportunities for intensive grazing of up to 31,000 acres would be provided in those years when it is warranted to reduce accumulations of hazardous fuels. Motorized vehicles would be limited to designated roads or trails throughout most of the NCA to reduce vehicle impacts to vegetation and soils. Although National Guard maneuver activity would continue where currently authorized, an additional maneuver area would be provided to the east of the OTA on lands that have been repeatedly impacted by wildfires. As such, National Guard impacts on remnant shrub habitat in the OTA Maneuver Area would be reduced.

Noxious and invasive weeds would be treated on up to 4000 acres annually.

2.7.8.2 Vegetation – Riparian and Wetlands

Rationale: Water quality is important not only for human uses, but also for proper ecosystem function. Management practices, such as grazing, mining, recreation, timber harvest, and other forms of vegetation management should be designed to maintain healthy sustainable and functional ecosystems, as described in the Standards and Guides.

The Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended, requires the restoration and maintenance of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nations waters. Under the Act, State-developed Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) and State-approved water quality management plans are required for water bodies containing water quality limited segments.

General Management Guidance: BLM's continuing management mandate would be to authorize only those uses and activities on public lands that further compliance with State water quality standards. Uses and activities would be emphasized that address water resource objectives, such as those related to reduction of erosion and sedimentation. Uses and activities would be managed to meet water quality standards on water quality limited river and stream segments.

Implementation of existing water resource objectives and maintenance or improvement of existing water quality would continue. Streams segments not meeting State water quality standards and/or PFC would be managed to attain an upward trend in the composition and structure of key riparian/wetland vegetation and desired physical characteristics of the stream channel.

Aggressive weed suppression activities would continue at the Trueblood Wildlife Management Area (TWMA). Other riparian areas infested with noxious weeds would also be treated as weeds are identified.

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Use of biological controls, such as golden loosestrife beetle (*Galerucella pulchella*) would be emphasized wherever possible.

Management common to all alternatives:

To comply with State water quality standards, BLM would take actions to reduce the number of Section 303(d) listed stream segments on public land as follows:

- € BLM would assess the effect of its management actions on the water quality parameter for which a waterbody is 303(d) listed. BLM management activities would be assessed for their effects on water quality for the standard for which it was listed. This would be done at the site-specific scale during evaluations of Groundwater Management Areas (GMA's). BLM would document where sufficient measures have been implemented to bring listed segments into compliance in a reasonable timeframe. EPA's current standards allow two years for waterbodies to meet the water quality standard.
- € For waterbodies that remain on the 303(d) list and are affected by BLM management activities, BLM would develop or adjust management actions necessary to restore water quality and meet Idaho water quality standards. BLM would work with State agencies and local Tribes to set priorities and timelines for addressing listed waterbodies. BLM would develop Water Quality Restoration Plans (WQRP), to address the water quality parameter at issue for lands it administers.

Note from Mike: Do we have any 303(d) waterbodies? Any actions needing change or is this just speculating about the future?

Management Actions Common to all alternatives:

Because BLM is required to meet various state and federal water quality standards in all its activities, there would be no difference between alternatives in the way water quality issues are managed. Riparian and wetlands would be managed throughout the NCA in a manner that either maintains or improves their proper functioning condition, including the restoration or maintenance of plant species diversity and hydrologic functioning of springs, seeps, and wet meadows. In addition, noxious and invasive weeds would be reduced through a combination of biological, physical, chemical, and prescribed fire treatments.

2.7.9 Visual Resources

Common to All Alternatives:

Authorities, Management & Assumptions:

Section 102(8) of FLPMA declares that public land would be managed to protect the quality of scenic values and, where appropriate, to preserve and protect certain public land in its natural condition. NEPA, section 101(b), requires Federal agencies to “assure for all Americans...aesthetically pleasing surroundings.” Guidelines for the identification of VRM classes on public land are contained in “BLM Manual Handbook 8410-1, *Visual Resource Inventory*. The establishment of VRM classes on public land is based on an evaluation of the landscape's scenic qualities, public sensitivity towards certain areas (such as certain special management areas, travel corridors and landscape settings), and the location of affected land from primary travel corridors (distance zoning).

Approved VRM objectives (classes) provide the visual management standards for the approval, design and development of future projects and for rehabilitation of existing projects.

Visual design considerations are incorporated into all surface disturbing projects regardless of size or potential impacts. Emphasis is placed on providing these inputs during the initial planning and design phase so as to minimize costly redesign and mitigation at later phases of project design and development. Every effort is made to inform potential applicants of the visual management objectives so visual design considerations can adequately be incorporated into their initial planning and design efforts.

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In all alternatives, the OTA Impact Area ([IDARNG Map 3](#)) would be allowed to sustain major modifications to the landscape (VRM Class IV).

Alternative A: Future proposals to develop public land or construct improvements would be evaluated to ensure that they comply with the existing VRM classifications (see [VRM Map 1](#)

The narrowest portion of the Snake River Canyon (the Swan Falls area) and ½ mile buffer zones associated with certain portions of the Oregon National Historic Trail would continue to be managed to preserve the existing character of the landscape under VRM Class I objectives. Remaining portions of the Snake River Canyon and the area around C.J. Strike Reservoir would continue to be managed to minimize the level of change to the existing landscape.

Visual corridors along Simco Road, State Highways 51, 67, and 78, Interstate 84, and the portion of the NCA located west of the OTA would continue to be managed as a travel influence zone, where activities would be managed to partially retain the scenic quality for the benefit of those passing through the area on the highways and major road networks. The remaining areas of the NCA, accounting for about ½ of the total area, would be managed to allow for major modifications to the existing landscape.

Alternative B: Although the NCA is a nationally designated area, the most restrictive visual management class objectives would be retained for only the Oregon National Historic Trail ([VRM Map 2](#)). A major part of an Oregon Trail experience is being able to have, as much as possible, the same views as those who originally traversed the route in the 1800s.

The Snake River Canyon, areas adjacent to the canyon, and the travel corridor in the western portion of the NCA would be managed under VRM Class II objectives to retain the existing character of the landscape and to minimize the level of change to the landscape. The remaining portions of the NCA would be managed to partially retain the visual qualities of the high desert under VRM Class III objectives.

Alternative C: The Snake River Canyon and the Oregon Trail would be managed under the strictest (VRM Class I) visual objectives to preserve the existing character of the landscape (see [VRM Map 3](#)). To protect the visual values of this VRM Class I area, adjacent areas would be managed under VRM Class II objectives as a buffer zone to retain the existing character of the landscape (see [VRM map 3](#)).

The OTA Maneuver Area and the remaining upland plateau areas would be managed to partially retain the existing visual values of the area under VRM Class II standards.

Alternative D: This alternative is similar to Alternative B, but allows more landscape modifications (VRM Class IV) in the OTA Maneuver Area and the lands immediately east thereof ([VRM Map 4](#)). The most restrictive visual management class objectives would be retained only for the Oregon National Historic Trail.

The Snake River Canyon, areas associated with the canyon, and the travel corridor in the western portion of the NCA would be managed to retain the existing character of the landscape and to minimize the level of change to the landscape (VRM Class II objectives). The area between the OTA and the Snake River would be managed as a buffer area to partially retain the characteristic landscape.

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Resource Uses

2.7.10 Idaho Army National Guard

Goal: The Idaho Army National Guard (IDARNG) would continue to manage military activities in the Orchard Training Area in a manner compatible with the NCA-enabling legislation.

Rationale:

The IDARNG currently conducts military training activities in the 138,000 acre Orchard Training Area under the authority of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (Appendix XXX), which was last amended in 2002. Among other things, the 2002 amendment extended the term of the MOU to 30 years. The MOU provides for additional amendments at the conclusion of the RMP process to incorporate RMP decisions that affect operational aspects of the OTA. Section IX. B. of the MOU specifically states that “Active components of the Armed Forces may not use the OTA except in support of the [Idaho Military Division].” (emphasis added)

Section 4(e) of the NCA-enabling legislation (Public Law 103-64) provided for the continued authorization of National Guard military training activities in the OTA, subject to the requirement that the activities were compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established. Current and future military training activities will undergo a compatibility determination prior to authorization.

Management Actions Common to All Alternatives:

BLM policy provides that public lands should be withdrawn to the Department of Defense that have been subjected to military training activities and have accumulated potentially hazardous chemicals or contain unexploded ordnance. The purpose for the withdrawal is to reduce BLM’s potential liability for future remediation and other costs associated with the hazardous materials and unexploded ordnance. This policy affects the entire OTA Impact Area. The Idaho Army National Guard has requested that fee title to the Impact Area be transferred to the Department of Defense, rather than the area being administratively withdrawn. Regardless of the method of transfer, either proposal would require Congressional action, since the Impact Area is over 5,000 acres in size. As such, BLM could only recommend the transfer to Congress through the Secretary of Interior, and will do so under all alternatives.

No military training would occur in occupied slickspot peppergrass areas, under requirements of the slickspot peppergrass candidate conservation agreement.

The Impact Area would remain closed to public access, as it has been for many years. The closure has been incorporated as an Ada County ordinance, the purpose for which is to protect the public from the potential safety and health hazards related to unexploded ordnance and munitions-related chemical soil contamination.

Administrative assembly areas are the support areas that are critical to the military. As such, it is important, as part of the training process, to become familiar with how to set up and operate assembly areas, which include temporary quarters, restroom areas, cooking and feeding facilities, equipment maintenance areas, etc. To maximize the usefulness of this training, the assembly areas need to be located within close proximity to the training operation. To minimize the impacts to existing shrub habitats, these areas have historically been located in non-shrub areas. In all alternatives, the IDARNG will be allowed to randomly locate these assembly areas as needed in non-shrub areas, and when authorized by BLM, frequently used sites would be graveled or cindered.

Existing ranges, utilities, support and maintenance facilities authorized under current rights of ways would continue to be authorized. Over the past 18 years the National Guard has made a significant

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investment in the construction of ranges and the facilities to support them to meet Army training requirements. These will continue to be maintained and upgraded as authorized.

An established network of firebreaks, which are primarily located on existing roads, would continue to be maintained. These firebreaks also serve as travel corridors for the fire crews to extinguish fires in the Impact Area when they are started by training activities. This quick response generally keeps the fires to less than an acre in size.

Because live-fire weapons training carries with it such a high potential for starting wildfires, the IDARNG has had to increase their level of fire fighting capability. As part of their authorization to conduct military training activities in the OTA, BLM has imposed on IDARNG the primary responsibility for initial attack of all wildfires in the OTA. As such, they have purchased more and newer equipment, and ensure that their fire fighters are trained to BLM standards. In addition, the IDARNG conducts pre-suppression activities to reduce the potential for wildfires, including the annual blading of firebreaks in the Impact Area, as well as the prescribed burning of hazardous fuels located along fences and around target areas in the Impact Area. These activities would continue under all alternatives.

The IDARNG would continue road improvements and maintenance, fence repair, sign maintenance, and public notification of training activities as required. A small (5 acre) site north of Christmas Mountain would continue to be used for engineer excavation training ([IDARNG Map 10](#)).

Alternative A Under this alternative, the IDARNG would be authorized to continue current types, levels, seasons, locations, etc. of military training within the current OTA boundary. Soldiers would continue to train on heavy armored and light armored vehicles by conducting live-fire weapons training on ranges established for that purpose ([IDARNG Map 1](#)). Helicopter gunnery training, artillery weapons training, individual and special weapons firing, and demolition training would continue within the Impact Area.

The IDARNG would continue to have initial attack responsibility for fires within the OTA, and would have trained fire crews and equipment present during gunnery activities during the fire season. Gunnery training stops while crews extinguish fires that start during training activity. Firefighter training would be conducted to BLM standards for wildland fire crews. The IDARNG would continue to invest in fire suppression infrastructure and equipment, and maintain a firebreak system within the OTA that is reviewed and approved by BLM.

Tactical maneuver training would continue in designated maneuver sectors ([IDARNG Map 9](#)). Vehicle and troop movements would be conducted both on and off-road over a large area. Administrative (non-tactical) travel through maneuver sectors would be restricted to established roads and trails. Heavy maneuver training, which involves movement by multiple tracked vehicles operating in teams, would continue in grassland areas. These open grassland areas would be designated for off-road tracked and wheeled vehicle tactical maneuvers. Tracked vehicle activity would also occur on established roads and trails. Light maneuver training, which includes wheeled vehicles and infantry operations on-foot, would continue in areas where vegetation includes both grasslands and shrub cover. Logistical (re-supply) training is an integral part of this maneuver training and would be conducted in the same area.

Off-road maneuvers with tracked vehicles would continue to be restricted from heavy shrub areas. No military training would occur in slickspot peppergrass areas, as described in the slickspot peppergrass candidate conservation agreement. Logistical and support training activities would continue in non-shrub areas of sufficient size to accommodate the training. This activity consists of heavy vehicle maintenance, large scale food preparation, refueling of vehicles, communications centers, medical treatment, and other logistical activity. Existing cindered areas within the maneuver areas and on Ranges would continue to be maintained to support many of these operations.

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Alternative B: Continue authorization of the OTA for military training in a manner that minimizes impacts to existing shrub habitats, supports shrub maintenance projects, and provides modified and/or new training areas to enhance military training opportunities.

Under this alternative, the existing MOU would be revised to authorize IDARNG to continue military training operations in the OTA much as described in Alternative A, but with restrictions imposed on the use of some current maneuver areas to protect remnant shrub communities, sensitive plants, and future habitat restoration sites. This alternative would also provide IDARNG the potential to expand their maneuver training activities onto BLM lands outside the current OTA boundary.

Maneuver training would be limited to designated routes in that portion of the OTA located north of the Impact Area and east of Pleasant Valley Road ([IDARNG Map 4](#)) to protect an extensive Wyoming big sagebrush community and occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat. Vehicle maneuvers would also be restricted to designated routes in areas subjected to future habitat restoration projects. In addition, the OTA boundary would be modified to delete approximately 4150 acres of occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat from the OTA (see [IDARNG Map 11](#)).

Under this alternative, the IDARNG would be provided with an expanded excavation training area that is 50 feet wide and approximately five miles long, located along the western boundary of the OTA ([IDARNG Map 10](#)). This proposed excavation training area is located adjacent to a major road along the western boundary of the OTA, and excavation training within this corridor would satisfy a secondary objective of providing a firebreak for wildfires that could otherwise enter the northern maneuver areas from the west.

Because urban warfare is becoming more common throughout the world, the IDARNG has requested authorization to construct a Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOU) site within the OTA in which trainees could conduct urban warfare scenarios. In this alternative, IDARNG would be authorized to construct a MOU site in the vicinity of Range 1 ([IDARNG Map 1](#)). Training could then be monitored from the Christmas Mountain tower.

This alternative would provide IDARNG with the potential to expand their maneuver training onto about 21,000 acres of BLM land located adjacent to and east of the OTA, as shown on [IDARNG Map 7](#). This area has been impacted by repeated wildfires, and has the lowest priority for future habitat restoration projects. Tracked and wheeled vehicles involved in training activities would access the area via an access corridor, as shown on [IDARNG Map 7](#).

Alternative C: In this most aggressive habitat protection and restoration alternative, military training would be accommodated within the existing OTA boundary only to the extent that it meets resource protection and restoration requirements.

Under this alternative, maneuver training would be eliminated from approximately 22,000 located north of the Impact Area and east of Pleasant Valley Road ([IDARNG Map 5](#)) to protect an extensive Wyoming big sagebrush community and occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat. As in Alternative B, vehicle maneuvers would be restricted to designated roads and trails in areas subjected to future habitat restoration projects. In addition, the OTA boundary would be modified to delete approximately 4150 acres of occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat from the OTA (see [IDARNG Map 11](#)).

To obtain training competencies for urban encounters, IDARNG would be authorized to construct a MOU site in a previously disturbed area near Cinder Cone Butte and contains nearby utility lines. ([IDARNG Map 1](#)).

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Other than the loss of maneuver training lands north of the Impact Area, military training would be conducted within the existing OTA much as described for Alternative B, with the exception that there would be no opportunity for the National Guard to mitigate the loss of maneuver training lands by expanding into adjacent areas.

Alternative D: Continue authorization of the OTA for military training in a manner that provides modified and/or new training areas to enhance military training opportunities.

Under this alternative, the IDARNG would continue military training activities much as described in Alternative A. IDARNG would also be authorized to construct a MOUT site near the Snake River Training Facility ([IDARNG Map 1](#)) to obtain competencies in urban encounters. The proximity of the MOUT site to the Snake River Training Facility and existing utility lines would increase the efficiency of the trainees transferring from classroom to “real world” training activities.

In addition, IDARNG would extend their maneuver activities onto about 28,000 acres of adjacent BLM lands outside the current OTA boundary, as shown on [IDARNG Map 8](#). This area has been impacted by repeated wildfires, and has the lowest priority for future habitat restoration projects. Tracked and wheeled vehicles involved in training activities would access the area via an access corridor, as shown on [IDARNG Map 8](#).

The IDARNG would be provided with an expanded excavation training area that is 50 feet wide and approximately five miles long, located along the western boundary of the OTA, as discussed in Alternative B. However, under this alternative, the IDARNG would be authorized an additional, but smaller area south of the Impact Area ([IDARNG Map 12](#)). The area authorized for the two excavation sites would total about 50 acres.

2.7.11 Lands and Realty

The NCA’s Lands and Realty program is composed of discretionary and non-discretionary cases. Non-discretionary cases consist of application-generated proposals that BLM is required to process, such as rights-of-way, land use permits, and various leases. Congress has delegated BLM wide discretionary authority to determine whether specific applications merit authorization, and if so, where and under what terms and conditions an authorization will be granted.

Within the NCA, all lands and realty proposals undergo site-specific analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act, and must meet the requirement of being compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established. As such, these individual actions are not RMP decisions, and will not be further discussed.

The issues related to non-discretionary actions that will be discussed in the RMP involve the designation of utility corridors and avoidance areas. The designation of areas either suited or unsuited for a specific use is a landscape-scale RMP decision that bears heavily on future right-of-way applications. An existing utility corridor crosses the extreme eastern corner of the NCA, but the utility industry believes that it is insufficient to satisfy their long-term needs. As such, they have asked that an additional corridor(s) be designated. Related to this issue, the NCA possesses certain resources and other values that could be adversely impacted by utility or other types of development. As such, the designation of an avoidance area(s) would be appropriate to protect these sensitive resources.

Discretionary cases consist largely of land adjustment proposals that BLM proactively generates, as well as proposals that are filed by outside sources. BLM has full discretion to determine whether it will act on specific land adjustment proposals. In its evaluation process, BLM determines whether a proposal is

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feasible, whether it is in the public interest, and whether sufficient personnel and funding are available to process the case. Land adjustment proposals in the NCA mainly involve the acquisition of inholdings and the blocking up of federal ownership to facilitate management and to reduce conflicts with adjacent private landowners.

An issue related to land adjustment is the potential realignment of the NCA boundary. The original NCA boundary was located largely through negotiations with individual landowners following a general determination of the foraging needs of prairie falcons. The boundary was located on property lines and other administrative boundaries, and does not conform to easily identifiable landmarks, such as roads, railroads, pipelines, transmission lines, etc. As such, in many locations, both land managers and users of the area have difficulty determining the exact boundary location.

Alternative A: Since this alternative continues the current management, the existing 43,000 acre avoidance area in Owyhee County ([Lands Map 3](#)) and the existing utility corridor in Elmore County ([Lands Map 2](#)) would be retained. Land tenure adjustments (exchanges, purchases, donations, etc.) would continue to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and would be completed only when they are in the public interest and are consistent with the NCA-enabling legislation and the slickspot peppergrass candidate conservation agreement. The existing NCA boundary and the OTA boundary would be unchanged.

Surface disturbing actions would not be authorized in areas affecting special status species unless the action could be appropriately mitigated.

Alternative B: Under this alternative, a 108,000 acre avoidance area would be designated along both sides of the canyon from approximately Guffey Bridge to C.J. Strike Dam ([Lands Map 4](#)) to protect the visual corridor along the canyon and the Oregon Trail. A second utility corridor would be provided south of and roughly parallel with Highway 78, as shown on [Lands Map 2](#). In addition to the land exchanges, purchases, etc. referenced above, BLM would seek to complete a land exchange with the State of Idaho Department of Lands. The exchange would involve about 40,000 acres of State land scattered throughout the NCA, consisting largely of Sections 16 and 36 that were granted to the State at Statehood ([Lands Map 7](#)). The BLM lands that would be transferred to the State in the exchange are located north and west of Mountain Home. State lands are not affected by the NCA-enabling legislation; however, both agencies are signatories to the slickspot peppergrass conservation agreement. Thus, no impacts to slickspot peppergrass management would occur from the exchange. In addition, both BLM and State land management would be enhanced by blocking up their respective ownerships. In addition, the OTA boundary would be realigned to delete large areas of occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat located north and east of the Impact Area ([IDARNG Map 5](#)).

Alternative C: In this alternative, BLM would establish a 170,000 acre avoidance area ([Lands map 5](#)), and would maintain only the existing utility corridor ([Lands Map 2](#)). BLM would continue with land exchanges and acquisitions as discussed in Alternative A, and with the State land exchange discussed in Alternative B.

The current NCA boundary is difficult to identify on the ground. As such, the public often cannot tell where NCA-related land use restrictions apply. To improve management and facilitate public use, BLM would recommend that Congress realign the NCA boundary onto more easily identifiable boundaries, such as roads, railroads, etc., as shown on [Lands Map 6](#). In addition, the OTA boundary would be realigned to delete large areas of occupied slickspot peppergrass habitat located north and east of the Impact Area ([IDARNG Map 5](#)).

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Alternative D: Under this alternative, the State land exchange discussed in Alternative B and the realignment of the OTA and the NCA boundaries discussed in Alternative C would be completed. The alternative would identify no avoidance areas, but an additional utility corridor would be located parallel to and north of the Snake River Canyon ([Lands Map 2](#)).

2.7.12 Livestock Grazing

Common to All Alternatives:

Section 3(a)(3) of the Act establishing the NCA provides that uses of public lands in the NCA existing on the date of enactment, including livestock grazing, shall be allowed to continue as long as they are consistent with the purposes for which the NCA was established.

The Standards for Rangeland Health, as applied in the State of Idaho, are to be used as the BLM's management goals for the betterment of the environment, protection of cultural resources, and sustained rangeland productivity. Rangelands should be meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health or making significant progress toward meeting the standards. When rangelands are meeting the standards, they are providing for proper nutrient cycling, hydrologic cycling, and energy flow. Where livestock grazing is found to be a significant factor in not meeting standards or objectives; actions that control the intensity, duration, and timing of grazing, and/or provide for periodic deferment or rest are required, unless it can be demonstrated that significant progress toward the standard or objective is being or can be achieved. It is also the intent of current livestock management to meet other resource management objectives ([Do you mean NCA legislative purposes?](#)). This applies to all subsequent livestock grazing guidelines

Alternative A: This Alternative would meet the minimum requirements of laws, regulations, and policy mandates that apply to livestock grazing on public lands. Additional proactive grazing management actions would be implemented in accordance with the NCA enabling legislation and Idaho Standards and Guidelines requirements.

Current livestock management would be continued according to “*Best Management Practices*”. Rangeland management strategies would provide for the maintenance or restoration of watershed function, nutrient cycling and energy flow, water quality, habitat for special status species, and habitat quality for populations and communities of native plants and animals. These management strategies are supported by regional Standards and Guides. ([Are regional S&Gs different from Idaho S&Gs?](#))

Livestock grazing would be managed so as to be consistent with the purposes for which the NCA was established. Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management would continue to be the standard against which management is measured. Currently, rangeland restoration occurs primarily through emergency rehabilitation projects following wildfire, where necessary and when funding is available.

The 340 acre Priest Ranch, located along the south side of the Snake River downstream from Swan Falls Dam, would continue to be off-limits to livestock grazing ([Grazing Map 4](#)).

Alternative B: This Alternative would provide multiple use management, while still providing the protection and *enhancement* of the NCA's raptor populations and habitats. Livestock grazing would be eliminated or seasonally restricted on about 1,630 acres located along the Snake River downstream from Swan Falls Dam to reduce impacts to cultural and recreational values ([Grazing Map 4](#)).

More restrictive utilization levels would be imposed to maintain or enhance perennial plants and watershed health, as well as implementing management to provide additional forage for big game and small mammal raptor prey species. Forage competition between ground squirrels and livestock would be minimized in Sandberg bluegrass areas.

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A more aggressive fuels management and habitat protection program would be initiated, but most historical grazing preferences would be maintained. Grazing would be managed to maintain current populations of special status plants.

Rangeland rehabilitation and restoration efforts would increase up to an average of 1000 acres per year, and objectives for utilization of key forage species would be clearly defined with the intent of benefiting raptor populations and habitats. The timing, duration, and intensity of grazing use would be managed for improving key forage plant vigor and cover. After a habitat restoration seeding has become fully established, the BLM authorized officer will determine if, when, how, and to what extent livestock grazing will be returned to the area to ensure that the habitat quality of the treated area is not jeopardized.

Alternative C: Alternative C emphasizes and enhancement of natural resources. The livestock grazing recommendations are more restrictive than BMPs or SOPs. This alternative would provide the highest protection and enhancement for the NCA’s raptor populations and habitats. Livestock grazing would be eliminated or seasonally restricted on about 2,750 acres located along the Snake River downstream from Swan Falls Dam to reduce impacts to cultural and recreational values ([Grazing Map 4](#)).

More restrictive livestock utilization levels would allow for greater forage allocations to wildlife with the intent to maintain or enhance perennial plant species and enhance watershed health. A more aggressive fuels management and habitat protection and restoration plan would be initiated to protect remaining shrub communities and reestablish habitat where it has become degraded. After a habitat restoration seeding has become fully established, the BLM authorized officer will determine if, when, how, and to what extent livestock grazing will be returned to the area to ensure that the habitat quality of the treated area is not jeopardized. Grazing would be managed to increase current populations of special status plants and their habitats.

Objectives for utilization of key forage species would be clearly defined with the intent of benefiting raptor populations and habitats first and foremost; consistent with the purposes for which the NCA was established. The more restrictive utilization levels and timing of key plant communities also reflects the frequent drought conditions in the NCA’s high desert environment, which causes increased stress on perennial plants.

Alternative D: Alternative D emphasizes sustained use by traditional users, as well as increased economic return to local economies. This alternative includes the least restrictive grazing requirements, but BMPs and SOPs would still be implemented as they support sustainable livestock grazing on public lands. The 340 acre Priest Ranch, located along the south side of the Snake River downstream from Swan Falls Dam, would continue to be off-limits to livestock grazing ([Grazing Map 4](#)).

2.7.13 Minerals (Leasable, Locatable, Mineral Materials)

Common to All Alternatives:

Section 3(d) of the Act establishing the NCA withdrew public lands within the Area from entry, appropriation, or disposal under the general mining laws, mineral and geothermal leasing laws, and mineral material disposal laws. Mineral authorizations and activities existing prior to the establishment of the NCA may continue; however, no new mining claims, mineral or geothermal leases, or mineral material sites, sales or free use permits may be established. There is a continuing and ever-increasing need by the public, communities, and government agencies for mineral materials (sand, gravel, clay, building stone, and decorative rock) for use in the construction, repair and maintenance of homes, businesses and public facilities, such as roads. Mineral material sales and free use permits would continue to be authorized in the NCA to the extent compatible with the purposes for which the area was

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established. Currently, BLM operates 16 active mineral material sites. There are also about the same number of inactive sites that were previously operated at some time in the past.

Alternative A: BLM would continue to issue mineral material sales and free use permits from existing mineral material sites, and if adequate material was available, those sites would be reauthorized when the existing permits expire. Also, if compatible with the NCA legislation, currently inactive sites could be reopened for operation if needed to meet the demand for mineral materials.

Alternative B: Under this alternative, BLM would continue to issue mineral material sales and free use permits from existing mineral material sites, and if adequate material was available, those sites would be reauthorized when the existing permits expire. However, currently inactive sites would not be reopened for operation.

Alternative C: Same as Alternative B

Alternative D: Same as Alternative A

2.7.14 Recreation

John, Mike and Larry – we need to decide if we want to split these... whatever you guys decide is fine, we just need to decide.

Before I do any serious editing on this section we will need to decide if we want to split transportation from the Recreation section --- in light of the route designation process I'd like to recommend that we do this. We might want to say something about how recreation and transportation relate so the reader can easily transition. Also, the table will go away from this section – we are going to include the table in its entirety in this chapter. Also, I've highlighted – in teal – the sections I think will need cut and moved to transportation.

See Special Designation Section before completing this edit

Common to All Alternatives:

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA; P.L. 94-579) recognized recreational use of public land as an important part of multiple use management. Dispersed, unstructured activities typify the recreational uses occurring on most public land. BLM Manual 8300 directs the BLM to designate administrative units known as Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) where there is a need for a higher level of managerial presence or investment than is typical of most BLM land. Remaining public land is designated as an Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA) where limited resources are required to provide extensive, unstructured recreation activities.

Federal regulations require BLM to designate all public lands as either open, limited, or closed to off-highway vehicles for the purpose of meeting public demand for OHV activities, protecting natural resources, providing for public health and safety, and minimizing conflicts between user groups. Regulations pertaining to OHV planning include 43 CFR 8342; Executive Order 11644, Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public lands (37 FR 2877: Feb. 9, 1977); Executive Order 11989, Off-Road Vehicles on Public lands (42 FR 26959h: May 25, 1977).

This plan will manage recreation opportunities as a secondary objective to protecting raptors and their habitats. The educational values of the NCA are also recognized in the NCA-enabling legislation and are given a major management emphasis. Although the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) approach to management is used to identify areas where certain types of recreation experiences will occur, we do not

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expect to provide the full range of experiences provided in other BLM-administered areas because the primary management focus in the NCA is raptor and habitat protection. Under all alternatives, most of the NCA will be managed to emphasize undeveloped, roaded natural and semi-primitive non-motorized recreation experiences with limited facility development. All alternatives assume that most recreation-related improvements would be developed to protect resource values and to serve as starting areas for resource-based use and not as visitor attractions in and of themselves.

Education and interpretation are the primary techniques used to inform and educate the general public and to meet management objectives. Outreach and public presentations play a significant role in all alternatives. The general public, as well as commercial and competitive recreation permit holders, are informed of proper user etiquette through programs such as “Leave No Trace” and “Tread Lightly”. Signs, brochures, maps, kiosks, websites, and other “light handed” methods would be used to meet management objectives.

Alternative A: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) – The existing ROS inventory was completed as part of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan, and shows that most of the NCA is managed for “roaded natural” experience opportunities. This means that the visitor can expect some opportunities to affiliate with other users in developed sites, but with some chance for privacy. Access and travel is afforded with conventional motorized vehicles including sedans, trailers, RV's and motor-homes.

Facilities – Developed recreational facilities would only be provided at Dedication Point and Cove Recreation Site. These two sites would be maintained and expanded as needed to meet the increasing demand for facilities.

SRMAs - The following SRMAs would continue to be designated:

Bruneau Field Office

C.J. Strike Reservoir – 7,000 acres,
Oregon Trail – 7,888 acres,

Owyhee Field Office

Snake River BOP – 53,177 acres,
Owyhee Front – 8,100 acres.

Following designation, the NCA was managed as a unit of the Bruneau Field Office, and in 1995, a management plan was written for the area, in which the entire NCA (484,072 acres) was designated an SRMA. Alternative A would maintain the five overlapping SRMAs and each would continue to be managed for its respective recreational values.

Travel Management – The 1995 NCA Management Plan made the following OHV designation decisions: 1) zero (0) acres were designated as “open”; 2) 1,293 acres within the Snake River Canyon were “closed” to motorized vehicles; and 3) vehicles in the rest of the NCA were “limited” to designated roads and trails with no cross-country travel allowed. However, since route designations had not as yet been completed, vehicles were required to stay on existing roads and trails. The current road density averages 2.2 miles of road per square mile. Road density is highest in Management Area 1 (3.3 miles/square mile) and lowest in Management Area 3 (1.7 miles/square mile). Management Area 2 averages 2.0 miles of road per square mile.

In the non-motorized area around Halverson Lake, existing two-track roads are now used as trails. On a case-by-case basis certain roads have been physically closed and rehabilitated as part of activity level planning. These travel management conditions would continue under Alternative A.

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We need to make the above paragraphs “would” statements to be consistent with other sections and show what would carry forward if Alternative A became the preferred alternative.

Compatible Uses –Existing activities would be allowed to continue to the extent they do not adversely affect raptors or raptor habitat.

Recreational Shooting – The current recreational shooting restrictions would be retained in the Snake River Canyon and the northwest portion of the NCA as described below (See Rec Map ???).

Plateau – Close year-round to the discharge of rifles and pistols the portion of the NCA located north of the Pacific Power & Light (PP&L) Company powerline, as well as the area located south of the PP&L line and west of Swan Falls Road. Within this area, organized groups may apply to develop and manage a target shooting range(s). Groups wishing to apply for this privilege will be required to show that they are able to adequately develop, manage, and maintain the site to avoid adverse impacts to other users in the area.

Snake River Canyon – Close public lands year-round to the discharge of rifles and pistols within the Snake River Canyon downstream from Gold Island (near Grandview) except for the deer hunting season in Hunting Unit 40 on the south side of the Snake River. Shotguns and muzzleloaders will be allowed within this area only from September 1 to February 14. The width of the closed area will be 1/2 mile from the river or 100 yards back from the canyon rim, whichever is greater.

Use of firearms within the above areas for animal damage control and law enforcement are exempt from the shooting closure.

These restrictions provide for public safety around the urban interface and high recreation use areas.

Climbing and Rappelling – Rock climbing and rappelling would continue to be prohibited along the Snake River Canyon. Unstable basalt rocks pose a significant safety hazard to those climbing on the cliffs. In addition, these activities can adversely impact nesting raptors.

Open Fires – While specific restrictions may be imposed during high fire danger, there would be no general restrictions on open camp fires.

Commercial Uses – The NCA would be available for commercial outfitter use by special permit only.

Other Activities – Although the use of paintball guns and equipment do not pose an immediate threat to raptors, their use does detract from the scenic quality in the high use areas of the Snake River Canyon. Their use would continue to be prohibited within the Snake River Canyon, and within 1/4 mile of the canyon rim.

Recreational activities not specifically mentioned would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as to their compatibility with NCA Management objectives.

Environmental Education and Interpretation –Alternative A would continue the current direction of the NCAs environmental education and interpretive program. BLM would continue to provide public information and presentations about the recreational, natural and cultural resources of the area through a variety of methods. The three existing watchable wildlife sites at Dedication Point, Ted Trueblood Wildlife Area, and CJ Strike Reservoir would be maintained and improved as needed to provide the public with opportunities for viewing raptors and other wildlife species in their natural habitats. No

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additional wildlife viewing areas have been identified and no new sites would be designated or constructed. Management would continue to emphasize public information and education techniques over regulatory methods to reduce user conflicts and increase public awareness, enjoyment, and sensitivity to raptors and other resources values.

Alternative B:

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) – The majority (98.5 percent) of the NCA would continue to be managed for “roaded natural” experience opportunities ([Recreation Map 20](#)). This means that the visitor to affiliate with other users in developed sites, but with some chance for privacy. The landscape is mostly natural appearing as viewed from roads and trails. BLM management is obvious in some areas for on-site control of users. Access and travel would be afforded with conventional motorized vehicles including sedans, trailers, RV's and motor-homes. However, this alternative would provide for nearly 7,000 acres of opportunities for semi-primitive non-motorized experiences. These opportunities would be situated within the western portion of the Snake River Canyon and around the Grand View area (see [Recreation Map 21](#)).

Facilities – The two existing developed recreational facilities at Dedication Point and Cove Recreation Site would be maintained and expanded as needed to meet the increasing demand for facilities. New facilities would be developed at Kuna Butte and Initial Point (See [Recreation Map 2](#)).

SRMAs – The designation of SRMAs would be based on areas with significant recreational, scenic, or cultural values. The following four SRMAs would be designated ([Recreation Map 8](#)).

Snake River Canyon SRMA – This SRMA would consist of about 30,000 acres within the Snake River Canyon. The SRMA boundary would include the Snake River Canyon from the old Guffey Bridge upstream to the town of Grand View. The recreational, cultural, and scenic values of the area are the primary reason for designation. The Snake River Canyon receives a tremendous amount of recreational visitor use throughout the year. The cultural significance of the same area is the reason that it was previously designated as an Archaeological District.

Owyhee Front SRMA – This SRMA would consist of 8,100 acres of desert habitat located west of State Highway 78. The boundary of this SRMA extends beyond the NCA boundary into the Owyhee Field Office and is managed as a part of the larger SRMA. The recreational values are the primary reason for designation. The Owyhee Front is a major destination site for Off-Highway Vehicle use, both recreational and competitive. This area abounds with hundreds of miles of trails for motorized and non-motorized activities. Limited to designated roads and are these designated roads intended to enhance the motorized OHV experience? If the NCA boundary is realigned as proposed in the Lands and Realty section, this SRMA would no longer be within the NCA.

CJ Strike SRMA – This SRMA would consist of 10,000 acres of desert and canyon land surrounding CJ Strike Reservoir. The boundary primarily follows gravel and paved roads that surround the reservoir. The recreational values are the primary reason for designation. CJ Strike Reservoir and the surrounding lands provide excellent opportunities for flat water activities, wildlife viewing, waterfowl hunting, fishing, and camping.

Travel Management – The management objective for Alternative B is to provide for additional areas for non-motorized activities, and unrestricted motorized activities, and continued access to the majority of the NCA on the current road network. (Road Map??? See Map XXX)

The following Off Highway Vehicle designation would be made.

Open –51,237 acres would be open for unrestricted vehicle use, as follows:

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1) 50,937 acres of public land within the OTA Impact Area would be open for cross country travel by the National Guard and other authorized users. This area would continue to be closed to the general public for safety reasons.

2) Up to 300 acres north of the Grand View Highway along Canyon Creek.

Limited –425,565 acres would be limited to designated roads and trails.

Closed – 6,903 acres would be closed to motorized uses. The closed areas are described as follows:

1) Halverson Bar – 1,293 acres – includes land below the canyon rim extending from the Canyon/Ada County line upstream along the north side of the Snake River to approximately the USGS gaging station.

2) Guffey Butte – 2,477 acres – includes the majority of the butte.

3) Wees Bar – 1,222 acres – includes lands on the south side of the Snake River below the rim from approximately Con Shea Basin upstream to Priest Ranch.

4) Trueblood – 306 acres – includes the majority of the Ted Trueblood Wildlife Area.

5) Cove – 1,605 acres – includes the land south of the “Bruneau Narrows,” east of Cove Recreation Site, north of State Highway 78, and west of the gravel road along the Oregon Trail South Alternate east of Cottonwood Campground.

In areas designated as limited, all vehicles must remain on designated roads and trails. No cross-country travel is allowed. The route designation process would be phased in starting with Management Area 1, followed by Management Area 2 and 3. The designated road network would continue access to most places in the NCA, but would reduce the road and trail density to an average of about 1.7 miles per square mile.

Until the route designation process is completed all vehicles must remain on existing routes as identified in the 2003 BLM Road inventory. Any routes that are closed would be rehabilitated to a natural condition.

Within areas designated as closed to motorized uses, at least 20 miles of non-motorized trails would be designated and signed to create a trail network.

Compatible Uses – The general objective of this alternative would provide for a diversity of resource based recreational opportunities while protecting resource values, minimizing user conflicts, and promoting public safety. While it is difficult to predict what new recreational activities may emerge over the next 20 years, this alternative attempts to be flexible to current or future compatible recreational uses.

Recreational Shooting – Existing shooting restrictions promote public safety in areas located in close proximity to developed areas around the urban interface and high recreation use areas. Under this alternative, the existing Canyon shooting restrictions would be unchanged. However, the Plateau shooting management area would be expanded to include the northern portion of the OTA and the area north of Moore Road ([Recreation Map 13](#)). The existing shooting restrictions would be unchanged, but would now apply to the larger area. This expansion is predicated on the increasing numbers of recreational shooters that are causing conflicts with military training activities in the portion of the OTA located north of the Impact Area.

Use of firearms within the above areas for animal damage control and law enforcement would be exempt from the shooting closure.

Climbing and Rappelling - The unstable basalt rocks of the Snake River Canyon pose a significant safety hazard to the general public climbing and rappelling on cliffs. These safety concerns also exist in areas away from the canyon where volcanic rocks are exposed. To mitigate these safety issues, rock climbing and rappelling would be prohibited throughout the NCA.

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Open Fires – Open fires would be limited to established (improved) camp sites or metal fire pans to reduce the potential for accidental fires that destroy important shrub habitat. Additional restrictions on open fires may be imposed during periods of high fire danger.

Commercial Uses - The NCA would be available for commercial outfitter use by special permit only.
[Why?](#)

Other activities - The use of paintball guns and equipment would continue to be prohibited within the Snake River Canyon, and within 1/4 mile of the canyon rim.

Recreational activities not specifically mentioned would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as to their compatibility with NCA Management objectives.

Environmental Education and Interpretation –Alternative B would continue the current direction of the NCAs environmental education and interpretive program. BLM staff would provide public information and presentations about the recreational, natural and cultural resources of the area through a variety of methods. A comprehensive interpretive plan, with recommendations for facilities, exhibits, and programs, would be developed within two years to allow for continuity of messages and information. The three existing watchable wildlife sites, (Dedication Point, Ted Trueblood Wildlife Area, and CJ Strike Reservoir) would be maintained and improved as needed to provide the public with opportunities for viewing raptors and other wildlife species in their natural habitats. Additionally, at least two more wildlife viewing sites would be identified and constructed. By the year 2010, a trail network and vehicle turnouts along main routes would be established to provide additional wildlife viewing opportunities. Management would continue to emphasize public information and education techniques over regulatory methods to reduce user conflicts and increase public awareness, enjoyment, and sensitivity to raptors and other resources values.

Alternative C:

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) – The majority (97 percent) of the NCA would continue to be managed for “roaded natural” experience opportunities. This means that the visitor could expect some opportunities to affiliate with other users in developed sites, but with some chance for privacy. Self-reliance on outdoor skills would be of only moderate importance and there would be little challenge and risk. The landscape is mostly natural appearing as viewed from roads and trails. BLM management would be obvious in some areas for on-site control of users. Access and travel would be afforded with conventional motorized vehicles including sedans, trailers, RV's and motor-homes. However, this alternative would provide for over 14,000 acres of opportunities for semi-primitive non-motorized experiences. These opportunities would be situated within the western portion of the Snake River Canyon and around the Grand View area (see [Recreation Map 22](#)).

Facilities - Developed recreational facilities would be provided at Dedication Point and Cove Recreation Site. These two sites would be maintained and expanded as needed to meet the increasing demand for facilities. New facilities would be developed at Celebration Park Annex, Three Pole, Kuna Butte, and Initial Point (See [Recreation Map 2](#)).

SRMAs – The designation of SRMAs would be based on areas with significant educational and interpretive values. The following two SRMAs would be designated ([Recreation Map 9](#)).

Snake River Canyon SRMA – **If this has already been described in a previous alternative, just reference the first description.** This SRMA would consist of 30,000 acres within the Snake River Canyon. The SRMA boundary would include the Snake River Canyon from the old Guffey Bridge

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upstream to the town of Grand View. The educational and interpretive values associated with the recreational, cultural, and scenic resources of the area would be the primary reason for designation. The Snake River Canyon receives a tremendous amount of visitor use throughout the year with many opportunities to educate the public.

CJ Strike SRMA – If this has already been described in one of the previous alternative, just reference the first description. This SRMA would consist of 10,000 acres of desert and canyon land surrounding CJ Strike Reservoir. The boundary primarily follows gravel and paved roads that surround the reservoir. The educational and interpretive values associated with the cultural, recreational, and wildlife resources would be the primary reason for designation. CJ Strike reservoir and the surrounding lands provide excellent opportunities for educating the public about the recreational opportunities associated with the reservoir (flat water activities, wildlife viewing, waterfowl hunting, fishing, and camping), the cultural significance of the Oregon Trail, and wildlife management.

Travel Management – The management objective for Alternative C would be to provide for non-motorized activities, opportunities for unrestricted motorized activities, and minimize unnecessary routes while allowing continued access to the majority of the NCA. **Much of this discussion is repetitive from previous alternatives. Just describe the new stuff and reference the previously described stuff.**

The following Off Highway Vehicle designations would be made.

Open –51,237 acres would be open for unrestricted vehicle use. This total breaks down as follows:

- 3) 50,937 acres within the OTA Impact Area would be open for cross country travel by the National Guard and other authorized users. This area would continue to be closed to the general public for safety reasons.
- 4) Up to 300 acres north of the Grand View Highway along Canyon Creek.

Limited –418,375 acres would be limited to designated roads and trails.

Closed – 14,093 acres would be closed to motorized uses. The closed areas are described as follows:

- 1) Halverson Bar – 1,293 acres – includes land below the rim extending from the Canyon/Ada County line upstream along the north side of the Snake River to approximately the USGS gaging station.
- 2) Guffey Butte – 2,477 acres – includes the majority of the butte.
- 3) Wees Bar – 1,222 acres – includes lands on the south side of the Snake River below the rim from approximately Con Shea Basin upstream to Priest Ranch.
- 4) Tick Basin – 2,229 acres – includes lands on the north side of the Snake River below the rim from roughly Ball Point upstream to Tom Draw.
- 5) Bigfoot Bar – 4,961 acres – includes lands on the north side of the Snake River below the rim from roughly Tom Draw upstream to the lower end of upper Bigfoot Bar.
- 6) Trueblood – 306 acres – includes the majority of the Ted Trueblood Wildlife Area.
- 7) Cove – 1,605 acres – includes the land south of the “Bruneau Narrows,” east of Cove Recreation Site, north of State Highway 78, and west of the gravel road along the Oregon Trail South Alternate east of Cottonwood Campground.

In areas designated as limited, all vehicles would remain on designated roads and trails. No cross-country travel would be allowed. The route designation process would be phased in starting with Management Area 1, followed by Management Area 2 and 3. The route designation process would work toward creating a road and trail network that would continue access to most places in the NCA while minimizing the total number of routes. The road and trail density would average no more than 1.5 miles per square mile.

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Until the route designation process was completed all vehicles would be required to remain on existing routes as identified in the BLM Road inventory dated 2003. Any routes that were designated as closed would be rehabilitated to a natural condition.

Within areas designated as closed to motorized uses, at least 40 miles of non-motorized trails would be designated and signed to create a trail network by the year 2010.

Compatible Uses – The general objective to this alternative is to provide for a diversity of resource based recreational opportunities while protecting resource values, minimizing user conflicts, and promoting public safety. While it is difficult to predict what new recreational activities may emerge over the next 20 years, this alternative attempts to be flexible to existing or new compatible recreational uses in the future.

Recreational Shooting - Shooting restrictions would be the same as described in Alternative B.

Climbing and Rappelling - Rock climbing and rappelling would be prohibited throughout the NCA.

Open Fires –Open fires would be limited to established (improved) camp sites or metal fire pans. Additional restrictions on open fires may be imposed during high fire danger.

Commercial Uses - The NCA would be available for commercial outfitter use by special permit only.

Other activities - The use of paintball guns and equipment would continue to be prohibited within the Snake River Canyon, and within 1/4 mile of the canyon rim.

Recreational activities not specifically mentioned would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as to their compatibility with NCA Management objectives.

Environmental Education and Interpretation –Alternative C is much the same as Alternative B, with the exception that existing cultural resources would not be interpreted or emphasized in order to provide them better protection.. BLM staff would provide public information and presentations about the recreational and natural resources of the area through a variety of methods, but cultural resources would not be highlighted.

Alternative D:

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) – The majority (99 percent) of the NCA would continue to be managed for “roaded natural” experience opportunities. (This is same for all alternatives) This means that the visitor could expect some opportunities to affiliate with other users in developed sites, but with some chance for privacy. Self-reliance on outdoor skills would be of only moderate importance and there would be little challenge and risk. The landscape is mostly natural appearing as viewed from roads and trails. BLM management would be obvious in some areas for on-site control of users. Access and travel would be afforded with conventional motorized vehicles including sedans, trailers, RV's and motor-homes. This alternative would provide for 2,821 acres of opportunities for semi-primitive non-motorized experiences. These opportunities would be situated within the western portion of the Snake River Canyon and around the Grand View area (see [Recreation Map 23](#)).

Facilities – Developed recreational facilities would be provided at Dedication Point and Cove Recreation Site. These two sites would be maintained and expanded as needed to meet the increasing demand for facilities. New facilities would be developed at Black Butte, Celebration Park Annex, Three Pole, Guffey Butte, Kuna Butte, and Initial Point (See [Recreation Map 2](#)).

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SRMAs – The designation of SRMAs would be based on areas with significant recreational, scenic, or cultural values. The following four SRMAs would be designated ([Recreation Map 8](#)).

Snake River Canyon SRMA – **Reference the previous description.**

Owyhee Front SRMA – **Reference the previous description.**

CJ Strike SRMA – **Reference the previous description.**

Travel Management – The management objective for Alternative D is to provide for additional areas for non-motorized activities, opportunities for unrestricted motorized activities, and reduce the unnecessary routes while allowing continued access to the majority of the NCA. The following Off Highway Vehicle designations would be made.

Open – 51,237 acres would be open for unrestricted vehicle use. This total breaks down as follows:

- 1) 50,937 acres within the OTA Impact Area would be open for cross country travel, when necessary, by the National Guard and other authorized users. This area would continue to be off limits to the general public.
- 2) Up to 300 acres north of the Grand View Highway along Canyon Creek.

Limited – 429,647 acres would be limited to designated roads and trails.

Closed – 2,821 acres would be closed to motorized uses. The closed areas are described as follows:

- 1) Halverson Bar – 1,293 acres – includes land below the rim extending from the Canyon/Ada County line upstream along the north side of the Snake River to approximately the USGS gaging station.
- 2) Wees Bar – 1,222 acres – includes lands on the south side of the Snake River below the rim from approximately Con Shea Basin upstream to Priest Ranch.
- 3) Trueblood – 306 acres – includes the majority of the Ted Trueblood Wildlife Area.

In areas designated as limited, all vehicles would remain on designated roads and trails. No cross-country travel would be allowed. The route designation process would be phased in starting with Management Area 1, followed by Management Area 2 and 3. The route designation process would work toward creating a road and trail network that would continue access to most places in the NCA, but would also reduce the road and trail density to an average of no more than 2.0 miles per square mile.

Until the route designation process is completed all vehicles must remain on existing routes as identified in the BLM Road inventory dated 2003. Any routes that were designated as closed would be rehabilitated to a natural condition.

Within areas designated as closed to motorized uses, at least 20 miles of non-motorized trails would be designated and signed to create a trail network.

Compatible Uses – The general objective to this alternative would be to provide for a diversity of resource based recreational opportunities while protecting resource values, minimizing user conflicts, and promoting public safety. While it is difficult to predict what new recreational activities may emerge over the next twenty years, this alternative attempts to be flexible to existing or future compatible recreational uses.

Recreational Shooting - Recreational shooting restrictions would be the same as described in Alternative A.

Climbing and Rappelling Rock climbing and rappelling would be prohibited within the Snake River Canyon.

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Open Fires – While specific restrictions may be imposed during high fire danger, there would be no general restrictions on open camp fires.

Commercial Uses - The NCA would be available for commercial outfitter use by special permit only.

Other activities - The use of paintball guns and equipment would continue to be prohibited within the Snake River Canyon, and within 1/4 mile of the canyon rim.

Recreational activities not specifically mentioned would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as to their compatibility with NCA Management objectives.

Environmental Education and Interpretation –The environmental education and interpretation program under Alternative D would be the same as that described in Alternative B.

2.7.15 Renewable Energy

This is covered under lands and realty

2.7.16 Transportation

This section is combined with recreation – in light of route designations we might want to rethink this. See note from recreation above.

2.7.17 Utility and Communication Corridors (Land Use Authorizations)

The oil and gas, utility, and communication industries have a continuing need to upgrade and increase their infrastructure developments. As such, BLM would continue to receive right-of-way applications for major developments, such as communication sites, electric transmission lines, oil and gas pipelines, and wind energy developments. Currently, one utility corridor crosses the extreme eastern corner of the NCA. Future right-of-way applications, however, may propose developments that have a greater impact on the NCA. It is important to identify areas where developments of this type may be compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established, and where they would be unacceptable.

Common to All Alternatives:

- € Land use authorizations would enhance or at least not adversely affect raptor populations or their habitat
- € All land use authorizations would require weed control measures.
- € To protect occupied habitat adjacent to construction activities, temporary or permanent project fencing would be required prior to the implementation of ground disturbing activities.
- € New, renewing or amending right-of-way holders or other related permit holders would be required to establish 40-60% perennial cover depending on the location of the project after all ground disturbing activities are completed.
- € Surface disturbing activities and/or human developments would be located at least 1/2 mile away from existing (occupied?) sensitive plant habitat. (Is this a set distance or dependent on the activity?)

Alternative A: Under this alternative, BLM would maintain the existing right-of-way corridor, but would designate no new corridors. The existing 43,000 acre right-of-way avoidance area in Owyhee County ([Lands Map 3](#)) would continue to be managed as such. The compatibility of right-of-way applications for major or minor developments would be evaluated on a site-specific basis as they are received.

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Management Actions:

- € Rights-of-way and permits would continue to be authorized in the NCA to the extent they are compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established.
- € Surface disturbing activities would not be authorized in areas affecting special status species unless the action could be appropriately mitigated.
- € To the extent practical, all major utility transportation systems would be located within the existing utility corridor
- € Wind energy and communication site proposals would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Alternative B:

This alternative provides for limited development, but with an emphasis on habitat protection and restoration. As such, the potential for a new right-of-way corridor would be provided south of the Snake River Canyon and roughly parallel with Highway 78. Since most of the raptor activity occurs north of the canyon, this option would cause fewer impacts to raptors and their prey than a corridor that ran north of the canyon.

Wind energy and communication sites would be limited in number and an emphasis would be placed on collocation of communication site users. Industry and cooperating government agencies have established wind classifications ranging from Class 1 (worst) to Class 7 (best). Only wind energy sites that are determined to be Class 4 or better would be considered for development.

Management Actions:

- € A 108,000 acre avoidance area would be designated along the canyon to protect the scenic values of the canyon and the nearby Oregon Trail ([Lands Map 4](#)).
- € Surface disturbing activities would not be authorized in areas affecting special status species unless the action could be appropriately mitigated.

Alternative C:

This alternative has a heavy emphasis on habitat protection and restoration. As such, BLM would maintain the existing right-of-way corridor, but would designate no new corridors. No new communications sites or wind energy projects would be allowed within the NCA.

Management Actions:

- € A 170,000 acre avoidance area would extend along the canyon from Guffey Bridge to Hammett to protect the scenic values of the canyon and the nearby Oregon Trail ([Lands Map 5](#)).

Alternative D: This alternative emphasizes habitat protection, but with an increased level of economic development. Wind energy and other energy related rights-of-way would be encouraged in cooperation with and in support of the National Energy Policy. As such, the alternative would provide for designation of a right-of-way corridor that lay north of, but parallel to the Snake River, which is the industry's preferred route. The establishment of a new corridor would not only streamline processes for use authorization, it would also protect natural resources by confining rights-of-way within a designated area, which would limit overall impacts within the NCA.

Proposals would be considered throughout the NCA for wind energy projects, communication sites, and electrical power, natural gas, and buried telecommunication utility needs.

Management Actions:

- € A new utility corridor would be designated, as shown on [Lands Map 2](#).
- € No new avoidance areas would be designated for this alternative

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Other

2.7.18 Fire Ecology

Common to All Alternatives:

Rationale, Management & Assumptions:

The current fire regime in the NCA has been drastically altered from the historic conditions, as native plants have been lost due to fire, livestock, and human disturbances. Non-native plants, including cheatgrass, have become the dominant vegetation. The competitive nature of these plants, along with their adaptations to fires which burn much more frequently than in the past, has prevented shrubs and other less fire-adapted native plants from reestablishing. Thus, a system has been perpetuated that encourages annual grasses to the detriment of shrubs. This broken system will not heal itself without direct action by BLM to treat competing weeds and annual grasses and seed perennial grasses and shrubs.

In order to conserve a dwindling ecosystem component, the remaining shrub habitat would have the highest priority for protection, after human life and property, including the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). These factors, along with firefighter and public safety, and the economic value of resources lost, would be considered when fires escape initial attack, in formulating an Appropriate Management Response (AMR). The practice of using wildland fire for resource benefit (allowing naturally-occurring fires to meet resource objectives, including hazardous fuels reduction), would not be used. However, mechanical, chemical, and biological treatments, as well as prescribed fire (when conducted under appropriate conditions), would be actively used to help restore native plant communities and reduce the size and occurrence of future wildfires. Fire suppression priorities would be as follows:

1. Threats to human life and habitations in the WUI
2. Shrub habitat and LEPA sites
3. Fire-altered areas restored with perennial grasses and shrubs
4. Fire-altered areas dominated by annual grasses (Cheatgrass)

Habitat restoration improves the overall health of the vegetation and returns the Fire Regime Condition Classes (FRCC) closer to historic states. To this end, native species would be seeded with low soil-disturbance techniques unless adapted non-native species would provide greater protection to existing habitat by thwarting invasive species or providing improved fire resistance, while meeting the needs of raptors and their prey base.

Alternative A: Native vegetation loss due to fire has been severe in the NCA with the effect of diminishing the habitat for small animals that birds of prey hunt. The remaining sagebrush habitat in the NCA supports a substantial amount of the remaining slickspot peppergrass populations. Due to the need to actively preserve existing slickspot peppergrass communities, the objective for fire suppression in slickspot peppergrass Management Areas ([Veg Map 5](#)) is to keep 90% of fires to less than 100 acres. Ninety percent of fires in the rest of the NCA would be kept to 200 acres or less. The goal of this alternative is to allow no more than 50,000 additional acres of shrub habitat to burn over the 20 year life of the plan. High-risk areas would be determined by the threat(s) to human or animal habitat, as well as whether the area(s) lies within a designated slickspot peppergrass Management Area.

Alternative B: In Alternative B, the objective for fire suppression in slickspot peppergrass Management Areas ([Veg Map 5](#)) is to keep 90% of fires to less than 100 acres. Ninety percent of fires in the rest of the NCA would be kept to 200 acres or less. The goal of this alternative is to allow no more than 30,000 additional acres of shrub habitat to burn over the 20 year life of the plan. The historic role of fire would be restored on up to 2000 acres. High-risk areas would be determined by the threat(s) to human or animal habitat, as well as whether the area(s) lies within a designated slickspot peppergrass Management Area.

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Alternative C: Alternative C is similar to Alternative B, but with more aggressive management. The alternative would allow no more than 15,000 acres to burn, and would quadruple the acres of habitat restored. The increase in fire protection would result in a reduced loss of important shrub habitat, as well as fewer impacts to slickspot peppergrass management areas. At the same time, restoring 8000 acres to a more historical fire regime would help to protect and offset future losses, by replacing very flammable vegetation that is adapted to frequent fires with vegetation that is more resilient to fire disturbance and adapted to the historic (less frequent) fire regime.

Alternative D: This alternative is the same as Alternative B.

2.7.19 Special Designations

2.7.19.1 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

See Recreation Section

2.7.19.2 National Trails

This info is included in the Recreation section.

2.7.19.3 Wild and Scenic Rivers

This info is included in the Recreation section.

2.7.19.4 Wilderness

NOTE: The Affected Environment discusses the legislative language that makes the wilderness question moot. Therefore, there will be no wilderness section.

2.7.20 Social and Economic Conditions

2.7.20.1 Social and Economic

Common to All Alternatives:

Rationale, Management & Assumptions:

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA: P.L. 94-579) directs the Bureau of Land Management to manage the public lands for multiple use purposes. This includes the commercial and non commercial uses of natural resources for the welfare of the public and the environment. This mandate, however, was modified by the 1993 NCA-enabling legislation (PL 103-64), which requires BLM to provide for a multitude of uses, so long as each authorized use is determined to be compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established. The legislation, however, specifically withdrew the area from certain activities, including: 1) entry, appropriation, or disposal under the public land laws, 2) mining claim location, 3) mineral and geothermal leasing, and 4) mineral material disposal, with the exception that mineral materials could continue to be made available from existing sites to the extent compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established..

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Alternative A: Maintain current commercial activities on the NCA as presently allocated.

Objective: Continue to provide opportunities for commercial utilization of natural resources at the current levels, including livestock grazing, mineral material extraction, transportation, and transmission corridors to maintain interstate and intrastate commerce, military training, recreation opportunities, and other potential developments to facilitate economic growth.

Alternative B: Maintain commercial activities on the NCA, accompanied with increased habitat restoration activities.

Objective: Continue to provide opportunities for commercial utilization of natural resources, as described in Alternative A, but with some limitations due to expanded habitat protection and rehabilitation requirements. Expend resources to improve the landscape and have an expanded presence on the NCA.

Alternative C: Resource protection and increased levels of habitat restoration would take precedence over commercial activities and other non commercial human uses of the NCA.

Objective: Fully protect natural resource values. Opportunities for commercial uses would be restricted or limited where they conflict with this objective.

Alternative D: Maintain traditional uses and expand commercial activities in the NCA.

Objective: Increase opportunities for commercial utilization of natural resources (new utility corridors, more acres open to OHV use, more intensive livestock grazing for fuels reduction purposes, use of local contracting for habitat restoration, etc.).

2.7.20.2 Hazardous Materials

Common to All Alternatives:

€ Protect human health and safety and prevent environmental damage from hazardous materials.

Rationale: The Secretary's waste management initiative commits the BLM to reducing hazardous material situations on public lands. Federal agencies are required to comply with all federal and State laws, regulations and policies regarding hazardous materials on public lands. These include:

- € Resource Conservation and Recover Act (RCRA), as amended 1976/1980 (42 USC 6901f).
- € Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) 1980 (42 USC 9601f).
- € Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) 1987 (33 USC 1251-1387).
- € Clean Air Act, as amended 1977/1990 (42 USC 7418).
- € Federal Land Policy and Management Act, as amended 1976 (43 USC 1701f).

Management common to all alternatives:

Reduce the occurrence of unlawful disposal of hazardous materials on public lands through education, law enforcement, and cost recovery. Utilize educational programs for public awareness of the impacts of hazardous materials on health and safety and the environment. Law enforcement would be utilized for investigation and apprehension, which would aid in the cost recovery phase of these actions. All authorizations providing for the use or storage of, or the potential for, hazardous materials would include special stipulations to assure human and natural resource safety. All hazardous material incidents would be responded to in a timely and efficient manner that provides for human safety and environmental protection.

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Land use would be authorized and managed so as to reduce the occurrence and severity of hazardous material incidences on public lands and to minimize human health threats and natural resource risks from hazardous material contamination and associated actions.

The hazardous materials program would be managed in the same general manner in all alternatives in accordance with policies, laws, and regulations. Consequently, the hazardous materials program will not be addressed again in other alternatives.