

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The Headwaters Resource Management Plan (RMP) is being prepared for one fundamental purpose: to provide a comprehensive framework for managing and allocating public land and resources in the Headwaters Resource Area during the next 10 or more years. This document includes both a proposed RMP (the preferred alternative) and a draft EIS addressing future management of the approximately 311,337 surface acres, and 655,505 acres of federal mineral estate, that are administered by the BLM through its Butte District and Headwaters Resource Area offices in Montana (see the Headwaters Resource Area Location map).

The contents of this plan are focused on resolving eleven key issues (see Chapter One). In addition, several statutory or court-ordered requirements will be met upon final approval of the decisions proposed in this document. As required under Section 603 of FLPMA this document analyzes preliminary wilderness suitability recommendations for all wilderness study areas located in the Headwaters Resource Area. For these wilderness study areas, the RMP will make only preliminary recommendations as to whether they are suitable or unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. These recommendations will be reported through the Director of the BLM, the Secretary of the Interior, and the President, to Congress. Final suitable or unsuitable decisions for the WSAs can only be made by Congress. In addition, three areas are being studied for wilderness under authority of Section 202 of FLPMA. If any of these areas are recommended as

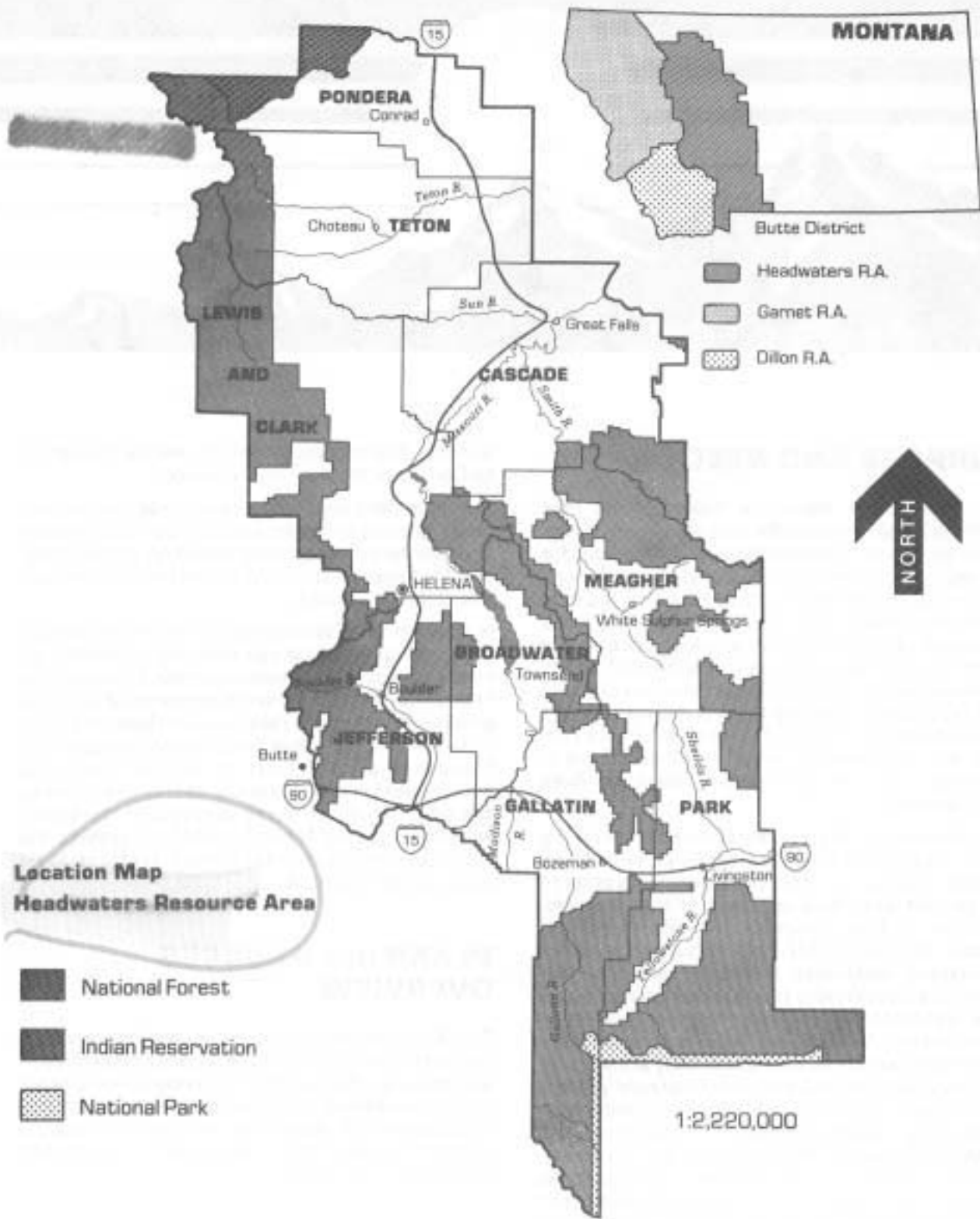
suitable, the recommendations will be forwarded to Congress for their final decision.

The document also analyzes alternatives for livestock grazing on public land, as required under a court-ordered agreement based on a 1973 lawsuit filed against the BLM by the Natural Resources Defense Council.

In addition, this planning action serves to consolidate and update land use planning guidance currently contained in eleven separate Management Framework Plans that were prepared prior to the establishment of the Headwaters Resource Area in 1976. In some cases the existing management framework plans consist of partially completed documents which were never formally adopted by the BLM. Thus, for some portions of the Headwaters Resource Area, this RMP will provide the first comprehensive management guidance to be approved by the BLM.

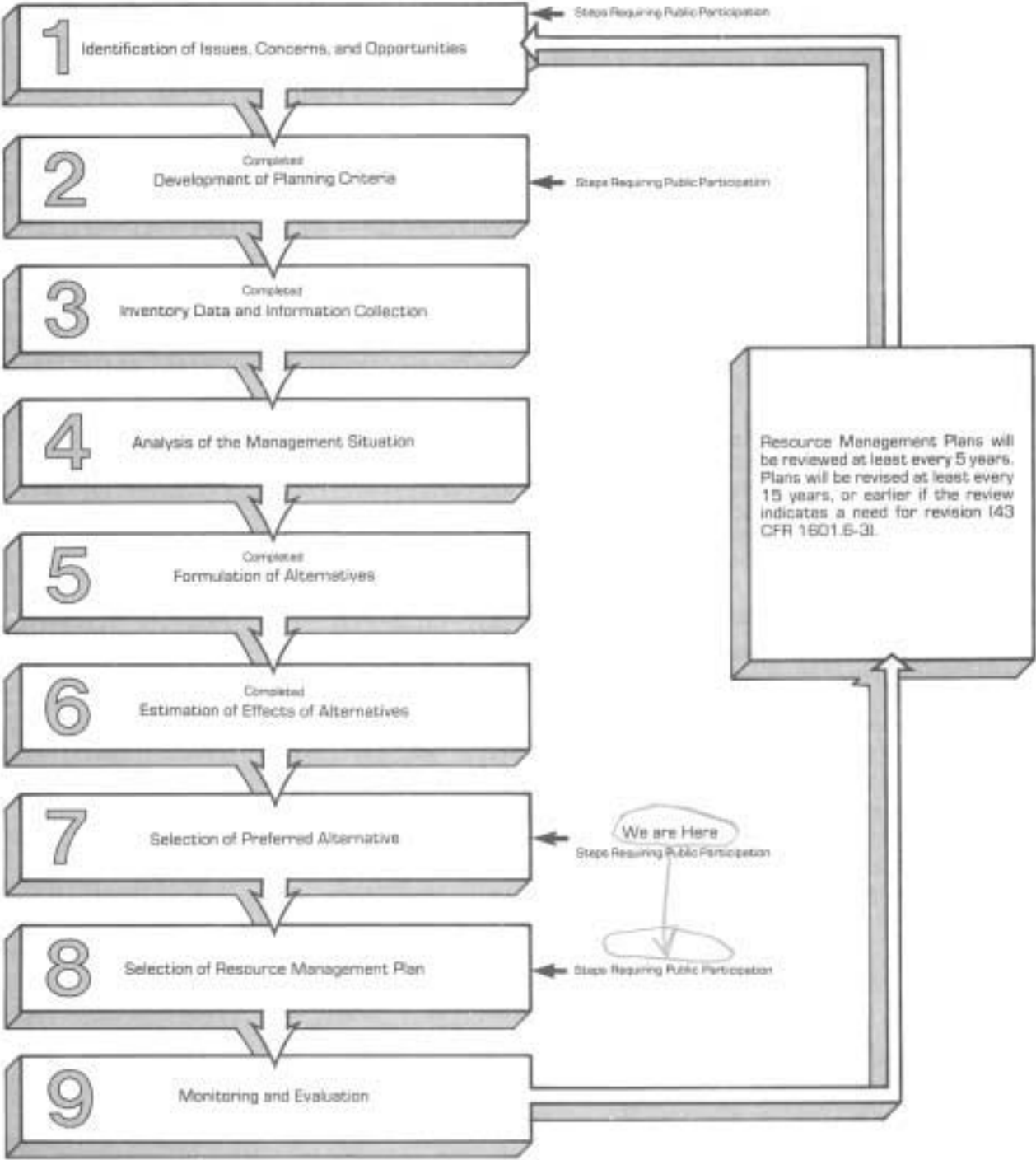
## **PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW**

The BLM resource management planning process consists of nine basic steps (we are now at Step 7) and requires the use of an interdisciplinary team for the completion of each step. The planning steps described in the regulations and used in preparing this plan are described below and are graphically summarized in Figure I-1.



**FIGURE I-1**

**Steps in the Resource Management Planning Process**



## INTRODUCTION

### **Step 1. Identification of Issues**

This step is intended to identify resource management problems or conflicts that can be resolved through the planning process.

### **Step 2. Development of Planning Criteria**

During this step preliminary decisions are made regarding the kinds of information needed to clarify the issues, the kinds of alternatives to be developed, and the factors to be considered in evaluating alternatives and selecting a preferred resource management plan.

### **Step 3. Inventory Data and Information Collection**

This step involves the collection of various kinds of issue-related resource, environmental, social, economic, or institutional data needed for completion of the process.

### **Step 4. Analysis of the Management Situation**

This step calls for a deliberate assessment of the current situation. It includes a description of current BLM management guidance, a discussion of existing problems and opportunities for solving them, and a consolidation of existing data that is needed to analyze and resolve the identified issues.

### **Step 5. Formulation of Alternatives**

During this step several complete, reasonable resource management alternatives are prepared; including one for no action and several that strive to resolve the issues while placing emphasis either on environmental protection or resource production.

### **Step 6. Estimation of Effects of Alternatives**

The physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing each alternative are estimated in order to allow for a comparative evaluation of impacts.

### **Step 7. Selection of the Preferred Alternative**

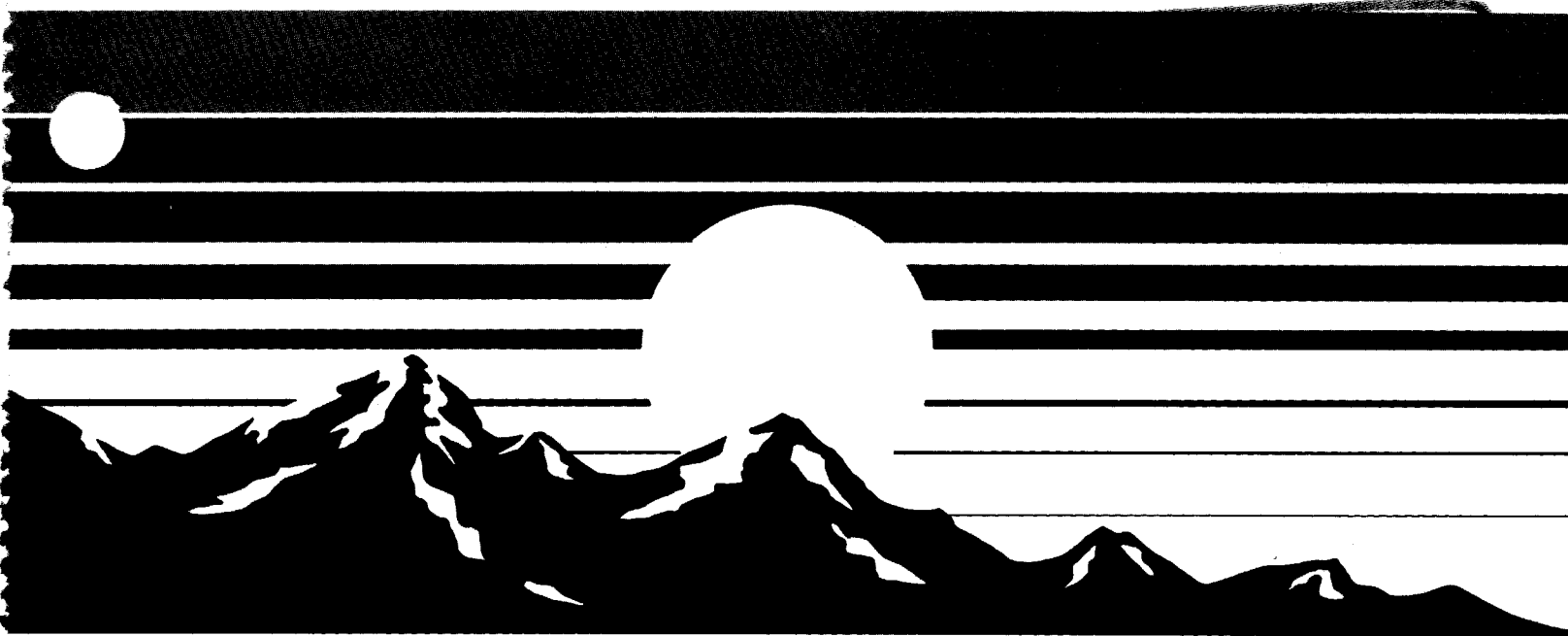
Based on the information generated during Step 6, the District Manager identifies a preferred alternative. The draft RMP/EIS document is then prepared and distributed for public review.

### **Step 8. Selection of the Resource Management Plan**

Based on the results of public review and comment, the District Manager will select a proposed resource management plan and publish it along with a final EIS. A final decision is made after a thirty-day appeal period on the final EIS.

### **Step 9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

This step involves the collection and analysis of long-term resource condition and trend data to determine the effectiveness of the plan in resolving the identified issues, and to assure that implementation of the plan is achieving the desired results. Monitoring continues from the time the RMP is adopted until changing conditions require a revision of the whole plan or any portion of it.



## **ISSUE-DRIVEN PLANNING**

The BLM planning regulations generally equate land use planning with problem solving, or, in other words, with issue resolution. An issue may be defined as an opportunity, conflict, or problem regarding the use or management of public lands and resources. Obviously not all issues are capable of resolution through land use planning, but may instead require changes in policy, budgets, or legislation.

As a practical matter, issue-driven planning means that only those aspects of current management direction that are felt to be at issue are examined through the formulation and evaluation of alternatives. Alternatives are not developed for those aspects of current management direction that are felt to be satisfactory.

## **ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE HEADWATERS RMP**

Eleven issues are addressed in this document. These issues were identified based on the judgment of planning team members, interagency consultation, public input, and review by BLM managers.



### Issue 1: Oil and Gas Leasing and Development

Special attention is needed in the Rocky Mountain Front to reduce the likelihood of future conflicts between oil and gas activities and other important resource uses and values. The principal considerations in the Rocky Mountain Front include grizzly bear, wolf, bighorn sheep, mule deer, and elk habitats, and social and economic values. Needed decisions include:

What public land should be made available for oil and gas leasing and development?

What special stipulations would be needed to accommodate such use?



### Issue 2: Grazing Allotment and Riparian Habitat Management

Management changes appear to be needed in some livestock grazing allotments in order to reduce conflicts between livestock grazing and other important resource uses and values. Such conflicts typically involve elk and mule deer habitat, riparian areas, and/or sensitive watersheds. In the Rocky Mountain Front, grizzly bear and bighorn sheep habitats are also resources of special concern. Riparian habitat is considered particularly important because of its relationship to watershed protection, water quality, fisheries habitat, and terrestrial wildlife habitat diversity. Resolution of this issue should satisfy the requirements of the court-ordered agreement between the BLM and the Natural Resource Defense Council, thus responding to litigation filed in 1973. Needed decisions include:

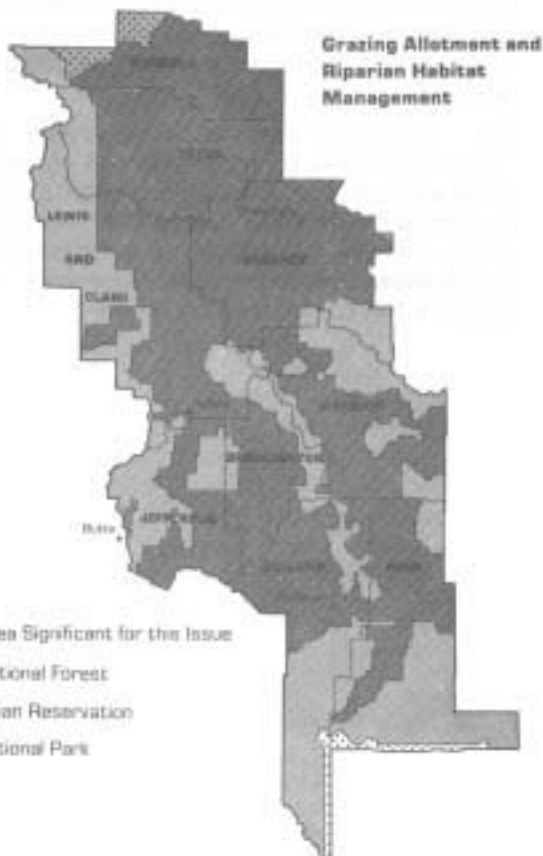
How should grazing allotments be categorized for selective management?

What allotment-specific objectives should be established to guide future grazing management decisions?

Which allotments will require further activity planning, such as allotment management plans, and according to what priorities?

What short-term adjustments in livestock forage allocations may be needed to meet management objectives?

What condition objectives should be established for riparian habitat areas?



### Issue 3: Wilderness Study Recommendations

The Headwaters Resource Area includes two BLM Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and three other areas being studied for possible wilderness designation. All areas must be studied through the BLM planning process to determine whether they are to be recommended to Congress as suitable or unsuitable for designation as wilderness. Primary considerations include the protection of wilderness values, manageability, and the value of the energy, mineral, range, timber, and recreation resources in the areas. Needed decisions include:

How much of the public land in each area should be recommended to Congress as suitable for wilderness designation?

How will each area be managed if it is not designated as wilderness?

### Issue 4: Forest Management

Special attention is needed to identify portions of the Headwaters Resource Area that are suitable for producing forest products, and to assure that other important resource uses and values are adequately protected. Principal considerations include areas being studied for wilderness; grizzly bear, elk, moose, and mule deer habitat; recreation values; sensitive watersheds; land ownership pattern; and timber values. Needed decisions include:

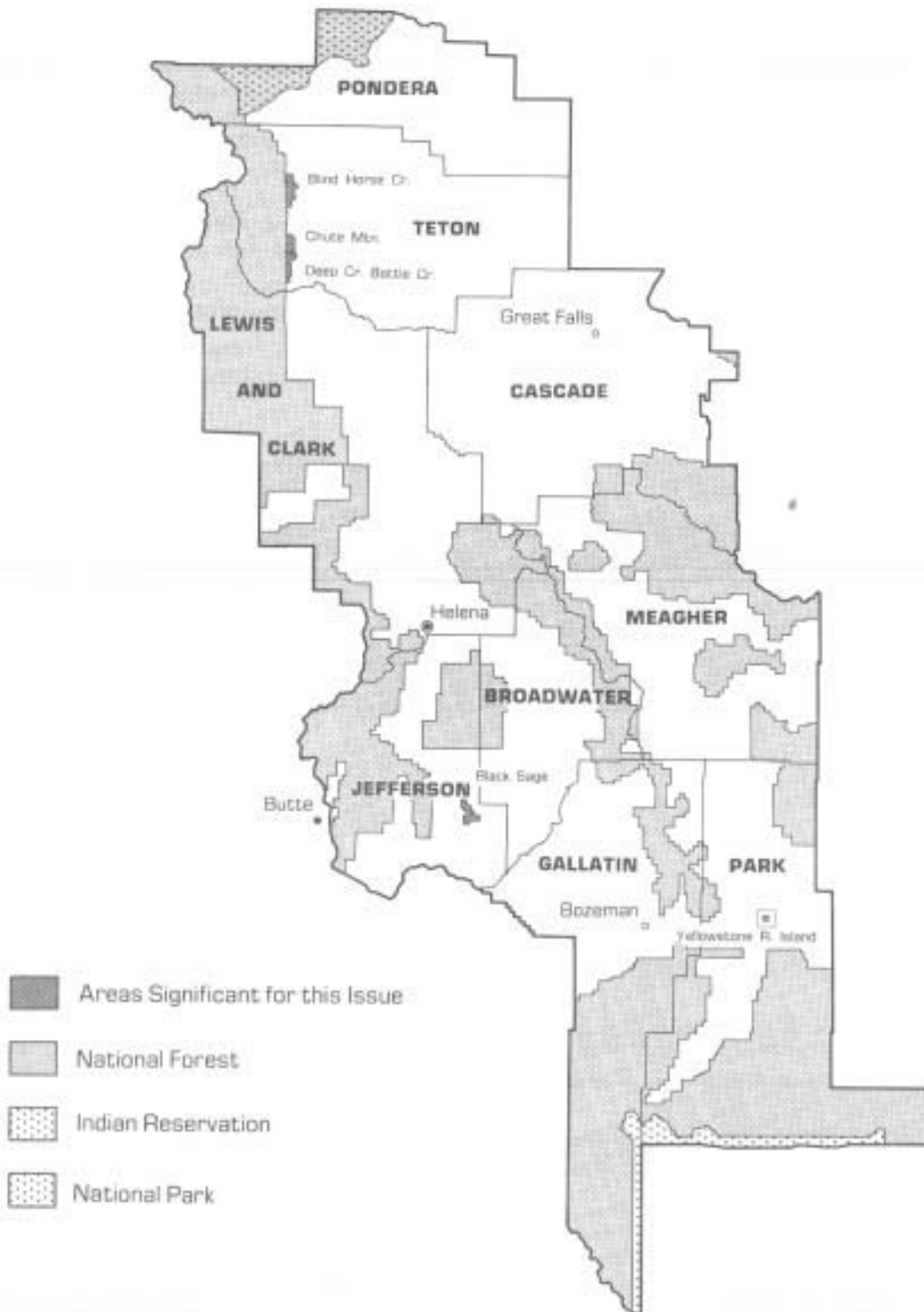
What public land should be made available for the harvest of forest products?

What stipulations and support actions would be needed to accommodate such use?

What areas will require further activity planning, such as compartment management plans?

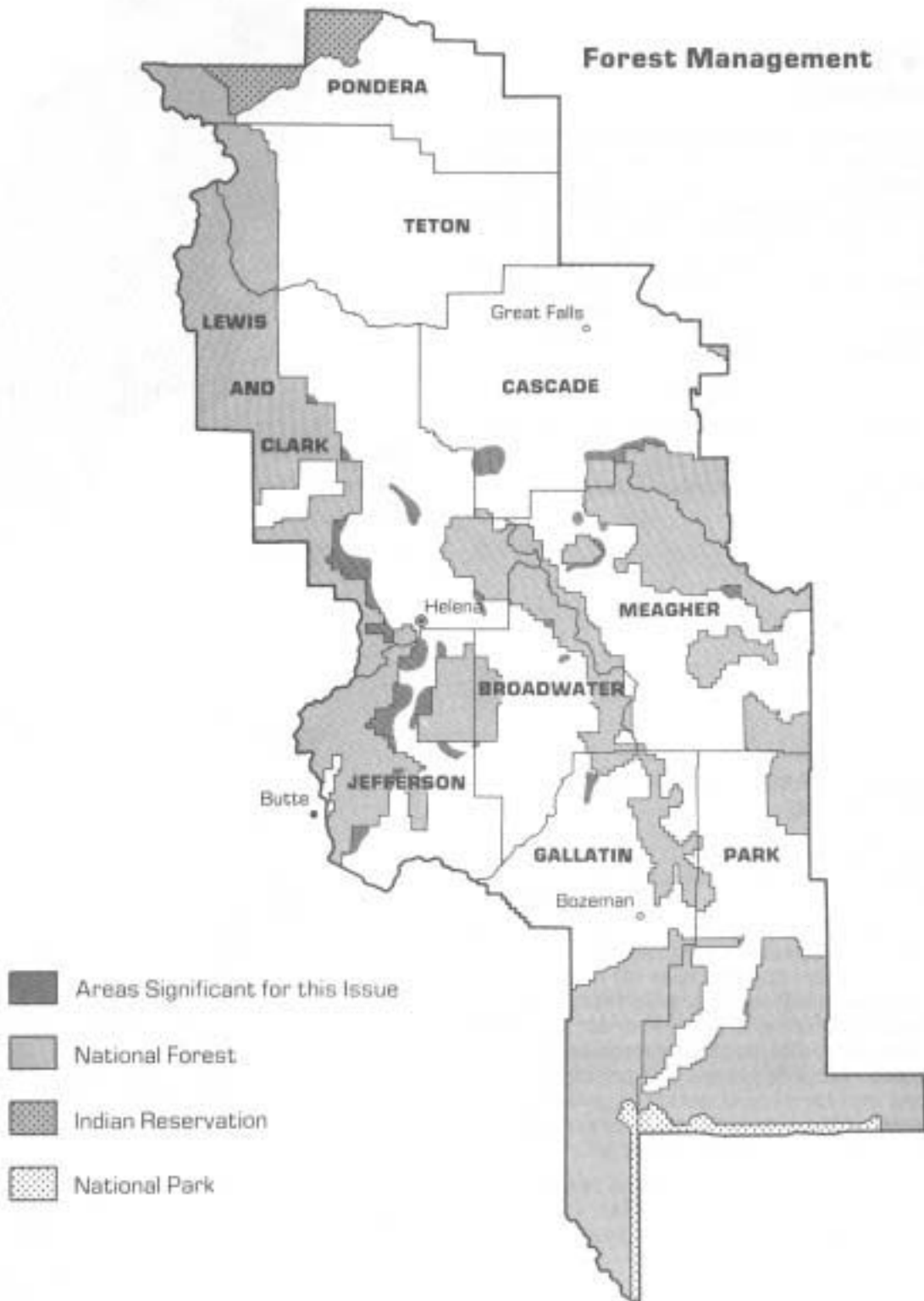


## Wilderness Study Recommendations





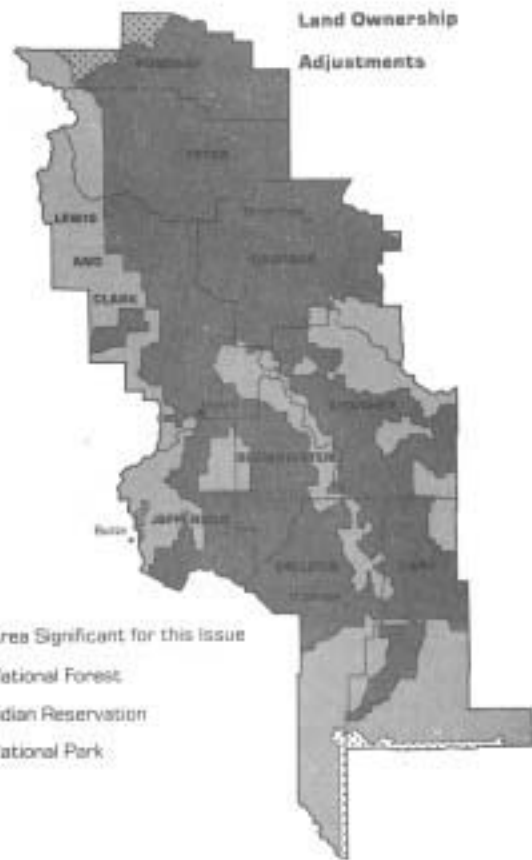
## Forest Management



### Issue 5: Land Ownership Adjustments

Special attention is needed to identify those portions of the Headwaters Resource Area where land ownership adjustments are needed to achieve more efficient management and utilization of public resources. Adjustments include exchanges, sales, transfers, and acquisition. Principal considerations include public resource values, current use, location, proximity to other agencies, manageability, and compatibility with adjacent land uses. Needed decisions include:

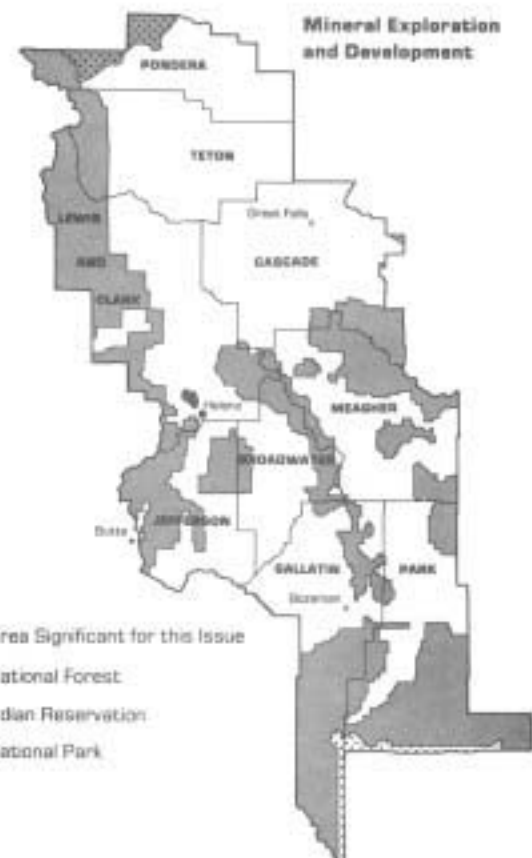
- What public land should be disposed of?
- What land should be retained in public ownership?
- What land requires further study?



### Issue 6: Mineral Exploration and Development

Special attention is needed to reduce, if possible, the potential for future impacts from mining on other important resource values in the Scratchgravel Hills. The BLM presently has only limited authority to regulate mining activity on mining claims. However, opportunities do exist to withdraw certain public land in the Scratchgravel Hills from additional mineral entry in order to protect groundwater quality, open-space values, and other important resource values. The principal considerations include mineral potential, water quality, visual resources, property values, and other open-space values. The decision needed is:

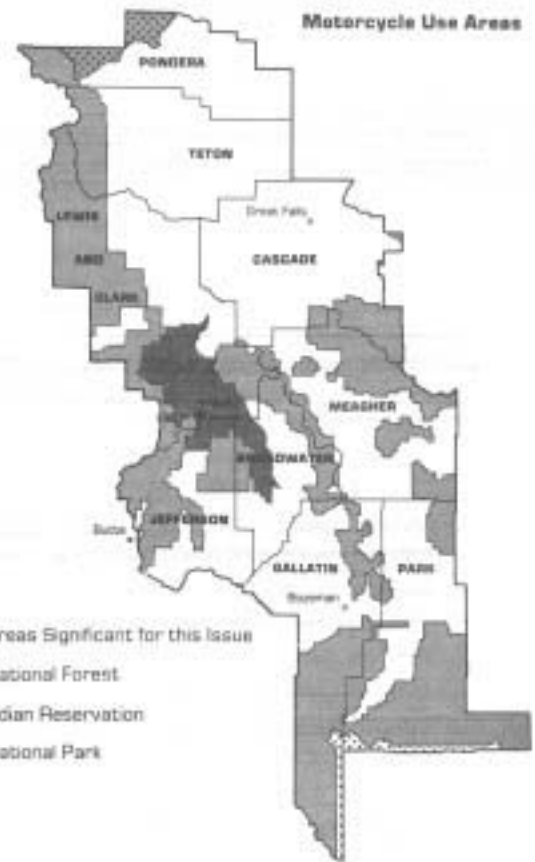
- What public land, if any, should be withdrawn from mineral entry in order to protect groundwater quality and open-space and other resource values?



### Issue 7: Motorcycle Use Areas

The demand for motorcycle race areas in the Helena Valley and the Limestone Hills appears to be high. Public land could be used to accommodate at least part of such demand. However, off-road motorcycle use in certain areas could result in unacceptable impacts to wildlife habitat, watershed values, other public land users, and adjacent residential and agricultural property owners. Special attention is needed to identify, if possible, appropriate motorcycle use areas on public land in the Helena Valley and the Limestone Hills. Primary considerations include sensitive watersheds, wildlife habitat, compatibility with adjoining land uses, and conflicts with other users. Specific areas of use or interest include the Scratchgravel Hills, Hilger Hills, Spokane Hills, Montana City, Marysville, and the Limestone Hills. The decision needed is:

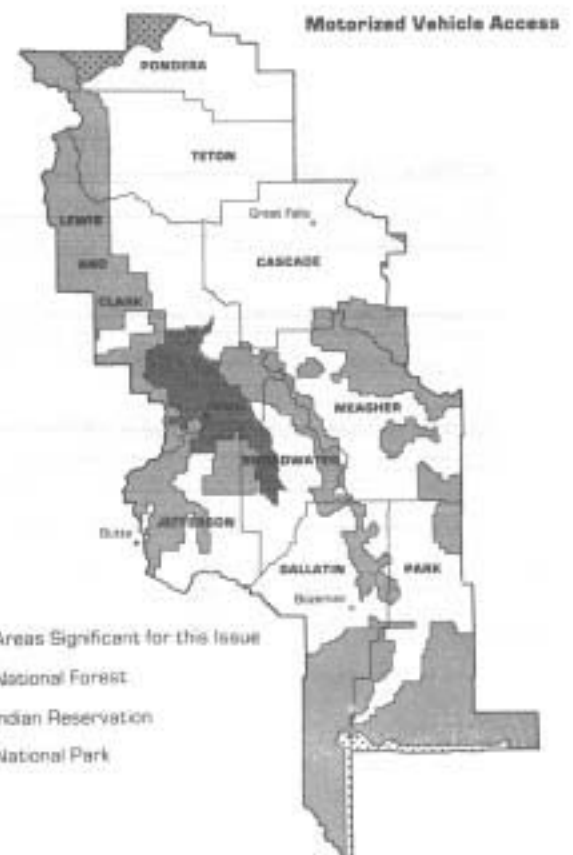
How should public land be allocated for motorcycle racing?



### Issue 8: Motorized Vehicle Access

In portions of the Limestone Hills and the Helena Valley, current levels of motorized vehicle use are resulting in conflicts with wildlife, range users, and adjacent landowners. Special attention is needed to identify appropriate levels of motorized access for these areas. Principal considerations include sensitive watersheds, wildlife habitat, compatibility with adjoining land uses, and conflicts with other users. Specific areas of concern include the Scratchgravel Hills, Hilger Hills, and Limestone Hills. The decision needed is:

Which public land, if any, should be designated as restricted or closed to motorized vehicle access?



### Issue 9: Utility and Transportation Corridors

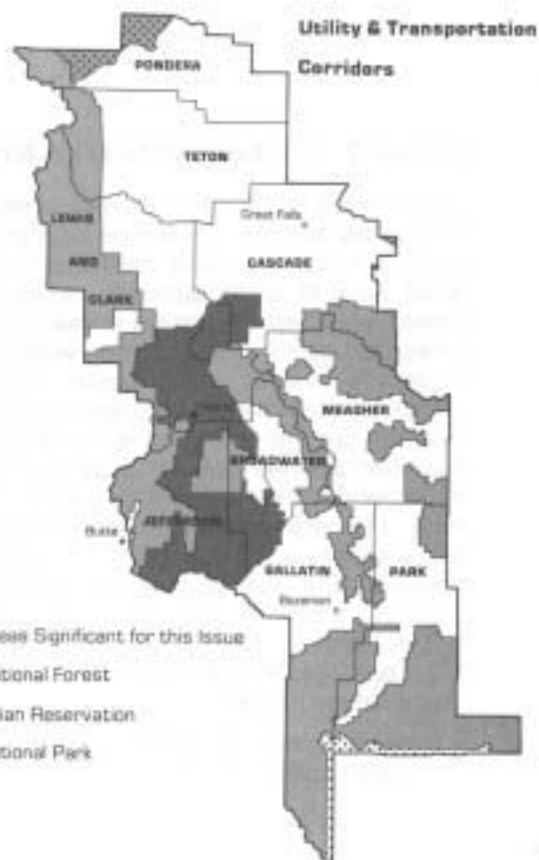
Special attention is needed to assure that development of linear energy and transportation facilities does not result in undesirable impacts to other important resource uses and values, and also to assure that public land located in the logical path of such development remains available for use. The primary areas of interest include the Sleeping Giant and Devils Kitchen areas, the Helena Valley, and Jefferson and western Broadwater counties. Principal considerations include visual and recreation resources, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness values, and compatibility with adjoining land uses. The decisions needed include:

What public land should be excluded from future routing of major utility and transportation corridors?

What public land should be avoided, if possible, during future routing of major utility and transportation corridors?

What special stipulations would be necessary if such avoidance areas were to be crossed?

What public land should remain available for future corridor development?

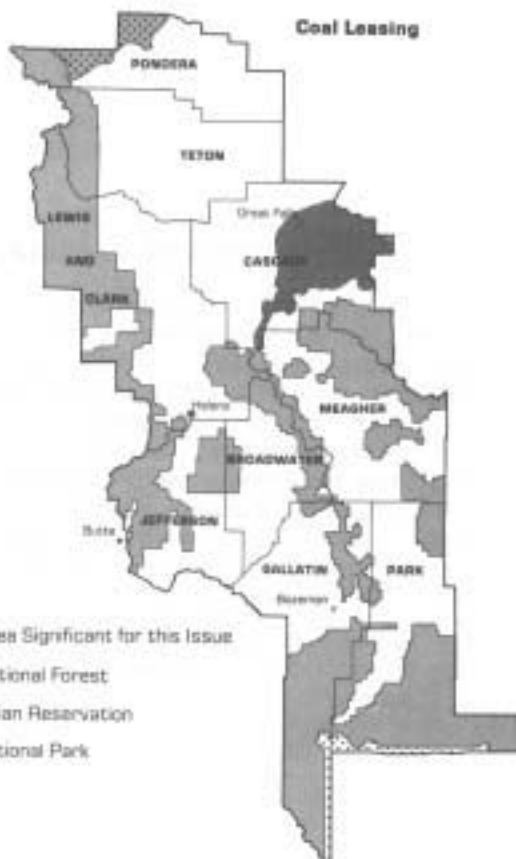


- Area Significant for this Issue
- National Forest
- ▨ Indian Reservation
- ▨ National Park

### Issue 10: Coal Leasing

Special attention is needed to determine the suitability of federal coal for possible future consideration of coal leasing in the Great Falls Coal Field. This area has been subject to underground mining in the past, and could be a source of fuel for a coal-fired power plant expected to be built in the Great Falls area during the next decade. Principal considerations include wildlife habitat, recreation values along the Smith River, and social and economic values. The decision needed is:

What portion of the Great Falls Coal Field should be made available for further consideration of coal leasing?



- Area Significant for this Issue
- National Forest
- ▨ Indian Reservation
- ▨ National Park

**Issue 11: Special Designations**

Public land and resources along the Rocky Mountain Front and in the Sleeping Giant area may warrant special management attention and public recognition through such special designations as Area of Critical Environmental Concern and Outstanding Natural Area. Principal considerations include the effects such designations would have in providing additional management emphasis for the protection of important surface values (primarily wildlife and recreation) and the possible loss of resource development opportunities. Needed decisions include:

Which public land, if any, should be included within a special designation?

How should such areas be managed?

**PLANNING CRITERIA**

Planning criteria were developed and revised at several points during the planning process to assure that the planning steps were focused on the issues. Planning criteria were used to guide

resource inventories, to establish an outline for the management situation analysis, to aid in formulating alternatives, and to highlight factors to be considered in evaluating alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative.

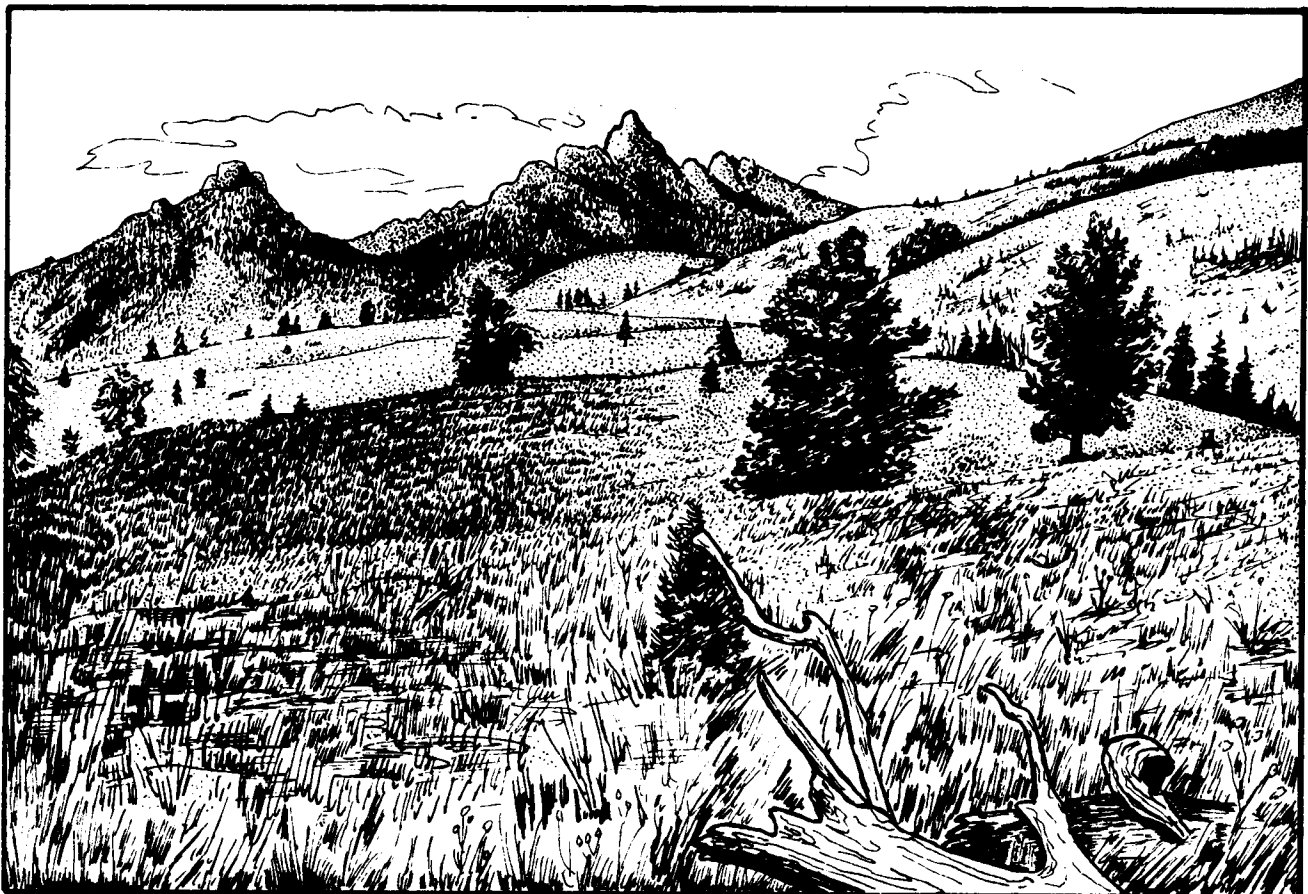
The various criteria used are available for review at the Headwaters Resource Area office.

**Alternative Formulation Criteria**

The criteria developed for alternative formulation are as follows:

All alternatives will assume a continuation of oil and gas leasing as recommended in the Butte District Oil and Gas Environmental Assessment. However, the level of leasing and the kinds of stipulations required may be different.

All alternatives for the Rocky Mountain Front will provide at least minimum levels of protection for the habitat of threatened and endangered species, as required by the Endangered Species Act.



### Special Designations



All alternatives will assume a continuation of existing interagency cooperative agreements.

At least one alternative will be developed that ensures that sufficient forage is available on grizzly bear spring/summer habitat and bighorn sheep winter/spring habitat to maintain or achieve at least a satisfactory habitat rating.

At least one alternative will be developed that strives to maintain or improve crucial wildlife habitat and to minimize disruptions to existing livestock operators.

At least one alternative will consider increasing livestock use in those allotments that have additional forage available after other consumptive and nonconsumptive needs have been met.

The no action alternative, which constitutes the existing management direction, will be considered the initial proposed action for livestock grazing in all allotments. The BLM's preferred alternative, which is based on rangeland monitoring and consultation with permittees, may differ from the initial proposed action (no action alternative).

Three alternatives will be considered in detail for each area being studied for wilderness—all wilderness, no wilderness, and no action.

All alternatives will, at a minimum, provide for maintaining riparian habitat in current condition.

At least one alternative will be developed with the objective of improving unsatisfactory riparian habitat conditions to satisfactory, to the extent practicable.

All alternatives will be reasonable and attainable.

At least one alternative will be developed which addresses the following land ownership adjustments:

- retention of public land in the Rocky Mountain Front and Limestone Hills,
- retention and/or acquisition of land in Jefferson and western Broadwater counties and the Sleeping Giant area, and
- disposal of scattered tracts with low resource values.

At least one alternative will consider a mineral withdrawal in the Scratchgravel Hills to reduce the potential for future impacts from mining on other resources.

At least one alternative will strive to balance the need for motorcycle race areas with protection of other resource uses and values.

At least one alternative will strive to balance the need for motorized access with protection of other resource uses and values.

At least one alternative will strive to balance the need for corridor development with the protection of other resources and values.

All alternatives will assume continued National Guard use at existing levels.

At least one alternative will be based on application of the coal unsuitability criteria, multiple use conflict resolution, and social and economic considerations regarding development of federal coal in the Great Falls Coal Field.

### Evaluation Criteria

The criteria that were used to evaluate alternatives are as follows:

- social and economic impacts;

- consistency with federal, state, and local plans;

- management efficiency or effectiveness;

- availability of public land for use and development;

- availability of public land for use and development, including:

- oil and gas leasing,
- livestock forage allocations,
- locatable minerals,
- timber harvest,
- utility and transportation corridors, and
- coal leasing;

- impacts on surface values:

- wildlife habitat condition,
- wilderness characteristics,
- watershed/water quality,
- range vegetation condition, and
- recreation opportunities;

- compatibility with adjoining land uses; and
- implementation requirements.