

SUMMARY

This draft Headwaters Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) addresses future management options for approximately 311,337 surface acres and 655,505 acres of federal mineral estate administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through its Headwaters Resource Area office in Butte, Montana. The Headwaters Resource Area encompasses nine counties in west-central Montana—Broadwater, Cascade, Gallatin, Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, Meagher, Park, Pondera, and Teton.

When completed, the Headwaters RMP will provide a comprehensive framework for managing and allocating public land and resources in the resource area during the next ten or more years. However, the contents of this RMP/EIS document are primarily focused on resolving eleven key resource management issues. These issues are: oil and gas leasing and development, particularly along the Rocky Mountain Front; grazing allotment and riparian habitat management; wilderness study recommendations; forest management; land ownership adjustments; mineral exploration and development, particularly within the Scratchgravel Hills; motorcycle use areas; motorized vehicle access; utility and transportation corridors; coal leasing in the Great Falls Coal Field; and special designations, such as Outstanding Natural Areas.

Four RMP alternatives are considered in detail in this document. One represents no action, which means a continuation of present management direction. The other three alternatives provide a range of choices from those favoring resource protection to those favoring resource production.

The preferred alternative, which is the proposed Resource Management Plan, incorporates portions of the no action, protection, and production alternatives, and generally represents a balance between resource production and environmental protection. The allocations or outputs and environmental consequences that characterize each alternative are summarized below.

ALTERNATIVE A

Alternative A is the preferred alternative.

Under Alternative A, oil and gas leasing and development would be permitted on 99,700 acres of federal mineral estate along the Rocky Mountain Front (84% of the total acreage available for consideration in that area), and on approximately 634,607 acres of federal mineral estate within

the entire resource area (97% of the total). Oil and gas leasing and development within specific portions of the Rocky Mountain Front area would be subject to seasonal restrictions (49,500 acres) and to no surface occupancy stipulations (14,040 acres) to protect important grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat, and to prevent surface disturbance in the proposed Outstanding Natural Areas. Approximately 18,550 acres would not be available for leasing because of no surface occupancy restrictions that effectively prohibit oil and gas development. The remaining 36,160 acres along the Rocky Mountain Front would be leased subject only to standard stipulations.

Authorized livestock use in the resource area would be targeted for reductions in 19 allotments, for increases in 7 allotments, and for no change in 301 allotments. Target levels of adjusted livestock use would be based on range condition ratings and the Soil Conservation Service's *Montana Grazing Guides*. The net result of all adjustments in the resource area would be a 2,204 AUM (7%) short-term reduction in current authorized livestock use. In the long term, livestock use would be expected to increase to 33,417 AUMs, or 6% above current levels.

The estimated range improvements required to implement this alternative include: 2,560 acres of reseeding, 300 acres of prescribed burning, 62.2 miles of fence construction, 21 spring developments, 23.5 miles of pipeline, 20 stock tanks, 467.5 acres of noxious weed control, 11 cattle-guards, and 5 other water developments. The estimated initial cost for all improvements is \$449,331.

This alternative would result in a significant long-term improvement in ecological range condition. The percentage of the resource area in good and excellent condition would increase from 57% to 75%, while fair and poor condition ratings would decrease from 43% to 25%.

The long-term effect of this alternative on riparian habitat would be to increase the mileage of stream banks in satisfactory riparian condition from the current 104 miles to 123 miles.

None of the five areas currently under wilderness study would be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation. However, three of the areas (Blind Horse Creek, Chute Mountain, and Deep Creek/Battle Creek), comprising 11,218 acres, would be proposed for Outstanding Natural Area designation and would be managed essentially as wilderness.

Forest resources under this alternative would be managed essentially as they are at present. The estimated potential timber yield for the resource area would remain at 26.45 million board feet per decade, well above the average actual harvest rate of approximately 1 million board feet per decade. Most of the public land in the resource area would be available for forest management activities; the only areas to be set aside from such activities would be the four proposed Outstanding Natural Areas along the Rocky Mountain Front, the proposed Sleeping Giant Area of Critical Environmental Concern, the Scratchgravel Hills, and the Yellowstone River Island. Commercial forestland in the Eightmile Creek, Elkhorn, Boulder-Clancy, Marysville, and Rogers Pass areas would receive the highest priority for forest management activities. Special harvest restrictions would be applied in key elk seasonal use areas.

Under Alternative A, the land ownership adjustment issue would be resolved by establishing priority areas for retention and acquisition, disposal, and further study. Approximately 282,283 acres of public land within retention areas would remain in public ownership and be managed by the BLM. Approximately 25,637 acres of public land within disposal areas would be available for disposal through sales and/or exchanges. The remaining 3,417 acres of public land within further study areas would not be prioritized at this time. All subsequent site-specific decisions regarding land ownership adjustments would be made based on criteria identified in the plan.

Future investments in public facilities and improvements, including land and access acquisition, generally would receive highest priority in retention areas. In the long term, Alternative A would result in a minor overall improvement in the land ownership pattern and the legal accessibility of public land in the resource area.

Mineral exploration and development in the resource area would not be significantly affected under this alternative. The withdrawal review program would continue, resulting in a projected future decrease of 11,587 acres of public land withdrawn from mineral entry. Approximately 613,486 acres (94%) of federal minerals in the resource area would be available for mineral entry and development in the long term.

Under this alternative, approximately 77,203 acres of public land, including the Scratchgravel Hills and the Limestone Hills, would be closed to organized motorcycle events. Approximately 234,134 acres, including the Hilger Hills, Spokane Hills, and Marysville areas, would remain available for further consideration. Applications for motorcycle events on public land within areas identified

as available for further consideration would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis using criteria provided in the plan. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for organized motorcycle events.

Alternative A would identify approximately 219,404 acres of public land as priority areas for motorized vehicle access restrictions, and 12,058 acres would be closed yearlong to motorized vehicle access. The remaining 79,875 acres would be open without restrictions. Public land within priority areas for restrictions generally will receive priority attention during travel planning. Specific roads, trails, or portions of such areas may be closed seasonally or yearlong to all or specific types of motorized vehicle use. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific motorized vehicle access decisions. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for motorized vehicle access.

The utility and transportation corridor issue would be resolved by identifying approximately 74,489 acres of public land as avoidance areas, and 952 acres as windows. The remaining 235,896 acres of public land in the resource area would remain available for further consideration. Public land within avoidance areas generally would not be available for corridor development; public land within windows would be available. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific decisions regarding corridor development.

The preferred alternative would make all federal coal in the Great Falls Coal Field available for further consideration for leasing, pending further study. Approximately 25,452 acres of federal minerals, containing an estimated 125.6 million short tons of coal, would be affected. Approximately 1,755 acres would be identified for no surface occupancy to protect public roads, rights-of-way, and important wildlife habitat. All coal would be extracted by using underground mining methods.

Four Outstanding Natural Areas would be designated along the Rocky Mountain Front—Blind Horse Creek, Ear Mountain, Chute Mountain, and Deep Creek/Battle Creek. These four areas, comprising 12,058 acres of public land, would be managed to protect wildlife habitat, scenery, and other surface resource values from disturbance. In addition, 11,609 acres of public land in the Sleeping Giant area would be designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and would be managed with primary emphasis on the protection and enhancement of wildlife and recreation values. All remaining public land in the resource

area, totalling 287,670 acres, would continue to be managed without special designation.

Air quality would not be significantly affected by this alternative, watershed conditions would improve moderately, and water quality would increase slightly in the long term.

Neither developed recreation opportunities, visual quality, nor cultural resources would be significantly affected by this alternative. There would be a minor increase in dispersed, nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

Under this alternative, all categories of wildlife habitat would either improve in condition, or would be essentially unaffected. The most significant improvement would occur in grizzly bear, riparian, waterfowl, and fisheries habitats. Moderate levels of improvement would occur in elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, gray wolf, bald eagle, and upland game bird habitats.

The short-term adjustments in livestock use proposed under this alternative would result in moderately significant economic impacts—both positive and negative—for the affected ranch operators. In the long term, the expected increases in livestock forage availability would result in moderately significant positive economic impacts to affected operators. The net overall impact of this alternative on the regional economy and attitudes is expected to be insignificant.

ALTERNATIVE B

Alternative B is the no action alternative.

Under Alternative B, oil and gas leasing and development would be permitted on 102,820 acres of federal mineral estate along the Rocky Mountain Front (87% of the total acreage available for consideration in that area), and on approximately 637,080 acres of federal mineral estate within the entire resource area (97% of the total). Oil and gas leasing and development within specific portions of the Rocky Mountain Front area would be subject to seasonal restrictions (59,460 acres) and to no surface occupancy stipulations (7,200 acres) to protect important grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat. Approximately 15,430 acres would not be available for leasing because of no surface occupancy restrictions that effectively prohibit oil and gas development. The remaining 36,160 acres along the Rocky Mountain Front would be leased subject only to standard stipulations.

Authorized livestock use in the resource area would remain at current levels in the short term in all allotments. In the long term, livestock use would

be expected to increase to 33,417 AUMs, or 6% above current levels.

The estimated range improvements required to implement this alternative are the same as those identified for Alternative A, the preferred alternative. The estimated initial cost for all improvements is \$449,331.

This alternative would result in a significant long-term improvement in ecological range condition. The percentage of the resource area in good and excellent condition would increase from 57% to 75%, while fair and poor condition ratings would decrease from 43% to 25%.

The long-term effect of this alternative on riparian habitat would be to increase the mileage of stream banks in satisfactory riparian condition from the current 104 miles to 123 miles.

The long-term improvements in resource conditions and livestock forage production would be the same as those shown under the preferred alternative. However, they would be slower to appear, particularly in allotments targeted for short-term adjustments in livestock use in Alternative A.

None of the five areas currently under wilderness study would be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation, nor would any area be recommended for other forms of special designation.

Forest resources under this alternative would be managed essentially as they are at present. The estimated potential timber yield for the resource area would remain at 26.45 million board feet per decade, well above the average actual harvest rate of approximately 1 million board feet per decade. Most of the public land in the resource area would be available for forest management activities; the only areas to be set aside from such activities would be the Scratchgravel Hills and the Yellowstone River Island. Commercial forestland in the Eightmile Creek, Elkhorn, Boulder-Clancy, Marysville, and Rogers Pass areas would receive the highest priority for forest management activities. Special harvest restrictions would be applied in key elk seasonal use areas.

For purposes of analysis, all public land in the resource area would be retained in public ownership under this alternative. In actual practice, some public land could be sold or exchanged as a result of tract-specific land use plan amendments, but the net result would be little or no change in the land ownership pattern, nor in the legal accessibility of public land in the resource area.

Mineral exploration and development in the resource area would not be significantly affected under this alternative. The withdrawal review pro-

gram would continue, resulting in a projected future decrease of 11,587 acres of public land withdrawn from mineral entry. No new areas would be withdrawn. Approximately 613,486 acres (94%) of federal minerals in the resource area would be available for mineral entry and development in the long term.

Under this alternative, approximately 45,188 acres of public land would be closed to organized motorcycle events. Approximately 266,149 acres, including the Scratchgravel Hills, Limestone Hills, Hilger Hills, Spokane Hills, and Marysville areas, would remain available for further consideration. Applications for motorcycle events on public land within areas identified as available for further consideration would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis using criteria provided in the plan. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for organized motorcycle events.

Alternative B would identify approximately 199,447 acres of public land as priority areas for motorized vehicle access restrictions. The remaining 111,890 acres would be open without restrictions. Public land within priority areas for restrictions generally will receive priority attention during travel planning. Specific roads, trails, or portions of such areas may be closed seasonally or yearlong to all or specific types of motorized vehicle use. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific motorized vehicle decisions. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for motorized vehicle access.

The utility and transportation corridor issue would be resolved by identifying approximately 22,171 acres of public land as avoidance areas. The remaining 289,166 acres of public land in the resource area would remain available for further consideration. Public land within avoidance areas generally would not be available for corridor development. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific decisions regarding corridor development.

The no action alternative would make none of the federal coal in the Great Falls Coal Field available for further consideration for leasing. Approximately 25,452 acres of federal minerals, containing an estimated 125.6 million short tons of coal, would be affected.

No public land in the resource area would be proposed for special designations.

Air quality would not be significantly affected by this alternative, watershed conditions would improve moderately, and water quality would increase slightly in the long term.

Neither developed recreation opportunities, dispersed nonmotorized recreation opportunities, visual quality, nor cultural resources would be significantly affected by this alternative.

Under this alternative, all categories of wildlife habitat would either improve in condition, or would be essentially unaffected. The most significant improvement would occur in grizzly bear, riparian, waterfowl, and fisheries habitats. Moderate levels of improvement would occur in elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, gray wolf, bald eagle, and upland game bird habitats.

There would be no short-term impacts (positive or negative) on livestock operators under this alternative. In the long term, the expected increases in livestock forage availability would result in moderately significant positive economic impacts to affected operators. The net overall impact of this alternative on the regional economy and attitudes is expected to be insignificant.

ALTERNATIVE C

Alternative C emphasizes environmental protection.

Under Alternative C, oil and gas leasing and development would be permitted on 77,460 acres of federal mineral estate along the Rocky Mountain Front (66% of the total acreage available for consideration), and on approximately 616,978 acres of federal mineral estate within the entire resource area (94% of the total). Oil and gas leasing and development within specific portions of the Rocky Mountain Front area would be subject to seasonal restrictions (3,700 acres) and to no surface occupancy stipulations (39,020 acres) to protect important grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat, and to prevent surface disturbance in areas recommended for wilderness or outstanding natural area designation. Approximately 40,790 acres would not be available for leasing because of no surface occupancy restrictions that effectively prohibit oil and gas development. The remaining 34,740 acres along the Rocky Mountain Front would be leased subject only to standard stipulations.

Authorized livestock use in the resource area would be targeted for reductions in 34 allotments, and for no change in 293 allotments. Target levels of adjusted livestock use would be based on a variety of information, including range condition ratings, the Soil Conservation Service's *Montana Grazing Guides*, actual use information, monitoring data where available, and professional judgment. The net result of all adjustments in the

resource area would be a 4,465 AUM (14%) short-term reduction in current authorized livestock use. In the long term, livestock use would be expected to decrease to 28,217 AUMs, or 10% below current levels.

The estimated range improvements required to implement this alternative include: 440 acres of reseeding, 240 acres of prescribed burning, 75.9 miles of fence construction, 13 miles of fence removal or alteration, and 10 cattleguards. The estimated initial cost for all improvements is \$247,659.

This alternative would result in a minor long-term improvement in ecological range condition. The percentage of the resource area in excellent condition would increase from 8% to 15%, while the percentage in good condition would decrease from 49% to 42%. Fair and poor condition ratings would remain at 43%.

The long-term effect of this alternative on riparian habitat would be to increase the mileage of stream banks in satisfactory riparian condition from the current 104 miles to 135.5 miles.

All five of the areas currently under wilderness study would be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation. As a result, wilderness values generally would be maintained over the long term on 17,197 acres in the resource area.

Forest resources under this alternative would be managed essentially as they are at present. The estimated potential timber yield for the resource area would remain at 26.45 million board feet per decade, well above the average actual harvest rate of approximately 1 million board feet per decade. Most of the public land in the resource area would be available for forest management activities; the only areas to be set aside from such activities would be the five areas recommended for wilderness designation, the proposed Ear Mountain Outstanding Natural area, the proposed Sleeping Giant Recreation Lands, and the Scratchgravel Hills. Commercial forestland in the Eightmile Creek, Elkhorn, Boulder-Clancy, Marysville, and Rogers Pass areas would receive the highest priority for forest management activities. Forest management objectives would emphasize the protection or enhancement of key mule deer and elk habitat.

Under Alternative C, the land ownership adjustment issue would be resolved by establishing priority areas for retention and acquisition, disposal, and further study. Approximately 282,283 acres of public land within retention areas would remain in public ownership and be managed by the BLM. Approximately 25,637 acres of public land within disposal areas would be available for disposal

through sales and/or exchanges. The remaining 3,417 acres of public land within further study areas would not be prioritized at this time. All subsequent site-specific decisions regarding land ownership adjustments would be made based on criteria identified in the plan.

Future investments in public facilities and improvements, including land and access acquisition, generally would receive highest priority in retention areas. In the long term, Alternative C would result in a minor overall improvement in the land ownership pattern and the legal accessibility of public land in the resource area.

Mineral exploration and development in the resource area would be slightly affected under this alternative. The withdrawal review program would continue, resulting in a projected future decrease of 11,587 acres of public land withdrawn from mineral entry. However, approximately 2,960 acres of public land in the Scratchgravel Hills would be withdrawn from mineral entry in an effort to limit future impacts from mining on groundwater resources. Approximately 610,526 acres (93%) of federal minerals in the resource area would be available for mineral entry and development in the long term.

Under this alternative, approximately 102,513 acres of public land, including the Scratchgravel Hills, Limestone Hills, Hilger Hills, Spokane Hills, and Marysville areas would be closed to organized motorcycle events. Approximately 208,824 acres would remain available for further consideration. Applications for motorcycle events on public land within areas identified as available for further consideration would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis using criteria provided in the plan. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a moderate decrease in the availability of public land for organized motorcycle events.

Alternative C would identify approximately 216,828 acres of public land as priority areas for motorized vehicle access restrictions, and 18,037 acres would be closed yearlong to motorized vehicle access. The remaining 76,472 acres would be open without restrictions. Public land within priority areas for restrictions generally will receive priority attention during travel planning. Specific roads, trails, or portions of such areas may be closed seasonally or yearlong to all or specific types of motorized vehicle use. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific motorized vehicle access decisions. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for motorized vehicle access.

The utility and transportation corridor issue would be resolved by identifying approximately 17,197 acres of public land as exclusion areas, 63,271 acres as avoidance areas, and 952 acres as windows. The remaining 229,917 acres of public land in the resource area would remain available for further consideration. Public land within avoidance areas generally would not be available for corridor development; public land within windows would be available. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific decisions regarding corridor development.

The environmental protection alternative would make none of the federal coal in the Great Falls Coal Field available for further consideration for leasing. Approximately 25,452 acres of federal minerals, containing an estimated 125.6 million short tons of coal, would be affected.

The Ear Mountain area (840 acres) along the Rocky Mountain Front would be recommended for designation as an Outstanding Natural Area, and would be managed to protect wildlife habitat, scenery, and other surface resource values from disturbance. In addition, 11,609 acres of public land in the Sleeping Giant area would be designated as Recreation Lands, and would be managed with primary emphasis on the protection and enhancement of recreation values. All remaining public land in the resource area, totaling 298,888 acres, would continue to be managed without any special administrative designation.

Air quality would not be significantly affected by this alternative, watershed conditions would improve moderately to highly, and water quality would increase moderately in the long term.

Neither developed recreation opportunities, visual quality, nor cultural resources would be significantly affected by this alternative. There would be a minor increase in dispersed, nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

Under this alternative, all categories of wildlife habitat would either improve in condition, or would be essentially unaffected. The most significant improvement would occur in grizzly bear, gray wolf, elk, mule deer, moose, riparian, waterfowl, and fisheries habitats. Moderate levels of improvement would occur in bighorn sheep, antelope, bald eagle, and upland game bird habitats.

The adjustments in livestock use proposed under this alternative would result in moderately significant negative economic impacts for the affected ranch operators in both the short and long term. However, the net overall impact of this alternative on the regional economy and attitudes is expected to be insignificant.

ALTERNATIVE D

Alternative D emphasizes resource production.

Under Alternative D, oil and gas leasing and development would be permitted on 107,300 acres of federal mineral estate along the Rocky Mountain Front (91% of the total acreage available for consideration), and on approximately 640,631 acres of federal mineral estate within the entire resource area (98% of the total). Oil and gas leasing and development within specific portions of the Rocky Mountain Front area would be subject to seasonal restrictions (70,820 acres) to protect important grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat. Approximately 10,950 acres of federal minerals within the Sun River Game Range would remain withdrawn from leasing. The remaining 36,480 acres along the Rocky Mountain Front would be leased subject only to standard stipulations.

Authorized livestock use in the resource area would be targeted for reductions in 9 allotments, for increases in 34 allotments, and for no change in 284 allotments. Target levels of adjusted livestock use would be based on range condition ratings, the Soil Conservation Service's *Montana Grazing Guides*, actual use information, and professional judgment. The net result of all adjustments in the resource area would be a 2,453 AUM (8%) short-term increase in current authorized livestock use. In the long term, livestock use would be expected to increase to 38,618 AUMs, or 23% above current levels.

The estimated range improvements required to implement this alternative include: 3,140 acres of reseeding, 4,640 acres of prescribed burning, 45.3 miles of fence construction, 26 spring developments, 23.5 miles of pipeline, 20 stock tanks, 467.5 acres of noxious weed control, 8 cattle-guards, and 5 other water developments. The estimated initial cost for all improvements is \$442,020.

This alternative would result in a significant long-term improvement in ecological range condition. The percentage of the resource area in good and excellent condition would increase from 57% to 86%, while fair and poor condition ratings would decrease from 43% to 14%.

The long-term effect of this alternative on riparian habitat would be essentially no change in the mileage of stream banks currently in satisfactory riparian condition.

None of the five areas currently under wilderness study would be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation, nor would any areas be recommended for other forms of special designa-

tion. In the long term, wilderness values generally would be forgone in all areas.

Forest resources under this alternative would receive slightly more management emphasis than under present direction. The estimated potential timber yield for the resource area would increase to 29.0 million board feet per decade, well above the average actual harvest rate of approximately 1 million board feet per decade. All commercial forestland in the resource area would be available for forest management activities. Commercial forestland in the Eightmile Creek, Elkhorn, Boulder-Clancy, Marysville, and Rogers Pass areas would receive the highest priority for forest management activities. Harvest restrictions would be based primarily on forest productivity, operability, and silvicultural or regeneration requirements.

Under Alternative D, the land ownership adjustment issue would be resolved by establishing priority areas for retention and acquisition, disposal, and further study. Approximately 282,283 acres of public land within retention areas would remain in public ownership and be managed by the BLM. Approximately 25,637 acres of public land within disposal areas would be available for disposal through sales and/or exchanges. The remaining 3,417 acres of public land within further study areas would not be prioritized at this time. All subsequent site-specific decisions regarding land ownership adjustments would be made based on criteria identified in the plan.

Future investments in public facilities and improvements, including land and access acquisition, generally would receive highest priority in retention areas. In the long term, Alternative D would result in a minor overall improvement in the land ownership pattern and the legal accessibility of public land in the resource area.

Mineral exploration and development in the resource area would not be significantly affected under this alternative. The withdrawal review program would continue, resulting in a projected future decrease of 11,587 acres of public land withdrawn from mineral entry. No new areas would be withdrawn. Approximately 613,486 acres (94%) of federal minerals in the resource area would be available for mineral entry and development in the long term.

Under this alternative, approximately 45,188 acres of public land would be closed to organized motorcycle events. Approximately 266,149 acres, including the Scratchgravel Hills, Limestone Hills, Hilger Hills, Spokane Hills, and Marysville areas, would remain available for further consideration. Applications for motorcycle events on

public land within areas identified as available for further consideration would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis using criteria provided in the plan. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for organized motorcycle events.

Alternative D would identify approximately 199,447 acres of public land as priority areas for motorized vehicle access restrictions. The remaining 111,890 acres would be open without restrictions. Public land within priority areas for restrictions generally will receive priority attention during travel planning. Specific roads, trails, or portions of such areas may be closed seasonally or yearlong to all or specific types of motorized vehicle use. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific motorized vehicle access decisions. The long-term effect of this alternative would be a minor decrease in the availability of public land for motorized vehicle access.

The utility and transportation corridor issue would be resolved by identifying approximately 22,171 acres of public land as avoidance areas. The remaining 289,166 acres of public land in the resource area would remain available for further consideration. Public land within avoidance areas generally would not be available for corridor development. Criteria provided in the plan would guide future site-specific decisions regarding corridor development.

Alternative D would make all federal coal in the Great Falls Coal Field available for further consideration for leasing, pending further study. Approximately 25,452 acres of federal minerals, containing an estimated 125.6 million short tons of coal, would be affected. Approximately 1,755 acres would be identified for no surface occupancy to protect public roads, rights-of-way, and important wildlife habitat. All coal would be extracted by using underground mining methods.

No public land in the resource area would be proposed for special designations.

Air quality would not be significantly affected by this alternative, while watershed conditions and water quality would decline slightly.

Neither developed recreation opportunities, visual quality, nor cultural resources would be significantly affected by this alternative. There would be a minor decrease in dispersed, nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

Under this alternative, most categories of wildlife habitat would either decline in condition, or would be essentially unaffected. Only minor improvement would occur in grizzly bear, riparian, and fisheries habitats. Major decreases in the satis-

factory condition ratings would occur for some mule deer and antelope habitats, while moderate decreases would be expected in elk, bighorn sheep and moose habitats.

The short-term adjustments in livestock use proposed under this alternative would result in moderately significant economic impacts—both positive and negative—for the affected ranch operators. In the long term, the expected increases in livestock forage availability would result in moderately to highly significant positive economic impacts to affected operators. The net overall impact of this alternative on the regional economy and attitudes is expected to be insignificant.

