

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

COLORADO STATE OFFICE

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To: Field Office Managers

From: State Director, Colorado

Subject: Final Recreation Guidelines

Attached is the following Recreation Guidelines to Meet Public Land Health Standards on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Managed Lands in Colorado.

Please take appropriate action to include the guidelines in your Resource Management Plans. This can be accomplished through a plan maintenance action. The guidelines are being announced through a press release and will be posted on the Colorado BLM website.

If you have any questions regarding the guidelines, contact Tina McDonald at 303-239-3716, or Dennis Zachman at 303-239-3883.

Signed by Authenticated by

Ann J. Morgan Don Snow

State Director EMS Operator

Attachment

cc: Deputy State Director - Colorado, Resource Services

Branch Chief - Colorado, Social and Cultural Services

External Affairs (CO-912)

**RECREATION MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES
TO MEET PUBLIC LAND HEALTH STANDARDS
ON BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT LANDS
IN COLORADO**

December 11, 2000

INTRODUCTION

Colorado's population has grown significantly in the past ten years - the state's growth rate is among the highest in the nation. As the state becomes more crowded, an increasing number of people seek out undeveloped land to recreate. In addition, Colorado remains a popular destination for tourists, especially those seeking experiences in a backcountry or wildland setting. As a result, public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are absorbing increasing recreational use. In many areas, the increased use has resulted in user conflicts and damage to vegetation, soils, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources.

In February 1997, Standards for Public Land Health in Colorado (Standards) were approved by the Secretary of Interior and adopted as decisions in all of BLM's land use plans, commonly referred to as Resource Management Plans (RMP). The Standards describe natural resource conditions that are needed to sustain public land health. The Standards encompass upland soils; riparian systems; plant and animal communities; special, threatened, and endangered species; and water quality. The Standards relate to all uses of the public lands. The full text of the Standards is found in Attachment 1.

Based on the increased awareness and understanding of the social and environmental impacts of outdoor recreation, the following establishes recreation management guidelines to help achieve and maintain healthy public lands as defined by the Standards. The guidelines are tools, methods, and techniques that can be used by managers to maintain or meet the standards.

It is the intent of these guidelines to encourage and permit a variety of recreational opportunities and enjoyable experiences that are managed to avoid conflicts and serve diverse recreational interests, while at the same time minimizing and preventing adverse impacts to land health, ecosystems, and cultural or natural resources, including historic and archaeological sites, soils, water, air, vegetation, scenery, wildlife habitats, riparian areas, endangered or threatened species, and wilderness areas. Recreational uses are a highly regarded social value of our society which impacts our public lands, and accordingly BLM in Colorado will plan, manage, and pursue funding sources so that various services, areas, and activities are environmentally sustainable for present and future populations.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

A. Standards 1 & 2: Upland Soils and Riparian Systems

1. Manage recreational activities to maintain sufficient vegetation on upland areas to protect the soil from wind and water erosion and to buffer temperature extremes.
2. Minimize disturbances and manage recreation use in riparian areas to protect vegetation, fragile soils, springs, and wetlands.
3. Plan and locate routes, trails, and developments away from riparian and wetland areas, and highly erosive soils.
4. Reduce stream crossings to the minimal number dictated by the topography. Reduce sedimentation and compaction associated with stream crossings.
5. Manage watercraft types and uses as appropriate to protect riparian systems and water quality from adverse impacts.

B. Standard 3: Healthy Plant and Animal Communities

1. Manage recreational use on public lands to promote the survival and health of native plants and animals.
2. Protect against the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.
3. Protect wildlife habitat by preserving connectivity and avoiding fragmentation.
4. Minimize wildlife disturbances and artificial attractions such as feeding wild animals or improper disposal of garbage.
5. Protect plant and animal communities by limiting recreational use by type, season, intensity, distribution, or duration.

C. Standard 4: Special Status and Threatened and Endangered Species

1. Protect habitat for federal and state Threatened and Endangered Species and other special status species.

D. Standard 5: Water Quality

1. Manage recreational uses in coordination with other uses on public lands to achieve or exceed applicable water quality standards.
2. Control water quality impacts resulting from recreational use, such as human waste, trash, and other elements.

E. Public Values and Education

1. Use information and interpretative services as major tools to protect public land health and significant natural, cultural, and recreational resources. As appropriate, improve public knowledge by locating kiosks, interpretive signs, and visitor information facilities at visitor contact points. Provide guidebooks and pamphlets for users.
2. Increase efforts to educate public lands visitors about an ethic of responsible use, through programs such as Tread Lightly, Leave No Trace, Project Archeology, the International Mountain Bike Association's "Rules of the Trail," and the Public Lands Watch program.
3. Communicate to the members of the public their individual rights and responsibilities in the use and preservation of public lands, including the recognition of the rights and responsibilities of others because public lands are our legacy for the future.

4. Initiate and maintain collaborative partnerships among government agencies, local governments, business communities, volunteers, user groups, stakeholders, educational institutions, individuals, and the private sector to achieve recreation management objectives and implement these guidelines.
5. Encourage the development of a concise educational program to be implemented at the initial point of contact with the public, to promote public land values, knowledge of rights and responsibilities, environmental awareness, communication between the BLM and the public, and changing management practices and policies.
6. In order to mitigate adverse impacts to the public lands, work with the private sector to integrate a responsible recreational use message with the goods or services they provide.

F. Recreation Management

1. Protect natural resources with a priority on management methods that effectively maintain healthy public lands. Utilize the least restrictive but appropriate limitations on public lands activities and users. Recognize that in some cases various levels of regulations and limits on users are necessary.
2. In the development of recreation plans, use the best current and sound recreation science practices to enhance public land health.
3. Develop and maintain updated inventory and monitoring information concerning both the resource and the recreational uses.
4. Use on-the-ground presence as a tool to protect public lands.
5. In order to prevent adverse impacts to the public land health, establish appropriate levels and types of recreational use. Utilize public participation in the development of these levels and types. Where long-term adverse impacts are created or anticipated by recreational uses, limit or control activities through specialized management tools including, but not limited to, designated campsites, permits, area closures, and limitations on stays and number of users.
6. Locate permanent facilities away from riparian areas, cultural sites, or other locations subject to adverse impacts, and relocate existing facilities away from areas that have been adversely impacted.
 - If it is determined that a facility must be located in these areas, it must be properly mitigated. For example, if it is determined that a path must cross a wetland area, appropriate mitigation such as a wooden boardwalk may be constructed to avoid water quality problems and other wetland disturbance.

7. Manage recreational uses to protect cultural, historical, and archeological resource sites, and areas where there are unique wilderness or environmental values. Where appropriate, set aside some areas for certain scientific, environmental, and archaeological activities, and limit or prohibit other recreational uses in these areas.
8. Allow and manage dispersed recreation activities so that the nature and the frequency of such activities does not create adverse impacts to public land health.
9. Set aside areas, limited in number and size, for certain high impact recreational uses, such as off-road vehicles, motorcycles, and target practice to be relatively unrestricted. Establishment of such areas must be consistent with the Standards and other RMP decisions.
10. Manage activities associated with hunting and fishing to protect the resource from adverse impacts to public land health.
11. Often a land area is utilized by many users; implement feasible management methods to maintain the essential enjoyment elements of the various user groups.
12. Encourage public land recreational activities near population centers and highway corridors by placement of appropriate visitor use infrastructure. Provide restrooms and other facilities adequate for anticipated uses at designated campgrounds, trail heads, and other areas where there is a concentration of recreational users.
13. Build collaborative partnerships with local communities and the private sector to provide recreational support services on private land near public land access points where possible.

G. Routes, Trails, and Travel management

1. Work expeditiously toward the goal of a statewide inventory of routes and trails.
2. Place a high priority on developing local travel management plans with public participation. Travel management plans should consider all forms of travel in the affected area (i.e., motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized). The plans should address travel management prescriptions (such as open, closed, and limited off-road vehicle designations), and identify appropriate actions to meet or maintain public land health standards and meet the needs of the visitor.
3. Until local travel management plans are prepared and implemented, BLM will take prompt action using existing authorities to prevent the proliferation of roads and trails that have caused or will lead to conditions whereby the Standards are not met. Existing authorities include, but are not limited to, restrictions under the specific rules section for off-road vehicle use⁽¹⁾, amending land use plan decisions pertaining to off-road vehicles⁽²⁾, and closure and restriction orders for other uses⁽³⁾.

4. When developing travel management plans and/or implementing travel management decisions, managers should consider the following:

- a. Where adverse impacts, user conflicts, damage to ecosystems, injury to the environment, or other conditions are anticipated or are occurring that would impair the health of the public lands and diminish recreational opportunities, restrict recreational travel to designated routes or take other appropriate action such as seasonal closures.
- b. Cross-country travel (i.e., off of roads and trails) should only be permitted in areas that meet the designation criteria for "open" areas⁽⁴⁾, and the Standards.
- c. Where conflicts among recreational users can be minimized, combine multiple uses on one route instead of establishing parallel or alternative routes.
- d. Where and when appropriate, plan, develop, and designate in cooperation with user groups new routes and trails, as well as selected areas for open travel, that enhance and expand recreational opportunities and encourage responsible use with little or no adverse impacts.
- e. Relocate, abandon, or close routes and trails seasonally or temporarily that adversely impact riparian and wetland areas, wildlife, highly erosive soils, cultural sites, and sensitive ecological systems, and abandon routes that are duplicated or unneeded. Where routes, trails, or other facilities have been abandoned, provide for restoration and revegetation of the site.

5. Where adverse impacts or safety considerations warrant, limit or prohibit public access when authorizing specific routes to oil and gas locations, mines, timber sales, or other areas or sites under permit or lease.

6. Provide clear maps, signs, guidelines, descriptions, and other information for users of routes, trails, and other facilities or areas, including mileages and estimated hours of travel by type, limitations caused by travel surfaces and conditions, and availability of loop trails. Provide clear information to the public when closures, seasonal use, and other regulations or limits are placed on public lands.

RECREATION MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

In addition to the implementation objectives included in the Standards, the following critical issues should be considered for successful implementation of the Recreation Guidelines:

1. The guidelines contained in this document are designed to provide direction, yet allow flexibility for local implementation of RMP decisions. Typically, decisions made in RMPs provide resource goals and objectives, allocate resources, identify land areas for limited, restrictive or exclusive use, and provide guidance for implementation. During the

implementation process, additional planning may be needed to better define goals, make objectives more specific, and identify or add specific detail to implementing actions. Frequently, multiple guidelines may be used to maintain or achieve the land health standards. All implementing actions will be completed in consultation, cooperation, and coordination with local communities and the interested public.

2. Declining federal budgets challenge the ability of the BLM to provide services adequate to meet growing recreational demands, create difficult management concerns, and place the health of public lands at risk. Addressing current and future needs will require increased agency budgets as well as collaboration, partnerships, and shared responsibility among public land agencies and the various constituencies using public lands.

3. Increasing recreational uses of public lands create increased needs for funding, manpower, and other resources to simultaneously protect the environmental and ecological values of public lands consistent with multiple use and sustained yield principles. Management practices specifically tailored to recreational impacts are necessary to improve and expand recreational facilities and protect effective planning, maintenance, enforcement, monitoring, and programming of public recreational opportunities. Possible supplementary funding resources to meet these goals should be considered, including non-federal resources such as state, county, and local governments, non-profit entities, and private interests.

4. Important to implementing multiple use recreation management and environmental management objectives are: an achievable scientific approach to the inventory and analysis of biological and ecological data; gathering of accurate data on recreational needs, benefits, demands, carrying capacities, and trends; and developing consensus on difficult issues relating to economically sustainable programs, use controls, other limitations and resolution of user conflicts.

5. The involvement by the BLM of the public, other governmental entities, and various recreational constituencies is necessary throughout the planning, use, and evaluation cycle to establish appropriate management priorities. This involvement should encourage a high degree of public interaction, foster collaboration, educate and inform the public regarding important land use issues, and contribute to the successful implementation of the Standards for Public Land Health and Recreation Management Guidelines.

6. Not all RMP decisions require subsequent planning such as activity plans or transportation management plans. If the actions needed to implement RMP decisions are well defined, then only appropriate environmental assessment documentation may be needed. If, however, the decisions and information in RMPs do not contain enough detail, additional planning may be needed to better define goals, make objectives more specific, and identify or add specific detail to implementing actions.

7. During the implementation process, it may be determined that existing RMP decisions are no longer valid or do not adequately meet the needs of the resource or the public.

Therefore, it may be necessary to initiate a plan amendment to address the affected decisions in the RMP. ⁽⁵⁾

8. It is not possible for each acre to achieve every standard. It is important to assess and consider the overall health of a landscape when applying the recreation guidelines. For example, when determining how to manage vehicle parking in a landscape, it may be determined to concentrate vehicles in a small confined area, rather than having uncontrolled parking throughout the landscape. In this example, this approach would result in improved resource conditions overall although the site specific impacts at the small parking area would be high (e.g., vegetation disturbance).

The guidelines contained in this document are designed as "tools" to assist managers implement recreation management decisions and actions. At this stage, the environmental effects of implementing the guidelines are too broad, speculative, or conjectural to lend themselves to meaningful environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Furthermore, most implementing actions will be subject to further NEPA analysis. Therefore, adoption of the guidelines are categorically excluded from NEPA analysis ⁽⁶⁾.

GLOSSARY:

Activity plan: A detailed, site specific plan for management of one or more resource programs. An activity plan provides additional specificity needed to implement RMP decisions. Activity plans are completed only if necessary. When multiple programs are addressed, activity plans may be called Integrated Activity Plans or Coordinated RMPs.

Guidelines, Recreation: Recreation management tools, methods, and techniques designed to provide activities, experiences, and benefits for the recreating public while maintaining or achieving healthy public lands as defined by the standards. The recreation guidelines contained in this document are directed toward maintaining or achieving public land health.

Landscape: A defined land area that forms a management unit or basis of analysis.

Mechanized Vehicle: Any non-motorized vehicle capable of, or designed for, travel on or immediately over land. An example of a mechanized vehicle is a mountain bike.

Motorized Vehicle: Synonymous with off-road vehicle. Examples of this type of vehicle include all-terrain vehicles (ATV), Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV), motorboats, and snowmobiles.

Non-Motorized Use: Recreational human and animal foot traffic. Examples include horses, llamas and other domestic animals.

Off-Highway Vehicle: This term is synonymous with the term off-road vehicle (or

ORV). Whereas off-road vehicle is used in the regulations and includes any motorized vehicle, the term off-highway vehicle (or OHV) is a more contemporary term.

Off-Road Vehicle: Any motorized vehicle capable of, or designed for, travel on or immediately over land, water, or other natural terrain, excluding: (1) any non-amphibious registered motorboat; (2) any military, fire, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle while being used for emergency purposes; (3) any vehicle whose use is expressly authorized by the authorized officer, or otherwise officially approved; (4) vehicles in official use; and (5) any combat or combat support vehicle when used in times of national defense emergencies.

Off-Road Vehicle Designations:

- **Open area** means an area where all types of vehicle use is permitted at all times, anywhere in the area subject to the operating regulations and vehicle standards set forth in subpart 8341 and 8342 of this title.
- **Limited area** means an area restricted at certain times, in certain areas, and/or to certain vehicular use. These restrictions may be of any type, but can generally be accommodated within the following type of categories: Numbers of vehicles; types of vehicles; time of season of vehicles use; permitted or licensed use only; use on existing roads and trails; use on designated roads and trails; and other restrictions.
- **Closed area** means an area where off-road vehicle use is prohibited. Use of off-road vehicles in closed areas may be allowed for certain reasons; however, such use shall be made only with the approval of the authorized officer.

Protect: To take actions to guard against injury or loss.

Standards for Public Land Health: A description of conditions needed to sustain public land health; the standards relate to all uses of the public lands in Colorado.

Recreation Support Services: Resource, facility, and visitor management actions taken to provide activities, experiences, and benefits for the recreating public.

Resource Management Plan (RMP): A BLM multiple use planning document, prepared in accordance with Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, that

- a. establishes resource conditions goals and objectives to be attained;
- b. allocates resources and identifies allowable uses;
- c. identifies land areas for limited, restrictive, or exclusive uses; and
- d. provides guidance for implementation of the decisions made in the plan.

Transportation Management Plans: An activity plan that focuses on all aspects of transportation in a land area. Transportation planning can also be accomplished within Integrated Activity Plans, or Coordinated RMPs where multiple resource programs are planned for concurrently.

Visitor Use Infrastructure: Amenities such as roads, parking areas, and facilities, to protect the resource and support the recreation user in his/her pursuit of activities, experiences, and benefits.