

SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Livestock Grazing Management

The Preferred Alternative would make 449,059 acres available for livestock grazing. These lands would be retained in federal ownership and managed under moderate, intensive and limited management levels. Grazing levels would increase 6% over existing use at the end of 20 years. The amount of lands under stock driveway withdrawal would be reduced to 41,390 acres. Range improvement projects, AMP/CRMP updating and new AMPs would be scheduled for implementation within three time segments 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 10-20 years.

Rationale

The proposed plan for livestock grazing was selected because it helps meet the rangeland resource management objectives of maintaining or improving the soil, esthetic, wildlife, vegetation and watershed resources. It identifies the potential for increases in livestock use if monitoring studies indicate that the basic resources (soil, vegetation, wildlife, water quality) are adequately being maintained or are improving.

Livestock production is a major component of the local economy. The Cascade Resource Area currently provides about 66,424 AUMs of forage for livestock. Generally, the resource area has limited potential for vegetative improvement through vegetation manipulation or more intensive livestock management due to soil and slope limitations and the invasion of native ranges by annual grasses; Medusahead wildrye and cheatgrass.

Land treatment proposals are included in the plan to improve rangeland condition for livestock, wild horses, wildlife and watershed. The outlook for increased forage production through land treatment is conservative because of limitations on site condition and the low potential for improving rangeland condition. Improvement on native ranges would generally result in ecological site condition class changes within the condition class rather than from one class to another, i.e., changes in the fair condition class would improve from poor fair to high fair but not from fair to good. Rangeland that is predominantly annual grass is classified as poor condition. Vegetation manipulation projects to eliminate the annual grasses would improve forage condition but would not represent a change in ecologic site condition. Revegetation of the annual grass ranges would classify these areas as seedings.

Forage increases would also be realized through more intensive management practices especially in the areas with the greatest potential such as those with native vegetation, good soils and in the higher precipitation zones.

The proposed plan would initially stock the area with 66,424 AUMs of forage for livestock with a gradual increase over the 20 year period to 70,536 AUMs. The increase in available forage would occur through more intensive livestock management and range improvements. Monitoring studies would be carried out in those allotments receiving increased livestock management and range improvements to determine forage increases and stocking

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levels. The increases are projected to occur even though the land base would be reduced over the present acreage as a result of transfers out of public ownership (sale and exchange) and limitations would be placed on livestock grazing by other resource activities, ie., sharp-tailed grouse habitat, crucial big game habitat, etc.

Prior to authorizing forage increases for livestock, rangeland condition would be monitored and evaluated to ensure basic soil and vegetative resources would be maintained or improved.

As land treatment projects are implemented and additional forage becomes available, grazing use would be shifted from areas of poor condition range within respective allotments, so the net result would be reduced grazing use in the poor condition areas. Grazing use shifts would be accomplished by salting, new water developments, fencing, herding, and other management techniques.

Range improvement projects would include mitigating measures to reflect site capabilities and protect other resource values.

Portions of existing livestock driveways are proposed to be eliminated because the need for them no longer exists.

Wild Horses

One wild horse area will be managed to maintain a viable wild horse herd size of 20 horses. Approximately 15,500 acres in the Four-Mile Creek Area will be managed to support this herd.

Rationale

Wild horses in the Four-Mile herd management area would be managed in accordance with the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

The present level of 10-12 horses would be allowed to increase to 20 horses in order to develop a more viable herd. Excess horses would be removed periodically to maintain the maximum number of twenty. If for any reason the capability did not exist to remove horses in excess of twenty, it is felt the herd area could support additional horses for a short duration without causing irreversible damage.

Under the plan, the West Crane horse herd would be removed and the horses disposed of in accordance with conditions of the Wild Horse and Burro Act. The yearlong grazing by wild horses has a negative impact on vegetation. Degradation of the vegetative resource is incompatible with livestock and wildlife management objectives for the area.

The decision to remove the West Crane wild horses from the herd area is based on the determination that uncontrollable horse use is not compatible with intensive grazing management in the West Crane allotment. It has not been possible to implement the grazing system for this allotment.

Wildlife Management

The preferred alternative will provide sufficient habitat to meet or exceed the population goals identified in the most current big game wildlife plans developed by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Special management areas or provisions are provided to protect sensitive wildlife species. Approximately 23,900 acres of lands (mostly in crucial habitat) will receive land treatments.

Rationale

Increases in big game numbers from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game management plans were evaluated to determine how projected increases would impact habitat on the public lands. In many of the crucial big game habitat areas, public lands only represent a portion of the total habitat needs. The projected increases on public lands were determined considering the land ownership pattern, habitat potential and compatibility with other resource programs.

Big game numbers in this alternative over the 20 year period would increase by the following percentages for the resource area: +22% elk, +33% deer. Antelope would increase from the current population of 50 animals to 175 animals.

The Black Canyon Curlew management area would receive priority attention for maintaining bird populations at about 1,000 nesting pairs. There may be activities proposed outside the curlew management area that disrupt curlews but efforts to maintain curlew habitat would be maximized in the designated curlew management area. Maintaining curlew habitat outside the curlew management area would be considered in proposing activities in these areas but would not be the dominant consideration as it will be within the curlew management area.

Riparian/Aquatic Resources

Approximately 11 miles of streams have been selected for instream improvements and 7 miles of streams for riparian stream bank planting improvements, while 11 miles of streams would be fenced. Other proposals for livestock management and watershed protection have included provisions that will help to improve the condition on 18 miles of perennial stream habitat and 124 miles of intermittent stream habitat.

Rationale

More intensive livestock management would aid in the maintenance and improvement of riparian/aquatic habitat on 142 miles of streams.

In addition, specific projects would be proposed to correct problems and improve condition on 14 miles of streams.

Standard operating procedures would be incorporated into all management proposals to ensure protection and/or improvement for riparian and fisheries habitat.

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Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, Sensitive and Uncommon Plant Species

The preferred alternative recognizes the need to protect plant species through special management. Thirteen (13) areas have been identified to receive special management considerations that would limit land disturbing activities on these sites. Five of these areas are identified for special designation as Research Natural Areas (RNA) because of their values to the scientific and educational communities. Four of these RNAs support candidate, sensitive, or uncommon plant species and one RNA supports valuable plant communities. The remaining eight areas (with special management but without special designation) also support candidate, sensitive, or uncommon plant species.

Rationale

Special management on twelve areas (4 RNAs and 8 non-designated areas) would protect known candidate, sensitive or uncommon plant species. Special management on the remaining area (RNA) would protect it primarily for scientific and educational purposes.

Standard operating procedures would be followed in evaluating proposals to ensure compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

New populations of plant species would be protected as they are identified through site evaluations and other inventory programs in the resource area.

Soil and Water Quality

The preferred alternative has given special attention to areas classified as "Potential High Erosion Hazard Areas." Specific management actions have been included in the plan to recognize this situation, such as; limiting rangeland improvements, adjusting stocking levels, fire management activities and limiting ORV use in areas with granitic and sedimentary soil origins.

Rationale

Standard operating procedures would be followed to ensure management proposals are in compliance with soil and water quality standards.

Soils would be managed to maintain productivity and minimize erosion.

A variety of methods would be employed to maintain, improve, protect, and restore watershed conditions. Priority would be given to meeting emergency watershed needs due to flooding, severe drought, or fire.

The 12,000 acre Boise Front ACEC would be designated and managed to help protect the critical watershed as well as other important resource values in the area.

Lands and Realty

Approximately 3 1/2% (17,604 acres) of the resource area is identified as being available for transfer from federal ownership.

Rationale

A significant portion of the Cascade Resource Area consists of small isolated parcels with no legal or physical access. Because of these characteristics many parcels are difficult and uneconomical to manage, and could meet the needs of other agencies or private individuals. However, because of their location, some of these isolated parcels are valuable for access to other lands, possess important wildlife habitat or provide open space qualities to surrounding lands and should be retained in public ownership.

All lands identified for disposal (sale or exchange) appear to meet the disposal criteria outlined in Sections 203 and 206 of FLPMA. The tracts will be evaluated through the NEPA process and will again be compared with the requirements of Sections 203 and 206 of FLPMA prior to disposal.

Tracts proposed for disposal through the agricultural development act would be fully evaluated for resource values and economic feasibility before an allowance determination is made.

Rights-of-Ways

Over 480,000 acres of the resource area is available for various types of rights-of-ways. Rights-of-way avoidance areas have been identified and include one cultural site, 15 developed recreation areas/facilities and 13 candidate, sensitive or uncommon plant species areas.

Rationale

The concept of avoidance areas is the most realistic approach for the Cascade Resource Area because of the fragmented land pattern. In essence the public lands are open for right-of-way proposals with a few minor exceptions to protect specific site values.

The size of the areas to be avoided are relatively small and in designing routes for linear right-of-ways such as powerlines it would be realistic to work around those areas.

Recreation

The preferred alternative recommends that 8 miles of the South Fork of the Payette River be studied for possible inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic River system as a recreation river.

Rationale

The South Fork of the Payette River (Banks, Idaho upstream to the boundary of the Sawtooth Wilderness Area) was identified on the Nationwide

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River Inventory developed by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service/National Park Service. It was determined that this segment meets the basic criteria as described in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The planning evaluation determined that because of past development the South Fork could not qualify for any ranking above the recreational component standard.

The plan recommendation therefore is that the South Fork of the Payette River be nominated for study as a recreational component in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

This recommendation recognizes the existing limitation of the resource and sets the standard for management of the public lands in the corridor. If Congress designates the South Fork of the Payette River as a study river, and the study eventually leads to designation as a component of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System the same management philosophy would prevail as during the interim period.

Since the BLM is not a principal land management agency on the North Fork of the Payette River, no recommendation regarding this river segment is made.

ORVs

Off-Road Vehicle recreation activities will continue to be provided for on public lands. Six specific areas will be ORV play areas or cycle parks. Off-road vehicle use in the resource area will be open (unrestricted) on 244,118 acres (50%), limited to designated or existing roads and trails on 241,215 acres (50%), and closed on 2,133 acres (less than 1%).

Rationale

The primary soil types in the Cascade Resource Area include granitics, basalts and sediments. Within each of these major soil types certain conditions exist that qualify areas in the high erosion category, with slope the major factor affecting the erosion capability.

It is felt that basalts, even those in the high erosion capability category, appear to be resilient to use by off-road vehicles. These areas have been designated as open to off-road vehicles recognizing that topographic and vegetation would drastically limit use in some areas. Where steep terrain and heavy vegetation occurs de-facto closures and limitations actually exist.

The sediments and granitic soil types are both susceptible to damage by off-road vehicles. These classes have been designated as limited to off-road vehicles again recognizing that terrain and vegetative factors would close certain areas to off-road use.

There are a few exceptions to the limited use class in the Dewey, Parma, Little Gem and Clay Peak Cycle Park areas because of the need to provide for concentrated vehicle use close to population centers.

Selection of Preferred Alternative

Designation of these open play areas helps to divert this use from other more fragile areas and provide the opportunity to concentrate facilities to accommodate use.

The areas identified as closed to off-road vehicle use are those with candidate or sensitive plant species, proposed/existing developed recreation sites, and a motorcycle park buffer zone.

Developed Site

Twenty-one areas have been identified for various levels of recreation management. Facilities will be managed/developed at 16 specific sites within these areas (campgrounds, boat launch, trails, high ORV use areas).

Rationale

The plan identifies the need for designated sites primarily to accommodate increased demand on the important river systems (Weiser, Snake and Payette Rivers).

Because of the public land pattern in the Cascade Resource Area, most of the important recreation areas are located fairly close to population areas on lands administered by other state and federal agencies.

The recreationalist can utilize developed facilities provided by private enterprise, state parks or National Forest recreation sites while recreating on the adjacent public lands.

VRM

Visual resource classes in the resource area will be managed as follows: 81,000 acres as Class II; 383,466 acres as Class III; 23,000 acres as Class IV.

Rationale

The visual resource management system will be used to identify management proposals that may impact aesthetic values. The degree of alterations to the natural landscape would be guided by the criteria for the visual resource management classes in BLM Manual 8400.

Wilderness

The Box Creek WSA (111-91A) was not analyzed for wilderness in this document.

Rationale

The original wilderness inventory identified Box Creek as a wilderness study area because of its proximity to a National Forest roadless area. A separate EIS for areas less than 5,000 acres will evaluate this area for further wilderness consideration.