

U.S. Department of the Interior

BLM

Bureau of Land Management

Vegetation EIS Update

Volume 1 Number 1
July 2002

BLM Continues Work on Vegetation Treatments Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

The BLM is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to update and replace analyses contained in four existing EISs completed by the agency from 1986-1992 for 13 western states. The EIS will analyze vegetation treatments in four additional western states and Alaska.

Under the Proposed Program, up to 6 million acres would be treated annually using prescribed fire, herbicides, biological and cultural control agents, and mechanical and manual methods.

As part of the EIS, the BLM will evaluate the risks to humans and fish and wildlife from several new herbicides that were not evaluated in the previous EISs, but that the BLM would like to use to treat vegetation. The BLM will also develop protocols that will enable the BLM to evaluate the risks from using chemicals that may become available in the future.

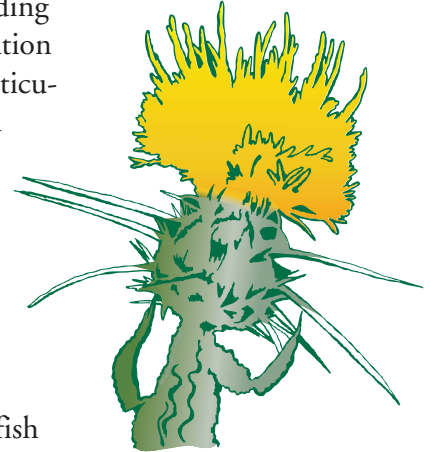
This EIS will provide a comprehensive programmatic National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document that can be used by BLM staffs at the field level for local land-use planning.

The Notice of Intent to prepare the EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on Oct. 12, 2001. The following summarizes important activities since mid-October.

Interagency Meetings

Since October, the BLM has met with scientists from other federal agencies to identify and address

issues of concern regarding the treatment of vegetation on public lands. In particular, scientists have been looking at the impacts of treatment methods on air quality and human and animal health, and evaluating alternative treatment methods to reduce impacts to soil, water, fish and wildlife.



yellow starthistle

Scoping Meetings and Public Comments

The public had the opportunity to comment on the project during the scoping period that ran from Oct. 12, 2001, to March 29, 2002. Written comments submitted by mail, facsimile and electronic mail, as well as oral and written comments given at public scoping meetings, are being used by the BLM to develop project alternatives and to identify issues to be addressed in the EIS.

From mid-January through mid-March 2002, 19 scoping meetings were held in 12 western states, including Alaska; and in Washington, D.C. The scoping meetings were conducted in an open-house format. Informational displays were on view at the meetings, and handouts describing the project, the NEPA process, and issues and possible alternatives were given to those attending. Formal presentations provided the public with additional information on program goals and objectives. Over 450 people attended the scoping meetings and lively and informative discussions were held at each meeting.

[.blm.gov](http://blm.gov)

The BLM received over 1,000 requests to be placed on the project mailing list from individuals, organizations and government agencies, and 360 written comment letters or facsimiles pertaining to the proposal to prepare an EIS.

Nearly 2,900 catalogued individual comments were obtained from written and oral comments given by the public during the scoping period. Concerns focused on the effects of treatments on vegetation and wildlife (13% of all comments), causes of land use impacts (10%), treatment methods (6%), scope of the analysis and decisions to be made (4%), and human health risks (3%). In addition, 9% of comments focused on other potential program alternatives, including treatment programs that do not involve the use of prescribed fire and/or herbicides. Approximately 15% of the comments will not be considered in the EIS because they were not related to the project or did not address issues that could be covered in this EIS.

The BLM has prepared a draft scoping document that summarizes the comments given during the scoping period. This summary should be finalized in late June and will be available for review on the BLM Weeds website at www.blm.gov/weeds.

Development of Other Alternatives

Under NEPA, the BLM is required to look at a reasonable range of alternatives, from a *no action* (maintain status quo) alternative to a *proposed action* alternative. The BLM received several alternative proposals during scoping, ranging from prohibiting certain activities on BLM lands, to eliminating the use of prescribed fire or herbicides, to increasing the number of acres treated, to taking an ecosystem-based approach to land management.

The BLM is currently evaluating these proposals and considering alternatives that would reduce, but not necessarily eliminate, the use of prescribed fire and herbicides, and focus more on ecosystem management.

Coordination with Native American and Alaska Native Groups and Federal Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Since October, the BLM has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to identify consultation procedures that must be followed to comply with the Endangered Species Act. As part of the compliance process, the BLM is preparing a Biological Assessment (BA) that will address the impacts of vegetation treatments to over 300 plant, wildlife, and fish species listed as threatened or endangered, or proposed for listing by the USFWS or NMFS, that are on public lands managed by the BLM.

The BLM has also been consulting with Native American tribes and Alaska Native groups to explain the program and to solicit their concerns. In particular, the BLM is interested in knowing which plants and animals are of particular interest to these groups, and which vegetation treatment practices may be detrimental to plants and animals used by these groups.

Assessments on Human Health, Ecological Risk and Air Quality

The potential risks to humans and animals from the use of herbicides and risks to air quality from prescribed burning are important issues being addressed in this EIS. Unless new information is available to indicate the need for additional studies, herbicides approved for use in the earlier EISs will not be evaluated in this EIS. However, the BLM does propose to use four to five new herbicides and is conducting a human health and ecological risk assessment to determine the risks of using these herbicides on humans and fish and wildlife.

Currently the risk assessment team, composed of scientists from the BLM, USFWS, NMFS, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and a consulting firm are developing methodologies to ensure the risk assessments reflect current knowledge.

Once these methods are developed, assessments will be conducted on risks to humans, as well as several species of fish and wildlife.

The BLM is also concerned with potential impacts of prescribed burning and wildfires on air quality. The BLM recognizes that prescribed burning will release pollutants into the air that will affect air quality. Without prescribed burning, however, the risk of wildfires, which also release pollutants into the air, increases.

The BLM will be modeling the effects of prescribed burning and wildfires on air quality to determine whether prescribed burning can be done in a manner that reduces the amount of pollutants entering the air from all types of burning while at the same time reducing the risk of wildfires.

Treatment Acreage Determinations

In 2001, the BLM asked field offices to provide information on the number of acres likely to be treated over the next 10 years, and types of treatments that would occur on these lands. This information showed that more acres would be treated in Oregon, Idaho and Nevada than other states.

The BLM decided that more detailed information was needed to adequately identify where vegetation treatments would occur and to assess the impacts to the environment from these treatments. Thus, the BLM is currently canvassing field offices to obtain more detailed information on proposed treatment activities, including information on vegetation types to be treated and the locations of treatments.

This information should be available by July 2002, when the BLM will begin to assess the impacts of vegetation treatments on the environment.

Next Steps

From June through September 2002, the BLM will complete those sections of the EIS that describe

the project and its purpose and need, identify alternative actions that will be evaluated in the EIS, and describe baseline conditions on public lands that may be affected by vegetation treatments.

Once information is received from the field offices on the locations and types of acres to be treated, the EIS team will begin to evaluate the effects of treatment actions on resources. It is anticipated that risk assessment and air quality modeling will also be conducted during this period. The BLM will continue to coordinate with fish and wildlife agencies and Native American tribes and Alaska Native groups.

The Draft EIS (DEIS) should be available late this year. Timing of the release depends in part on completion of air quality and risk assessments, and status of consultation with USFWS and NMFS.

For More Information

The Scoping Comment Summary Report for the Vegetation EIS was published June 30, 2002. To read a summary of all the comments received during the scoping process, open it on BLM's website, or obtain a copy from Brian Amme. Information updates will be posted as they become available on BLM's website, www.blm.gov/weeds.

To receive more information, or be placed on the mailing list, contact Brian Amme, Project Manager, BLM, P.O. Box 12000, Reno, NV 89520-0006. He can also be reached by phone at (775) 861-6645, by fax at (775) 861-6712, or by email at brian_amme@blm.gov.



tansy ragwort

Vegetation EIS Update

Published bimonthly by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM),
P.O. Box 12000, Reno, NV 98520-0006.

The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior,
administers 262 million acres of federal public lands
located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska.

The agency also administers 700 million acres
of onshore minerals located throughout the nation.

The BLM manages public lands and their vast array of resources
to benefit both current and future generations.

Vegetation EIS Project Manager:

Brian Amme, BLM, Nevada State Office

Vegetation EIS Co-Manager:

Gina Ramos, Senior Weeds Specialist
BLM, Washington, D.C.

Editor:

Sharon K. Wilson, BLM
Washington Office Public Affairs
Tel: 202-452-5130
e-mail: [*Sharon_Wilson@blm.gov*](mailto:Sharon_Wilson@blm.gov)
