



In Reply To:
8320(OR-027)

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Burns District Office
28910 Hwy 20 West.
Hines, Oregon 97738
<http://www.or.blm.gov/burns/>



December 4, 2007

To All Recreationists, Visitors and Neighbors:

We are embarking on a plan to assess, determine and provide for recreational opportunities on the Steens Mountain, and we invite you to be part of the planning process. During the next year, we are seeking public comment on recreational opportunities and facilities and activities that occur or should occur on the Steens Mountain. We want to look at the whole picture, and thus are initiating a public comment opportunity for the:

Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area *Comprehensive Recreation Plan*

PUBLIC COMMENTS REQUESTED

Introduction and Background

The Steens Mountain is special to many people, and is of such importance that Congress established the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area through legislation in October 2000. BLM (Bureau of Land Management) was required to write a management plan (which we call an RMP) for the Steens Mountain and has done so. In addition, a Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan and a Transportation Management Plan have also been completed. A major recreation decision in the Steens Mountain RMP was to develop as a next step, a separate Comprehensive Recreation Plan (CRP) for those public lands on the Steens Mountain. We will be preparing an environmental assessment as we construct our plan, and public participation is involved in all steps.

The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000, PL 106-399 (Act) provides for the cooperative management of public and private lands on the Steens Mountain. While BLM decisions in the CRP will only affect public lands managed by BLM, private landowners who wish to participate in identification of recreational opportunities supported on private lands are invited to do so in this CRP.

The CRP Area encompasses Steens Mountain, which lies within central Harney County, Oregon. The area to be addressed in the CRP involves the entire area recognized by Congress as being

Steens Mountain Comprehensive Recreation Plan COMMENT FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Representing _____ Telephone _____

Please add me to your mailing list for this project.

Comments:

Please feel free to enclose additional sheets if needed.

Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Burns District Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays, and may be published as part of an environmental analysis documents or related correspondence. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

**Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738**

place
stamp
here

**Attention: Rob Perrin
Outdoor Recreation Specialist
BLM – Burns District
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738**

with the Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA,) and contiguous portions of public land that may provide access to the Steens Mountain.

The BLM, in cooperation with the Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC), Harney County Court and the Steens Mountain Landowners Group, is the agency responsible for plan preparation and coordination with other agencies, key stakeholders, and the general public.

Why is a Comprehensive Recreation Plan/Environmental Assessment being developed?

During the development of the Steens Mountain RMP, the SMAC recommended that BLM look at all recreation issues on the Steens Mountain in a comprehensive manner, rather than by planning for piecemeal activities. Certain actions to maintain existing infrastructure and to address specific resource damage or public health and safety issues are continuing as the CRP is under development. For example, funding that came available for the Page Springs Campground to improve known water system and campground road drainage issues will be expended during fiscal year 2008 to address public health and resource protection needs.

The Steens Mountain Landowners Group has requested that BLM emphasize work towards cooperative management within the CMPA. This opportunity for a comprehensive look at recreation issues provided on both public, and on certain private lands, works towards meeting the intent of the Act.

The Act placed constraints on BLM management of the CMPA specific to developments that may be constructed to provide for recreation, but not to promote recreation. This CRP will assist BLM in the assessment of current and expected recreational activities and the associated facilities that may be desired including: campgrounds, trails, interpretive sites, access points, and other facilities that may be needed to assist both intensively used sites as well as dispersed recreation activities. For example, some visitors desire developed campgrounds, while others only require a place to park their vehicles, while they hike further into the backcountry.

The CRP document, to be developed following a year long public comment period, will discuss what is currently happening, what we would like to provide, and management actions (facility developments, or permission for activities) necessary to achieve objectives.

CRP Sideboards

The Steens Act, other laws and regulations, and some additional plans that BLM has already completed place some sideboards, or constraints, to what the CRP can deliver. So that you know what constraints we work under, the following table is provided.

Citation	Constraint	Allowable Activities
Steens Act PL 106-399 102 (a)	Preserve the ecological integrity of Steens Mountain	Recreational activities that do not degrade ecological processes
..102 (b) 1	Promote grazing, recreation, historic, and other sustainable uses	Recreation is one of multiple uses of the Steens Mountain. Other uses will also continue.
..111 (a)(2)	Recognizes and allows current and historic recreational use	Historic recreational uses may continue when we can assure conservation, protection, and improved management of ecological, social and economic environment [111(a) (1).]
..112(a)	Transportation Plan shall be developed	CRP should be consistent with the Transportation Plan
..112(b)	Prohibition on Off-Road Motorized Travel	No recreational off-road driving is allowed on Federal lands
..112(b)(1)(B)	Motorized or mechanized travel is limited to designated routes	CRP should be consistent with the Steens Mountain Travel Plan, which designates routes available for motorized and mechanized travel. Changes to route designations would require a change to the Steens Mountain Travel Plan.
..112(d)	Prohibition on New Construction - No new road or trail for motorized or mechanized vehicles may be constructed.	No new construction for mountain bike, ATV, or jeep trails may occur
..112(d)(2)	No limitations in the Steens Act to construction of non-motorized trails	Construction of hiking trails, or equestrian use may be allowed
..113 (d)	Hunting, fishing and trapping are authorized on Federal lands	Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities will continue to exist
..113 (f) (D)	Prohibition on construction of facilities, unless for the management of recreation, but not for the promotion of recreation	Construction of facilities needed to manage existing or expected recreation; but not to promote new uses that are not currently occurring.
.,115	Special recreational use permits in the wilderness may be renewed or modified	Steens Mountain Wilderness Area will continue to provide for grandfathered special recreation permits (commercial guides, camps)
..201	Steens Mountain Wilderness Area is designated as a component of the national wilderness system	Within the wilderness area, there are certain restrictions to recreational uses

Please see PL 106-399, October 2000, for a complete text of the Steens Act.

Planning Area Description

The Steens Mountain rises from its Great Basin surroundings as an oasis of natural resources and recreational opportunities. High elevation aspen stands and wildflower meadows are surrounded by sagebrush hillsides and juniper woodlands. Several perennial streams and mountain lakes are present. Both motorized and non motorized recreational opportunities currently exist.

Federal land on the Steens Mountain CMPA encompasses 428,156; there are also included 66,910 acres of private land and 1,070 acres of State of Oregon land. The Steens Mountain Wilderness Area contains 170,084 acres. Recreation-related Cooperative Management

Agreements with private landowners are invited during the CRP process. There are more than 100 miles of designated Wild River.

Recreation Goal and Objectives from the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area Resource Management Plan

The Act, the RMP, the Steens Mountain Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Plan (WP) and the TMP are our guidance documents as we develop the CRP. The following are the recreation goal and objectives contained in the CMPA RMP and therefore provide the framework around which the CRP will be developed.

A. Goal

1. Provide developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities, while protecting resources, to manage the increasing demand for resource dependent recreation activities.

B. Objectives

1. Establish and manage recreation areas where the presence of high quality natural resources and the current or potential demand warrants intensive management practices to protect areas for their scientific, educational, or recreational values while accommodating anticipated increases in use for recreation activities in specific areas.
2. Manage recreation facilities to protect natural resources and to meet user needs.
3. Outside of intensive use areas and developed recreation sites, manage the remainder of the Planning Area for dispersed recreation.
4. Manage visitor use in the Planning Area to protect natural resources and to provide a variety of recreation opportunities.
5. Provide information and educational opportunities to public land visitors.
6. Manage commercial, competitive, educational, and organized group recreation activities.
7. Manage Back Country Byways (BCB) to protect the recognized values.
8. Manage the Oregon High Desert National Recreation Trail to protect the recognized values and setting.

Direction related to the management of roads and trails which will impact recreational use of the CMPA is provided in Appendix M – Transportation Plan, Andrews Management Unit and Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area Resource Management Plans and

Records of Decision Appendices (A-O) and Maps. Designation of additional travel routes are identified in the Travel Management Plan, November 2007.

Additional guidance pertaining to recreational use and facility development within Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers is provided in the Steens Mountain Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Plan, Appendix P – Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area Resource Management Plan.

The intent of the CRP is to refine and provide more detail to the existing guidance in the CMPA RMP and associated plans as they pertain to the management of recreation opportunities. It is not the intent of this planning process to reconsider decisions already made in the CMPA RMP, unless compelling reasons become known.

All of the above documents are available for your review on-line at:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/burns/plans/burnsrmp.php>

Potential Issues

The initially identified issues, which will be addressed in the CRP, are listed below. Each issue has different sub-topics, questions, and management concerns which address specific uses and resources.

- Dispersed Recreation (hiking, camping, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, other)
- Developed Recreation Sites (campgrounds, picnic grounds)
- Riddle Brothers Ranch National Historic Site
- Steens Mountain Back Country Byway/Overlooks/Facilities
- Winter Recreation (snow shoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, other)
- Fir Grove Trail
- Trails/Trailheads
- Special Recreation Permits
- Off-Highway Vehicle Management
- River Use
- Signing/Interpretation
- Other

Each of these issues may lead to competing use of a resource, which would be analyzed in the EA. The following outlines each of the issues with ideas and questions to consider in resolving the issue.

Issue 1: Dispersed Recreation

Dispersed recreation takes many forms. The quality and quantity of dispersed recreation opportunities based on motorized/mechanized use is largely determined by access. Access has largely been determined by the Transportation Plan and Travel Management Plan. Non-motorized dispersed recreation has fewer limits as the BLM managed portions of the CMTA are open to cross-country travel for hikers and equestrian use.

- √ What level of dispersed use should be encouraged? Why?
- √ How should information on dispersed opportunities be provided to the public?
- √ What types of facilities, if any, should be developed and maintained for the benefit of dispersed users? Why? Where?

Issue 2: Developed Recreation Sites

Page Springs Campground is the most highly used, developed facility on the CMTA. It is usually open for year round use. The site can accommodate large recreational vehicles. For many, it serves as a base from which to explore other areas within the CMTA and adjacent areas of interest, such as the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. It is located within the Donner and Blitzen Wild and Scenic River corridor and adjacent to Steens Mountain Wilderness boundary. It serves as a trailhead for the Blitzen River and Wilderness Nature Trails.

- √ Are the sites OK as currently exist?
- √ What additional types of facilities and services, or changes to existing facilities and services should be provided at Page Springs? Why?
- √ What additional needs are there for resource protection or public safety?

Fish Lake and Jackman Park Campgrounds are located adjacent to the North Steens Loop Road at 7400' and 7650' in elevation respectively. The campgrounds are usually open from July to November. A small boat launch and dock are available at Fish Lake. The sites are not well suited for large recreational vehicles or group use.

- √ Are the sites OK as currently exist?
- √ What additional types of facilities and services, or changes to existing facilities and services should these two campgrounds provide? Why?
- √ What additional needs are there for resource protection or public safety?

South Steens Campground, the newest of the developed recreation sites, consists of a family camping area and an equestrian camping area located on the South Steens Loop Road. It is usually open from May to November. The site serves as a base for hiking and horse riding in the Little Blitzen and Big Indian Gorges along with the Mud/Ankle Creek areas.

- √ Are the sites OK as currently exist?
- √ What additional types of facilities and services, or changes to existing facilities and services should be provided at the South Steens Campground? Why?
- √ What additional needs are there for resource protection or public safety?

The Mann Lake Recreation Site is a semi-developed day/overnight use area along the East Steens Road. The recreation opportunity is primarily fishing in Mann Lake. Though there are two restrooms, an information board, a graveled road, boat launch and parking areas, the site has many user created access routes and use areas.

- √ Is the site OK as currently exists?
- √ Should the site be upgraded to a campground? Why?
- √ What additional needs are there for resource protection or public safety?
- √ Are there additional developments you would like to see on Steens Mountain?
- √ What should these sites provide?
- √ Where should they be located, and why?

Issue 3: Riddle Brothers Ranch

Riddle Brothers Ranch is a National Historic Site located on the Cold Springs Road approximately two miles from the South Steens Loop Road. The site is managed under its own site plan. The public may hike into the area, or on certain days of the week during the summer season, they may drive in and park during daylight hours. Fishing and sightseeing are the most common activities. Facilities at the site include a vault toilet and trails to access the historic structures. Camping is not allowed at the site. Access to the site is limited by locked gates several days of the week during the summer season, and by both weather and a very rough road.

- √ Is the site OK as currently exists?
- √ Are there any changes needed to recreation management for this site? Why?
- √ What additional needs are there for resource protection or public safety?

Issue 4: Steens Mountain Back Country Byway/Overlooks/Facilities

The Steens Mountain Loop Road is designated as a Back Country Byway. This is the main motorized route used by visitors to Steens Mountain. Several pull outs and parking areas are provided with limited interpretive information.

- √ How should the Byway be managed? Is the information available at overlooks and pull outs OK as is? Or, should changes be made? Why?
- √ Where should any additional waysides be located if any? What additional information would you like to have provided?
- √ What types of facilities should be provided at the waysides?

Issue 5: Winter Recreation

Currently, limited winter recreation use occurs on Steens Mountain under a permit system which allows permit holders access beyond the closed North Steens Loop Road gate at Page Springs. Cross country skiing, snowshoeing and limited snowmobiling are currently allowed. Potential exists to accommodate an increase in both motorized and non-motorized winter recreation.

- √ Should more use be allowed? Is the level of use sufficient to meet demand?

- √ Are sufficient routes of travel or trails available for uses? What changes should occur and why?
- √ Is there a need for additional services and facilities to be developed?

Issue 6: Fir Grove Trail

The Fir Groves Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) offers an opportunity for the visiting public to experience a unique Grand Fir forest community, the only one of its kind in the CMPA. A public access easement to the newly designated area exists, but no constructed trail is in place at this time.

- √ Should a constructed or a cairn marked trail be developed from the North Steens Loop Road to the Fir Groves ACEC?
- √ Should any other visitor services or facilities be developed?

Issue 7: Trails/Trailheads

Currently, the Steens Mountain Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Plan (RMP, Appendix P) list ten trails that are currently being managed within the Steens Mountain Wilderness and the Wild and Scenic River corridors. Trailheads for these trails exist at various locations throughout the CMPA including Page Springs Campground, Nye Cabin, Wild horse Overlook, South Steens Campground, Little Blitzen Trailhead, Mud/Ankle Creek Trailhead and Pike Creek Trailhead. Use within the Steens Mountain Wilderness is limited to non-motorized/mechanized travel.

- √ What types of services and facilities should be provided at these trailheads?
- √ Should other existing trails be actively managed?
- √ Should new trails be developed? Why?
- √ Should closed roads be maintained as non-mechanized trails?
- √ What types of trail opportunities should be provided?
- √ Should less developed trails become more developed?
- √ Should the trail route be signed?

Issue 8: Special Recreation Permits

A wide variety of activities within the CMPA are currently managed under the Special Recreation Permitting system. The Act recognizes that certain Special Recreation Permits may be continued in the Wilderness Area of the CMPA, and these grandfathered permits will continue in the future. The CRP does not seek to change these permitted uses, evaluated under separate analyses. Currently many commercial and organized group permit uses are provided outside of the wilderness area, and only limited commercial special recreation permits are provided in the wilderness area.

- √ What types of additional commercial and competitive events are appropriate for the CMPA?
- √ Are there specific organized group activities that should be provided? E.g. group camping areas?

Issue 9: Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Management

The Steens Act closed the CMPA to recreational off road travel. The Transportation Plan and Travel Management Plan associated with the Steens Management Plan designate routes that may be used by motorized and mechanized vehicles.

- √ In consideration of the constraints to OHV recreation, are there any changes needed to OHV recreation opportunities? Why?

Issue 10: Wild River Use

Congress established over 100 miles of stream as Wild, under the management authority of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Currently, the primary recreational use of the Wild and Scenic Rivers within the CMPA is fishing. Limited floating occurs due to access and flow limitations.

- √ Are there any issues for recreational uses of the Wild Rivers that should be considered? Why?

Issue 11: Information/Signing/Interpretation

Currently, there is a wide variety of directional and interpretive signing in the CMPA.

- √ What kinds of educational materials would enhance or improve your visit to Steens Mountain? Examples could include (but aren't limited to) directional signs, interpretive signs, information signs, brochures, maps, etc. How should they be managed?
- √ What type of educational material do you prefer? For example, would you rather have a brochure with a map or signs on the ground, or vice versa, or both? Why?
- √ What is your opinion about signage? More or less is best? Why?
- √ Is there any type of educational material you would not use or appreciate? Why or why not?
- √ What kinds of information do you need most when visiting an unfamiliar place? Examples could include (but aren't limited to) rules and regulations, safety messages, directional information, etc.

Other:

- √ Is there any additional information you would like us to consider?

What Are the Next Steps?

This mailer is part of the early planning process, and constitutes a scoping period preparatory to BLM completing an environmental assessment (EA) and plan (CRP). The anticipated scoping period for the CRP/EA is one year, from approximately December 1, 2007 to December 1, 2008. As scoping continues, BLM will be collecting and analyzing public comments as it compiles agency information. We are available to meet with you or your group to discuss recreation issues on Steens Mountain, and welcome your participation. The BLM will incorporate agency information and public comments into a CRP/EA. The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the CRP/EA before a decision is made.

How Can You Help?

You can participate in the planning process by reviewing the preliminary issues listed above and then by identifying other concerns or ideas you have. To be most helpful, your comments should relate to a specific concern or conflict that can be resolved in this planning process.

Interested parties are encouraged to submit comments to the Burns District Office so they can be considered in preparation of the CRP/EA. Please use the attached comment form or address comments and letters to:

Rob Perrin,
Outdoor Recreation Specialist
Bureau of Land Management
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738

You may also comment by e-mail to SteensRecPlan@blm.gov or call Rob Perrin at (541) 573-4442 with any questions. If you would like to receive a copy of the CRP/EA when it becomes available, please let us know. If you provide scoping comments, and have provided us contact information (email or mailing address) you will automatically receive a copy of the CRP/EA. The CRP/EA will also be available for review on the BLM – Burns District website:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/burns/plans/index.php>

I look forward to the important information you can provide us. Recreational users have a great stake in the decisions that will be the outcome of the Steens Comprehensive Recreation Plan. I hope that you will become involved.

Sincerely,

/s/ Karla Bird

Karla Bird
Andrews Resource Area Field Manager

Enclosures