

SCOPING REPORT
for the
POCATELLO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
and
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

SEPTEMBER 2003

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Pocatello Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is revising existing land use plans with new and updated direction to manage public lands in Southeastern Idaho.

The proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) will revise two existing plans, the Pocatello RMP (1988) and the Malad MFP (1981). An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared to analyze the potential impacts of proposed changes to management direction, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), BLM policies and handbooks.

Public scoping was conducted to help identify issues which will be used in developing a full range of alternatives. This report describes the public scoping process undertaken for the preparation of a comprehensive draft EIS and RMP. The comments received from the public during the scoping process are summarized in this report.

2.0 BRIEFINGS

Before soliciting public involvement in the development of the draft EIS and RMP, BLM representatives have met with various groups having specific interest in the successful development of the EIS and RMP to explain the basic activities inherent in the project.

2.1 Congressional Staffs

At the onset of the Pocatello Field Office planning effort in Fiscal Year 2001 (FY01), local congressional staffers for Congressman Mike Simpson and Senators Michael Crapo and Larry Craig were updated periodically on the planning effort by the Pocatello Field Office Manager. In addition, these Pocatello offices received individual scoping letters and briefing packages mailed in April of 2003.

2.2 Resource Advisory Council (RAC)

Beginning in FY01, the Upper Snake River District (USRD) RAC was periodically updated on the status of the Pocatello planning effort. To date, the USRD RAC has been briefed on the planning effort on May 29, 2001 and November 20, 2002 of which both meetings were held at the Pocatello Field Office.

3.0 SCOPING PROCESS

Scoping is the term used in the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) [40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500 et. Seq.] to define the early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed in the planning process. The scoping process serves a number of purposes. It provides an avenue to involve the public in identifying significant issues related to potential land use management actions, and helps identify any issues that are not significant and can thereby be eliminated from detailed analysis. The list of stakeholders and other interested parties is also confirmed and augmented during the scoping process. The scoping process for the Pocatello RMP encompassed a number of venues.

3.1 Notice of Intent

The Notice of Intent (NOI) is the legal document notifying the public of the BLM's intent to initiate the planning process and to prepare an EIS for a major federal action. The NOI invites the participation of the affected and interested agencies, organizations, and members of the general public in determining the scope and significant issues to be addressed in the planning alternatives and analyzed in the EIS. The NOI for the Pocatello RMP was published in the Federal Register on November 14, 2001. The official close of the scoping period was June 30, 2003.

3.2 Press Releases

Local and regional newspapers and radio stations throughout the planning area were used to disseminate information on the Pocatello RMP scoping and planning process. Press releases were prepared by the BLM announcing the official scoping meetings and inviting the public to provide input. These were mailed on May 15, May 29, and June 9, 2003. The press releases were provided to the following print and broadcast media:

Newspapers	
Associated Press – Boise	Caribou County Sun – Soda Springs
Idaho State Journal – Pocatello	Idaho Statesman – Boise
Morning News – Blackfoot	News-Examiner – Montpelier
Preston Citizen – Preston	Post Register – Idaho Falls
Power County Press – American Falls	Shelley Pioneer – Shelley
Sho-Ban News – Fort Hall	
Television	
KIFI Channel 8 – Idaho Falls	KIDK Channel 3 – Idaho Falls
KPVI Channel 6 – Pocatello	
Radio	
KICN-KLCE – Blackfoot	KVSI – Montpelier
KWIK-KPKY – Pocatello	KZBQ – Pocatello
KSEI – Pocatello	KBYI – Rexburg
KBRV-KFIS – Soda Springs	

3.3 Public Scoping Notice and Planning Criteria

A public scoping letter and briefing package were prepared and mailed to federal, state and local agencies, interest groups, and members of the general public on April 23, 2003. The mailing list was compiled from data kept by the Pocatello Field Office and included over 800 entries. The scoping letter and briefing package were also made available for public view on the Internet in April 2003.

The briefing package served to inform the recipients of the public scoping process for the preparation of the EIS for the Pocatello RMP and the scheduled scoping meetings. The notice included background information on the purpose and need for the planning activity and the proposed action. Preliminary resource issues were identified and summarized. Preliminary planning criteria were also included. These serve as ground rules for the planning process and to ensure efforts are tailored to pertinent issues that will lead to the development of alternatives.

The notice invited the public to participate in the scoping process and to comment on the planning criteria. The mailing address and email address for comments were provided in both the scoping letter and briefing package.

3.4 Scoping Meetings

Public scoping meetings were held in Montpelier on May 28, Malad on May 29, Fort Hall on June 5, Pocatello on June 10, and Soda Springs on June 11. The BLM provided the local media with press releases announcing the time, location and purpose of these meetings.

The format for the scoping meetings featured informal, one-on-one presentations by interdisciplinary team members. Attendees signed a registration sheet as they entered the room. Team members then escorted attendees to stations set up around the room, which detailed the proposed action, resource issues, planning criteria and a proposed schedule for completing the planning process. Stationed GIS inventory maps highlighted various resources.

Following presentations, attendees were encouraged to mail in written comments/questions or to sit and fill out comment cards specific to the Pocatello RMP. Copies of the aforementioned briefing package and planning criteria were also made available at the comment table.

4.0 COLLABORATION

The Pocatello RMP will provide guidance for a vast area of public land in Southeastern Idaho and necessarily requires the coordination of a wide variety of organizations with interests in the area. Among those are governmental bodies which create, administer and monitor policy for these, as well as adjacent, lands. BLM established a coordinated effort in developing the Pocatello RMP by seeking the active participation of these parties.

4.1 Other Federal Agencies, State Agencies and State and Local Governments

To enhance public participation, members of state, county and city governments were contacted about the FMDA and invited to submit comments. As a result, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation submitted a comment letter through the public scoping process.

Wildlife management agencies, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Fish and Game, have supplied comment letters through the public scoping process. Furthermore, employees of these agencies – Dwayne Winslow from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Jim Mende from Idaho Fish and Game – participate on an interdisciplinary team charged with crafting the Pocatello RMP. Linda Ward is also an interdisciplinary team member representing the USDA Forest Service.

4.2 Shoshone-Bannock Tribes

Prior to public scoping, a meeting was held on May 15, 2003 with the Land Use Commission and Resources and Wildlife staff specialists of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to offer information on the development of the Pocatello RMP and to solicit input. In addition, the Tribal Council, members of the Land Use Commission and resource staff specialists were sent individual scoping letters and briefing packages mailed in April of 2003.

One public scoping meeting was held on the Reservation at Fort Hall on June 5, 2003.

5.0 SCOPING SUMMARY

The scoping period officially closed on June 30, 2003. The public scoping process provided sufficient opportunity for federal, state and local agencies, interested organizations and industries, and members of the general public to express their comments and provide meaningful input to the planning process. The BLM provided adequate notice of the scoping process and offered different venues for the public to learn about the Pocatello RMP planning process and to provide their input.

5.1 Attendance

Given the thoroughness of the notification process, attendance was lighter than expected at several meetings. The following table summarizes the number of attendees that registered.

Attendance	
Montpelier	1
Malad	7
Fort Hall	11
Pocatello	44
Soda Springs	18
Total	81

5.2 Comments

Responses – called *letters* for the purpose of this document – were received through all venues and in a variety of formats. Written letters were received from the attendees at the scoping meetings and by surface mail and email at the BLM Pocatello Field Office. Most of the letters were received at the scoping meetings and by surface mail.

A total of 44 letters were received from a number of states, as indicated in the following table:

State	Number of Letters
Idaho	39
Oregon	2
Utah	3

Of the 39 letters that were received from inside the State of Idaho, the majority came from communities located within the Pocatello Field Office.

Community	Number of Letters
Arimo	1
Boise	3
Buhl	1
Chubbuck	2
Firth	2
Geneva	1
Idaho Falls	2
Lava Hot Springs	1
Malad City	1
McCammon	1
Pocatello	18
Preston	1
Soda Springs	1
Multiple Cities/Unidentified	4

More letters came from individuals than from federal and state agencies or interest groups:

Originator	Number of Letters
Federal/state agencies	4
Interest groups	10
Individuals	30

There were 1304 unique comments identified among all 44 letters. A database was established to capture these comments, utilizing categories – or *analysis topics* – which were developed during preplanning to highlight issues and/or resources affected by the Pocatello RMP. The resulting comment analysis database was completed in June 2003.

Comment Distribution by Analysis Topic (# of comments)

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) Air Quality (3) | 10) Paleontological Resources (17) |
| 2) Cultural Resources. (6) | 11) Planning Criteria (1) |
| 3) Fire Management (76) | 12) Process (38) |
| 4) Fish and Wildlife (90) | 13) Recreation (221) |
| 5) Forestry (33) | 14) Soil & Water Resources (88) |
| 6) Lands & Realty (149) | 15) Special Designation (99) |
| 7) Livestock Grazing (246) | 16) Special Status Species (69) |
| 8) Minerals (23) | 17) Vegetation (99) |
| 9) Other (46) | |

5.3 Summary of Public Comments by Topic

Following is a list of analysis topics that were developed to highlight issues and/or resources affected by the Pocatello RMP:

AIR QUALITY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

FIRE MANAGEMENT

- WUI/Private Landowners
- Suppression
- Treatments

FISH & WILDLIFE

- Aquatic Species
- Avian Species
- Habitat
- Predators/Animal Control

FORESTRY

LANDS & REALTY

- Access/Easement/ROW
- Communications
- Corridors
- Land Tenure
- Wind

LIVESTOCK GRAZING

- Range Improvements
- Standards & Guidelines
- Suitability Analysis

MINERALS

- Reclamation/Mitigation/Monitoring

OTHER

- Other - Need for Change

PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

PLANNING CRITERIA

PROCESS

RECREATION

- Ecological Concerns
- More Law Enforcement
- OHV
- Transportation Plan

SOIL & WATER RESOURCES

- Soil Quality
- Water Quality

SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS

- ACEC
- SRMA
- Wild & Scenic River

SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES

VEGETATION

- Manipulation/Restoration
- Noxious/Invasive Weeds
- Non-Natives/Native Species

All comments received were input to the database and sorted accordingly by analysis topic. The Pocatello RMP interdisciplinary team then reviewed each comment to determine how best to address the concerns they raised. Many of these comments will be considered in the development of the EIS, i.e. affected environment, environmental consequences, cumulative effects, alternative development and or management actions. Others raised points that fell outside the scope of the EIS.

In general, comments received suggested that the BLM follow an open NEPA process with full public comment and review periods. Many comments urged full compliance with federal laws, regulations and policies regarding a wide range of environmental issues, such as air and water quality and the protection of threatened or endangered species. BLM's compliance with federal laws, regulations and policies is the foundation of all alternatives to be considered.

Following is a general summary of comments by analysis topic:

Air Quality One comment suggested that management activities be designated to improve the Pocatello airshed. Mitigation measures and management actions will be considered. Another comment focused on the long term impacts of various land management activities, such as prescribed fire and road maintenance. This will be considered under environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections in the EIS.

Cultural Resources One comment suggested specific actions be taken to protect these resources from artifact collectors, looters, thieves and vandals. This will be considered in the in the development of alternatives and under mitigation measures. Another comment requested the designation of new Archeological Districts to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. While this is addressed by existing policy, regulations, and laws, new management actions and the designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) may be considered.

Fire Management Comments under this analysis topic stressed flexibility, as one set of guidelines may not suit all areas or habitats, and coordination between BLM direction and local firefighting efforts and private landowners. Suggestions were made for rehabilitation guidelines, fuel load reduction, prescribed fire, and rest periods from livestock grazing and recreation use after fire. Limited, or restrained, fire management was also requested to protect human life and property. Several requested fire suppression for vulnerable habitats. Another comment noted that naturally occurring fire should be allowed in areas away from human habitation. These comments will be considered in the development of alternatives and management actions.

Several requests were made to look at the fire history of the area and to identify and quantify acreages that receive treatment. These will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS. Concerns were also expressed about the cumulative impacts of hazardous fuel reduction, prescribed fire and vegetation management to ecosystem components, recreation and the creation of new roads. These comments will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments found to be outside the scope of the EIS included suggestions for the planning and zoning of private lands and the education of private landowners.

Fish and Wildlife Many comments focused on the threat of habitat fragmentation to several species, from big game to aquatic and avian species. These will be addressed in the development of alternatives.

Concerns were raised about the relationship between livestock grazing and the habitats of several wildlife species. As well, several comments requested more information on the status of habitats for specific species. These will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS. One comment focused on the impact old growth plant communities have on wildlife species. This will be considered in the in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Several comments expressed a desire to avoid listing more species as sensitive, threatened or endangered. Mule deer was noted as a species needing consideration. Some comments stressed flexibility – as what may be beneficial to one species may be the opposite for another. Concerns over the impact of seeding non-native species after fire, the maintenance of migration corridors and the identification of big game wintering ranges and calving areas were also voiced and will be addressed in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments found to be outside the scope of the EIS included manipulating the numbers of beaver and raccoon and certain predators, the stocking of fish, and the management of other wildlife populations. The BLM manages habitat, not population numbers. Other comments called for the implementation of Grasslands Reserve Program initiatives, which do not fall under BLM jurisdiction. One comment requested a look into the effects of pesticides and herbicides on aquatic species; however, the BLM does not conduct such research.

Forestry Comments requested an assessment of beetle damage as well as juniper seral stages, encroachment and its importance to habitat. These will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS. Comments regarding the management of juniper to the benefit of sagebrush will be considered in the development of alternatives. One comment asked about the risk to habitats associated with juniper removal. This will be addressed in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

One comment deemed outside the scope of the EIS asked for the inclusion of appropriate monitoring procedures for the determination of compliance with forest plan standards and guides, an area over which the BLM does not have jurisdiction.

Lands and Realty Several comments questioned how to manage utility corridors (widening, proposing new, or limiting existing). Many focused on acquiring or maintaining public access to BLM lands. Clarification of land tenure adjustments (sale, exchange, disposal, acquisition) and tying fragmented parcels to larger habitats were also mentioned. Others requested a prioritization of acquisition objectives with regard to habitat enhancement. These will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Many comments inquired about the impacts of new power lines, energy corridors and wind energy sites on wildlife species and habitats. These will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments deemed outside the scope of this EIS include requests for private landowners to provide access to public lands; suggestions for the implementation of right-of-way (ROW) regulations; requests for single owner easement procurements, which falls under the responsibilities of counties; calls for research into the effects of power lines, energy corridors and wind energy sites on wildlife populations; and a request for a large-scale programmatic EIS on wind energy.

Livestock Grazing Many comments suggested ways in which to manage livestock grazing in order to enhance wildlife habitats through standards and guidelines, animal conversion, seasonal adjustments, the reduction in AUMs and allotment closures, and changes to range improvements. These comments will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Some comments requested that the needs of healthy ecosystems, including sagebrush habitat, take precedence over livestock grazing, while others expressed concerns that grazing might enhance the spread of noxious and exotic weeds. Other comments questioned the impact to vulnerable soils, water, riparian habitat, and sensitive species. The effects of water developments, water hauling and stocking rates were also questioned. These comments will be addressed in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

One commenter took exception with livestock grazing not being identified as a “Need for Change Topic”. The commenter believes livestock grazing detrimentally affects other resources, e.g. soil, water quality and wildlife habitat and changes are needed in livestock grazing to reduce these effects. The environmental effects of livestock grazing will be addressed in the EIS. These comments also need to be addressed through implementation of the livestock grazing program.

Comments deemed outside the scope of this EIS included calls for a removal of all cattle and sheep, overgrazing analyses, removal of public access from grazing allotments, predator control, federal legislation to buy out grazing permits, the retiring of allotments, experiments in the design of range improvements, the stocking rates of all herbivores, paperwork reduction for permittees, individual allotment analyses, requirements that permittees use guard dogs and herding, the assignment of all maintenance costs of structural improvements to permittees, range management monitoring protocols, new long-term rangeland condition studies, and specific direction requests that are handled at the implementation or site-specific level.

Minerals Several comments asked about how mining activities may be adversely affecting habitats through air and other types of pollution. These will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS. As well, some comments requested withdrawals and that mineral development be conducted in ways to minimize adverse impacts. These will be considered in the development of alternatives.

A few comments raised questions about the effects of mining roads and will be considered in the development of mitigation measures. Other comments focused on the degree of impact due to

mineral developments and reclamation efforts. These will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments deemed outside the scope of this EIS involved requests regarding capping, backfilling and other specific actions which are addressed at implementation. Another comment asked about the procedure for handling mining claims, which are addressed by current policy and regulation.

Other Under this catch-all analysis topic, one comment questioned the state of military impacts and will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS.

Several comments focused on the needs of scientific study, biodiversity, use restriction and resource restoration. These will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Comments deemed outside the scope of the EIS included requests for outlawing Temporary Non-Renewable Use (TNR), removing commercial interests, compensation to the American public for mining/grazing/OHV activities, and action against vandalism on private lands.

Paleontological Resources Comments suggested increasing protection against vandalism and collecting and will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Process One comment recommended the use of adaptive management principles and will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Two comments requested the analysis of a broad range of actions and will be addressed in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments deemed outside the scope of the EIS suggested conducting an experiment with management actions, new data collection, re-inventories and an estimation of the success of long-term implementation of the plan

Planning Criteria One comment questioned a criterion based on preserving genetic integrity. This will be considered in the refinement of criteria.

Recreation Many comments highlighted the balance between ecology and recreation and perceived an increase in recreation. These will be addressed in the affected environment section of the EIS.

Many comments questioned the location of motorized/non-motorized route designations, use restrictions, the creation of new motorized routes, the closure or obliteration of roads, enhancements to water recreation on the Bear and Blackfoot Rivers, current law enforcement levels and winter access. These will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Some comments expressed concern over Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use, ecological impacts, the effects of roads and their improvement or maintenance, and impacts due to an increase in

recreational use. These comments will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments deemed outside the scope of the EIS included requests for road and trail inventories, increased frontcountry interpretation, and a designated transportation network, all, of which, would be handled in implementation. Some comments identified actions to be conducted at certain locations and were found to be too site-specific for this broad planning effort. Other comments included suggestions for Revised Statute 2477 assertions, assuming the counties' duties regarding road construction and maintenance, implementing Idaho Fish and Game regulations, and controlling the flow of water through the Oneida Narrows.

Soil and Water Resources Some comments wanted to know about the current state of streams, seeps, ponds, and other riparian areas and microbiotic crust. These will be addressed in the affected environment section of the EIS.

Several comments requested that more conservative measures be taken when buffering riparian areas to protect water quality and reduce erosion. These will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Other comments suggested that more emphasis be placed on soil and water quality and that ecosystems should remain intact through any proposed treatments. Disturbances to soils and streams, changes in organic matter levels, erosion and the introduction of roads and range improvements were also mentioned. These will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Some comments found to be outside the scope of the EIS focused on monitoring and assessing water developments and water sources, through sampling, in order to manage livestock grazing. Others addressed implementation actions regarding water quality protocols, trail placement, restoration and state listed streams.

Special Designations Several comments suggested that Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designations be considered for historic trails and sage grouse habitat, a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) designation be considered for the Oneida Narrows and Wild and Scenic River designations be considered for portions of the Blackfoot and Bear Rivers. Others requested restrictions on some uses within special designations. One comment suggested the release of some parcels from WSA designation.

Some comments questioned the impact of Wild and Scenic River designations on habitats. These will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments deemed outside the scope of the EIS included requests that the public be given more information and be allowed to request ACEC designations after the RMP process; that roadless areas be turned into Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), which are not designated by the BLM; that there be designations of critical habitats for all sensitive species, based on species survival

information not developed by the BLM; and that management actions and monitoring plans be developed for special designations, which would be handled during implementation.

Special Status Species Some comments asked if the populations of several species are declining. These will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS. Many comments under this analysis topic addressed sagebrush connectivity and the needs of sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse and pygmy rabbit populations and those of other sagebrush-dependent species. These comments will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Several comments focused on the effects of certain uses on sensitive species such as the sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse. These actions will be addressed in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Deemed outside the scope of the EIS were comments regarding the use and effects of pesticides and herbicides; compensating private landowners for wolf predation; and the stocking of non-native fish species, which is handled by Idaho Fish and Game.

Vegetation Some comments requested the location of vegetation manipulation projects and will be considered in the affected environment section of the EIS. A major theme among comments dealt with the degradation and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat and the spread of noxious weeds. The development of programmatic policy encouraging ecosystem management and restoration and a goal of no net sagebrush loss will be considered in the development of alternatives.

Several comments focused on uses and actions that may cause the spread of exotic plants that adversely affect native species; and one comment questioned how herbicides affect habitats. These will be considered in the environmental consequences and cumulative effects sections of the EIS.

Comments found to be outside the scope of the EIS included requests to test herbicides and suggestions for monitoring the spread of exotic plants, which will be handled under implementation.

5.4 Relevant Issues and Anticipated Decisions to be Made

Public comment analysis conducted by the RMP team in August 2003, resulted in identifying six relevant issues based on specific criteria. These included identifying if the effects of a proposed action would approach or exceed standards or a threshold, would substantially change a resource, would be controversial, would offer a wide range of opportunities, or would cause disagreement regarding their environmental impact.

Following comment analysis, RMP team members returned to flagged comments to fully develop and describe the relevant issues. All issue statements included here were identified by the public except the Phosphate Mining and Selenium Release issue statement. Aside from the Phosphate Mining and Selenium Release issue statement, which was written by the RMP team,

all issue statements below contain opposing views held by the public, as described in the comments. Using the actual wording submitted by the public, these issue statements attempt to capture both sides of each issue/conflict.

OHV Management

How will the increasing OHV use and associated conflicts be managed within the planning area?

Public Comments:

Some people who commented feel that OHV use has negative effects to resources, including off-trail vegetation and soil damage, erosion, damage to riparian areas, spread of noxious weeds, and disturbance to wildlife. Large acreage of resource area, like the Pocatello front, is being modified due to trail pioneering and the development of alternative routes over time. Some people believe the BLM must take strong steps to limit OHV use, and to restore damaged lands as part of the process. There should be no wide open areas (prohibit cross county travel). Some people said BLM needs to restrict all OHV use to designated roads and manage roads as closed unless marked open. Motorized vehicle use must not be allowed in areas with sensitive or highly erodable soils, or at times of the year when soil conditions are inappropriate for such use. Illegal routes should be closed and fully restored.

Some winter users feel the "open" designation for over snow vehicle use should be reconsidered. Over snow vehicles interfere with backcountry skiers' recreation and solitude and also cause avalanche dangers. Certain areas should be closed to over snow vehicles and left open for skiers and foot travel.

Other people feel their historical and lawful OHV access should be preserved by the BLM in the RMP revision. Some would like to continue to have OHV access over the existing roads and trails on BLM property. OHVs can also be an excellent vehicle to get into otherwise difficult areas. Education can encourage respectful recreation that is not damaging to the resource. Some feel that the BLM needs to work with and educate user groups, OHV dealers, and OHV manufacturers to promote responsible OHV behavior and direct users to appropriate places to ride.

Phosphate Mining and Selenium Release

How does the BLM best manage the process of mining and reclamation to ensure containment and control of hazardous substances such as selenium and other potential contaminants?

Public Comments:

Phosphate is the largest mineral resource in the Pocatello Field Office area. The BLM is mandated to promote orderly and efficient mining operations which maximize its mineral resources for the economic benefit of the public, while avoiding or minimizing environmental damage. Phosphate mining and processing are key components of the SE Idaho and Star Valley, WY economies. Operators are required to return disturbed land back to beneficial use at the completion of mining through monitoring, reclamation and reclamation bonds.

In 1996, the BLM and other regulatory agencies became aware of selenium releases from both active and inactive phosphate mines in the region. Investigations have shown that mining of phosphate ore promotes the oxidation of and increased mobility of selenium and other metals, found as naturally occurring constituents in some of the waste rock associated with phosphate ore. Elevated levels of selenium have been found in surface water, groundwater, vegetation, and in biota associated with phosphate mine activity. Locally, these occurrences exceed some State and Federal water quality standards. Selenium has been linked to several sheep kills, on phosphate mine disturbance, since the mid-1990s. Federal and State investigations are currently evaluating the nature and extent of the selenium release and its effects on grazing, recreation, wildlife and human populations.

Public Access - Acquiring/Maintaining

How will the planning process address the need for acquiring and maintaining access to public lands while also protecting private property rights?

Public Comments:

There is a strong sentiment among the public that the BLM in this RMP effort must solidify the rights of the public to access public lands. Some feel that BLM must keep all historical routes to public lands open and if possible acquire rights-of-ways on existing roads. Their observation is that the public has been let down by state and federal land managers and that public access has not been protected by land managers and easements have not been purchased or pursued in the quantity that the federal agency's own rules suggest. One commenter recommends that if ranchers blocks access, the BLM should purchase easements or condemn the private lands if they are an impediment to a long established right-of-way.

A common concern is access to grazing allotments and farming areas. A commenter pointed out that some private landowners adjacent to BLM lands have boldly locked gates and denied access. One group suggested that all individuals should have access to roads, streams, and rivers (such as the Blackfoot River) and that access should be kept open and available to the public for hunting, fishing, camping, floating, etc.

One commenter felt that routes through private lands where the landowners do not want to provide access should be specifically identified and categorically removed from consideration. Another concern among the public is the protection of landowner's property rights and litter control on public access to BLM.

Recreation Management

How will the increase in recreational use and demand for quality recreational opportunities be balanced within the planning area?

Public Comments:

Some people said they would like to see the Pocatello RMP recognize in some way and start the process of managing the resources of the public lands with higher emphasis on recreational wants. It is easy to anticipate that increase population and use will bring increased pressure for BLM to expand facilities. Planning efforts in southeast Idaho have shown a need for additional recreational opportunities in close proximity to the Pocatello and Idaho Falls areas. While dispersed recreation already takes place on BLM lands in the area, we feel there will be increased demand for destination recreation. These lands presently provide a wealth of dispersed recreation opportunities.

Other people feel recreational use of the public lands managed by the Pocatello Field Office has environmental impacts, and these impacts can be severe depending on the use and on the habitat type. Recreation opportunities should not impact cultural, historical, tribal, paleontological, geological, biological, and other values. Certain types of uses are incompatible and must be separated so that user conflict is minimized. For instance, motorized use and hiking are generally incompatible. Management tools should include seasonal and visitor restrictions to prevent impacts to wildlife populations from increased use and recreation. Restrictions can take the form of seasonal closures, complete closures, or changes in use types or intensities. Recreation use needs to be spread out to new areas instead of pushing everything into a few small areas. One commenter encouraged the BLM to operate from the frame of reference that demand will grow virtually infinitely yet the land will always remain finite. Clearly, high quality recreational experiences depend on healthy habitats and ecosystems.

Sagebrush Ecosystems

What effects will future management of sagebrush ecosystems have on sage grouse and sagebrush-obligate species?

Public Comments:

Sagebrush plant communities westwide are besieged by an array of threats such as wildfire, weed invasions, conversion to agriculture and herbivory. Given the wide scale loss, fragmentation, and degradation of low elevation big sagebrush communities, we recommend the RMP identify strategies to protect, improve and restore them.

Connectivity of sagebrush communities is a key component of sage-grouse habitat. Reestablishing connectivity of sagebrush communities, particularly communities occupied by sage grouse have long-term benefits for sage grouse populations. RMP must focus on unfragmented core habitat for sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, antelope, sage-steppe obligate migratory birds as well as gray flycatcher and other juniper dependent species. Actions clearly are needed to ensure that there will not be a need in the future to list sage-grouse or other sagebrush dependent species in Idaho as Threatened or Endangered). We need to ensure that these species and their habitats are conserved and restored.

In many instances, managing sagebrush stands by creating a “mosaic” of vegetation ends up benefiting weedy species like deer mice and results in fragmentation of habitat for other native

species like sage-grouse and sage steppe obligate migratory songbirds. In the long term fragmentation of sagebrush dependent wildlife can influence size, stability and success of wildlife populations.

Socioeconomics

How will social and economic benefits of commodity and amenity uses be balanced within the planning area?

Public Comments:

Some people who commented feel amenities (non-consumptive uses) derived from intact, healthy sagebrush communities, old growth pinion-juniper, wild and untrammelled vistas, native fish, wildlife habitat, properly functioning riparian areas, and clean water are more important than benefits derived from commodity (consumptive) type uses, e.g. timber harvesting, mining and livestock grazing. Some indicate a desire that a higher emphasis be placed on recreational wants and less on extractive type uses.

Others feel commodity uses, e.g. livestock grazing, timber harvesting and mining, are appropriate uses of public lands and provide local and regional social and economic benefits.

Some believe management activities must operate within biological parameters in order to keep ecosystems healthy and to continue providing a stream of benefits to local communities and visitors alike.

6.0 DRAFT PLANNING CRITERIA

Preliminary planning criteria were developed prior to public scoping meetings to set the side boards for focused planning of the Pocatello RMP and to guide decision making by topic. These criteria were introduced to the public for review in May and June of 2003 at all scoping meetings. The public was encouraged to comment on, and suggest additions to, these criteria at the meetings, through written correspondence and at the Pocatello RMP web site, which has posted the criteria since April 2003.

Comments on the preliminary planning criteria were collected through June 30, 2003, and were incorporated, as appropriate, in August 2003, with the final planning criteria approved by the Acting District Manager in September 2003.

7.0 DATA SUMMARY/DATA GAPS

At the onset of the Pocatello RMP planning effort, management direction was to use available data and limit the collection of any new data which was essential to the effort. The Pocatello RMP planning team identified resource data and GIS themes required for the development of the draft EIS/RMP. The Preparation Plan, approved August 13, 2001, identifies these needs in detail.

To assure timely completion of these GIS themes, the District Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Project Manager, and Pocatello Field Office GIS Specialist reviewed, discussed, and inventoried current spatial data to determine availability/usability. This effort resulted in a field office commitment of GIS resources to update, compile, develop and/or digitize non-electronic data into a spatial data format for analyses and the development of maps. This effort, undertaken by the Pocatello Field Office GIS Specialist and Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) contract employees, occurred during FY02 and FY03. At this time, all required data has been prepared in a spatial data format.

Comments received, through the public scoping process regarding the proposed action and no action alternatives, have not identified any issues requiring the collection or obtaining of new data or information. No significant data gaps have been identified. Sufficient information and spatial data is available to address issues and conduct analysis for the identified alternatives.

8.0 SUMMARY OF FUTURE STEPS

A draft version of the Pocatello RMP EIS will go to print in the first quarter of fiscal year 2005 and will be made available for public comment during that quarter.

Public meetings to review the draft FMDA EIS will be held during the second quarter of fiscal year 2005. Locations will be identified and meetings will be scheduled well in advance. This information will be disseminated via press release to a wide variety of media outlets in order to generate public awareness and to allow sufficient time for public participation.

Printing of the Final FMDA EIS is planned for the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2005. Signing of the Record of Decision is expected in the first quarter of fiscal year 2006.

Further information regarding the status of the Pocatello RMP EIS and opportunities for public participation may be obtained through the following contacts:

Bureau of Land Management
Attention: Terry Lee Smith
FMDA Project Manager
1111 N. 8th Avenue
Pocatello, ID 83201
Telephone: (208) 478-6347

Project Web Site:
www.id.blm.gov/planning/pocrmp

9.0 SCOPING REPORT CONCURRENCE:

Recommended By:

Gerry Lee Smith
Project Manager

15 Sept. 03
Date

Jeffy Gurdial
Acting Field Office Manager

9/15/03
Date

Concurrence:

Joe Kraaybill
Acting District Manager

9/17/03
Date