

Vermillion Ranch ltp
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Bureau of Land Management
Little Snake Field Office
Jeremy Casterson
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Dear Jeremy

On behalf of Vermillion ranch and the Dickinson Families I submit the following comments for your consideration on the Draft RMP. As always thank you for the opportunity to comment.

1. Fragile soils, p. 2. The draft needs to limit soil mitigation to oil and gas or construction activities. We have seen problems elsewhere when surface disturbance is not defined and can be applied to driving or moving livestock. The terms “surface disturbing activities” and “surface occupying” need to be carefully defined. Otherwise, they can be interpreted to include everything from construction to grazing. We are opposed to including livestock grazing and related activities as “surface disturbing” and surface occupying”

- a. Page 3, footnote 1 is wrong as a matter of law. BLM lacks the authority to limit road construction, reconstruction or maintenance on existing state or county roads within the right-of-way. BLM acknowledges an exception for only three numbered county roads excluding CR 57. This suggests that BLM will try to force the county into Title V of FLPMA rights-of-way for all of the other roads.
2. Vegetation
- a. Page 6, Overall Objectives:
 - i. Management must incorporate and be consistent with NW Colorado Range Health Standards and livestock use
 - ii. Does the draft define viable population? Viability is basically a mathematical equation but are we talking about viability in northwest Colorado based on the assumption that this is an isolated or distinct population? Neither the planning rules nor handbook use this term so it needs to be clearly defined or dropped.
 - iii. Sagebrush vegetation also needs to be qualified in terms of consistency with Colorado rangeland health standards.

iv. Forest woodland goal needs to be qualified based on site potential.

v. Overall objectives: manage “to meet, maintain or make substantial progress towards meeting rangeland health standards.” This term needs to apply to all vegetation management objectives.

vi. Draft uses term “connecting sagebrush habitat” but it is not defined. Sage grouse fly, albeit not that far but this term needs to be defined.

vii. See comments below Page 6: overall objectives #3: Manage for juniper within historic range of natural variability- add (i.e.- fire-safe sites such as rim rocks and rock outcrops)

Sagebrush Goal B: “Reconnect large patches of sagebrush”- This must be defined. WE recommend that it does not include maintaining sagebrush in decadent states, large late seral stages outside of a natural range of variability or that it prohibits brush treatments to reestablish succession, natural range of variability and that physical connection is not required.

b. Page 7, Riparian Objectives for Habitat Management also need to be qualified to be consistent with rangeland health standards and grazing use

c. Page 7 Weed Objectives. The draft RMP needs to recognize that BLM is required to incorporate local and state weed and pest control programs. So this is not a voluntary partnership but legal requirement under FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. §1712(c) (9).

d. Page 8 Sagebrush vegetation needs to conform to rangeland health standards.

E Page 9: Item G, Alt C&D- What is intended here? - restore 500 ac of PJ? Are you meaning to encourage PJ vegetation somehow or is this referring to removing PJ from encroachment sites? Clarify to mean removing.

3. Fish & Wildlife Habitat Management page 11

a. Modify Goal B to include vegetation management consistent with rangeland health standards and livestock use

b. Same comment for all of the Goal C Objectives

- c. Goal E I doubt that it is possible to “manage all forms of disturbance to wildlife populations.” Clarify reasonable.

Objective about limiting access needs to be thoroughly documented. Trend has been to do blanket road closures, without adequate scientific data supporting closure.

- d. Page 12-13: big game winter habitat closures
 - i. Data do not support total closure but trend has been to close all roads during winter &/or calving
 - ii. Closures broadly written and would prohibit livestock use, range improvement construction or maintenance we oppose that.
- e. Page 15, CDOW adjustments need to be imposed when big game are a factor in not maintaining, meeting or not making substantial progress in meeting rangeland health standards.
Item L, Alt A- Replace the word “recommend” with “require.”
- f. Page 18, Alternative D refers to prairie dog ACEC. This does not meet FLPMA definition of ACEC, since there is no threat of irreparable harm nor is there any basis to assume this is a nationally significant population of prairie dogs.

4. Special Status & ESA Species

- a. Page 22, BLM cannot limit use of existing rights-of-way. Moreover, roads do not necessarily reduce prairie dogs to point of threatening black footed ferret food supply.
- b. Page 22, pipelines in Colorado fish critical habitat need qualification for exercise of water rights.
- c. Page 25, CC. ban on irrigation needs to be qualified, since BLM has limited or no authority over water rights. Recommend removal of this section as it not clear that irrigation is a significant threat to the fish and the Yampa management plan serves as the “reasonable and prudent alternative” for the protection of the Colorado fishes.
- d. Pages 27 & 28: item JJ- why this statement regarding livestock grazing being required to meet rangeland health standards? All BLM authorized livestock grazing is subject to rangeland health standards.

- e. Page 30-31, surface use limits on mountain plover areas are not warranted. USFWS decided not to list the mountain plover given its prevalence in ploughed fields and grazed areas. Draft RMP is too broadly written.
 - i. But if define surface occupancy solely in terms of oil and gas, then need to determine whether occupancy differs from that of cultivated field, *e.g.* vehicles, etc.
 - ii. Not sure there is any evidence that mountain plovers are adversely affected, they grazed area around borrows, other than by paved roads and subdivisions.

5. Wild Horses

- a. Page 43, WH&B goal- Add- consistent with other multiple uses
- b. Goal needs to add qualification that any AML must maintain, meet or make progress towards meeting BLM Colorado Range Health Standards.
- c. Objective must commit to keeping AML at those numbers and removing all wild horses that leave boundaries of HMA.
- d. Should also coordinate with Wyoming BLM to limit immigration of wild horses from Wyoming.
- e. None of the proposed AMLs address whether wild horses play a role in rangelands not maintaining or not meeting range health standards.

6. Livestock Grazing

- a. Page 47: goal A,B,C- We support the NWCOS consensus language supporting Grazing
- b. Page 48, RMP needs to support range improvements rather than just “consider” them.
Item D, alt B&C- Replace the word “consider” with “construct and/or implement range improvements...”

7. Special Management Areas

- a. ACECs: draft RMP needs to thoroughly reassess existing ACECs to document whether still under threat of irreparable loss to regionally or nationally significant resource. 43 U.S.C. §1702(a); we support the BLM’s determination to remove the existing ACEC designations. See c below

- b. In the case of sensitive or ESA species (Cross Mountain and Lookout Mountain) ESA and sensitive species department manual already provide protection.
 - c. In case of cultural resources (Irish Canyon) protected under National Historic Preservation Act and Archeological Resources Protection Act and ACEC is duplicative and does not meet the threat requirement for an ACEC. Recommend with drawl of ACEC designation for Irish canyon as well.
 - d. As noted above, cannot justify ACEC for prairie dogs
 - e. Cross Mountain already a WSA so no basis to impose ACEC
 - f. Vermillion Basin, pp. 62-63
 - i. Class II VRM not documented and based on description was “lumped” rather than calculating view shed and visibility
8. Cooperation and Consistency Issues
- a. Draft needs to incorporate Moffat County plan
 - b. Needs to address rights-of-way
 - c. Needs to recognize role of Moffat County in cultural resource management
 - d. OHV restrictions not consistent with Moffat County road resolution and travel management
9. General Definitions
- RMP needs to define key terms including “ground-disturbing activity” “surface
10. Lands and Realty
- Sale and disposal of agricultural trespass lands and reasonable property boundary adjustments need to be specifically allow and facilitated by Alternative C in the RMP for all areas of the county. It’s a good neighbor policy.

