

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA, 42 USC 4321 et seq.), the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA), as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976, (NFMA, Sec. 6, 16 USC 1600.), and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 USC 1701 et seq.), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), in southwest Colorado, in cooperation under a “Service First” partnership, have prepared a Draft Land Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DLMP/DEIS) for the public lands under their jurisdiction. The San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC), and its Ranger District/Field Offices (Columbine, Dolores, and Pagosa), are the joint USFS/BLM Service First office responsible for the management of the public lands and resources considered in this DEIS/DLMP. In fulfillment of these, as well as all other legal, regulatory, and policy requirements, this DLMP/DEIS documents the comprehensive analysis of alternatives and environmental impacts for the planning and management of public lands and resources administered by the SJPLC exclusive of the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument which has a stand alone Resource Management Plan being developed.

The purpose, or goal, in developing this DLMP/DEIS is to ensure that USFS- and BLM-administered lands, resources, and mineral estate are managed in accordance with applicable laws, as well as with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. The public lands in this administrative area, although under the care and management of the USFS and the BLM, belong to the American people; thus, it is the overriding goal of these agencies to actively seek out, engage, and include the public, and all other interested parties, in this planning process--a process that could shape how visitors perceive, experience, use, and enjoy their public lands. The USFS and the BLM encourage the public to review and comment on the DLMP/DEIS, and to raise concerns, if any, about proposed management.

THE PLANNING AREA

The planning area discussed in this DLMP/DEIS is located in southwestern Colorado, in Archuleta, Conejos, Dolores, Hinsdale, La Plata, Mineral, Montezuma, Montrose, Rio Grande, San Juan, and San Miguel Counties. The western border of the planning area is the Utah/Colorado State line. The southern border of the planning area is the New Mexico/Colorado State line. The eastern border is the Continental Divide. The northern border is the administrative boundaries of the Rio Grande, Gunnison, Grand Mesa, and Uncompahgre National Forests, and the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office. This DLMP/DEIS will provide a framework to guide future management decisions on approximately 1,867,800 acres of the San Juan National Forest, administered by the USFS, and approximately 500,000 surface acres and 300,000 acres of subsurface mineral estate administered by the BLM.

THE EXISTING BLM/USFS LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

The San Juan Public Lands are currently being managed under the following land use plans:

- ***The San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan (BLM 1985)***: The current Resource Management Plan (RMP) was approved in 1985, and has been amended five times. It provides management direction for what is now the SJPLC and its four Field Offices: Dolores, Columbine, Pagosa, Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM). A separate RMP is being prepared for CANM)
- ***The San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USFS 1983)***: The current San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (also known as a Forest Plan) was approved in 1983, with a major amendment in 1992 and twenty additional amendments. This DLMP/DEIS has been prepared using the provisions of the 1982 planning rule (36 CFR 219), as provided by the 2004 interpretative rule that clarified the transition provisions of the planning rule adopted on November 9, 2000. The current 1983 plan provides direction for the San Juan National Forest and its three Ranger Districts: Dolores, Columbine and Pagosa.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Four land management alternatives, and their associated environmental impacts and related issues, are described and analyzed in this document. Additionally, oil and gas leasing alternatives, including the no lease alternative, are described and analyzed. The alternatives reflect a reasonable range of potential management actions, based on the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS); Federal, State, local, and other governmental agency input and consultation; Native American tribal agency input and consultation; and public scoping. The alternatives in this DLMP/DEIS seek to fully address the changing needs of the planning area, with the goal of selecting a management strategy that best achieves an effective combination of management actions, including one that:

- addresses all of the BLM-administered and USFS-administered public lands and resources administered by the SJPLC (exclusive of CANM);
- employs a community-based planning approach that complies with all applicable local, State, Federal, and Native American tribal laws, standards, policies, and implementation plans, as well as with all BLM and USFS policies, guidelines, and regulations;
- recognizes all valid existing rights;
- complies with the FLPMA, the NFMA, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and all other applicable laws, rules, regulations, standards, policies, and guidelines;
- coordinates and consults with Native American tribes in order to identify sites, areas, and/or objects important to their cultural and religious heritages;
- identifies management actions and allowable uses anticipated to achieve the established goals and objectives, and to reach the desired outcomes;
- provides comprehensive management direction by serving as a basis for land use decisions for all appropriate resources and resource uses administered by the SJPLC;
- establishes goals and objectives (desired outcomes) for managing resources and resource values according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield;
- identifies land use planning decisions that will serve to guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions;

- considers current scientific information, research, new technologies, as well as the results of relevant resource assessments, monitoring, and coordination;
- considers current and potential future uses of the public lands and resources administered by the SJPLC through the development of reasonable foreseeable future developments and activity scenarios based on historical, existing, and projected levels of use;
- recognizes the Nation’s needs for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber, and incorporates the requirements of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act Reauthorization, the Energy Policy Act, the National Fire Plan, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, and the Healthy Forest Initiative;
- retains flexibility so that the USFS and BLM can adapt to new and emerging issues and opportunities, and provide for adjustments to decisions over time, based on new information and monitoring; and
- strives to be compatible with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, State, Federal, and Native American tribal agencies, consistent with Federal law, regulations, and BLM and USFS policy.

ISSUES

Planning issues identify demands, concerns, and/or conflicts regarding the use or management of public lands and resources. These issues typically express potential impacts on land and on resource values. The main topic areas addressed in this DLMP/DEIS were identified based on input from interagency consultation, State government, cooperating agencies, internal review, as well as input from the public, industry representatives, and special interest groups. The identified issues represent the challenges that exist with current management and with the current BLM and USFS land management plans. The SJPLC has documented each of the issues in a scoping report.

The public scoping process invited interested parties to comment on, and contribute input with regard to, the planning process. On September 23, 1999, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise the USFS Land Management Plan (LMP) for the San Juan National Forest was published in the Federal Register. On December 14, 2004, a second NOI was published, updating timelines and informing all interested parties that the BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP) would be revised concurrently.

Four main issues drove the development of alternatives for this DLMP/DEIS. The alternatives reflect where people had notably different ideas about how to manage and/or how to use different areas administered by the SJPLC. These different ideas came from the community study groups, web-based interaction, as well as from scoping meetings, written comments, and other scoping activities. These issues include the following:

- ***Issue One - Balancing Management Between the Ideas of Maintaining “Working Forests and Rangelands” and of Retaining “Core Undeveloped Lands”***: Here, issues and concerns included balancing the concepts of a “working forest and rangelands” (respecting valid and existing rights to resources, retaining access and commodity production activities that are important to the economy of local communities, and continuing historical uses in areas where access and infrastructure investments have already been made) with that of retaining “core undeveloped areas” (retaining areas that have not been developed in order to provide high-quality wildlife habitat and corridors, minimize ecosystem fragmentation, and support natural ecosystem functions). Maintaining the roadless character of much of the public lands in the planning area was identified as important by wildlife managers, sportsmen, and by many interested citizens.

- **Issue Two - Providing Recreation and Travel Management Within a Sustainable Ecological Framework:** Here, issues and concerns included the need to find a balance between the way long-time residents, new arrivals, and visitors use the public lands with regard to recreation and travel management. Opinions were divided on where to emphasize motorized travel versus non-motorized travel. Issues and concerns also included the appropriate mix of different kinds of recreation settings and opportunities that should be provided on public lands in the planning area.
- **Issue Three - Management of Special Areas and Unique Landscapes:** Here, issues and concerns include debate about which areas should be recommended for special designations and/or managed in order to emphasize unique features. Special designations would include Forest Service wilderness recommendations, suitability of rivers for Congressional designation into the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, Research Natural Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, botanical, archaeological, and habitat areas, scenic, historic and backcountry byways, and national, recreation and scenic trails. Issues and Concerns also included alternative ways of managing some unique landscapes, including the Dolores River Canyon, Silverton, Rico, McPhee and the HD Mountains.
- **Issue Four - Managing Impacts from oil and Gas Leasing and Development:** Here, issues and concerns included providing for potential energy development while, at the same time, protecting other resource values. People expressed concern with both where and how development might occur.

ALTERNATIVES

Land use planning regulations and NEPA require the USFS and the BLM to develop a range of reasonable alternatives during the planning process. The basic goal of developing alternatives is to prepare different combinations of management scenarios in order to address all identified issues and to resolve conflicts among uses. Alternatives must meet the purpose and need; must be reasonable; must provide a mix of resource protection, use, and development; must be responsive to the issues; and must meet the established planning criteria (See Volume 1, Chapter 2). The alternatives proposed for this DLMP/DEIS were developed with varying Management Area (MA) allocations and objectives in order to focus on resolving these issues and concerns (see Table 1). Additionally, oil and gas leasing availability alternatives are described in detail, including the no leasing alternative, and are described for both FS and BLM administered resources to accommodate both USFS and BLM leasing availability requirements and decision making authorities.

A number of other alternatives were considered, but were not analyzed in detail (See Volume 1, Chapter 2). Each of the alternatives proposed for this DLMP/DEIS provides a framework for multiple-use and sustained-yield management of the full spectrum of resources, resource uses, and programs present in the planning area. The alternatives analyzed in this DLMP/DEIS represent a reasonable range in management actions and each has a different blend or balance of resource allocations and protections, resource uses, and potential impacts, as summarized below:

- **Alternative A:** Alternative A, the No-Action Alternative, is the continuation of present management under the existing BLM and USFS land management plans. This alternative meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (40 CFR Part 1502.14) that a no-action alternative be considered (“no-action” means that current management practices based on existing land use plans and other management decision documents would continue.) This alternative would serve as a baseline for comparing the impacts of the other alternatives. Direction from existing laws, regulation, and policy would also continue to be implemented. Under this Alternative, the current levels of products, services, and outputs of multiple-use and sustained-yield management of the public lands and resources administered by the SJPLC would continue, except for fluctuations due to budget. Activities such as timber harvesting and oil and gas development would potentially occur over a greater percentage of the planning area under Alternative A than they would under the other alternatives.
- **Alternative B:** Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative, would provide for a mix of multiple-use activities, with a primary emphasis on maintaining most of the large, contiguous blocks of undeveloped lands and on enhancing various forms of recreation opportunities while, at the same time, maintaining the diversity of uses and active forest and rangeland vegetation management. Alternative B is focused on balancing the ideas of maintaining “working forest and rangelands” and of retaining “core, undeveloped lands.” Uses and activities that require roads, such as timber harvesting and oil and gas development, would be focused in areas that already have roads. Relatively undeveloped areas and areas that currently do not have roads would, for the most part, remain that way. This alternative would represent a mix and a variety of actions that would resolve the issues and management concerns raised during public scoping, in consideration of all of the resource values and all of the management programs. (Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative, is described in detail in Volume 2 of the DLMP/DEIS.)
- **Alternative C:** Alternative C would provide for a mix of multiple-use activities, with a primary emphasis on the undeveloped character of the lands and resources administered by the SJPLC. Production of goods from vegetation management would continue, but might be secondary to other non-commodity objectives. Under Alternative C, production of goods and services would be slightly more constrained than that proposed under Alternatives A, B, and D. And, in some cases and in some areas, uses would be excluded in order to protect sensitive resources. Management provisions under this alternative would emphasize retaining the undeveloped character of large blocks of contiguous land and non-motorized recreational activities to a greater degree than would any of the other alternatives.
- **Alternative D:** Alternative D would provide for a mix of multiple-use activities, with a primary emphasis on the “working forest and rangelands” concept in order to produce the highest amounts of commodity goods and services, when compared with the other alternatives. Similar to Alternative A, this alternative would allow the greatest extent of resource use within the planning area while, at the same time, maintaining ecosystem management principles in order to protect and sustain resources. Under this alternative, potential impacts to sensitive resource values would be mitigated on a case-by-case basis.
- **No Leasing Alternative:** The no-leasing alternative is analyzed in compliance with 36 CFR 228.102(c)(2)&(3) which requires the Forest Service, when considering oil and gas leasing, to analyze an alternative of not leasing. Under this alternative acres not already withdrawn by law from leasing would be administratively not available for leasing. Under this alternative, only existing leases would continue to be developed. Any new leases would be deferred, pending a new analysis and decision (See Table 2).

Table 1 - Comparison of Land Allocations by Alternative

MANAGEMENT AREAS	Alternative A (No-Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative C	Alternative D
MA 1 Natural Processes Dominate ¹	538,658	652,307	1,080,606	553,786
MA 2 Special Areas and Unique Landscape Areas	100,755	193,503	198,512	151,040
MA 3 Natural Landscape with Limited Management	891,718	825,000	472,022	788,289
MA 4 High-Use Recreation Emphasis	148,465	79,711	54,765	86,236
MA 5 Active Management (commodity production in order to meet multiple-use goals)	675,014	529,413	487,299	682,632
MA 7 Public and Private Lands Intermix	0	81,756	71,929	89,116
MA 8 Highly Developed Areas	14,475	7,395	3,952	17,986
Total Acres	2,369,085	2,369,085	2,369,085	2,369,085

¹ Under all of the alternatives, MA 1 would include 420,522 acres that are currently designated as Wilderness (Lizard Head, South San Juan, and Weminuche); 60,341 acres in the Piedra Area that are currently managed in order to maintain Wilderness characteristics, as directed by the 1993 Colorado Wilderness Act; and 55,428 acres of BLM Wilderness Study Areas.

Table 2 - Oil and Gas Leasing Availability by Alternative on USFS and BLM Lands

Oil and Gas Leasing Availability on San Juan Public Lands	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B (Preferred)	Alternative C	Alternative D	No Lease Alternative
San Juan National Forest Fluid-Minerals - Oil and Gas (acres)					
Acres Withdrawn From Leasing	480,953	480,953	480,953	480,953	480,953
Acres Proposed for Withdrawal	0	67,726	532,957	0	0
Acres Administratively Not Available for Leasing	0	20,371	20,371	20,371	1,392,474
Acres Available for Leasing	1,392,474	1,304,377	839,146	1,372,103	0
No Surface Occupancy (NSO)	1,705	741,524	278,232	810,994	0
Controlled Surface Use (CSU)	169,485	248,636	265,420	235,850	0
CSU and Timing Limitations (TL)	559	77,176	73,089	69,843	0
Timing Limitations	1,390	69,935	67,826	71,693	0
Standard Lease Terms	1,219,355	167,106	154,579	183,723	0
BLM Fluid-Minerals - Oil and Gas (acres) <i>(figures are based on total mineral estate, including private surface)</i>					
Acres Withdrawn From Leasing	0	0	0	0	0
Acres Proposed for Withdrawal	0	0	0	0	0
Acres Administratively Not Available for Leasing	63,851	72,867	98,450	72,867	768,625
Acres Available for Leasing	704,804	695,758	670,175	695,758	0
No Surface Occupancy (NSO)	39,036	238,578	239,413	233,005	0
Controlled Surface Use (CSU)	201,022	55,286	55,153	56,947	0
CSU and Timing Limitations (TL)	57,641	12,762	12,521	15,831	0
Timing Limitations	113,915	264,019	238,095	264,782	0
Standard Lease Terms	293,160	125,113	124,993	125,194	0

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Volume 1, Chapter 3 of this DLMP/DEIS describes the environmental consequences that could result from the varying mix of land allocations (management area) and management emphasis of the alternatives. In Chapter 3 potential beneficial/adverse consequences are analyzed and discussed for each resource and program area.

Potential environmental impacts vary by projected outputs levels of management activities such as oil and gas development, timber harvest, road construction/reconstruction, fuel treatments, livestock grazing, recreation use (including mode of travel). To varying degrees across the alternatives, uses and activities would be affected by special designations including, but not limited to, areas recommended for Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Botanical Areas, and Archeological Areas.

Alternatives A and D place the most emphasis on commodity production; have the most land in MA 5, and the least restrictions on activities. This would probably result in higher levels of ground disturbance with more potential impacts to soil and water resources, wildlife and fisheries habitat, air quality, and scenery. Alternatives A and D also provide more opportunities for motorized recreation, with more potential conflicts with nonmotorized recreation. Alternatives A and D also result in higher levels of employment, income, revenues to State and local governments, and net revenues than the other alternatives.

Alternative C places the most emphasis on maintaining the undeveloped character of the area and has the most land in MA 1; has the largest acreages recommended for Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and other special designations. It has the lowest levels of commodity production and the most restrictions on activities. This would probably result in the lowest levels of ground disturbance with the least potential impacts to soil and water resources, wildlife and fisheries habitat, air quality, and scenery. Alternative C provides the most opportunities for nonmotorized recreation, with the fewest opportunities for motorized recreation. Alternative C would result in lower levels of employment, income, revenues to State and local governments, and net revenues than the other LMP alternatives (the no leasing alternative would have even lower levels).

Alternative B emphasizes a balance between commodity production and maintaining the undeveloped character of the area. It also emphasizes management of a number of unique landscapes for their special characteristics. It would probably result in lower levels of ground disturbance with less potential impacts to soil and water resources, wildlife and fisheries habitat, air quality, and scenery than under Alternatives A and D, but more than under Alternative C. Alternative B provides the most balance between motorized and nonmotorized recreation. Alternative B resolves the most potential conflicts among users of the San Juan Public Lands.

The No Lease Alternative would result in the lowest level of ground disturbance associated with oil and gas development with the fewer potential impacts to soil and water resources, wildlife and fisheries habitat, air quality, and scenery. It would result in lower levels of employment, income, revenues to State and local governments, and net revenues.