

4310-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

(WY-100-00-1610-DG)

Resource Management Plan, Pinedale Field Office, Wyoming.

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement and resource management plan, request for information for scoping process, call for coal resource information, and notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Pinedale Field Office invites the public to provide information on BLM-administered public lands and resources in the Snake River planning area and to identify issues and concerns to be addressed in the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Snake River Resource Management Plan (RMP). As required in 43 CFR 3420.1-2, this notice is also the specific call for coal resource information and identification of areas where there is an interest in future leasing and development of federal coal.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Interested parties may obtain further information or request to be placed on the mailing list for the Snake River RMP planning effort by contacting Kellie Roadifer, RMP Team Leader, or Prill Mecham, Field Manager, Pinedale Field Office, 432 East Mill Street, Pinedale, Wyoming 82941, (307) 367-5300.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION: The Snake River corridor and adjacent areas, collectively known as Jackson Hole, in Teton County, Wyoming make up the Snake River RMP planning area.

Within the Snake River corridor, BLM-administered public lands to be addressed in the RMP include about 1,345 acres of public land surface and Federal mineral estate, plus about 740 acres of public land surface underlain by state or privately-owned mineral estate.

In addition, the BLM is responsible for administering various recreation easements on private lands within the river corridor. These easements, combined with the public land parcels, provide almost continuous recreational access to the river channel, permitting public uses such as anchoring a boat to fish and wading in the river. A few of the Snake River levees are within these easements, supporting several miles of public access by foot and vehicle in places, but most of the easements allow access only by boat from the river.

The BLM is also responsible for administering mineral exploration and development on an additional 12,000 acres of federal mineral estate. This mineral estate, which is mostly outside the river corridor, underlies lands owned or administered by private individuals, the state of Wyoming, or local governments.

The Snake River RMP planning area includes all lands in Jackson Hole between the Forest Service boundaries on the east, west, and south, and the National Park Service boundary on the north, for the purpose of evaluating environmental impacts, including the cumulative impacts of BLM land-use planning decisions. However, the planning and management decisions to be

made by the BLM will apply only to the BLM-administered land surface, the federal mineral estate, and the recreational easements mentioned in the four paragraphs above.

The Snake River RMP is in the preplanning stage. Preplanning activities include identifying planning issues and concerns, developing a schedule for plan preparation, and establishing public participation activities.

Some preliminary planning issues and concerns have been identified which may be addressed by the following questions. (1) What types and levels of recreational and interpretive development are appropriate on public land surface to help satisfy existing and future demand for public recreation and education? (2) Consistent with valid existing rights, what other activities, including livestock grazing and mineral extraction, are appropriate on these lands? (3) What levels of mineral activity are appropriate for the exploration and development of the BLM-administered mineral estate? (4) What requirements or restrictions on land use will be necessary to protect important public resources, such as recreational opportunities, scenic quality, wildlife habitat, sensitive plants, and cultural resources? (5) Which, if any, of the BLM-administered public lands along the Snake River meet the eligibility criteria and suitability factors to be given future consideration for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System?

The public is invited to identify other issues and concerns that should be addressed in the planning process and to comment on those identified by the BLM staff.

The BLM is also requesting resource data and information that will be used to further define issues and concerns, update the inventory base, help develop planning alternatives, and analyze environmental consequences. The BLM will conduct very little new inventory work; therefore, development of the RMP will rely mostly upon existing available resource information and data.

A contingent valuation methodology (CVM) survey or study is planned as part of the RMP analysis to consider the economic value of certain non-market goods and services, such as clean air, open space, and wildlife habitat, associated with BLM-administered lands in the planning area. This survey will involve the collection of random public responses, through questionnaires and interviews.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 3420.1-2, this notice is a formal request for coal resource information and identification of any substantiated interest in future leasing and development of federal coal in the Snake River planning area. Specifically, information on the location, quality and quantity of federal coal with development potential and on surface resource values related to the twenty coal unsuitability criteria described in 43 CFR 3481.1 is requested and will be used to conduct any necessary coal screening (43 CFR 3420.1-4) during the planning process. The BLM has limited coal resource data for the planning area and will be unable to conduct further inventories. Parties interested in federal coal leasing and development will be expected to provide coal and other resource data for their areas of interest. Information concerning areas of

leasing interest, coal resource data, and other resource information related to unsuitability criteria must be submitted to the Pinedale Field Office, at the address above.

Federal coal leasing in the planning area outside designated coal production regions may be considered apart from the competitive leasing process set out in 43 CFR 3420.3 through 3420.5-2. Since the Snake River planning area is not within a coal production region, any federal coal leasing will be considered on a case-by-case basis, called "Leasing on Application" under the appropriate provisions of 43 CFR 3425 and 43 CFR 3420.1-4 through 3420.1-8. Note that the sale and issuance of federal leases under these provisions is still done through a competitive bidding process.

Identification at this time of definite interests in future federal coal leasing, substantiated with adequate coal and other resource data, will allow these interests to be considered in the planning process. In this way, unnecessary administrative delays or revisions in the plan may be avoided, if coal lease applications are submitted in the future.

Public participation activities will be initiated with an open house to be held at the Teton County Administration Building, County Commissioners' Meeting Room, at the corner of Willow and Simpson, in Jackson, Wyoming, on Thursday, January 27, 2000, from 4 to 8 pm. At 5 and 7 pm, BLM representatives will give short presentations.

The public will have opportunities to participate throughout the planning process, including input and comment on issues and planning criteria, and on the draft and final EIS for the resource management plan. Future public participation activities will be announced in the Federal Register and in the local media, and through mailings to parties included on the Snake River RMP mailing list.

Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Pinedale Field Office, 432 East Mill Street, Pinedale, Wyoming during regular business hours (7:45 am to 4:30 pm.) Monday through Friday, except holidays, and may be published as part of the final environmental impact statement (FEIS). Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If individuals wish to withhold their name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, they must state this prominently at the beginning of their comments. 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.

Alan R. Pierson

State Director, Wyoming

DATE: December 16, 1999