



Revision Reporter

Dakota Prairie Grasslands - Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest - Nebraska National Forest

July 1999

Volume 4, Number 1

Revised Management Plans at a *Glance*



We're pleased to share with you this special edition *Revision Reporter*, which summarizes the three proposed Revised Management Plans. It highlights differences between current management and what may occur under revised management. The proposed Revised Management Plans were identified from alternatives evaluated in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

We doubt this information will answer all your questions. Here are ideas for additional information:

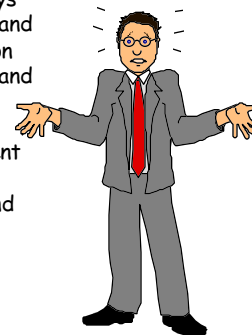
- read the DEIS Summary,
- examine the DEIS alternative maps,
- review the three proposed Revised Management Plans,
- study the DEIS,
- call or visit a Forest Service office (see centerfold),
- log on to the Internet to download or order materials,
- attend an open house.

The documents can be found on the Northern Great Plains Internet site:
www.fs.fed.us/ngp. Maps and documents can also be ordered from:

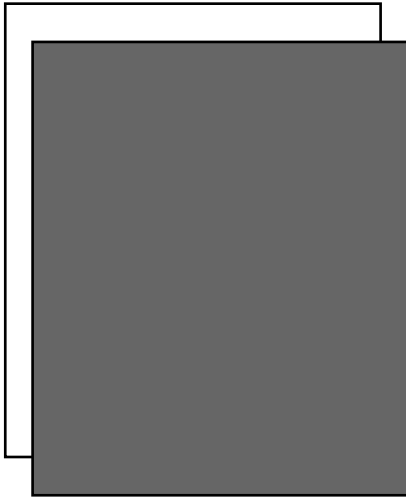
Northern Great Plains Planning
USDA Forest Service
125 North Main Street
Chadron, NE 69337
Phone: 308-432-0300
Fax: 308-432-0309



What now?
The public has 90 days to review and comment on the DEIS and proposed Revised Management Plans. Please send your comments to:



From the Supervisors. . .

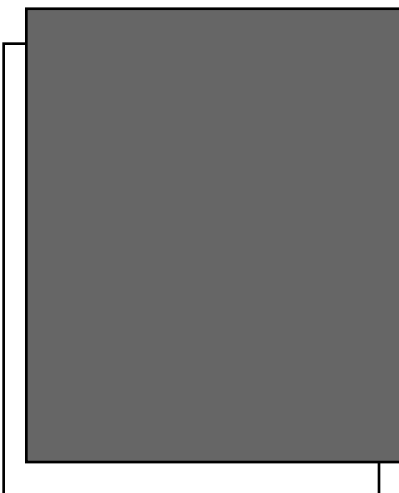
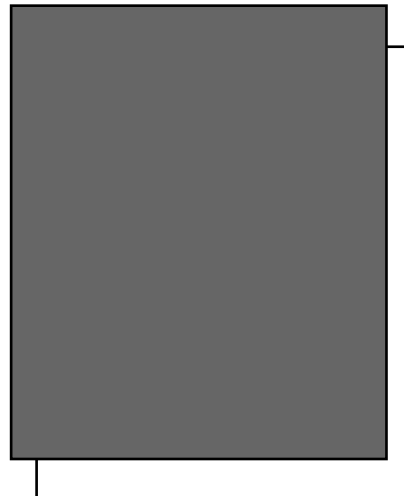


I think most people in the Dakotas will like what they see in the preferred alternative. We've tried to consider different points of view and reach a balance. We want to know what people like in the proposed Revised Management Plans.

LARRY DAWSON
DAKOTA PRAIRIE GRASSLANDS SUPERVISOR

All the alternatives would continue a wide variety of multiple uses. We feel the preferred alternative offers a good balance to meet the current demands and interests for the Northern Great Plains grasslands and forests. Public comments helped us get to where we are. Comments on the draft will help shape the character of the final decision.

JERRY SCHMIDT
MEDICINE BOW-ROUTT NATIONAL FOREST SUPERVISOR



The documents are out for people to review and comment on. We value public input and encourage people to let us know during the comment period what they want to see in the final Revised Management Plans.

MARY PETERSON
NEBRASKA NATIONAL FOREST SUPERVISOR



Key Points

about the proposed Revised Management Plans

The proposed Revised Management Plans. . .

Offer a balanced program of sustainable multiple uses, including forage for livestock grazing and opportunities for oil, gas, and mineral production.

Provide more diverse grassland landscapes to benefit wildlife, soil, water, recreation, scenery.

Manage for the conservation of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, including meeting national black-footed ferret recovery objectives and prairie dog strategies.

Conserve outstanding features by applying special designations and management prescriptions, such as Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, Special Interest Areas.

Work to be good neighbors to the people and communities who rely on and value the national grasslands and forests.



We welcome public comment on the draft documents.

- The public has 90 days from release of the draft documents to offer their comments.
- We'll be hosting many open houses during the comment period to answer questions.
- Comments should be as specific as possible and focus on the analysis, the alternatives, and the proposed Revised Management Plans.

Alternatives Considered in Detail in the DEIS

The alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) were developed without preconceived notions of a preferred alternative. The preferred alternative in the DEIS may change or be adjusted in the final EIS. Each alternative is essentially a separate and alternative Management Plan.

Major components of Management Plans include goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, management areas, monitoring and evaluation strategies, oil and gas leasing decisions, recommendations for new Wilderness, and recommendations for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Most of the direction in the proposed Revised Management Plans applies to all action alternatives except for differences noted in Appendix D of the DEIS.

While all alternatives provide a wide range of multiple uses, goods, and services, some alternatives give slightly more emphasis to particular uses in order to respond to public comment and to explore management options, opportunities, and trade-offs.

The themes of alternatives considered in detail are:

Alternative 1 - (No Action)

Current Land and Resource Management Plan (Management Plan) direction and emphases would continue. Management area titles and numbers have been changed to make this alternative more easily comparable to other alternatives.

Alternative 2

This multiple-use alternative would emphasize production of commodities such as livestock, minerals, oil, gas, and timber. Plant and animal habitats would be managed to meet viable populations. Recreation opportunities, and special area designations would be provided where they would not foreclose commodity production.

Alternative 3 (Preferred)

This multiple-use alternative would modify the current Management Plan direction by adopting additional special area designations, such as Research Natural Areas, Special Interest Areas, and placing added emphasis on native plants and animals and recreation opportunities.

Alternative 3a

This alternative was proposed by a public working group convened for the Fall River Ranger District of the Buffalo Gap National Grassland (west half). This alternative applies only to that unit.

Alternative 4

This multiple-use alternative would feature natural processes and restoration of impaired native ecosystems. It would demonstrate the role that national grasslands and forests have in sustaining rare animal and plant communities within the Northern Great Plains.

Alternative 5

This multiple-use alternative would accentuate recreation opportunities and noncommodity services and also provide commodity outputs that complement or fit within recreation objectives.

Proposed Revised Management Plans and The Major Revision Topics

The proposed Revised Management Plans modify the current Management Plans by adopting additional special area designations and placing greater emphasis on native plants and animals and recreation opportunities. Here are some highlights of the proposed Revised Management Plans as they address the major revision topics.

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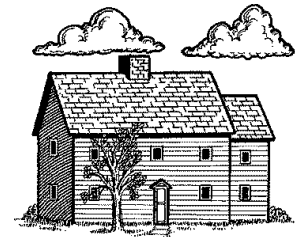
Community and Lifestyle Relationships

People wanting more emphasis on wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities should like what they see in the proposed Revised Management Plans. Managers believe that the national grasslands and forests can be managed for a broader group of interests and outputs by using a variety of vegetation management tools. This will provide a more diverse landscape, which should benefit associated recreation activities.

Those people who rely on motorized transportation to access their recreation destinations may have less freedom to roam. The revised direction will limit motorized travel to designated roads and trails in most areas. District rangers will have up to five years to work with the public in determining what roads and trails should be designated for motorized travel. Until that work is completed, the present motorized travel practices will continue.

People who support designation of special areas should be pleased with the proposal to designate 34 more Special Interest Areas and 15 additional Research Natural Areas, and the recommendation of 5 areas for Wilderness consideration. No rivers on the National Forest System lands are recommended to Congress for Wild and Scenic River consideration; however, the National Park Service is recommending that about 15 miles of the Little Missouri River be classified as "wild" and 7 miles be classified as "scenic."

The proposed Revised Management Plans respect and recognize the rights of American Indians on the Northern Great Plains planning units. The Forest Service will consult with American Indian tribal leaders on the design of projects that have potential to affect cultural rights and practices. Those cultural rights and practices will be protected and preserved. The Dakota Prairie Grasslands Revised Management Plan



Community and Lifestyle Relationships (continued)

uses a management prescription in the Blue Buttes area of the Little Missouri National Grassland especially designed to protect the traditional landscape values held by American Indians for the area.

Although the proposed Revised Management Plans will NOT set grazing levels, planners have estimated the number of animal unit months that could be grazed and still achieve the desired vegetation conditions. Again, managers will work with the public to determine grazing systems and intensities appropriate to site-specific conditions.

Estimates of total jobs and income associated with range-fed livestock on the national grasslands and forests are shown in the following table (could vary up to 20% depending on grazing systems and intensities used to meet desired conditions):

**Range-fed Livestock on the National Grassland and Forest Units
Total Jobs and Income**

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	319 jobs \$5.0 million income	278 jobs \$4.4 million income
Nebraska National Forest Units	219 jobs \$4.6 million income	212 jobs \$4.5 million income
Thunder Basin National Grassland	96 jobs \$1.9 million income	88 jobs \$1.8 million income

Future oil, gas, and mineral operations will be managed under a consistent set of standards and guidelines across all the Northern Great Plains planning units. Operating stipulations have been updated, with more consideration for wildlife and fossil resources.

Jobs and income associated with oil and gas produced on the national grasslands and forests are shown in the following table:

**Oil and Gas Produced on the National Grassland and Forest Units
Total Jobs and Income**

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	954 jobs \$34.8 million income	1,065 jobs \$38.9 million income
Nebraska National Forest Units	57 jobs \$1.3 million income	114 jobs \$2.2 million income
Thunder Basin National Grassland	1,196-1,264 jobs \$73.8-76.2 mil income	1,196-1,264 jobs \$73.8-76.2 mil income

Livestock Grazing



The planning units were evaluated for their physical capability to support livestock grazing. If the land met the physical criteria, then it underwent a suitability analysis to assess the appropriateness of livestock grazing given other uses or allocations in the area.

The following table shows the results of the capability and suitability analysis. (Capable rangeland does not change between present and revised management.)

Suitable Acres for Livestock Grazing

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	1,053,800	1,051,800
Nebraska National Forest Units	1,004,800	1,005,600
Thunder Basin National Grassland	532,100	532,100

The proposed Revised Management Plans will not set the number of livestock allowed to graze on the national grassland and forest units. Instead, they describe desired conditions for vegetation that fit within the context of rangeland health and multiple uses.

Managers have many tools available to them to achieve the desired vegetation conditions, such as grazing systems and prescribed fire. Desired vegetation conditions will be monitored, and grazing levels may be modified if desired conditions are not being met. Also, grazing agreements will be amended, if needed, to give livestock permittees the option to graze bison.

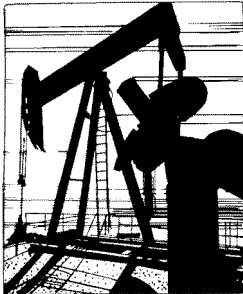
For comparison purposes, grazing-level estimates have been made that are believed to fit within the desired vegetation conditions. The following table displays those estimates: (Present management estimates were modeled based on direction in the current management plans. The modeled estimates may differ from what is actually occurring.)

continued on page 10

Livestock Grazing (continued)

Estimated Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of Livestock Grazing

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	418,000	376,000
Nebraska National Forest Units	343,000	334,000
Thunder Basin National Grassland	134,000	120,000



Oil and Gas

Future oil, gas, and mineral operations will be managed under a consistent set of standards and guidelines across all the Northern Great Plains planning units. Operating stipulations have been updated to give more consideration for wildlife and fossil resources.

The following tables shows acres that will be available for leasing:

Acres Available for Oil and Gas Leasing

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	976,680	976,620
Nebraska National Forest Units	246,850	246,850
Thunder Basin National Grassland (includes areas of federal subsurface ownership and non-federal surface ownership)	1,158,770	1,158,770



Plant and Animal Damage Control

Managers recognize that noxious and undesirable plants are an increasing concern. It's expected that the standards and guidelines in the proposed Revised Management Plans will help contain or

reduce some of these troublesome plants in the next 10-15 years. After appropriate consultation with state agencies, only noxious weed-free products will be allowed for livestock feed or revegetation projects.

Although control of prairie dogs is an important matter to many livestock producers and adjacent landowners, concerns for the ecosystems and species associated with prairie dog colonies will result in less prairie dog poisoning under the Revised Management Plans.

Insects and diseases will be managed using an integrated pest management approach. Treatment will be based on the risks to human health, and the value and risks to wildlife habitat and adjacent lands. Large-sale grasshopper spraying projects conducted by Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will receive additional environmental considerations when spraying projects are proposed

Rangeland and Forest Health

Over the next 10 years, management practices will be put in place to move upland landscapes toward the desired vegetation conditions. Recognizing that many of these public land units contain rare plant communities, the proposed Revised Management Plans instruct managers to prepare more specific management plans for these rare communities and modify management as needed.

Similarly, the proposed Revised Management Plans contain objectives to improve at least 20 percent of impaired watersheds and move at least 80 percent of unsatisfactory riparian areas and woody draws toward healthy, self-perpetuating plant and water communities.

Even though there are only a few forested areas on the planning units, the health and preservation of the forests are of interest. The proposed Revised Management Plans will maintain or restore the health of the forested areas by using timber practices, such as thinning and prescribed burning. No allowable timber sale quantity will be set; however, commercial timber harvest will be conducted at an average rate of about 800 thousand board feet per year to create more healthy timber stands.

Rangeland managers must ensure that the resources under their care can be sustained over time. Determining sustainable levels of livestock grazing requires estimates of the potential of a site to produce forage. While the amount of vegetation growing on the rangelands isn't expected to change, it is expected that the amount of grass grazed by livestock will be less than what is grazed now.



**Rangeland and Forest
Health
(continued)**

**Allocation of Available Forage to Livestock
(measured in thousands of pounds)**

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	326,200	293,500
Nebraska National Forest Units	267,500	260,400
Thunder Basin National Grassland	104,400	94,100

Black-tailed prairie dog colonies play an important role in rangeland health and biological diversity. Black-tailed prairie dogs and their colonies support a unique assemblage of Great Plains plants and animals. The following table shows the predicted acres of active prairie dog colonies over the next decade or two under the Revised Management Plans.

**Acres of Active (protected from poisoning) Prairie Dog Colonies
Predicted in 10 years**

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	2,600	4,400-11,000
Nebraska National Forest Units	6,400-7,850	20,900-55,200
Thunder Basin National Grassland	≥5,400	23,400-55,000

Black-footed ferret, one of the most endangered mammals in North America, is a species directly linked to black-tailed prairie dogs. Reintroduction of this endangered species is already underway on the Northern Great Plains planning units, with a successful program on the Wall Ranger District of the Buffalo Gap National Grassland. The Cheyenne River area on Thunder Basin National Grassland is also a potential reintroduction site.

The following table shows the number of areas and acres identified as reintroduction sites under the proposed Revised Management Plans:

Black-footed Ferret Potential Reintroduction Habitat

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	0 areas/0 acres	0 areas/0 acres
Nebraska National Forest Units	1 area/8,050 acres	2 areas/109,140 acres
Thunder Basin National Grassland	1 area/33,700 acres	1 area/51,400 acres

**Rangeland and Forest Health
(continued)**

Additional efforts will be made to restore and enhance bighorn sheep populations on the Little Missouri National Grassland and the Pine Ridge area of the Nebraska National Forest. Management of the threatened Western Prairie Fringed Orchid and other rare plants will be intensified on the Sheyenne National Grassland.

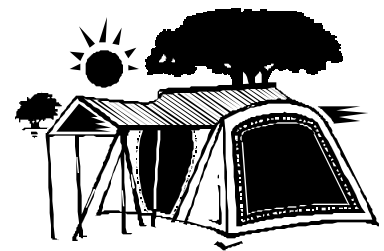
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Recreation and Travel Management

The diverse vegetation and landscapes expected under the proposed Revised Management Plan should enhance recreation experiences overall. Recreation enthusiasts of all types should benefit from the more diverse settings and wildlife habitats. Recreation opportunities associated with upland bird and deer hunting will be enhanced. Because of concerns for species associated with prairie dogs, there may be restrictions on recreational shooting of prairie dogs.

In some areas, visitors will find a more natural-appearing landscape as some fences are removed. In addition, people should find it easier to get around on the grassland and forest units with more fence crossings and easier-opening gates. New and replacement fences will be constructed to accommodate big-game movement.

Other recreation improvements include more recreation and interpretive information; maintenance, reconstruction or construction of trails, and more recreation facilities overall.

People who use motorized transportation for their recreation activities may have to make some adjustments. The nature of the grassland terrain makes motorized travel possible across much of the landscape. The travel direction in the proposed Revised Management Plans limits motorized travel to designated roads and trails (except for authorized administrative uses, such as livestock management, fire control, etc.). However, this new travel direction will not take effect immediately; district rangers have up to five years to develop their specific travel direction and designate routes.





Special Area Designations

Periodic revision of the land and resource management plans presents an opportunity to inventory and evaluate areas for special designations. There are four types of special area designations under this topic: Research Natural Areas; Roadless Areas/Wilderness; Special Interest Areas; and Wild and Scenic Rivers. As part of the revision process, planners have inventoried and evaluated the planning units for these special designations.

Research Natural Areas (RNAs)

Three Research Natural Areas have been established on the planning units containing about 1,300 acres. An additional 27,100 acres on 15 sites were nominated as RNAs.

The following table shows the number of areas and acres proposed as Research Natural Areas in the proposed Revised Management Plans.

Proposed Research Natural Areas
(and existing RNAs on Dakota Prairie Grasslands and Nebraska NF)

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	3 areas/840 acres	12 areas/20,500 acres
Nebraska National Forest Units	1 area/500 acres	5 areas/6,600 acres
Thunder Basin National Grassland	0 areas/0 acres	2 acres/1,200 acres

Roadless Areas/Wilderness

Presently, there is one Congressionally designated Wilderness: Soldier Creek Wilderness on the Nebraska National Forest (7,800 acres). About 350,000 acres of the 2.9 million acres in the planning units met the Forest Service's minimum criteria for Wilderness consideration. In addition, the public asked that 100,000 more acres undergo evaluation.

The following table shows the number of areas and acres recommended for Wilderness consideration under the proposed Revised Management Plans.

Roadless Areas Recommended for Wilderness

(and existing Wilderness on Nebraska NF)

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	0 areas/0 acres	3 areas/22,100 acres
Nebraska National Forest Units	1 area/7,800 acres	2 areas/23,800 acres (includes existing)
Thunder Basin National Grassland	0 areas/0 acres	1 area/16,000 acres

Special Area Designations (continued)

Special Interest Areas (SIAs)

Two Special Interest Areas of about 1,050 acres have been established on the planning units. After conducting inventories, 37 areas containing about 120,000 acres were considered for SIA designation.

The following table shows the number of areas and acres proposed as SIAs under the proposed Revised Management Plans.

Proposed Special Interest Areas

(and existing on Nebraska NF)

	Present Management	Proposed Revised Management Plan
Dakota Prairie Grasslands	0 areas/0 acres	16 areas/6,400 acres
Nebraska National Forest Units	2 areas/70 acres	15 areas/54,400 acres
Thunder Basin National Grassland	0 areas/0 acres	4 areas/12,600 acres

Wild and Scenic Rivers

No Congressionally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers occur on the planning units presently. After looking at the eligibility of the rivers on the planning units, a total of 127 miles on 5 rivers was determined eligible for Wild and Scenic River classification. However, no rivers are recommended for Wild and Scenic River classification under the proposed Revised Management Plans. Instead, on most rivers, management direction will continue existing conditions and uses.

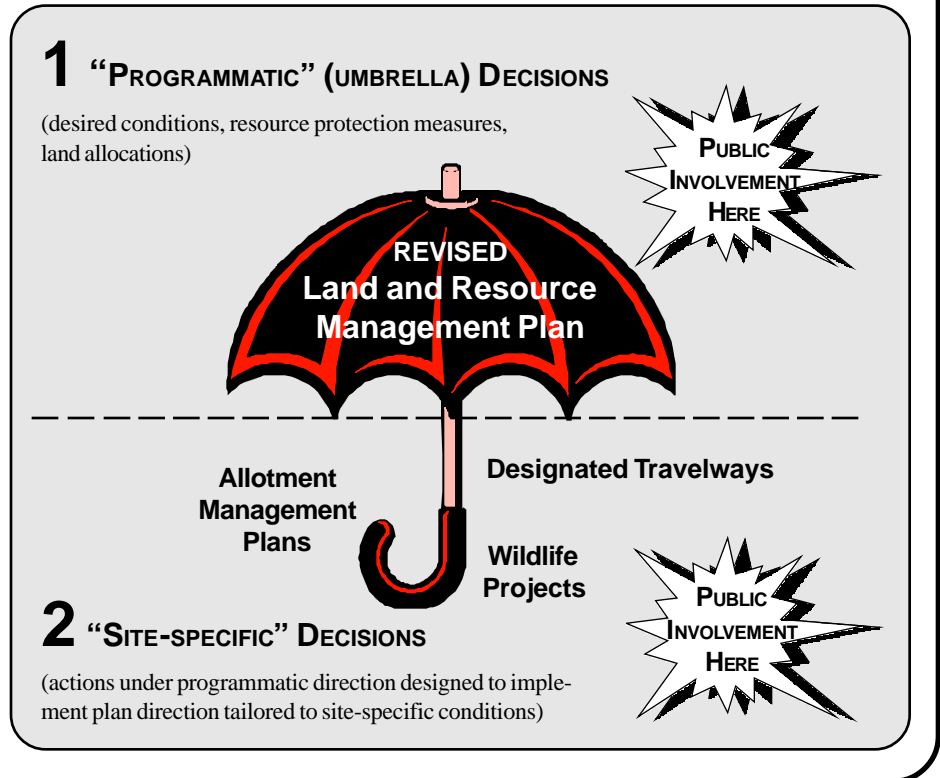
Because of the shared nature of the Little Missouri River with the National Park Service, the National Park Service conducted a concurrent evaluation with the river segments that flow through the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Based on their analysis, they are recommending about 15 miles of the Little Missouri River be classified as "wild" and 7 miles be classified as "scenic."

Two Levels of Decision Making and Public Involvement

The proposed Revised Management Plans describe broad resource goals, objectives, protection measures, and land allocations. They leave specific decisions about how best to accomplish the broad resource goals and objectives to a lower level of decisions.

The decisions and direction reflected in the proposed Revised Management Plans are "programmatic," the first level of decisions. Decisions at the second level are "site-specific."

The two levels of decisions are illustrated in the figure at right.



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USDA Forest Service
 125 North Main Street
 Chadron, NE 69337

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