BLM Wilderness Planning Information

BLM Wilderness Management Plans help to accomplish the following:
- Applies the Wilderness Act relevant to the unique aspects of a specific wilderness
- Aligns all activities to achieve the mandate: Preserve Wilderness Character
- Simplifies future decision making
- Helps respond to future requests
- Prioritizes response to current issues
- Provides budget justification
- Creates context for response to potential future issues

Purpose. The overall purpose of a Wilderness Management Plan: Preserve wilderness character

General Considerations. Keep these considerations in mind regarding BLM Wilderness Management Plans:
- Use the same planning process as used in any activity level plan; WMPs are tiered to RMPs, and as such are normally analyzed as an EA, but could be a EIS.
- The WMP is generally comprehensive; it is a programmatic NEPA document
- Generally WMPS do not include implementation detail; site specific implementation analysis occurs through a tiered EA
- Decisions must not to maximize a particular human use, but instead maximize the preservation of wilderness character
- The WMP Is subject to Minimum Requirements; the Administrative Record should contain a series of MRDGs to support discrete decisions made by the WMP
- Major investments must be analyzed in the WMP
- Enforceable regulations of visitor use must be analyzed in the WMP

Decision Space. The Wilderness Management Plan is limited in its decision space by the Wilderness Act. Decisions in the plan make site specific implementation decisions for issues such as travel management (trail systems and access points), the extent of and limitation to Special Recreation Permits, minimum requirements evaluation for all existing 4(c) prohibited uses (e.g. existing installations), visitor use allocations, known resource restoration needs, and management of special provisions unique to a wilderness. A wilderness management plan can identify zones where different conditions exist, at the time of designation, that are clearly different from one place or another and require different management approaches. WMPs set the context for responding to potential future issues.

Scope. The Scope of the WMP is all issues related to the wilderness, and should also include issues directly related to the wilderness, such as access roads and trailhead management. The WMP can be a component to a larger plan such as a Combined Resource Management Plan or Monument Plan, where it is useful to do so.

Other Guidance. Plans may also address subjects that are not decisions, but for which explanation may be helpful for future decision making.

- Describe Other Features of Value. This quality of wilderness character differs from Wilderness to Wilderness, and some Wilderness areas may not have any. But where they exist, they must be preserved as the other qualities of wilderness character (see explanation on this quality in Keeping it Wild II). Describe what they are for the Wilderness addressed in the plan so that they are formally recognized, and can be fully analyzed in present and future decisions.
- Describe the existing situation and setting related to issues that are anticipated in the future, but not currently analyzed. For example, the plan won't create authorization for an inholding owner to access a property, that will come through tired analysis. Because the application for access may not come for years, the plan can serve to document the existing conditions relative to the issue, so that future analysis does not have to attempt to establish the existing condition with little to base it on.
- Identify decision making processes so that the WMP can be a useful guide for stakeholders to understand how they will need to approach the Field Office. For example, describe how a rancher will seek authorization for grazing activities.
- Identify future desired outcomes, such as acquisitions, so that the plan supports future work in those issues.

Preparation. The WMP can be written in-house, by contract, or a combination of the two. It is important that the Field Office staff be involved in all aspects of plan preparation, even if a contractor has been hired to prepare the plan.

Public Participation. At least one public meeting must be held to identify issues. Coordinate and meet with state, county, local, and tribal governments, as appropriate and where desired by those entities. Give 45-day comment opportunity on draft.

Do's. Use the WMP to:
- Determine necessity for existing 4(c) issues in the wilderness
- Set response to regularly occurring and routine issues
- Identify areas needing immediate attention
- Identify timing or triggers, such as visitor management approaches should use levels increase
- Set context for future response, such as identifying existing activities related to inholding access, should the owner seek an access permit in the future

Do Not's. Don't use the WMP to:
- Set management direction in conflict with law, regulation or policy. Many wilderness decisions are already made, and so the WMP doesn't have much decision space. It's unnecessary to analyze alternatives which conflict with law, regulation, or policy.
- Set policy for issues of national or regional scope. For example, don't take on an issue that is already, or should be, addressed somewhere else (such as if a particular herbicide is an appropriate treatment for a certain weed – those are Noxious Weed EIS decisions).

- Create specific guidance for broad issues where there is not enough current information to identify the minimum requirement. For example, developing methods to remove graffiti may not be able to take into account all situations, or may preclude newer appropriate methods as they are developed.
- Address speculative issues with overly specific guidance. Avoid overly prescriptive decisions for potential future issues that will be affected by numerous variables. For example, the wide number of variables occurring with a fire may make it very difficult to have meaningful post-fire response practices identified in the plan. A general goal may be sufficient, pending site specific analysis after a fire event.

Previous planning documents. If an existing RMP has made decisions for an area that are not in compliance with law, regulation, or policy, do not carry those forward in the WMP. A newly designated wilderness (including on lands that the agency had not previously managed for wilderness values) is not subject to the decisions in a RMP that are out of compliance with the Wilderness Act.

Steps in the WMP process.

1. Review the Wilderness Act the enabling Act for the wilderness, paying special attention to special provisions that apply.
2. Complete wilderness character baseline inventory.
3. Identify additional issues not captured in WCM baseline.
4. Hold a public meeting and use other methods to scope issues.
5. Compile and analyze issues, and articulate assumptions that will guide alternative development.
6. Develop objectives and strategy to respond to issues and assumptions.
7. Develop alternative management actions, and identify when actions will take place.
8. Finalize the plan, keeping in mind that plan development may be iterative and you can return to an earlier step at any time.
9. Give a 45-day comment opportunity on the draft plan.
10. Approval of the plan. The State Director signs the plan.