

# BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT LAND USE PLANNING AND THE ROCK SPRINGS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

The **U.S. Bureau of Land Management** is the federal agency tasked with managing the largest amount of America’s public lands— over 245 million acres, or approximately 12 percent of the landmass of the United States. These lands are predominantly found in the western U.S. and do not include designated national forests or national parks. In Wyoming, these lands represent 18 million acres and contain a diversity of habitats, including sagebrush steppe, deserts, badlands, lower-elevation forests, and more.

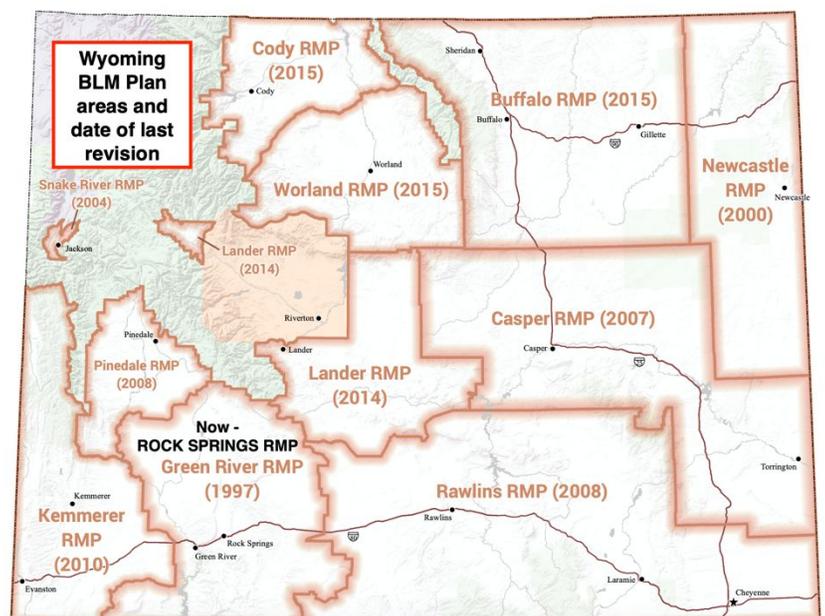
Congress requires the BLM to manage these lands for a variety of uses while simultaneously trying to preserve the resources. The law directing this, called the **Federal Land Policy and Management Act**, was enacted in 1976 and requires management for “multiple-use.” Multiple-use is defined as "management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people."

In order to fulfill this mandate, the BLM is required to conduct planning about every 20–25 years, in order to determine new priorities and directions for land use “that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.” Since these lands belong to all Americans, they are required to robustly engage the public in this planning process in order to gather input and develop plans that are high-level roadmaps for future management. The plans are called **Resource Management Plans** and the BLM must follow another law, the **National Environmental Policy Act**, in how they interact with the public in the planning.

NEPA requires that good, up-to-date information and environmental, economic, historic, and cultural analyses are provided to the American people so that they can be well-informed about the benefits and detriments of any uses on the landscape. To foster this understanding about the impacts or conflicts when prioritizing uses (for example, mining versus protection of wildlife habitat), the BLM is required to publish an **Environmental Impact Statement**, which lays out these choices, in a range of alternatives for management. The public is then provided a 90-day opportunity to comment on these draft plans and alternatives—to weigh in how they would like to see these lands managed in the next generation.

## WYOMING AND THE ROCK SPRINGS RMP

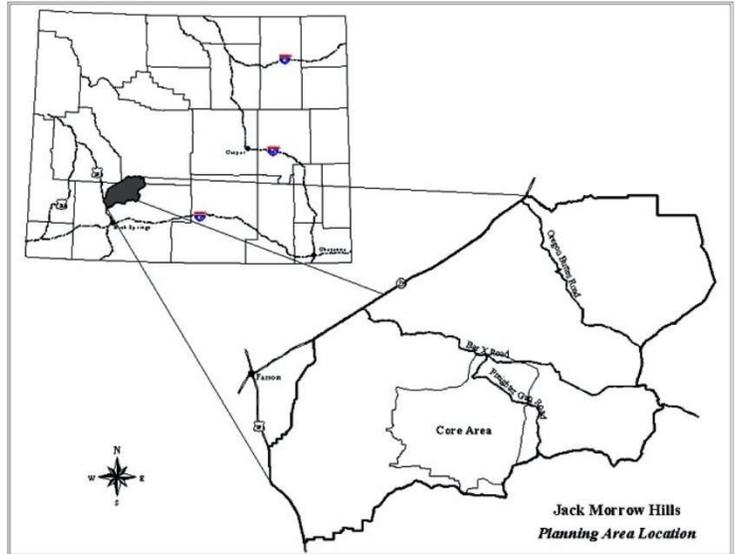
In Wyoming, the state is divided up into several BLM districts and each district develops an RMP for their area. All of the BLM districts have revised and updated their plans in the last 15 years, except Rock Springs (formerly called Green River). They started their RMP revision nine years ago and it’s been held up repeatedly. The last time they invited the public to



provide input about the plan was in 2011 during what's called the scoping stage of NEPA — when the BLM is required to ask the public, “What are the most important issues or prioritizes for you that we need to address in this plan?” Since 2011, the public has been left in the dark about the Rock Springs plan.

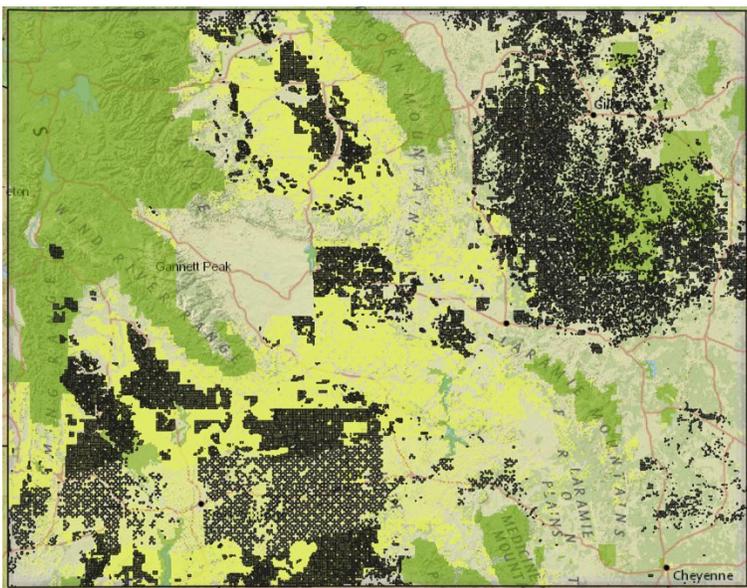
## THE JACK MORROW HILLS/RED DESERT RMP AMENDMENT

The Rock Springs BLM field office last updated its entire RMP in 1997 but due to public concern about the agency's failure to adequately protect the Red Desert, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior ordered Wyoming BLM to do a supplement in 2003. Known as the **Jack Morrow Hills Coordinated Activity Plan**, it focused on the Northern Red Desert and attracted the greatest amount of public comment ever in Wyoming BLM history — over 69,000 comments, with over 97 percent indicating conservation of the landscape as the highest priority for use. As a result, the BLM instituted protections for wildlife, cultural resources, water resources, and historic trails and landscapes. Also, as part of its response to the public's input, it set up a program to phase out oil and gas leases in highly sensitive areas and require mitigation efforts for development in other areas. This supplemental plan was formally incorporated into the RMP in 2006.



## NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE BLM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RED DESERT AND THE RMP

With the advent of a new federal administration in 2017, the leadership of the BLM and its priorities have been changing. The Trump administration has explicitly said that it wants to emphasize “energy dominance” on its BLM lands — prioritizing oil and gas and mining over other uses. We’ve seen this play out in Wyoming already where an unprecedented amount of BLM land has been leased to oil and gas companies at extraordinarily low prices— at \$2/acre for a 10-year lease. Of the 18 million acres of BLM lands in Wyoming about 60 percent is already leased for oil and gas (see map to the left where black = areas leased for oil and gas).



We have learned from contacts with the BLM in Washington D.C. that the

public comment opportunity on the Rock Springs RMP has been delayed in the last year because the Trump administration wanted more “energy dominance” in the draft plan; so the agency has been writing those management priorities internally. We have also seen, through RMPs that have already been issued in other Western states under this administration, that the federal government is trying to strip every protection for wildlife, cultural resources, and wild and scenic places away from these plans so as to give oil and gas and other extractive industries full, unrestricted use of the landscape. In an analysis conducted by Pew Trusts, looking at six other RMPs already released under the current administration, they found that the BLM only wanted to protect 2 percent of the acreage formerly deemed as areas of critical environmental concern. This management trend, if applied to the Rock Springs RMP, and specifically to the Red Desert area, could strip away the current protections we have in place for wildlife, cultural and historic resources, and wild and scenic lands on this landscape.