

Stewardship Plan for as little as 5 years, while others may require such management for over 20 years.

On March 20, 2003, the Service published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in the **Federal Register** (68 FR 13721). The purpose was to maintain and enhance, to the extent possible, the biological and physical conditions within the salt ponds for the period after commercial salt production ceased until long-term restoration was implemented. Scoping activities in preparation for the draft EIS/EIR included a public meeting on March 23, 2003 and a meeting with a group of technical experts on April 17, 2003.

On January 23, 2004, the Service published a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS/EIR in the **Federal Register**. A public meeting to accept comments on the draft document was held on February 4, 2004 in Fremont, California. In the Draft EIS/EIR, we proposed to circulate Bay waters through reconfigured pond systems and release pond contents to the Bay. This would require installation, replacement or removal of 55 water control structures, breaches or levee fills. We also proposed to manage a limited number of ponds in different manners: as seasonal ponds; as higher salinity ponds; as muted or full tidal ponds; or at different water levels in winter or summer. Project impacts were described in the Draft EIR/EIS.

Development of the Final EIS

The Draft EIS/EIR was jointly developed with the California Department of Fish and Game. Because of differences in notice and comment periods, the Final EIR under the California Environmental Quality Act has already been prepared and issued under a separate cover. However, all comments received by either the Service or the Department of Fish and Game during either the EIR or EIS comment periods, are included and considered in the Final EIS/EIR. A total of 21 comment letters were received from 17 different organizations or individuals. The Final EIS/EIR incorporates all changes or additions to the draft into one complete document.

The analysis provided in the Final EIS/EIR is intended to accomplish the following: inform the public of the proposed action; address public comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR; disclose the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the proposed actions; and indicate any irreversible commitment of resources that would result from implementation of the proposed action.

Alternatives Analyzed

The Final EIS/EIR considers four alternatives for Initial Stewardship: a No Action Alternative, a Seasonal Pond Alternative, and two Pond Management alternatives which vary based on the dates for initial release of saline pond waters.

Under the No Action alternative, there would be no flow circulation through the pond systems. Remaining brines would dry through the evaporation process and the ponds would then fill seasonally with rainwater in winter. No new public access would be available. No action would be conducted by the agencies, including no levee maintenance, and some levees would likely fail during this period, which could impact water quality in the Bay, flood protection for adjacent homes and businesses, and existing public access on the levees. The existing open water ponds in South San Francisco Bay would be dry during most of the year which would reduce their value for wildlife.

In Alternative 1, the Seasonal Pond Alternative, there would be no flow circulation through the pond systems. Remaining brines would dry through the evaporation process and the ponds would then fill seasonally with rainwater in winter. No new public access would be available. The only action taken by the agencies would be to maintain the levees at their current standard of maintenance to prevent release of existing brines, to assure continued public access, and to maintain a minimum level of flood control. The existing open water ponds in South San Francisco Bay would be dry during most of the year which would reduce their value for wildlife.

Under the two pond management alternatives, bay waters would be circulated through the ponds, the pond levees would continue to be maintained at the current level, existing public access would continue and the ponds previously kept closed by Cargill would be open to limited public access. The majority of the existing open water ponds would remain in open water habitat throughout the year thereby maintaining important wildlife habitat values. The two action alternatives differ in the timing of the initial release of the existing low to mid salinity brines in the ponds.

In Alternative 2, the Simultaneous March/April Initial Release alternative, the contents of most of the Alviso and Baumberg Ponds would be released simultaneously in March and April. The ponds would be managed as a mix of continuous circulation ponds, seasonal

ponds and batch ponds. Higher salinity ponds in Alviso and in the West Bay would be discharged in March and April in later years when salinities in the ponds have been reduced to required levels. The Island Ponds (A-19, 20, and 21) would be breached and open to tidal waters. This alternative would delay implementation of Initial Stewardship for over a year and could impact the ability of the agencies to maintain low salinities needed to meet permit discharge requirements.

In Alternative 3, the Phased Release Alternative, many lower salinity ponds in Alviso and Baumberg would be discharged in July, and medium salinity ponds would be discharged the following March and April. The higher salinity ponds would be discharged in later years and the Island Ponds would be breached as in Alternative 2. The ponds would be managed as in the Simultaneous March/April Release Alternative during the continuous circulation period. Alternative 3, the Phased Release Alternative, is the preferred alternative in the Final EIS/EIR.

This notice is provided pursuant to regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (40 CFR 1506.6).

Dated: March 30, 2004.

David G. Paullin,

Acting Manager, California/Nevada Operations Office.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[MT-050-1610-DP-018E]

Notice of Availability of the Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (DRMP/EIS) for the Dillon Field Office, MT

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Montana State Office, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), a Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (DRMP/EIS) has been prepared for public lands and resources administered by the Bureau of Land Management's Dillon Field Office. The public is invited to review and comment on the range and adequacy of the draft

alternatives and associated environmental effects. For comments to be most helpful, they should relate to specific concerns or conflicts that are within the legal responsibilities of the BLM and can be resolved in this planning process. The DRMP/EIS provides direction and guidance for the management of approximately 900,000 acres of public land and 1.3 million acres of federal mineral estate located in Beaverhead and Madison Counties in southwestern Montana. The DRMP/EIS will replace the Dillon Management Framework Plan approved in September 1979.

DATES: The comment period will end 90 days after the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability is published in the **Federal Register** announcing the availability of this DRMP/EIS. Comments on the DRMP/EIS must be received on or before the end of the comment period at the address listed below. Public meetings will be held during the comment period. Public meetings and any other public involvement activities will be announced at least 15 days in advance through public notices, media news releases, newsletter mailings, and on the Dillon RMP Web site at www.mt.blm.gov/dfo/rmp.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Dillon RMP Team, BLM Dillon Field Office, 1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, Montana 59725. Comments may also be sent by e-mail to MT_Dillon_RMP@blm.gov. Documents pertinent to the DRMP/EIS and written comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Dillon Field Office at the address above during regular business hours, 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Responses to the comments will be published as part of the Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

Review copies of the DRMP/EIS are available at the following locations in and near the planning area:

Beaverhead County Courthouse,
Commissioner's Office, Dillon
BLM Butte Field Office
BLM Dillon Field Office
BLM Ennis Field Station
BLM Missoula Field Office
Bozeman Public Library
Dillon Public Library
Ennis Public Library
Lima Town Hall
Madison County Courthouse,
Commissioner's Office, Virginia City
Red Rocks Refuge, Lakeview
Sheridan Forest Service Office
Twin Bridges Public Library
Whitehall Public Library
Wisdom Forest Service Office
Wise River Forest Service Office

The DRMP/EIS and other associated documents may also be viewed and downloaded in PDF format at the Dillon RMP Web site at www.mt.blm.gov/dfo/rmp.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information and/or to have your name added to the mailing list contact Renee Johnson, RMP Project Manager, at (406) 683-8016 or Tim Bozorth, Dillon Field Manager, at (406) 683-8023; use the toll-free number and information line at (877) 521-2889; or correspond by e-mail to MT_Dillon_RMP@blm.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Dillon Field Office RMP area is located in the southwestern portion of Montana in Beaverhead and Madison Counties. The planning area addressed in the RMP contains 901,226 acres of public surface estate and 1,354,710 acres of federal mineral estate administered by the BLM Dillon Field Office. The DRMP/EIS focuses on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield as prescribed by section 202 of the FLPMA. Beaverhead and Madison Counties participated in development of the plan as cooperating agencies with special expertise.

The public involvement and collaboration process implemented for this effort included a situation assessment conducted prior to scoping, five open houses during scoping, an information fair, release of reports on Wild and Scenic River and Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) findings, release of an *RMP Digest* document describing the current situation followed by nine public alternative development workshops, incorporation of recommendations from three Western Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) subgroups, and distribution of information via the Dillon RMP website and periodic newsletters. A copy of the DRMP/EIS has been sent to individuals, agencies, and groups who requested a copy, or as required by regulation or policy.

The DRMP/EIS considers and analyzes four (4) alternatives (A-D), including the No Action, or Continuation of Current Management alternative. These alternatives were developed based on extensive public input including scoping (September/October 2001), an information fair (April 2002), alternative development workshops (February 2003), numerous meetings with local, state, tribal, and federal agencies, and recommendations made by citizen-based working groups convened by the Western Montana RAC. The alternatives provide for an array of alternative land use allocations and variable levels of commodity production and resource protection and restoration. After comments are reviewed and any pertinent adjustments made, a Proposed RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be available in early 2005.

The issues addressed in the formulation of alternatives include upland and riparian management, forest and woodland management, noxious weeds, sage grouse and westslope cutthroat trout conservation, commercial uses (including livestock grazing, mineral development, oil and gas leasing, right-of-ways and communication use areas), Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), Wild and Scenic Rivers, and travel management. Information on the management of the 13 potential ACECs and analysis of impacts is described within the Draft RMP/EIS.

Dated: January 23, 2004.

Martin C. Ott,
State Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[OR-090-5900, HAG04-0090]

Notice of Availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Upper Siuslaw River Late-Successional Reserve Restoration Plan

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to Section 102 (2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, a Final Environmental Impact Statement has been prepared by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Eugene District, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service