

USDA-Forest Service

Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan Overview

Thunder Basin Cooperative Working Group

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Newcastle, Wyoming

Purpose of this Revised Management Plan

“This Revised Management Plan offers guidance for all resource management activities on the Thunder Basin National Grassland. It suggests management standards and guidelines, described resource management practices, levels of resource production, people-carrying capacities, and the availability and sustainability of lands for resource management.” (Preface, page 1)

Relationship of This Revised Management Plan to Other Documents

- “Alternatives were formulated according to the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).” (Preface, page 2)
- “Upon release of the final revised land and resource management plan for the Thunder Basin National Grassland, specific activities and projects will be to carry out the plan’s direction. **Forest Service managers will do environmental analysis on all projects, incorporating data and evaluations in the final Revised Management Plan and Final environmental impact statement (FEIS). All project analysis will tier to the FEIS.** (Preface, page 2) (emphasis added)

Reader's Guide to This Revised Management Plan

- Chapter 1: Grassland-wide Direction
- Chapter 2: Geographic Area Direction
- Chapter 3: Management Area Direction
- Chapter 4: Monitoring and Evaluation
- Appendices

Grassland-wide Direction

“This chapter contains direction that applies grassland-wide, unless more stringent or restrictive direction is found in Chapters 2 or 3. The grassland wide direction includes national and regional goals, grassland-wide goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. Additional direction can be found in the appendices. (Preface, page 2)

Geographic Area Direction

“Geographic direction is the most detailed management plan direction. Geographic areas include management direction that is too specific to apply across an entire grassland or several grasslands. [...] The geographic area directions is applies to the area in addition to the grassland wide direction in Chapter 1, and the management area direction in Chapter 3.” (Preface, page 2)

Management Area Direction

“Management areas are defined as parts of the grassland that are managed for a particular emphasis or theme. Each management area has a prescription that outlines the theme, the desired conditions, and the standards and guidelines that apply to it (in addition to the grassland-wide standards and guidelines). (Preface, page 3)

Monitoring and Evaluation

“Monitoring and evaluation are conducted at several scales and for many purposes, each of which has different objectives and requirements. Monitoring requirements and tasks are developed to be responsive to the objectives and scale of the plan, program, or project to be monitored.”

“Monitoring and evaluation are separate, sequential activities required by [the National Forest Management Act] regulations to determine how well objectives have been met and how closely management standards and guidelines have been applied.” (Preface, page 3)

Appendices

- A: Air Quality
- B: Recommended Fence Specifications for Big Game Movement
- C: Determining Animal Unit Equivalent Based on Livestock Weight
- D: Oil and Gas Stipulations
- E: Guideline for Constructing User-friendly Gates
- F: Geology and Minerals
- G: Glossary
- H: Habitat Descriptions for Management Indicator Species

Appendices (continued)

- I: Suggested Stocking Rates
- J: Paleontology
- K: National Goals
- L: National and Regional Policies
- M: Accidental Disturbance of Human Remains

Implementation of Land and Resource Management Plans: Introduction

“This Revised Management Plan suggests the framework to guide the day-to-day resource management operations on the Thunder Basin National Grassland (Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest), and subsequent land and resource management decisions made during project planning. **The [National Forest Management Plan] requires that resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of National Forest System (NFS) lands be consistent with the final revised management plan.** Site-specific project decisions also must be consistent with the final revised management plan, unless the plan is modified by amendment.
(Preface, page 4) **(emphasis added)**

Implementation of Land and Resource Management Plans: Project-level Decisions

“There are two objectives for project planning.”

- “In agency-initiated actions, the objective is to move toward or achieve the integrated direction in the management plan through the action.”
- “For proposals made by others, the objectives of project planning is to decide if the proposal is or could be made consistent with grassland-wide, management area and geographic area direction. In addition, it must be decided if the project is in the public’s interest in terms of grassland-wide goals and objectives.”

(Preface, page 5)

Implementation of Land and Resource Management Plans: Project-level Decisions

The following ideas are important:

- Management plans goals and objectives guide the identification and selection of potential agency projects.
- The determination of whether an individual project is consistent with the management plan shall be based on whether the project follows grassland-wide, management area and geographic direction.
- Projects that cannot comply with standards in the plan must be found inconsistent with management direction, unless the standard is modified through amendment. In the latter case, project approval and management plan amendment may be accomplished simultaneously.

Implementation of Land and Resource Management Plans: Project-level Decisions

- Grassland-wide and management area guidelines, project-specific outputs, and activity schedules should not be used in the consistency determination.
- **Resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of [National Forest System] lands must be consistent with the plan, unless specifically exempted from applicability in an amendment or revision decision document.**
- Generally, it is during plan implementation – when a project decision is made – that the irretrievable commitment of resources is also made. Therefore, **before making decisions, additional environmental analysis and site-specific disclosure of environmental effects are required according to [the National Environmental Policy Act] procedures.**

Operational Activates Exempt from the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process

“To help carry out the management plan, national grassland staff conduct resource inventories, prepare action plans and schedules, and administer previously approved activates. These are called operational activities. They represent neither binding decisions nor irretrievable commitments of resources, so they are not subject to environmental analysis and disclosure under [the National Environmental Policy Act] procedures.” (Preface, page 6)

Public Involvement and Coordination with Other Government Agencies

“Ongoing public involvement and governmental coordination are a central part of carrying out the administration of the Thunder Basin National Grassland, including implementation of land and resource management plans. The Thunder Basin National Grassland has committed to an intensive program of public involvement.”

“In essence, the Thunder Basin National Grassland has committed to a partnership with the public and with other government agencies (local, state or federal).”

(Preface, page 7)

Budget Formulation

“Annual budget proposals are based on the activities and actions required to achieve the goals and objectives of the management plans. Monitoring results and actual costs of carrying out the standards and guidelines in the final revised management plan will be the basis for each year’s budget proposal. Costs to carry out the management plan are not complete without providing for an adequate level of monitoring and evaluation of projects.” (Preface, page 7)

Budget Execution

“The Annual budget must comply with the final revised management plan and any specific direction provide in the annual *Appropriations Act* (Forest Service Manual 1930). **As actual allocations rarely provide for full funding of the management plan, the scheduled activities and actions for any particular year are adjusted to conform to the intent of Congress.** Although budget changes themselves do not require management plan amendment, implications of budget changes may.”
(Preface, page 7)

Management Plan Amendments

“The amendment process allows changes in components of the management plan’s management direction. Unless circumstances warrant a revision, an amendment is generally done when monitoring and evaluation show either of the following:

- That the achievement of one or all of the grassland-wide objectives is constrained by conflicting management plan direction, or
- That adequate progress toward achieving the grassland-wide objectives is not being made.”

(Preface, page 8)

The Management Plan Revision Process

“Normally, management plans are revised on a 10-year cycle (36 CFR 219.10). This means that anticipated completion of a normal revision will occur about 10 to 15 years following completion of this management plan revision. Variations of this rule may occur for various reasons. [...] However, scheduled inventories, anticipated staffing changes, or other circumstances that might improve planning efficiency, might warrant a delay. Delaying a revision is not appropriate if monitoring and evaluation show immediate changes in the management plan are needed.” (Preface, page 8)

The Management Plan Revision Process (continued)

“A thorough review of the management plan should be completed before initiating a management plan revision. An interdisciplinary team conducts this review, which includes:

- Results of recent monitoring and evaluation, along with pertinent research findings and recommendations.
- New laws, regulations, or policies that may suggest a need to change the management plan.
- How well the Thunder Basin National Grassland is progressing toward stated grassland-wide goals and objectives.
- Demand projections for selected outputs.
- Predicted and actual ecosystem responses.
- Predicted and actual costs, outputs, responses, etc.
- Emerging issues and opportunities.

Integration with Forest Service Directive System

“Management direction in the Forest Service Directive System, including the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and the Forest Service Handbook (FSH), is part of the management plan’s management direction and is appropriately referenced within the management plan. Management direction also includes applicable laws, regulations, and policies, although they might be restated in the management plan.”
(Preface, page 9)

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

3.63 Black-footed Ferret Reintroduction Habitat

Theme

Black-tailed prairie dog colony complexes are activated and intensively managed as reintroduction habitat for black-footed ferrets.

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

Desired Conditions

Large prairie dog colony complexes are established and maintained as suitable habitat for black-footed ferret reintroductions. Land uses and resource management activities are conducted in a manner that is compatible with maintaining suitable ferret habitat.

The Forest Service works with other agencies and organizations to pursue conservation agreements or easements with adjoining land jurisdictions to achieve black-footed ferret recovery objectives. Where landownership patterns are not conducive to effective and successful prairie dog and black-footed ferret management, landownership adjustments with willing landowners may also be used to help resolve management issues.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the regulatory agency that determines many of the conditions including when and where black-footed ferrets, an endangered species, may be released.

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

Standards and Guidelines

General

1. Authorize only those uses and activities that do not reduce the suitability of the area as black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat.

Standard

2. Manage all prairie dog colonies within this Management Area as though they were occupied by black-footed ferrets, and apply all Standards and Guidelines as though black-footed ferrets occupy all colonies. **Standard**

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

Mineral and Energy Resources

1. Oil and gas stipulations for black-footed ferrets (Appendix D) apply to all prairie dog colonies within this management area. **Standard**

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

Livestock Grazing

1. Prior to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service authorizing a black-footed ferret release, the Forest Service will coordinate and consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the state wildlife agency and other agencies that conduct, authorize or fund predator control to help ensure that predator control activities on the national grassland to reduce livestock losses do not pose significant risks to black-footed ferrets. **Standard**

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

Fish and Wildlife

1. Use of rodenticides in a colony to reduce prairie dog populations may occur only after consultation and concurrence of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The conditions when prairie dog poisoning may be authorized are presented in Chapter 1. **Standard**

2. Relocation of prairie dogs to establish new colonies and accelerate growth of prairie dog populations in selected areas may occur only after consultation with appropriate state and Federal wildlife agencies. **Standard**

Application of the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan

Recreation

1. To help expand and maintain suitable black-footed ferret habitat, coordinate and consult with the state wildlife agency to prohibit prairie dog shooting within black-footed ferret reintroduction habitat.

Standard

2015 Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Management Strategy

- Increased the Category 1 area by approximately 1,548-acres, a 3% increase in response to a request to remove state and private lands;
- Increased the Category 1 miles of boundary to control by approximately 25-miles, an increase of 36% in response to a request to remove state and private lands;
- Decreased the Category 2 area by approximately 50,497-acres, a 77% decrease in response to a request to remove state and private lands;
- Decreased the Category 2 miles of boundary to control by approximately 69-miles, a decrease of 73% in response to a request to remove state and private lands;
- Expanded, organized, and coordinated control tools use;

The End

Thank-you