

B u r e a u o f L a n d M a n a g e m e n t

Planning Outreach Meetings - Comment Summary

Thank you for attending one of the BLM's Planning Outreach Meetings held in Washington D.C. (March 13 and 14) and Denver, Colorado (March 20). The purpose of the meeting was to provide you information about the land use planning process and the 80 planning efforts being conducted during 2002, especially the 21 high priority Time Sensitive Plans.

Here is a summary, grouped by major categories, of the comments recorded for each of the three meetings. Many comments reflected similar concerns with the planning process and numerous suggestions for improvement were offered. Each category is followed by an observation from the BLM to indicate acknowledgment of the concerns, response to questions, or needed follow-up.

These meeting highlights will be distributed to all the BLM field offices for their consideration as they prepare land use plans. You are encouraged to discuss these topics with the individual field offices to facilitate your involvement in local planning efforts.

Comments from attendees transcribed, paraphrased, or summarized in bullets:

Alternatives

- Involve the public in developing alternatives.
- Develop a more reasonable range of alternatives that address all the issues, including management proposals from interest groups.
- Clarify distinctions between alternatives to understand trade offs.
- Consider implementation budgets in developing alternatives.

BLM Observations: Many participants were dissatisfied with the alternatives BLM develops for land use plans because they felt their interest was not well represented and thus choices were too limited or unreasonable. Though there are often technical, legal, environmental and other constraints on BLM decision-making, BLM has wide discretion in selecting alternatives for consideration in land use plans. Alternatives can be used to reflect various management scenarios and serve as the basis for describing environmental, social and economic effects and the trade-offs associated between the alternatives.

BLM Follow-up: BLM will encourage and work with the field office planning teams to involve the public in the development of the alternatives. BLM is developing new ways of public involvement in alternative development. Examples of this include alternative development meetings on the Jack Morrow Hills Plan, WY, and a Resource Advisory Council developing an alternative for the Otero Mesa area in southern New Mexico.

Cooperating Agency Status

- Encourage cooperating agency status.
- Take advantage and participate in local planning efforts.

BLM Observations: The BLM Director strongly endorses the concepts of collaborative planning and encourages State Governors, Tribal Councils, and county commissioners/supervisors to consider formal cooperating agency status to join BLM as partners in preparing land use plans.

BLM Follow-up: The BLM Director cosigned letters to each Western Governor with each BLM State Director offering full cooperating agency status in the major NEPA and planning efforts that are scheduled for completion by 2007. The BLM State Directors have also invited Tribes, county, and local officials to join BLM as cooperating agencies in these efforts.

Outreach tools

- Create a running list of those interested in being involved, possibly through website sign up.
- Do not rely entirely on electronic communication, as other means of communication may be more appropriate for some information. Don't forget that not all communities or citizens have equal access to the internet.
- Use interactive workshops and field trips during the planning process.
- Hold meetings periodically, both at the local level and the national level to discuss planning, implementation projects, and other related topics.
- Create a national planning website to inform the public of activities, track plans, provide information, and obtain input.
- Hold a forum with other Federal and state agencies to explore planning models and collaboration software.
- Provide regular feedback to participants of meetings and workshops.
- Having a broad range of interests represented at meetings and workshops will facilitate conflict resolution over the long term.
- Sponsor additional/regular meetings and updates and follow up on comments and issues raised at national-level outreach meetings.
- Recognize the full range of interests, including national-level interest groups, local communities, and individual citizens.
- Not all affected populations actively participate in the planning process.
- Tailor intensity of public participation to level of controversy to speed up process.
- Provide easily accessible information on current and future planning efforts and opportunities for public involvement.

BLM Observations: Constant and consistent access to current and accurate information is key to many stakeholders. The public lands are of great interest to a wide range of citizens from local landowners and permit holders to state and local governments to members of the general public from across the nation. Many are concerned about whether their particular interests and interests of people not actively involved in the planning process are considered or weighted properly in the planning process. Addressing the communication needs of this diverse citizenry and their desire to be involved will require the creative use of a variety of mediums.

BLM Follow-up: BLM will develop a national planning website to disseminate information and facilitate public access to BLM land use planning efforts and land use plans around the country. BLM will continue to hold periodic, national-level meetings with a broad-base of stakeholders to discuss planning issues.

BLM state and field offices will continue to serve as the primary source of information on individual land use planning efforts. Contact your local BLM office or visit the state BLM website for more information about how you can get involved and be informed about BLM planning at the state and local level. Also, many BLM field offices have a website which can be accessed from the state or national BLM website.

Contracting

- Avoid conflicts of interest with consultants who have clients with vested interests.
- Teaming agreements and flexible dollars create the best product.

BLM Observations: BLM does not have sufficient in-house staff to complete all the needed land use plans along with other important day-to-day activities associated with managing the public lands. Therefore, the use of qualified contractors to prepare land use plans or provide certain types of supporting materials and other planning services will continue to be an essential element of the BLM planning process. BLM is responsible and accountable for the work completed by contractors and will take all necessary steps to ensure the contractors are appropriately selected and that their products and services meet standards for quality.

BLM Follow-up: BLM is considering how best to utilize the experience and expertise of the contractors to explore improvements to the current planning and contracting processes and may host a meeting with the contractors on this topic later this year.

Documents

- BLM needs greater consistency across the country in approach to planning, look and feel of documents, and comparability.
- Share success stories and best example to develop national models.
- Consider scales other than jurisdictional boundaries for planning (i.e. watershed, scope of influence).
- Make documents shorter or release in sections to provide more review time for the public.
- Design documents from the beginning as an electronic document.

BLM Observations: Many readers of BLM land use plans find them complex and difficult to read, that there is little consistency in plan format and content. Others point out that the length of time between scoping and the draft plan is very long and suggest that BLM should provide more information during this timeframe.

BLM Follow-up: BLM will explore options to provide the public planning data and analysis and other planning products in advance of the Draft EIS on a planning effort. BLM has recently provided the field offices a model outline for land use plans. Though the model is optional at

this time, it is anticipated that the use of a standard format will increase consistency in document appearance over time. BLM is currently engaged in a project titled Information Technology in Support of Resource and Minerals Land Use Planning that will develop technological tools to use during plan development and plan implementation. These tools will focus on making planning products integrated digital documents, adaptable to paper or electronic format and interactive.

Data

- The public, states, local governments, and other agencies can provide data, expertise, or help acquire data for planning.
- All data should be standardized and reviewed for accuracy.
- Provide the source, currency, and review process for data (metadata).
- Provide public access to the data and metadata that supports/is the basis for all decisions / conclusions.
- Involve the public in the inventory process.
- Sometimes BLM has inadequate budget to acquire data and conduct analysis.
- Increase use of GIS.
- Utilize information from existing documents to the extent possible.

BLM Observations: Access to current, reliable information is an essential element of successful land use planning as well as the day-to-day management of public lands. Management of the information base is also important. BLM field offices are expected to consider all available information sources and are encouraged to work with the public, state and local governments, other agencies and Tribes to acquire, share and utilize data pertinent to the planning issues.

BLM Follow-up: BLM issued Instruction Memorandum 2001-202, which sets interim guidance on data management for land use plans. This guidance sets out the following as they relate to land use planning: roles and responsibilities, characterizing and managing data, metadata requirements, and data standards. BLM is also developing a common look and feel for GIS display and analysis.

Decisions

- Clearly state decisions in plans: desired future conditions, measurable objectives, allowable uses, monitoring, and implementation schedule/priorities.
- Balance market and non-market and local and national interests; balance all needs.
- Do not initiate planning with a decision in mind.
- Respond appropriately to all public comments. Demonstrate how public input influenced decisions.
- Explore creative problem solving that rely on partnerships.
- Clearly set sideboards of the planning effort at the beginning.

BLM Observations: Ultimately, the planning process leads to decisions. The desire to understand and influence these decisions is what drives public interest and participation in the planning process. Many stakeholders desire that BLM plans more clearly describe the decisions to be made up-front and that they be provided an opportunity to supply and review information that has a bearing on the decisions.

BLM Follow-up: BLM is developing guidance to make clear what types of decisions are made in land use plans, as well as guidance on the scoping process and scoping report.

Implementation and Monitoring

- Make priorities for implementation based on budget and reclamation contingencies.
- Establish a budget and parameters to monitor that will indicate whether goals and objectives are being met and to determine whether a change in implementation actions or plan decisions need to be changed - Adaptive Management.

BLM Observations: Plans that “sit on the shelf” are of little value; they must be reasonable and affordable so they can be implemented. The BLM commitment to completing land use plans must extend to plan implementation. Also, BLM must increase emphasis on compliance and monitoring.

BLM Follow-up: BLM is seeking additional funding from Congress to implement the decisions outlined in land use plans. This will be a new budget priority for BLM in the 2004 Fiscal Year.

EPCA

- Involve the public in the review and utilization of the EPCA study.
- How will the study be used in planning?
- Will the study address the rationale behind the “impediments?”

BLM Observations: The public is interested in being closely involved with the evaluation of the EPCA study and how it will be utilized by BLM.

BLM Follow-up:

BLM will review public land use allocations and lease stipulations based on the results of the EPCA priority basin studies and other information gathering efforts, and then develop recommendations to facilitate oil and gas exploration and development, while maintaining surface resource values. This is to be accomplished in a collaborative manner, with full and meaningful consultation with the public, particularly with local individuals through the land use planning process and other project-specific NEPA analysis. BLM’s intent is to accomplish this collaboration on a basin level, with the involvement of Federal agencies, state agencies, tribes, local government, interest groups, and the public.

Workload

- Continue operations while doing planning.

BLM Observations and Follow-up: BLM will continue the various day-to-day operations of managing public lands while completing land use plans. BLM managers are expected to balance the workload requirements of the planning process with the on-going workload of their office. Accordingly, some routine tasks and non-essential services may be dropped or deferred during the land use planning process.

Advisory Committees

- Balance the membership with the various interests and then use as a collaboration tool.

BLM Follow-up: BLM is actively involving Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) in current planning efforts and will look to continue to expand the role of RACs in the planning process.

Timing

- Coordinate planning work with other agencies so as not to overwhelm the public.
- Speed up the time it takes to complete a plan, but do not sacrifice collaboration to do so.

BLM Observations: Many stakeholders are concerned about the amount of time needed to participate in land use planning and want efforts amongst state and local governments and the federal agencies to be coordinated as much as possible. Some are concerned that the quicker timeframes for some plans will preclude collaboration.

BLM Follow-up: BLM is currently using the Time Sensitive Plans to pilot new ways to accomplish planning in a shorter time with increased public involvement. BLM has begun a dialogue with the Forest Service and agencies within the Department of the Interior to discuss cross-agency cooperation.

BLM looks forward to continued improvement of our land use planning process. Your participation in land use planning is critical to our ability to best meet manage the public lands. If you have additional comments or suggestions for future outreach meeting topics, please contact Mike Mottice, 202-452-0362, or Eli Ilano, 202-452-0364.