

DECISION RECORD
For Amendments To
the Monument Resource Management Plan
and the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan

Introduction

This decision record documents approval of amendments to the Monument Resource Management Plan and the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan. Both plans guide resource management in the Monument Resource Area.

The Environmental Assessment (EA# ID050-90-23) conducted as part of these amendments was completed on April 9, 1990, and a Finding of No Significant Impact was reached by the Monument Area Manager on July 10, 1990.

Decisions

I select the preferred alternative for the Brass Cap Kipuka, amending the Monument Resource Management Plan by designating the area as a Research Natural Area/Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

I select the proposed actions for the sites known as areas 1 and 2, amending the Monument Resource Management Plan by changing the classification from retention in federal ownership to available for transfer.

I select alternative 2 for the tract known as area 3, leaving the site in the retention classification as originally designated in the Monument Resource Management Plan.

I select the preferred alternative for Sun Peak, amending the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan by designating the site as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Rationale for Decision

The Brass Cap Kipuka represents an undisturbed example of a major range habitat type. Alkali sagebrush and Idaho fescue are the dominate species, covering nearly 100 acres of the kipuka. In addition, threetip sagebrush and Idaho fescue are also prevalent on a small portion of the kipuka. Some of these flows are completely void of vegetation, while others have a sparse intermixing of shrubs. The kipuka provides important research information on a natural vegetation type occurring in the region. The lack of significant disturbance due to general inaccessibility to livestock makes the Brass Cap Kipuka an especially good choice for a research area.

The change in classification from retention to transfer for areas 1 and 2 is based on the fact that the sites are uneconomical to manage and do not provide significant resource value to the public. Making these sites available for disposal provides the Bureau the opportunity to exchange these tracts for more desirable lands providing greater benefit to the public.

Selection of alternative 2 for area 3 is based on discussions with the State of Idaho Department of Lands during the Governor's review period and inclusion of the area in the Shoshone District BLM/Idaho State Land Exchange comprehensive plan (pending ratification by the State of Idaho). This decision does not change the finding that the site is uneconomical to manage, but will postpone any decision to future plan amendments or until 1993, when a new planning effort will be initiated for the Monument Resource Area.

While still undescribed in the literature, a mountain shrub zone has long been recognized in southern Idaho. It is dominated by a mixture of medium to tall shrubs and contains a rich diversity of associated graminoids and forbs. One center of mountain shrubland development in Idaho is along the southern edge of the Northern Rocky Mountain Province, especially in the Big Wood and Little Wood drainages. Sun Peak is the best undisturbed example found that is representative of communities of this zone.

Consultation and Coordination

The Bureau's Resource Management Plans must agree and support officially approved and adopted resource-related plans (or in their absence, policies or programs) of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes, so long as the Bureau's plans also agree with and support Federal law and regulations applicable to public lands. An effort has been made to ensure that the proposed amendments are consistent with approved plans. No inconsistencies have been identified with other agencies, local governments, or Indian tribes.

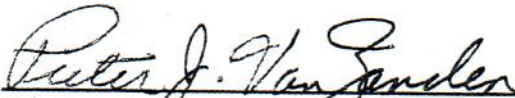
During the Governor's review period an inconsistency was raised over the designation of the site known as area 3 from retention to transfer from federal ownership by a means other than exchange with the state. The inconsistency was based on the fact that the area was included in the Shoshone District BLM/Idaho State Land Exchange conceptual plan pending ratification by the State. Specifically the State Department of Lands felt that disposal of the tract by any means other than exchange would disrupt the conceptual plan. Based on discussions with the State Department of Lands the inconsistency was removed by selection of alternative 2 (retention in Federal ownership) without altering the finding that the site is uneconomical to manage by the Bureau.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Mitigation

The results of implementing these amendments will be examined periodically to inform the resource managers and public of the progress of the plan. The results being achieved under the plans and amendments will be compared with the plan objectives.

Proposed monitoring and evaluation plan for the Monument Resource Management Plan is shown in the final Environmental Impact Statement. The plan specifies resource components to be monitored, how they will be monitored, where they will be monitored, the estimated cost of monitoring, and a suggested threshold level that will warrant a management concern. If future monitoring

shows a variation from RMP objectives warranting management concern, the reasons for the variation will be examined closely. Modification of a Resource Management Plan decision may be needed, or the variation may be due to factors beyond BLM's control, such a climatic or economic fluctuations.



Pieter J. Van Zanden
Associate State Director, Idaho BLM

1/14/91
Date

RECOMMENDATION:

Implement the preferred alternatives and amend two management plans: (the Monument Resource Management Plan and the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan) to make the following changes:

- (a) to designate Brass Cap Kipuka as a Research Natural Area/Area of Critical Environmental Concern.
- (b) to designate Sun Peak as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.
- (c) to change the classification of two areas from retention to transfer.

Do not implement the preferred alternative to amend the Monument Resource Management Plan to change the classification from retention to transfer of the tract known as area 3. Selection of Alternative 2 for this tract is recommended based on discussions with the State of Idaho Department of Lands during the Governor's review period and inclusion of the area in the State Exchange Comprehensive Plan

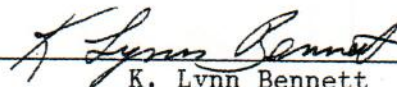
Summary of recommended actions:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Management Plan</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Designation</u>
Brass Cap Kipuka	Monument RMP	854	RNA/ACEC
Sun Peak	Sun Valley MFP	560	ACEC
Area 1	Monument RMP	80	Transfer
Area 2	Monument RMP	25.91	Transfer
Area 3	Monument RMP	200	Retention (no change)

(Legal descriptions are contained within this document)

11/2/90

Date



K. Lynn Bennett
Shoshone District Manager

Finding of No Significant Impact: Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment (ID050-90-23), I have determined that impacts are not expected to be significant and preparation of an environmental impact statement pursuant to Section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 is not required for this action.

7/10/90
Date

Steve Ellis
Steve Ellis
Monument Resource Area Manager

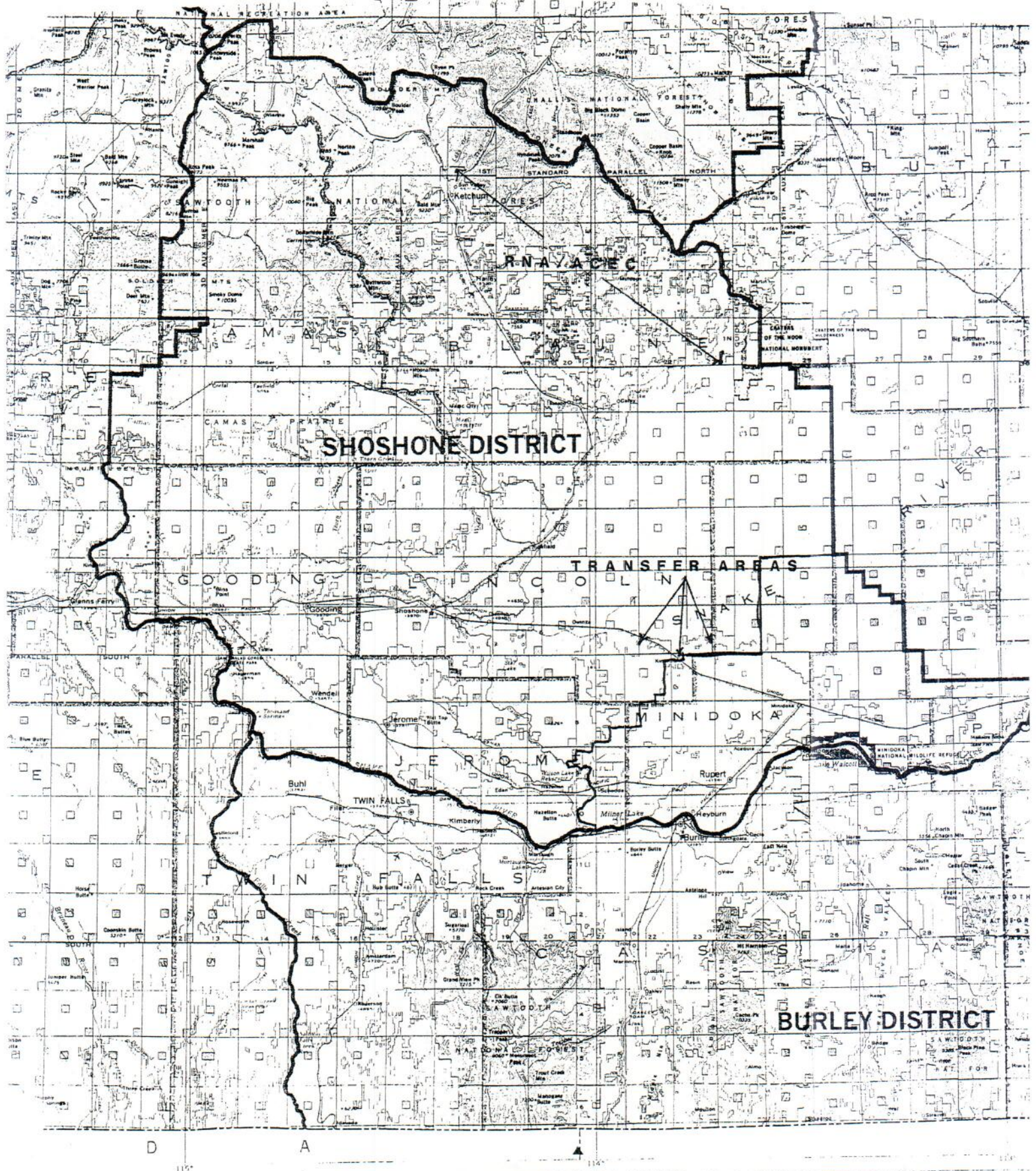


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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Shoshone District proposes amendments to two management plans: the Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (MFP).

These proposed changes include changing the classification of areas from retention in federal ownership to a transfer category. Once the classification of these parcels is changed, they may then be sold, by direct sale or bid; or exchanged for property of equal value.

Further, the Bureau proposes to designate two areas as Research Natural Areas/Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (RNA/ACEC). The purpose of this designation is to focus management attention on special resources located in these parcels. Attention to these particular areas was brought about through a cooperative effort with the University of Idaho, the Idaho Natural Areas Coordinating Committee, the Nature Conservancy and personnel in the Bureau of Land Management. These areas were identified as a result of field work conducted in 1983 and 1987.

Purpose and Need

Monument Resource Management Plan

The Monument Resource Management Plan, completed in 1984, included three Research Natural Area/Area of Critical Environmental Concern designations. One additional RNA/ACEC designation will be considered in this plan amendment as well as three parcels to be changed from a retention to a transfer category.

Sun Valley Management Framework Plan

The Sun Valley Management Framework Plan, completed in 1981, included no designations for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or Research Natural Areas. This plan amendment proposes to designate one area as an ACEC.

Planning Process

The BLM planning documents which are being amended, were prepared in accordance with BLM manual procedures and involved public participation. The planning documents were published and approved by the Idaho State Director, and distributed to all interested parties.

The planning documents made specific recommendations for the subject lands regarding RNA/ACEC designation, change from retention to transfer or change in management use. These lands are within management areas which are being managed for multiple use.

Upon concurrence of this plan amendment by the State Director, a public notice summarizing the amendment and probable environmental impacts will be published in the local newspaper. If no protests are filed, the decisions will be made part of their appropriate planning documents, clearly identified as amendments. Implementation would begin at that time.

Planning Issues

RNA/ACEC Designation

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) defines Areas of Critical Environmental Concern as:

"areas within the public lands where special management attention is required (when such areas are developed or used or where no development is required) to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards." (Section 103(a))

The policy concerning Research and Natural Areas (RNA) is stated in 43 CFR 8223.0-6 is:

"Areas established as research natural areas shall be of sufficient number and size to adequately provide for scientific study, research and demonstration purposes."

Environmental Issues Identified In RNA/ACEC Designation

The scoping process for these planning documents encompassed issues identified by the BLM Shoshone District staff and by the public. The environmental issues identified for analysis in this plan amendment follow.

1. Impacts on vegetation resources.

Protecting relic vegetation resources is a major benefit in the designation of an RNA/ACEC designation. Such a designation can provide specific guidelines for the protection of such resources within a specific area.

2. Impact of RNA/ACEC designation on lands and land use.

How will management actions taken to protect or enhance the resource values justifying ACEC designation affect other land uses such as mining, grazing, rights-of-way, etc.?

The following issues were identified during scoping, but were not selected for detailed analysis in this document. The reasons for setting each of the issues aside are discussed below.

1. Impact of RNA/ACEC designation on soil, air and water quality.

There are no new management activities proposed under the RNA/ACEC designation which would adversely affect the quality of soil, water, and air resources.

2. Impact of RNA/ACEC designation on wildlife resources.

There are no new management activities proposed under the RNA/ACEC designation which would adversely affect the quality of wildlife resources.

3. Impact of RNA/ACEC designation on recreation and visual resources.

There are no new management activities proposed under the RNA/ACEC designation which would adversely affect the quality of recreation or visual resources.

4. Impact of RNA/ACEC designation on wilderness resources.

Designation as RNA/ACEC would have no adverse impact on previous designations as wilderness study areas (WSAs). There are no new management activities proposed under the RNA/ACEC designation which would affect the character of these resources. This designation is compatible with wilderness designation.

5. Impact of RNA/ACEC designation on cultural resources.

There are no new management activities proposed under the RNA/ACEC designation which would adversely affect the quality of these resources.

Land Tenure Adjustment

Public lands are retained in federal ownership and managed by BLM according to the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, except those lands specifically identified in a plan or amendment as transfer areas. Transfer areas are those public lands identified through the planning process which are available for transfer from federal ownership.

Transfer of public land designated as suitable for transfer may be accomplished by any means authorized by law. Final transfer from BLM jurisdiction, however, is subject to a decision by the authorized officer, based on detailed analysis and such documentation as prescribed by law or regulation.

Mineral-in-character lands and lands which have been identified as either wilderness study areas or designated wilderness areas will not be identified as transfer areas.

BLM will manage transfer areas custodially with emphasis on: 1) removing present short-term authorizations; 2) removing any unauthorized users, and; 3) authorizing appropriate legal rights-of-way for roads, pipelines, ditches, etc. Investments and management in transfer areas will be kept to a minimum until transfer of title occurs.

Planning Criteria

RNA/ACEC Designation

A Research Natural Area is defined in 43 CFR 8223.0-5(a) as:

"an area that is established and maintained for the primary purpose of research and education because the land has one or more of the following characteristics: (1) A typical representation of a common plant or animal association; (2) an unusual plant or animal association; (3) a threatened or endangered plant or animal species; (4) a typical representation of common geologic, soil, or water features; or (5) outstanding or unusual geologic, soil, or water features."

To be considered as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, an area must meet the Relevance and Importance criteria as defined by the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 43 CFR 1610.7-2(a)(1) defines relevance as:

"There shall be present a significant historic, cultural, or scenic value; a fish or wildlife resource or other natural system or process; or natural hazard."

The definition of importance states that, "the above described value, resource, system, process, or hazard shall have substantial significance and values. This generally requires qualities of more than local significance and special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern. A natural hazard can be important if it is a significant threat to human life or property." (43 CFR 1610.7-2(a)(2))

The dual designation is recommended since the purpose of the Research Natural Area designation is to set aside areas for research purposes and the Area of Critical Environmental Concern designation will allow specific management guidelines to apply to these areas.

Land Tenure Adjustment

Land disposal actions are accomplished primarily through sale, agricultural entry, exchange, and Recreation and Public Purpose land laws. Miscellaneous transfers can also occur through Color of Title actions, airport conveyances, and State in lieu selections.

All transfers of public lands must be in conformance with the planning requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Public notice will be given on each disposal action and each action may subsequently be protested or appealed.

Specific criteria for various land tenure adjustment actions, i.e., agricultural entry, exchanges, and sales, may be found in the Monument Proposed Resource Management Plan (pages 41-43).

General Provisions for Multiple Use and Transfer Areas

Resource management plans in Idaho establish management and adjustment areas in the planning area. Management and adjustment areas are used to:

1. Clearly distinguish retention and transfer areas;
2. Provide a geographic basis for presenting land use decisions;
3. Help ensure consistency and uniformity in Idaho RMPs; and
4. Indicate the level of resource protection, management, use, and development provided for on the public lands.

All public lands in the planning area were categorized into management or adjustment areas. These categories reflect the general intent of the management decisions made for the included areas. More site-specific categories are discussed below for each management or adjustment area.

Management Areas

In this area, BLM-administered lands will remain in federal ownership for the long-term; unless land use plans are amended. These lands will be managed for multiple use purposes, and will meet one or more of the following criteria:

- high resource values, e.g., commercial timber, crucial/critical wildlife habitat, high mineral potential, paleontological;
- a consolidated land pattern;
- special designations, e.g. Research Natural Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wilderness Study Areas;
- protection by federal law, e.g., Wild Horse Management Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers;
- Executive Order or policy, e.g., flood plains, riparian, lake frontage;
- other locally important values or natural systems which merit long term ownership, e.g., Special Recreation Management Areas;
- lands not managed by BLM, displaying desirable resource values that would improve the manageability of other public lands will be identified for acquisition;
- lands incumbered with properly recorded unpatented mining claims;
- lands withdrawn for BLM or other agencies.

Adjustment Area

In this area, lands are considered unnecessary for long-term public ownership. These lands are identified for disposal through sale, exchange, Desert Land Entry, Carey Act, Recreation and Public Purposes Patent, Airport Grant, and State Indemnity Selection. Using these lands for exchange to enhance the Management Area should be the first priority. These lands may be used to meet other local, regional or State needs.

The lands will meet one or more of the following criteria:

- generally fragmented;
- difficult and uneconomic to manage;
- relatively inaccessible to the public;
- contain no known important natural resource values;

- lands identified for sale must meet one of the Federal Land Policy Management Act Section 203 criteria.

Transfer areas (labeled T-) are the only areas which may be transferred out of federal ownership under this plan. Public lands declared eligible for transfer by their inclusion in this category are subject to detailed consideration prior to the final decision regarding transfer. Transfer areas are delineated in response to specific demands and needs identified during the planning process, such as agricultural development, community expansion, and other transfers, including transfer to the State of Idaho. Transfer areas will be managed on a custodial basis until transferred from federal jurisdiction. Management activities and public investments in these lands will generally be kept to a minimum to maintain current resource values.

Consistency Determination

BLM's Resource Management Plans and Plan Amendments must agree with and support officially approved and adopted resource related plans (or in their absence, policies or programs) of other federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes, so long as BLM's plans also agree with and support federal law and regulations applicable to public lands.

This amendment is in conformance with the consistency requirements found in 43 CFR 1610.3-2 and is consistent with the Sun Valley Management Framework Plan (1981) and the Monument Resource Management Plan (1985).

CHAPTER 2 : DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION, ALTERNATIVES, AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Because of the number and the unrelated nature of the proposals, the affected environment and the environmental consequences are combined with the proposed action and the alternatives rather than placing the affected environment and environmental consequences in separate chapters. It is felt that by combining all the material for a proposal into a single location the readability of the document is improved.

The only elements of the environment which will be discussed in this section are those that would be affected by the proposed or alternative actions. If an element is not addressed then it is either not present or its impact neutral. Specifically, the critical elements of farm lands, floodplains, native American religious concerns, hazardous wastes, water quality and wild or scenic rivers are either not present or impact neutral.

Brass Cap Kipuka Proposed RNA/ACEC

A proposal has been made for the designation of the Brass Cap Kipuka as an RNA/ACEC for the purpose of preserving a unique vegetation community. This is a proposed amendment to the Monument Resource Management Plan.

Location (Map 1)

Township 1 North, Range 23 East, Boise Meridian
Section 34: SE $\frac{1}{4}$
Section 35: SW $\frac{1}{4}$

Township 1 South, Range 23 East, Boise Meridian
Section 2: W $\frac{1}{2}$
Section 3: All

Total area: 854 acres

Relevance and Importance

Brass Cap Kipuka represents an undisturbed example of a major range habitat type. Alkali sagebrush and Idaho fescue are the dominant species, covering nearly 100 acres of the kipuka. In addition, threetip sagebrush and Idaho fescue are also prevalent on a small portion of the kipuka. Also occurring within the proposed area and surrounding the kipuka is a large area

of recent lava flows. Some of these flows are completely void of vegetation, while others have a sparse intermixing of shrubs.

The kipuka is classed as a K-055 sagebrush steppe and is in the Snake River Plain sage/grass ecotype on the Idaho Natural Diversity Scorecard. The Kipuka provides important research information on natural vegetation type occurring in the region. The lack of significant disturbance due to general inaccessibility to livestock makes Brass Cap Kipuka an especially good choice for a research area. Brass Cap Kipuka has been nominated by the Idaho Natural Areas Coordinating Committee for designation as an RNA/ACEC.

Relation to Wilderness Study Areas

The proposed RNA/ACEC is within the Great Rift Wilderness Study Area (WSA). Proposed designation of this RNA/ACEC is independent of the wilderness suitability recommendation.

Alternative 1 - Preferred Alternative

Designate 854 acres of the Brass Cap Kipuka as an RNA/ACEC for the primary objective of preserving the existing vegetation community. The area would: 1) remain unallotted for domestic livestock grazing (no grazing allowed); 2) Be closed to Off-road vehicles (ORVs); 3) Be open to Oil and Gas exploration and development with a no surface occupancy stipulation; 4) Be closed to all surface disturbing activities except for research activities approved by the Area Manager and less than one acre size; 5) Be closed to all vegetation harvesting and manipulation except for research activities approved by the Area Manager and less than one acre size; 6) Be withdrawn to mineral entry under the 1872 mining law. The area manager will prepare a site specific, fire management plan based on the ecosystem need for fire to maintain the existing vegetation community. Fire suppression may occur without the use of bulldozers.

Alternative 2 - No Action Alternative

The area would continue to be managed under current guidelines contained in the Monument Resource Management Plan and the Great Rift Proposed Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Affected Environment

The principal feature of the Brass Cap Kipuka is the extensive vegetation dominated by alkali sagebrush (Artemisia longiloba) over Idaho fescue (Festuca idahoensis). Although this type is also found in the Owyhee Uplands, it is most extensive in Blaine and Camas counties. The type is restricted to claypan soils which are super saturated in the spring (Hironaka et al. 1983).

A small area in the southwestern extension of the kipuka is dominated by threetip sagebrush (Artemisia tripartita). The understory in this type is dominated by Idaho fescue. Both basin big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata tridentata) and mountain big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata vaseyana) are also present but uncommon. Webber's needlegrass (Stipa webberi) an Idaho State Sensitive Species is endemic to the area.

The site is near the Laidlaw Park allotment, but is unalloted and ungrazed by domestic livestock due to rough lava terrain.

The site is of high scenic value, and offers an opportunity for primitive recreation and solitude, although most recreationists will most likely be drawn to the Craters of the Moon National Monument, which lies only eight miles to the east. No Off Road Vehicle use has occurred on the site, and such use is unlikely due to impassable terrain.

No roads exist within the proposed area, and no roads are currently being planned.

As of January 1990, no mining claims had been established within the proposed area.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 1

The relic sagebrush/grass vegetation in the area would remain ungrazed and undisturbed. The habitat of the Wilcox primrose and Webber's needlegrass would not be subject to the effects of domestic livestock grazing. As a result, the native vegetation would continue to evolve under natural conditions and would become a baseline reference area for assessing other range sites.

Grazing management would not change from the current situation. Domestic livestock grazing is naturally excluded by the rough lava terrain around the Kipuka and no reduction in grazing capacity will occur.

The geology of the area makes it unlikely that any mining claims will be established.

Environmental analysis conducted as part of the Great Rift Proposed Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement (1980) indicate that proposed actions similar to those identified for this alternative would result in adverse impacts that would be "the loss of the opportunity to mine lava

rubble for building stone, and subject to existing rights, the withdrawal of all forms of appropriations under the mining laws and from disposition under all laws pertaining to mineral leasing. In addition, geothermal exploration within the area would only be allowed subject to a 'no surface occupancy' stipulation. Off-road (ORV) use would be prohibited along with rights-of-way for powerlines, roads, etc." Analysis from the Great Rift Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement is hereby incorporated in this analysis.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2

Since the kipuka is physically inaccessible, the impacts would be the same as under alternative 1 with the exception that the area would remain open to mineral entry and the area would be vulnerable to disturbance should it be rendered physically accessible. The site would be susceptible to surface disturbance, although this threat is slight, should Congress release the area from wilderness consideration.

MAP 1

BRASS CAP KIPUKA PROPOSED RNA/ACEC (854 Acres)

Township 1 North, Range 23 East, Section 34: SE $\frac{1}{4}$

Section 35: SW $\frac{1}{4}$

Township 1 South, Range 23 East, Section 2: W $\frac{1}{2}$

Section 3: All

Monument Resource Management Plan

