



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Rock Springs District Office

October 1997

Green River Resource Area

Record of Decision and Green River Resource Management Plan



RECORD OF DECISION

for the

GREEN RIVER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

DECISION

The decision is to select and approve the attached Green River Resource Management Plan (RMP), to guide the future management of the public lands and resources administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in the Green River Resource Area. The Green River RMP supersedes all previous land-use planning decision documents for the Green River Resource Area. The Green River RMP was prepared under the regulations (43 CFR 1600) for implementing the land use planning requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). An environmental impact statement (EIS) was prepared for the Green River RMP in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). A copy of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Green River RMP is on file in the Green River Resource Area Office.

The decisions in the Green River RMP provide general management direction and allocation of uses for the BLM-administered public lands and resources in the planning area. The selection and approval of the Green River RMP is based upon the analysis of environmental impacts of four alternative management plans, public comments, and consultation with federal, state, and local governments and agencies, and upon the consideration of 5 planning issues: 1) minerals resource management and rights-of-way; 2) land tenure adjustment and resource accessibility; 3) resource uses affecting vegetation, soils, air, and watershed values; 4) recreation and cultural resource management; and 5) special management areas.

The attached Green River RMP is the proposed RMP presented in the Green River RMP Final EIS, published in April, 1996, with minor correction of errors and wording clarification. The Green River RMP provides a balance between production and commodity uses with protection of the environment. It represents the BLM's preferred management plan alternative for the Green River Resource Area and one of the environmentally preferred alternatives, in terms of minimizing environmental impacts and guiding the uses of the public lands in the resource area. This alternative best meets the Bureau's statutory mission under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and identifies actions to protect resources and to avoid or minimize environmental harm while allowing for commodity uses. Alternative C of the EIS, which would place more restrictions on land uses than the approved RMP, also qualifies as an environmentally preferred alternative.

WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

The Bureau's recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior on Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the Green River Resource Area have been made under separate documentation. These areas were addressed in separate Wilderness EIS and Wilderness report documents which are also on file in the Green River Resource Area Office. The decisions regarding wilderness area designations are made by Congress. When Congress makes the Wilderness decisions for the WSAs in the Green River Resource Area, they will be incorporated into the Green River RMP.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA DESIGNATIONS

There are unique and important areas, values, or resources on BLM-administered lands within the Green River Resource Area that meet the criteria for protection and management under special management designations.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

The following designations for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) are retained (or modified) or established. The ACEC designations apply only to BLM-administered public land surface.

RECORD OF DECISION

Prior ACEC Designations Retained (or Modified):

- Cedar Canyon ACEC (approximately 2,550 acres)
- Greater Red Creek ACEC (approximately 131,890 acres - originally Red Creek ACEC, expanded from 55,880 acres to include relevant and important values in the Currant Creek and Sage Creek Drainages)
- Greater Sand Dunes ACEC (approximately 38,650 acres)
- Natural Corrals ACEC (approximately 1,276 acres)
- Oregon Buttes ACEC (approximately 3,450 acres)
- Pine Springs ACEC (approximately 6,030 acres, expanded from 90 acres to include adjacent relevant and important values)
- White Mountain Petroglyphs ACEC (approximately 20 acres).

New ACEC Designations:

- South Pass ACEC (approximately 53,780 acres)
- Special Status (Candidate) Plants ACEC (approximately 900 acres)
- Steamboat Mountain ACEC (approximately 43,270 acres).

Special Recreation Management Areas

The BLM-administered public lands in six areas are designated Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs). These SRMAs are the Killpecker Sand Dunes, the Oregon and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, the Continental Divide Snowmobile Trail, the Green River, and the Wind River Front. The remainder of the BLM-administered public lands in the Green River Resource Area are designated an Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA) (see Map 22).

PROTESTS

Eight protests were submitted during the 30-day protest period for the Proposed Green River RMP. All of the protests were responded to and resolved by the Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Resolution of the protests required some minor corrections and wording clarification but did not result in changing any of the proposed Green River RMP decisions.

Four additional letters were submitted to the Director during the protest period. These letters were submitted by parties who either had not participated in the planning process and had no standing to submit protests, did not protest a proposed decision in the proposed plan, or simply asked for clarification and information. Responses to the concerns raised in these letters were provided either by the Director or the Wyoming BLM State Director.

The Rock Springs Grazing Association submitted a protest (1) objecting to the potential BLM acquisition of 44 square miles of non-Federal land in Sweetwater County (which appeared to include many "live waters" on private and state administered lands), without any material analysis; (2) stating that the BLM made no analysis of the effects of the Proposed RMP on the adjacent private lands as a result of designating and managing ACECs; and (3) stating that substantial changes were made between the draft EIS for the RMP and the final EIS for the RMP (differences between the preferred plan in the draft EIS and the proposed plan in final EIS were also a protest issue with the Wyoming State Grazing Board, and the Wyoming Outdoor Council).

The Wyoming State Grazing Board, Gary Zakotnik, Big Sandy Conservation District, Vermillion Ranch Limited Partnership, and Thoman Ranch protested portions of the proposed RMP relating to livestock grazing issues. The Thoman Ranch also protested portions of the proposed RMP relating to wild horses and candidate plant species.

The National Wildlife Federation submitted a protest stating that the proposed RMP (1) did not incorporate the new regulatory priorities for protecting the fundamentals of rangeland health, that it set the levels of livestock grazing too high, and that it inappropriately provided that rangeland monitoring must be completed before

RECORD OF DECISION

implementing changes in grazing levels; (2) that it failed to designate lands unsuitable for coal surface mining because of their importance to wildlife; and (3) that it was lacking in providing protection for wildlife.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council, the Wyoming Chapter of the Sierra Club, Biodiversity Associates, Friends of Wild Wyoming Deserts, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition submitted a joint protest on the proposed RMP objecting to (1) changes made between the draft and final EISs; (2) portions relating to protection of air resources (this was the only issue of protest for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition); (3) exclusion of rivers or waterway segments crossing private lands from the BLM Wild and Scenic Rivers review; and (4) not establishing intervals and standards for monitoring and evaluating the RMP.

The issues raised in the protests brought to our attention that some wording and information presented in the proposed RMP and Final EIS caused confusion and misunderstanding. To help rectify this, clarification has been provided in the attached Green River RMP. In resolving the protests on the proposed RMP and addressing the concerns raised, the BLM made the following clarifications, reflected in the Green River RMP. It was not necessary to make any changes in the proposed plan in the Final EIS.

1. The appendix describing acquisitions to be pursued has been clarified to avoid further confusion about acquisition of State lands. Specific State land parcel exchange proposals are not included in the appendix material attached to the approved RMP. The potential for individual site specific parcel exchanges still exists, and should an exchange occur, the information in this appendix would be appropriately updated (Appendix 8-3).

Clarification has been added to the Lands and Realty Management section of the RMP to include wording that the preferred method of acquisition is through exchange, involving a discretionary and voluntary transfer of lands between the parties involved.

2. Information in the appendix describing standard operating procedures for range improvements and vegetation manipulations (Appendix 9-2) has been clarified.

Table A9-2-1 has not been included as part of the appendix to remove the confusion of this table being considered and applied as a land use plan decision. This table was intended to represent one example of several available methods that may be used toward attaining the management objectives for riparian areas, as described in the Proposed RMP, where livestock grazing has been determined to be a concern.

Clarification has also been added to the Vegetation Management section, now providing additional information on some of the methods that can be used to achieve proper functioning condition for riparian areas. This section indicates that forage utilization levels is one of many tools or methods that can be used, if and where appropriate, toward meeting management objectives for riparian areas. The utilization guideline information provided in Table A9-2-1 (see previous paragraph) may be considered and applied on an individual site basis during site specific activity and project planning for achieving riparian objectives.

3. The Wild Horse Management section and the Wild Horse Herd Management Area map in the RMP have been modified to clarify that the Little Colorado Desert Wild Horse Herd Management Area (WHHMA) is not a new proposed WHHMA. This area was originally established as a WHHMA in 1971 in accordance with the Wild Horse and Burro Act (Map 27).
4. The Special Management Area section of the RMP and the Visual Resource Management map in the RMP have been corrected to clarify the inconsistencies between the narrative in Special Management Areas and Summary Table 2-1 of the Final EIS (Table 14 and Map 24).

Cedar Canyon - VRM classifications are II, III, and IV. Specifically, the area that can be seen for 1/2 mile from the petroglyphs (vista) is a Class II VRM area.

Natural Corrals - VRM classification is II.

Pine Springs - VRM classification is II.

White Mountain Petroglyphs and the area that can be seen for 1/2 mile from the petroglyphs (vista) - VRM classification is II.

RECORD OF DECISION

5. An acreage clarification has been provided for the Greater Sand Dunes ACEC.
6. Wording clarifying that the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is an informational tool and not a decision factor has been provided in the recreation management objective.
7. Clarification has been provided in the introduction to the Green River RMP that appendix materials are not land use plan decisions but are intended as support material and guidance to the implementation and use of land use plan decisions.
8. Clarification has been provided under Wild and Scenic Rivers Management regarding the correct mileage of the scenic and recreational classifications on the Sweetwater River. The notation of miles of the river that meet the suitability factors have not changed and have always been presented correctly in the wild and scenic rivers appendix.
9. A footnote has been added to the table of oil and gas lease restrictions to clarify the restriction on floodplains. This footnote references the Watershed Management section of the Green River RMP that provides the guidance for managing surface disturbing activities in floodplains (Table 7).
10. The BLM will address the following items in future site-specific activity planning and will modify or amend the Green River RMP, if appropriate.
 - a. Fluid mineral leasing decisions will be developed for the Steamboat Mountain and Greater Sand Dunes ACECs and surrounding area.
 - b. The site specific coordinated activity plan for the Steamboat Mountain and Greater Sand Dunes ACECs will identify the areas where withdrawals from mineral location activities would be pursued.

DEFERRED DECISIONS IN THE STEAMBOAT MOUNTAIN, AND GREATER SAND DUNES ACECS AND ADJOINING AREAS

The fluid mineral leasing decisions and some locatable mineral decisions are deferred in a "core" area, involving the eastern portion of the Greater Sand Dunes ACEC (not including any parts of the Buffalo Hump or Sand Dunes Wilderness Study Areas - WSAs - because WSAs are closed to mineral leasing by Congressional mandate), the entire Steamboat Mountain ACEC, and the area of overlapping crucial big game habitats surrounding and adjacent to the Greater Sand Dunes and Steamboat Mountain ACECs. Approximately 85,000 acres are involved with this "core" area (see Map ROD-1). Because more site specific and detailed information is needed to make the fluid mineral and locatable mineral decisions for the core area, these decisions will be deferred in this core area until a coordinated activity plan (CAP) covering the area is completed.

Specifically, the decisions of, if and where fluid mineral leasing (i.e., oil, gas, geothermal, coalbed methane) will be allowed in the core area, and the conditional requirements of any allowable fluid mineral leasing in the core area, are deferred until completion of the activity plan. Accordingly, no leases for federally-owned fluid minerals will be issued in the "core" area until completion of the activity plan. Additionally, determining where withdrawals from mineral location (i.e., filing of mining claims) and related mining activities will be pursued, is also deferred in the core area until completion of the activity plan.

Decisions on the retention or revocation of existing withdrawals in the core area, as presented in the RMP, will not be deferred and are effective with this record of decision. While completing the activity plan, those parts of the core area not covered by withdrawals will remain open to mineral location. The other land use plan decisions for the core area, as presented in the Green River RMP, are also not deferred and are also effective with this record of decision.

Because of the numerous and complicated land and resource use interrelationships and the need to address cumulative effects concerning the deferred decisions for the "core" area, the entire area to be addressed by the site specific activity plan will involve about 600,000 acres, surrounding and including the core area. The objective of this activity planning effort will be to determine the appropriate level and methods of all the combined uses possible that are mutually compatible and that provide for the important resource concerns in the area, such as sustainability of crucial big game habitat, air and water quality, scenic quality, vegetative cover

RECORD OF DECISION

and soil stability, recreational activities, livestock grazing and range improvement activities, mineral development and other important resource concerns. The CAP will provide more specific management direction for the activity planning area to prevent or address potential conflicts among or resulting from these uses.

The area to be addressed and analyzed for the CAP (about 600,000 acres) represents the cumulative impact analysis area for the activity plan because the lands outside the "core" area could be affected by the management of the core area and vice versa. Therefore, criteria have been established to avoid premature commitments allowing development or disturbance within highly sensitive areas for wildlife and/or areas that are sensitive for soils, vegetation, visual intrusion, etc., within the activity plan area, until the CAP is completed. Land and resource use activities proposed for the public lands outside the core area may be restricted or prohibited, if they fall in areas where the following criteria apply:

- a) Slopes greater than 20%.
- b) Forest-type areas such as juniper, limber pine, and aspen.
- c) Tall sagebrush habitat (sagebrush 4 feet high or taller).
- d) Badland areas with highly erodible soils.
- e) All mountain shrub communities such as mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, and serviceberry (usually associated with 20% slopes).
- f) All big game severe winter relief/crucial winter range areas and big game birthing areas.
- g) Other sensitive areas or situations that may be identified.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Each of the four alternative plans examined in detail provided a different emphasis for managing the resource area, and each resolved the planning issues differently.

Alternative A, Continuation of Present Management (No Action), continued the existing management and uses of the public lands and resources at present projected levels.

Alternative B emphasized developing and using natural resources. Environmental protection was provided for but the major emphasis was resource development.

Alternative C emphasized protection of the environment to a greater extent than Alternatives A or B. Resource development was provided for but the major emphasis was resource protection.

The Preferred Alternative (and Proposed Plan) allowed for resource use, with greater emphasis on the protection of the natural environment than Alternatives A or B. The Preferred Alternative consisted of watershed and wildlife prescriptions from Alternative C, wild horse management prescriptions from Alternative B, and the remaining resource management prescriptions (e.g., leasing, forest management, and livestock grazing) from Alternatives A, B, and C.

Alternatives and Management Options Eliminated from Detailed Study

Alternatives and management options considered but eliminated from detailed study included: no mineral (oil and gas) leasing, and lease stipulations (or development restrictions) that are less stringent than a no surface occupancy requirement in certain sensitive areas; no grazing on public lands; no timber harvesting on public lands; and maximum unconstrained alternatives that exclude other resource uses.

The Selected Plan

The Green River RMP consists of the proposed RMP described in the Final EIS, with some reorganization and changes as a result of public comment. As a result of protests on parts of the proposed RMP, some clarification has been included in the Green River RMP; however, no changes were made to the proposed decisions identified in the proposed RMP. The land use plans of local and state governments and other federal

RECORD OF DECISION

agencies in and around the Green River Resource Area have been considered during the planning process to ensure the approved Green River RMP will be compatible with them.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND CONSISTENCY

Public participation occurred throughout the planning process. Both formal and informal involvement methods were encouraged and used. The public participation that occurred is described in Chapter 5 of the Final EIS. The Environmental Protection Agency Notice of Filing for the Final EIS was published in the Federal Register on April 5, 1996. News articles were published in newspapers and presented on the radio concerning both the draft and final EISs. Open houses and meetings were held throughout the planning process. Twelve letters were submitted to the Director during the 30-day protest period for the Proposed Green River RMP and Final EIS.

Government agencies, organizations, and individuals received copies of both the draft and final EIS documents. Comment letters were received from individuals and organizations at the Draft EIS stage. Responses to these comments were prepared and printed in the Final EIS.

The Bureau of Reclamation is a cooperating agency in the preparation and review of the EIS. The Bureau of Reclamation manages Fontenelle Reservoir and surrounding lands, and lands in the Farson area and around the Big Sandy River. Comments received from the Bureau of Reclamation have been incorporated into the EIS.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the BLM "no effect" conclusion on the Proposed Green River RMP for threatened and endangered species. Since the proposed decisions in the proposed RMP were not changed, the "no effect" conclusion is still applicable.

The Governor's letter of June 4, 1996, indicated no consistency problems between the Proposed Green River RMP and State of Wyoming plans and programs. However, concern was raised over potential confusion that exchanges for state lands in special management areas identified by the BLM might be considered as already agreed to by the state. Clarification has been provided in the Green River RMP that it is not the intent of BLM to acquire all state lands in special management areas, and that no such agreement has been reached. Exchanges can be considered any time with no obligation from either party. Concern was also raised with potential confusion over information in a table identifying utilization guidelines for proper functioning condition (located in Appendix 9-2 of the Final EIS). This livestock grazing issue is similar to those expressed by several parties who filed protests. To remove the confusion of this table being considered and applied as a land use planning decision, the table has not been included as part of the appendix materials. This utilization guideline information, as well as any appropriate method, may be considered and applied on an individual site basis, during site specific activity and project planning for achieving riparian objectives.

Grazing permittees/lessees were contacted throughout the process and were consulted about the allotment categorization process. Discussions included: range condition and existing grazing management, changes in management, range trend and suitability, forage production, riparian area management, wildlife habitat values, user conflicts, public controversy, land ownership patterns and acreage, and range improvement needs.

The public is invited to continue to participate in the implementation of the Green River RMP through involvement in the activity or implementation planning phase of the planning process. This phase deals with site specific and detailed decision making and project implementation or approval in support of the general land use planning determinations presented in the RMP.

The Green River RMP is consistent with officially adopted plans, programs, and policies of other Federal agencies and State and local governments, as well as those of the Department of the Interior and BLM.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Management actions and decisions of the Green River RMP will be tracked and evaluated to determine effectiveness and to determine if the objectives of the RMP are being met. If evaluation indicates that the RMP is not working as expected or needed, or if situations in the resource area change, it may become necessary to modify, amend, or revise the RMP. Intervals and standards for monitoring and evaluation will be established as necessary.

RECORD OF DECISION

All mitigation measures identified directly or referenced or implied in the Green River RMP are adopted. Additional or revised mitigation identified through activity or implementation planning or individual analysis, and that are in conformance with the RMP objectives, will be considered a supporting part of the Green River RMP.


PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF THIS DOCUMENT

Copies of the Green River RMP are available on request from the Green River Resource Area Office located at:

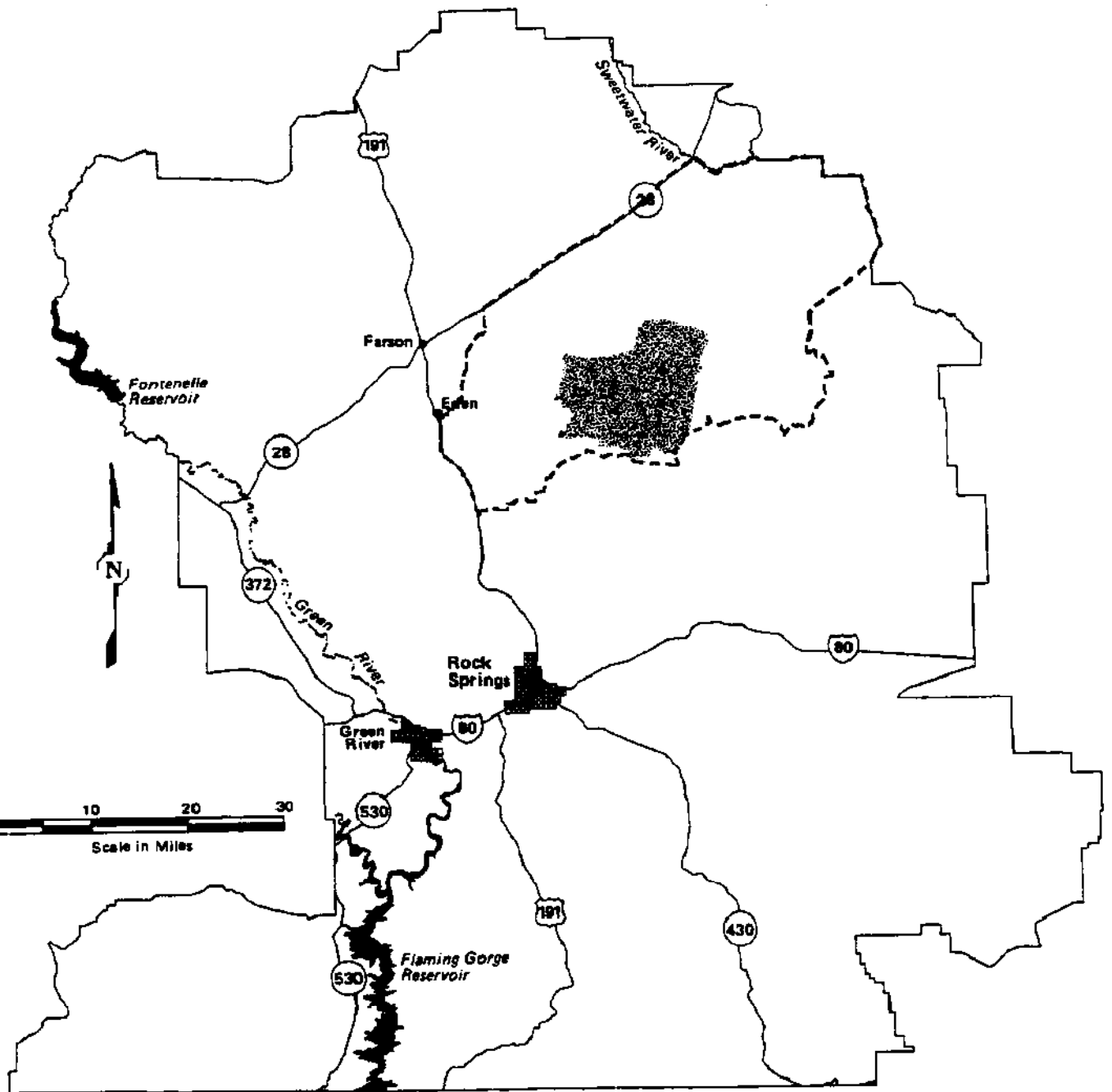
Bureau of Land Management
Green River Resource Area Office
280 US Highway 191 North
Rock Springs, Wyoming 82901-3447
Telephone: (307) 352-0256



Alan R. Pierson
State Director



Date



- Jack Morrow Hills CAP
- Core Area

Map ROD-1
Jack Morrow Hills CAP Area
Green River RMP