

RICHFIELD MANAGEMENT PLAN SLASHES WILDERNESS

ROADS, DEVELOPMENT WOULD DOMINATE THE LANDSCAPE

The Bush Administration continues its program to ram-rod an anti-wilderness, pro-development agenda on our public lands for a generation to come. Eleven million acres of public lands in Utah – many of wilderness quality – will be governed by Resource Management Plans (RMPs or Plans) currently being developed by the Bush Administration. Exploitation of oil and gas resources, and biases toward motorized recreation have been hallmarks of this administration -- from the shadowy Cheney Energy Task Force of 2001, to the administration's rejection of its authority to identify and protect previously overlooked wilderness areas, to its ongoing failure to protect public lands from increasing ORV (Off Road Vehicle) damages.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the Richfield Proposed RMP on August 8, 2008, for a 30-day protest period – the third such plan to be released in the past month. The Richfield Field Office of the BLM manages 2.1 million acres of public lands in central Utah, including the iconic landscapes of Factory Butte, the Henry Mountains and the canyons of the Dirty Devil River and Robbers Roost country. The BLM's proposed plan would slash proposed wilderness areas and adopt an off-road vehicle plan with designated routes in Wilderness Study Areas and within other BLM-inventoried roadless areas.



Mount Ellen proposed wilderness. © Ray Bloxham/SUWA



The Moroni Slopes in the Muddy Creek proposed wilderness.
© Scott Braden.

This flawed plan will negatively impact these amazing lands for decades and reflects the Bush Administration's single-minded focus on roads and development:

- Factory Butte** – the Plan will open thousands of acres previously closed to ORVs by a Travel Restriction Order BLM imposed to protect threatened and endangered cactus species. Despite regulations requiring the BLM to keep the closure in effect until the threat has been eliminated, the agency is capitulating to the desires of a few ORV special interests.
- ACECs (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern)** are an important management tool the BLM can use to protect specific threatened resources (e.g. archaeological, riparian ecosystems, endangered plants & animals). The BLM identified 16 potential ACECs totaling 886,810 acres. However, the plan designates only two, accounting for only 2,530 acres. This is a step backwards from the existing plan, and would un-designate over 12,000 acres of current protections.
- The BLM is required by law to maintain the pristine, wilderness character of Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) the agency identified in the early 1980's. **However, the plan designates 59 miles of motorized**



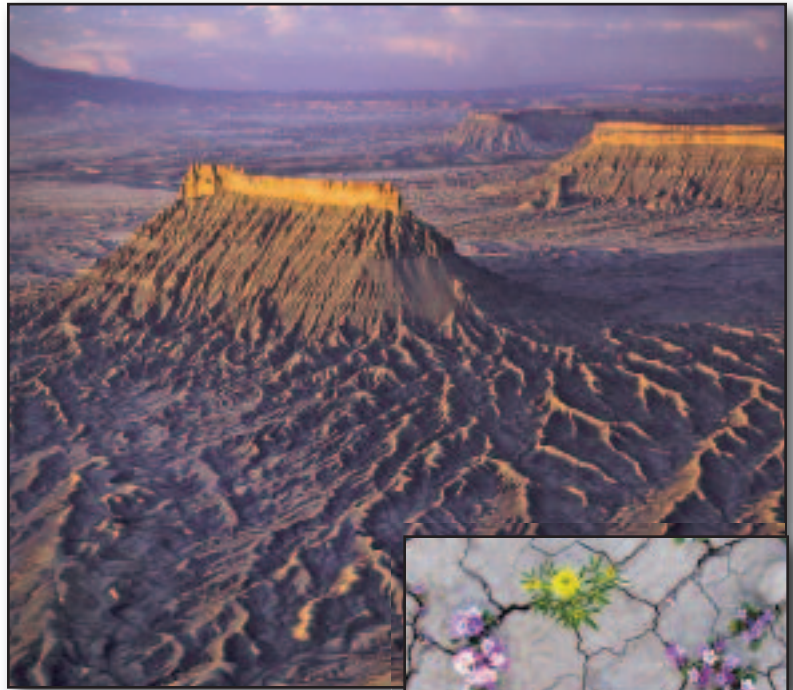
routes within WSAs, encouraging 4-wheeler and dirt bike use in the most pristine areas.

•The plan proposes to "protect" only 78,600 of the 682,600 acres outside of the WSAs that have been identified by the BLM as possessing wilderness characteristics (i.e. naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation). That means that less than 12 percent of these roadless areas will be managed to protect their wild character. However, the plan fails to provide real protection for even the 12 percent, as it will allow ORV use in these "protected" areas.

•The ORV Travel Plan designates 4,277 miles of routes, many routes carving up BLM-inventoried roadless areas and other lands in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, pending before Congress. This represents excess not access. The route designations are a giveaway to ORV special interests.

•The BLM has identified 12 eligible rivers and streams segments for inclusion in the Wild & Scenic River System. The plan recommends only one river segment as suitable for Wild & Scenic protection. The Dirty Devil River, one of the West's wildest and remotest waterways, was dropped even though it was included in the preferred alternative of the draft RMP.

•The plan leaves many spectacular landscapes open to oil and gas development, including the iconic Factory Butte, the Red Desert area adjacent to Capitol Reef N.P., Long and Bullfrog canyons near Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, and other areas within America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. Ninety-nine percent of lands outside of Wilderness Study Areas would be available for oil and gas development.



Above: Factory Butte proposed wilderness, © James W. Kay.
Right: Spring bloom in the Factory Butte badlands, © Laurel Hagen.



Dirty Devil proposed wilderness. © James W. Kay.

The BLM has taken the last seven years to prepare the six draft plans affecting much of southern Utah's public lands. Now the BLM is releasing these six plans in rapid succession before the Bush administration times out. Unfortunately, the public has only 30 days to review the plans and submit protest letters to BLM with concerns about the plans.

The BLM must revise its proposed plans to provide a more balanced approach to managing these lands for the foreseeable future. These public lands should provide opportunities for traditional non-motorized use and provide science-based management of natural resources that support the long term health of the land and ecosystems.

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