The Service held seven public hearings after release of the DEIS to gather input and comments from the public on the analysis and management alternatives. Responses to substantive comments from the public hearings are included in the responses to individual comments in chapter 3.

The following pages contain copies of the transcripts from each of the hearings.

- Billings, Montana; September 28, 2010 (see pages 336–353)
- Bozeman, Montana; September 29, 2010 (354–369)
- Great Falls, Montana; September 30, 2010 (370–380)
- Lewistown, Montana; October 12, 2010 (381–394)
- Jordan, Montana; October 13, 2010 (395–412)
- Glasgow, Montana; October 14, 2010 (413–426)
- Malta, Montana; October 14, 2010 (427–437)
The purpose of the meeting is to collect feedback from you all on the public Draft. We're going to start the meeting with a brief presentation that Barron is going to give, an overview of the CCP and a preview of the alternatives. And then we're going to turn the floor over to you. And anybody who has signed up, and anybody who hasn't signed up, if you would like to, can have the floor; have the mic. We're going to limit it to three minutes. We have a court reporter that will be recording your comments. If you are uncomfortable or would rather not provide comments by standing up here at the mic, we have handed out these sheets. You can enter your comment on the back. There's also information on here where you can email your comment, or fax it. So, many different ways to comment. We just encourage that you comment in some way, and look forward to hearing what you say.

So, with that, I'm going to turn it to Barron and let him give a quick presentation.

MR. CRAWFORD: Welcome, everybody. My name is Barron Crawford. I'm the Refuge Manager for the Charlie Russell Refuge and UL Bend, and I appreciate everybody coming out tonight. For about, oh, 15, 20 minutes here, I'll just give you a brief overview of what we have been doing for the past three years and a little bit about the alternatives that we've been formulating here during that process, and talk a little bit about the comment period. So, we started back in January of 2007. We've held 14 public meetings so far. The public scoping period, we received about 24,000 comments. We've had numerous meetings with our cooperators, and through all those meetings, we're up to this point now where we have a Draft Plan that's ready for the public to see and provide comments on. So, this is kind of the timeline. This shows the steps we have gone through, and where we are currently, you know, right here. We're
releasing the Draft out. We're going to be open
for a 60-day comment period.
After that, Refuge staff will be
spending their time assessing those comments and
formulating the Final Plan.
So, why do we do a CCP?
And basically the National Wildlife
Refuge System Improvement Act mandates that we
have CCPs for all of our refuges. And in that
Act, it said that all refuges will have a
completed Plan by 2012.
So, that's what we are working towards
right now, meeting that deadline.
What are some of the key elements of a
CCP?
It basically provides the management
direction and guidance based upon the refuge
purposes and the mission of the National
Wildlife Refuge System.
It outlines the vision statement,
goals, objectives and strategies for that
management.
It is accompanied by some type of a
NEPA document, either an Environmental Impact
Statement or an Environmental Impact

public and economic uses at current levels.
We will have a few changes in managing
existing wildlife populations and habitat. Some
of those, you know, we'll still manage under the
'65 Habitat EIS that we have now.
We'll gradually implement prescriptive
grazing, like we've been doing over the past 10
years or so.
Big game will still be managed at the
levels that were stated in the '86 EIS.
We'll still keep, you know, the 670
miles of roads that are out there.
And we will continue to protect the
155,000 acres of proposed wilderness.
Alternative B. We call this one the
"Wildlife and Habitat alternative". And it's
basically manage the landscape in cooperation
with our partners to emphasize the abundance and
diversity of wildlife populations using both
balanced, natural ecological processes, such as
fire and wildlife ungulate herbivory and some
synthetic methods, such as farming, tree
planting, flooding.
We'll still encourage
wildlife-dependent public uses. That's hunting
and fishing and wildlife viewing and wildlife
observation, wildlife photography and
environmental education and interpretation.
And we will limit some of those
economic uses when they compete for habitat
resources.
This is just a map. And we've got
these maps scattered around the room here, so
when we're done, if you wanted a closer look,
you can come up and look at them. They're also
in the document, obviously.
But this shows the wilderness areas.
Where we're proposing to expand some wilderness
areas; roads that we're proposing to close.
This is the west side of the refuge.
This is the east side of the refuge. This is
all under Alternative B.
Some of the differences in
Alternative B is we will actively manage and
manipulate habitats to create wildlife food and
cover.
Implement prescriptive grazing on 50 to
65% of the refuge within the next four to seven
years.
Aggressively restore the river bottoms
to native vegetation.

Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to provide quality hunting opportunities and sustain populations of big game and habitat for nongame.

Close approximately 106 miles of road, and expand acreage of proposed wilderness by 25,000 acres in six units.

Alternative C is what we call the "Public Use and Economic Use alternative". And this is basically manage the landscape in cooperation with our partners and emphasize and promote maximum compatible wildlife-dependent public uses and economic uses while protecting wildlife populations and habitats. Minimize damaging impacts to wildlife habitats while using a variety of management tools to enhance and diversify public and economic opportunities.

Under this alternative, we're not proposing to close any roads, and we're not proposing to expand any wilderness areas -- oops, excuse me. We will be closing one.

That's the East Hell Creek proposed wilderness area.

There is just a pre-synopsis of that alternative. Manage habitats to provide more opportunities for recreation.

Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to maintain balance numbers of big game and livestock.

Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to expand and maximize hunting opportunities.

Improve access to boat ramps; seasonal closures in other areas.

And, recommend eliminating four proposed wilderness areas, for a total of 35,000 acres.

And then Alternative D. This is our Proposed Action alternative, and this is the one we've called the "Natural Processes", or the "Ecological Processes alternative".

And again, working with our partners.

Intensively use natural ecological processes, such as fire and grazing, and active management to restore and maintain the biological diversity and biological integrity and environmental health of the refuges.

Once natural processes are restored, a more passive management approach is adapted.

Provide for quality wildlife-dependent public uses and experiences, and limit economic use when they are injurious to ecological processes or habitats.

In this one, we are proposing to close a few roads. We're proposing to expand a few wilderness areas, and we're proposing to eliminate a couple of others.

A brief synopsis of this alternative.

Economic uses would be limited when they're injurious to the processes.

Apply management practices that mimic and restore natural processes.

Use fire and wild ungulate herbivory and/or prescriptive livestock grazing on 50 to 75% of the refuge to mimic historic fire/grazing interaction.

Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to maintain health and diversity of all species.

Implement permanent or seasonal road closures on 23 miles of roads.

And, recommend expanding six proposed wilderness areas, for an increase of 18,500 acres, and eliminate three units, for a decrease of 26,000 acres.

So, as Mimi was saying, we want to hear your comments.

We have several ways in which you can comment. You can get up today, give your proposed testimony, which will be recorded.

The sheets that were handed out, you can write a comment on that and drop them in the envelope that Laurie has over there.

You can send us written comments that are in the Planning Updates, and you could mail those to us.

Or, you can send us an email to our web address.

All of those -- it doesn't matter which way you use, they're all counted the same. It's not a voting contest. What we are looking for is succinct comments that are relevant to this planning process.

Right now, our comment period is scheduled to end on November 16th. We have received a couple of requests to extend that comment period, and we haven't acted on those yet. We're going to wait and see how the commenting goes before we make that decision.
So, right now, as it stands,
November 16th is the comment period.
So, we're going to open the floor up.
We ask that you be respectful of your time.
It's not going to be a problem here tonight. We
got a small enough crowd that we should have
ample time for everybody to get their comments
in. And, look forward to hearing from you.
Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Okay.

So, here's how Part 2 of the meeting
will run.

I've got the list of everybody that's
signed up that wants to speak. If you haven't
signed up, or you're inspired by somebody else's
comment, go ahead and see Matt and sign up.

We're going to hold people to three
minutes just so we're not here all night, so,
please summarize your thoughts and get it down
to three minutes.

I will be a rather strict timekeeper up
here. I've got a stopwatch going, and I will
give you a flag when you have one minute left;
when you have 20 seconds left, and when you are
out of time, and then I pull you off the mic.

...the always contentious issues of land use,
environment and property rights that is extant
in Montana, especially eastern Montana.
I'm very familiar with this whole
area. I grew up -- I'm a fourth-generation
Montanan. I absolutely love the "empty corner",
as some people call eastern Montana.

As far as your plan, I like
Alternative D, your last one.
I don't like to see you close
wilderness areas, proposed wilderness areas, or
expand roads. That's kind of a bottom line.

But, in the interest of trying to work
together with other interests that I know feel
just as strongly, I would support Plan D.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Grant, and then Margaret.

GRANT BARNARD: My name is Grant
Barnard. I live in Red Lodge. Raised in
central Montana.

I have a question or two that someone
might be able to comment on.
I would like to know about your road
density. What is the road density currently in
the refuge, and what it would be when you}

...three minutes.
I know some of you mentioned that you
don't have a comment, per se, but you have a
question, so please come up; say your question.

We're going to be recording those; and
then after all the comments are spoken, Bill,
Laurie and Barron will take the time to respond
to those questions.

So, even if you have a 30-second
question, go ahead and come up and say it.
We would like you to withhold any
applause or cheering. Let's just try to move
through this smoothly with one after the other.

So, what I'm going to do is call
somebody up. I'm also going to let you know who
is on deck so that person can be ready to jump
up here.

So with that, Cal.
And then I've got Grant. So, come on
up.

CAL CUMIN: My name is Cal Cumin. Last
name spelled C-U-M-I-N. I'm from Billings.
I would like to compliment the U.S.
Fish & Wildlife Service on its effort to try to
address the -- or to try to bring some consensus
subtracted some of the roads that you propose in
Alternative B.
I'd also like to have a clear
understanding of who manages river traffic, and
who is the authority and how that is to be
managed through wilderness, proposed wilderness
areas in the Alternative B, and also in D.

And I would like to know how you plan
to manage RV use. I think I have an idea, and
if it is to keep RVs completely on designated
roads, that sounds good to me.

I'd also support any road closures that
are off these -- that you have in
Alternative B.

And I'd like to know a little bit more
about why the proposed wilderness areas would be
dropped from Alternative B.

And those, it seems to be because
there's a road through the middle of each of
those, but in my opinion, that would not be a
significant reason to eliminate that from
possible wilderness designation. After all,
there is more than 5,000 acres of proposed
wilderness on each side of those roads in both
of those areas that are proposed to be dropped.
Thank you for the time.

MS. MATHER: Thank you.

Okay, Margaret, and then Lesley on deck.

MARGARET WEBSTER: My name is Margaret Webster, like the dictionary, W-E-B-S-T-E-R.

I have a comment and sort of a question.

I support Alternative D. I don't believe that there should be a reduction of wilderness area. I think it should at least stay at the present number of acres, or increase it. Also, as part of the mission of the refuge is to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife. It seems like most of the discussion surrounds big game species, but I would like to know about the plans for the nongame species, such as the prairie dogs, which are threatened by sylvatic plague. Over 100 vertebrate species are associated with the black-tail prairie dog habitat, including four species of regional concern, such as the burrowing owl, swift fox, ferruginous hawk and mountain plover.

Jeff Hunnes. Last name is spelled H-U-N-N-E-S. I live here in Billings, but I grew up in Miles City and spent a lot of time at Hell Creek, and I'm really excited that you guys are proposing some wilderness in that area because I know what a special remote and wild area it is, and I want to commend you for that. In general, I would support Alternative B, as in boy. I would be in favor of increased wilderness, or proposed wilderness designation in the refuge. I had a comment -- or a question, if you are able to kind of explain the difference in the management priorities between the Fish & Wildlife Service and, for example, the Bureau of Land Management or the Forest Service, and whether any of these alternatives is more in keeping with the priorities that this particular agency has?

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Bernard. And Arlys on deck.

BERNARD ROSE: Hi. I'm Bernard Rose, the way it sounds.

MS. MATHER: Thank you.

Lesley, and then Susan on deck.

LESLEY ROBINSON: Lesley Robinson.

It's R-O-B -- Lesley is L-E-S-L-E-Y. Robinson is R-O-B-I-N-S-O-N. I'm a Phillips County Commissioner.

We just had a six-county meeting this afternoon, and we will be sending an official request for an extension of 60 days for the comment period.

And that's all my comments for this evening.

MS. MATHER: Susan, and then Jeff.

SUSAN GILBERTZ: Hi. I'm Susan Gilbertz, G-I-L-B-E-R-T-Z.

And conceptually, I like Plan D, as in dog, with one exception, and that would be the reduction of acreage of wilderness area. I am sympathetic to the notion of changing some areas to kind of capture areas that are perhaps better suited for that management style, but overall, I would hate to see a reduction in the number of acreage.

Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Jeff, and then Bernard.

I'm concerned that often when we talk about wilderness, people seem to think that wilderness has no value to local people; that somehow or another, if we make it into wilderness, no one will come.

I know there are studies which indicate that people value wilderness; that people come to hunt in the wilderness; that people come to enjoy the wilderness; that they are a real amenities values.

I think we see this in the western part of the state where areas we have significant wilderness or desirable places for people to live and to build homes and to do all of these kinds of things. And sometimes it seems to me that when you mention wilderness, it's kind of the "Big W word", one of those things that you're not supposed to say, because it takes away from the value.

And, you know, if there's grazing, and if we remove grazing, although grazing is still allowed in wilderness, existing wilderness, such as existing grazing rights are protected in wilderness, which I think most people normally...
A-R-L-Y-S; 248-4064 Fax:(406)256-5525 E-Mail:fran848@bresnan.net

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But it's really, really important to remember that wilderness has a particular positive value, and I wonder how much you are taking that into account as you do this analysis.

Thank you very much.

MS. MATHER: Arlys, and then Janelle on deck.

Did I have your name correct?

ARLYS RIEGER: Yes.


I am concerned about a couple of things. And I haven't had a chance to review A, B, C, D, because I couldn't get ahold of it, but I will do that and hopefully comment later.

But I've heard a lot of complaints -- concerns from the locals in Garfield County, the ranchers, and I'm sure there's a lot of rumors going around there that aren't true, and I'm hoping that you will be able to do something to help them understand what is actually going on.

But it is very much of a concern to the ranchers and what you actually are planning to

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do, and what you are going to allow to do and what you are not going to allow to do.

And one of my concerns, and one that I'm sure you've heard many times before is that you are going to turn bison loose on the Charlie Russell Memorial, and there has been no explanation of how that is going to happen.

You know, you are going to put fences up, or are we going to wake up one day and find 20 buffalo in our wheat fields?

I think this is a real concern of the local ranchers in Garfield County because we are not getting very good information about what is actually going on. So, I would appreciate information on that.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Janelle, and then Mark.


And I just want to echo a few things that folks have already said tonight; namely, that Alternative D has a lot of great points in it.

We really appreciate the effort to put

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fire back into the ecosystem and to try to restore some of those ecological processes and build wildlife habitat. I think that's a really important thing, and fire should definitely remain part of the refuge management system.

In terms of the wilderness, proposed wilderness, we do have some concerns about reducing proposed wilderness acreage overall in the preliminary preferred and support Alternative B, the expansion of proposed wilderness.

And that's in part because prairie wilderness experience is fairly rare in this country. If you think about Montana itself, we've got 34 million designated wilderness acres, and only 32,000 are in the prairie, of which 20,000 is in the refuge already.

So, limiting people's access to prairie wilderness experience, or taking that away seems to not be the direction we should be going in.

We really do need to expand wilderness in the wilderness system.

The other thing that I'm concerned about that I want to bring up tonight is the lack of any discussion in your presentation and
In some of the bullet points that you've used in terms of planning about climate change, I've seen it come up in the partnership's part. And I haven't gotten through the whole draft yet, so maybe you can address this in the questions part, but I would like to know how you are going to use research on climate change to manage the refuge, and where that will come into play, and how you plan to integrate that within your planning process, because I think that's very important. So, that's all I have for tonight.

Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Mark, and then Bernie on deck.

MARK GOOD: Hi. My name is Mark Good.

G-O-O-D. No E, just pure good.

That's a joke.

I work with the Montana Wilderness Association, and I just want to comment about what Beauchamp area, that proposed wilderness area that's being reduced -- or eliminated.

And my experience up there is that, yeah, it's probably not as dramatic as some of the other areas in the refuge, but it seems to me that it still maintains the wilderness character, you know, as a big, open grassland prairie landscape.

And I think part of it is how we may perceive wilderness. But grasslands are just as worthy for wilderness consideration as some of the peaks or Breaks, even, that we generally perceive. So, I hope you will reconsider that as you work through this process.

Second is really a question, and I was wondering if before the end of this, you could talk a little bit more about what prescriptive grazing and prescriptive use of fire means, and how that improves habitat for wildlife.

I think that would be helpful because I think there's a lot of confusion about what that means and how it might affect a variety of users.

So, thanks. Appreciate the opportunity.

MS. MATHER: Bernie.

And I'm having trouble reading this last one, Randall Gloery?

BERNIE QUETCHENBACH: Hi. My name is Bernie Quetchenbach, and I'll spell that out because it's not easy. Q-U-E-T-C-H-E-N-B-A-C-H.

And I also want to express concerns about reducing wilderness and support as much as we can have in that area.

But I would also like to ask a question about grazing, and particularly about range. Not about cattle grazing necessarily as such, but a question about the range conditions, what range conditions do you aspire to for the refuge? What are you looking to do with the range, and how has the range condition changed over the past century of use?

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Randall, and then David on deck.

RANDALL GLOEGE: My name is Randall Gloege, G-L-O-E-G-E.

I come from a long line of conservationists. And at the outset, I want to admit that I'm an ardent wilderness nut, and I think I would be less than candid if I didn't say so. I find myself surprised to be in agreement with a federal agency that the preferred alternative is the best one that you have listed.

I do have some reservations about it, but mostly I want you to consider enhancing or increasing the areas reserved for wilderness.

The fact is, as a couple of commentators have already mentioned, we have very little wilderness in eastern Montana, and being a Miles City boy when I was young, I have a very real feeling for prairie country.

I think that we need to consider vastly expanding our notion of what might constitute legitimate areas for wilderness consideration in eastern Montana, and the Charlie Russell is an ideal place to start talking about that.

The other thing I want to observe is that wilderness designation and the charge of the Charlie Russell, I feel, are identical. In other words, the best way to nurture wildlife, to allow it to promulgate, increase and in health, I think is to carry out the idea of wilderness classification for as much of the area of the Charlie Russell as you possibly can consider.

And this would include, in my view, holding a blind eye to two trail roads and just...
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simply closing the roads and let them recover on
their own.

So, I compliment you on choosing a good
alternative. I'd just encourage you to carry it
a bit farther.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: David?

DAVE PIPPIN: My name is Dave Pippin.

D-A-V-E; P-I-P-P-I-N.

I'm a third-generation Valley County
person and also a Valley County Commissioner.

And I formally would like to ask this
commission that Valley County be just as a
coordinator an not a cooperative on our status.

But the first thing I want to ask about
is that 670 miles of road that you would like to
close in one of your plans. Are those
petitioned roads? Are those roads that were
brought into action by a formal petition done
under the Montana constitution, MCA?

Because there's no doubt in my mind
that you need to take and go through due process
on roads like that. You don't have power of
acclimation on that.

The second thing is that, I heard a

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Public Service Announcement by Laurie here the
other day, and I want to know -- I'm sure it was
you.

Is there a Public Service Announcement
right on the CCP plan?

MS. SHANNON: I haven't made one.

MR. PIPPIN: Okay. So I just wanted to
bring that right now and ask that forward.

MS. SHANNON: Perhaps we put out a
press release.

MR. PIPPIN: Okay. Maybe that's what
it was.

All right. Thank you very much.

On the fire management, as a neighbor
to the CMR, we are very nervous about your
policy on fires. It's very irresponsible in our
regard.

The other thing I don't like is that
it's a possibility that you would use fire and
not go out and do your homework and check out
for sage grouse leks, and et cetera. And I've
questioned you on that before, that you need to
be very sure that you're not burning out some
sage grouse lek when you do this.

The other thing is that your

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prescriptive grazing on your plan effectively
puts the rancher out of business. These are
cow/calf pairs, and they run on AUMs.

30 years ago, there was 60,000 cattle,
AUMS, on the thing, on the CMR. Today, there is
17, 18,000. Serious cut for a county like
Valley County. So, I think that needs to be
taken in consideration.

And this wilderness that everybody
wants to preserve, you know why it's there?
Because of that rancher. Because he didn't
abuse the land, and he didn't take advantage of
it. He's been an integral part of that, and to
penalize him on this is unfair.

So, there's a lot of things that need
to be talked about on this. And I think the
roads are a big thing, and I think that there
are a lot of things that you need to address on
this.

But, I appreciate the opportunity to
come and talk to you tonight, and I would
welcome any dialogue on any of this.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: So I have reached the end
of my list.

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Is there anybody else who has been
inspired to come up and talk?

KATHY TETER: I'm kind of late, so I
feel a little bad about this.

MS. MATHER: That's fine.

MS. TETER: My name is Kathy Teter. I
am a member of Yellowstone County Farm Bureau.

We had a pretty lively discussion about
some of these proposals, some of the rumors, some of the facts.

I looked on -- there was like
400-and-some pages to read, which is obviously
something that I didn't get done last night. I
doubt a whole lot of folks have gotten that part
done yet.

And my comment, Farm Bureau is going to
make formal comments on all of these plans. But
one of the things that I wanted to bring forward
is that we basically oppose any plan that closes
roads, that decreases grazing, that does not --
we would like to maintain access to maintain the
livestock.

The producers need to be able to get to
do what they need to do to care for their
livestock because they are good stewards of
But just kind of wanted to make it clear that we're not afraid of wilderness. We like it. We like seeing the animals out there like anybody else, like good plants, like the whole area. We love it. We love what we have. We don't need to have somebody regulate it to tell us how we need to like it.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Okay, if nobody else has any comments -- oops, one more.

SUSAN NEWELL: I'm Susan Newell, N-E-W-E-L-L.

And I like your Alternative D because it looks at the ecological processes and the interweavings of the whole country out there.

I would like for you to look at reducing road density a bit, and I would like no net loss of wilderness acres, and I think more emphasis on restoring and increasing the cottonwood bottoms and the cottonwood galleries, and continue the ban on mineral activity, consider continuing that.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Anybody else?

MIKE BRYANT: Are you opening the floor to comments, is that what you --

MS. MATHER: Well, I'm going to keep you up to the mic, and then we'll let these guys answer the questions.

MR. BRYANT: I've just got some questions, so I'll wait.

MS. MATHER: Okay.

Barron, Bill, Laurie, you want to tackle questions?

MR. CRAWFORD: I'll tackle the easy ones.

Ah, some great questions.

Grant, your question on road density, and what would it be if we closed roads in Alternative B?

I don't know, to be perfectly honest.

There's 670 miles of road on the refuge now. We're proposing to close 106, so that's roughly -- help me out with some math here. I'm from Tennessee. I have got to take my shoes off.

But, it's what, probably about 20%?

MIKE BRYANT: Yeah, pretty close.

MR. CRAWFORD: We estimate right now with the 670 miles of roads, and with the river and the lake, that 80 to 85% of the refuge is accessible within one mile of some type of motorized access.

So, if you closed that 106 miles of road, you would probably change that -- and I'm just guesstimating here -- probably where 70% of the refuge would be accessible to some type of motorized access.

Who manages the river traffic?

Right now, we have got the Upper Missouri River Wild and Scenic designation, which flows through the Monument and into the first 10 miles of the refuge.

The BLM has management responsibility for the Wild and Scenic river, so they're the ones that post the motorboat restriction on the river at this time.

We had originally, as part of the plan, looked at boat use on the river, and we're looking at what type of impacts may be occurring due to that river use.

And what we have put in the plan is that we're going to continue to evaluate motorboat activity on the refuge, and is that activity impacting wildlife in some way. We've got a couple of studies proposed trying to...
Margaret was talking about nongame species management plans. Yes, we did address nongame. And why are we proposing to eliminate some wilderness in D? It's kind of a judgment call, to be really honest with you. You know, it is small. It is 5,000 acres on either side of the road. That road is one of our main refuge roads. It traverses most of the west end of the refuge. It does get quite a bit of seasonal use. So we threw it out there to see what kind of comments we might get. And obviously tonight, we heard a lot of comments that people would like to see that as proposed wilderness. And those are the exact type of comments that we're looking for.

We put quite a bit of emphasis in this plan on grassland bird species. That's something that the refuge has not done a lot of work in. Beverly Skinner has just moved into a new position at the refuge, and she's going to be doing quite a bit of bird work, not only grasslands birds, but our forest birds, migrates, breeding birds. So, we're going to see quite a bit of bird work occurring on the refuge in the next 15 years, hopefully. Prairie dogs are definitely an important keystone species, and we do have a pretty good section here devoted to prairie dogs and prairie dog management for the future. What else do we have here?

Question: Difference in management priorities between the Fish & Wildlife Service and the BLM? Great question, Jeff. The Fish & Wildlife Service is the only federal agency that has been mandated to manage for fish and wildlife resources, okay. That is our sole purpose, fish and wildlife habitat.

The Forest Service and the BLM have a multiple-use mandate. So they have to strike that balance between recreational opportunities, economic opportunities, wilderness, wildlife and habitat, and they get stretched pretty thin. There's no doubt about it. And I feel very fortunate that we have that very direct mission that tells us that you guys only have to worry about fish, wildlife and their habitats. So, that is one of the big differences.

Now we also, as part of the Improvement Act, did identify those six wildlife-dependent recreational uses. And that's the hunting, the fishing, the wildlife observation, the wildlife photography, the environmental education and interpretation.

So, we throw those out there as also being important for managing a natural wildlife refuge. However, they cannot conflict with the purpose of the refuge and what you're trying to accomplish from a wildlife and habitat management standpoint. So, there is a little bit of a balancing act there.
Climate change research. There is a reintroductions on the refuge. This is a prime example. Those are currently two listed threatened and endangered species, migratory birds and anadromous fish.

Now, if bison become listed, does that put a new spin on it? Maybe. Hard telling. You know, we have a lot of listed species right now that we're not proposing to do any reintroductions on the refuge. The grey wolf and the grizzly bear is a prime example. Those are currently two listed species, and there is no mention in our plan of reintroducing either of those species to the refuge.

So, does changing bison's classification to a threatened species change potentially reintroduction on the refuge? Probably not, you know. I can't say for certain, but probably not.

All I can say is, they're not a listed species right now. They are a state trust species, and there's nothing in the plan that the Fish & Wildlife Service plans to do any reintroductions on the refuge.

Climate change research. There is a section on Page 85, Janelle, that goes into pretty good detail about climate change. Obviously there is a huge emphasis on climate and what are the impacts going to be, and what can we do as far as a land management agency to maybe make sure that fish and wildlife have adequate habitats, have corridors so that they can move as these landscapes change. And so that is something that we did take into consideration. And scattered throughout the uplands and the riparian, we also have stuff in there that talks about building resilience. Habitats that are resilient can accommodate change much better than those habitats that are kind of extremely stressed, and so we kind of built that into this plan as well.

What is prescriptive grazing and prescriptive fire, and how is it going to improve habitat on the wildlife? Mark asked that question. Another great question.

Prescriptive grazing is basically using grazing as a wildlife and habitat management tool, okay. This area evolved with fire and grazing as those two primary ecological processes that drove this landscape.

What we're looking to do in Alternative D is to restore those processes. Obviously, we can just let fire run across the landscape like it did 200 years ago. You know, Dave brought up a great point about that. We have to be extremely cautious as how we use and manage fire so that we don't impact our neighbors.

So, what we're looking at doing is through this combination of restoring prescribed fire out there, that will reduce wildlife occurrence across the refuge, restore prescriptive grazing. And basically what I mean by prescriptive grazing is using those animals to achieve a specific wildlife and/or habitat management objective.

And a classic example would be, if you have an area, and you want to manage it for mountain plovers, now mountain plovers like to nest in those areas with prairie dogs towns. Prairie dogs like to have very short grass. So that's a place where we could go in there, use a little prescriptive fire, reduce the grass cover. Put livestock in there. Let livestock graze it down. Encourage prairie dogs to expand, which would encourage mountain...
plovers to expand.
So, that's how you use fire and grazing
to achieve a very specific wildlife and/or
habitat management tool.

MS. SHANNON: Do you want to give
another example of that?
MR. CRAWFORD: Do I want to give
another example of that?

Another example would be some of these
fire-dependent plants. They basically need fire
in order for them to continue their survival.

And there's several places on the
refuge where fire has been excluded, and so
basically these plants are being severely
impacted through continuous grazing or
continuous browsing.

And so by putting fire back into those
areas, they're fire-adaptive. They respond very
quickly. They resprout. They grow quickly.

And as you continue to move those
patches of fire around, you continue to move
those animals around, and therefore reduce that
overall pressure on that plant, and it allows
the plant to grow up, reach maturity, fruit,
reproduce, and the cycle starts all over again.

reaching fruit-producing age? Are they
expanding in density, expanding in cover?
So that's how we are going -- that's
the technique that we're going to use to
determine whether our management actions are
meeting our stated objectives for what we have
outlined under the Upland section of plan.

A lot of folks equate range condition
and habitat condition as being the same. From
my standpoint, I look at them as very
different.

Range condition relates to primarily
grass cover, and is the grass cover out there as
what you would expect it to be at the end of the
grazing season.

Whereas wildlife habitat conditions,
depending on the wildlife species that you are
talking about, varies tremendously.

You could have great habitat conditions
for elk but have very poor wildlife habitat
conditions for sage grouse.

So, when you're looking at habitat
conditions, you first have to look at the
wildlife species that you're trying to provide
habitat for. And you can't just go across and

So, a good example of that would be
like a chokecherry or a buffalo berry that's
extremely important to like sharp-tail grouse.
I should have had Bob here for that.

Another question from Bernie. Range
conditions, and what we aspire to.

In Alternative C, we focus on range
condition as being our primary measuring tool as
to looking at whether we're meeting our wildlife
and our habitat objectives.

In Alternative D, we're looking to use
what's called the sentinel plant approach. And
these are basically plants that are extremely
important to wildlife. They are plants that are
currently in decline across the refuge.

They're those ice cream plants.

They're the plants that whenever an elk, a deer,
a cow, a rabbit walks by, that's the first thing
they eat. You know, it's very delicious, very
nutritious.

So what we're looking in Alternative D
is to restore again those natural processes, and
then measure our success by looking at these
sentinel plants, and are those plants
increasing? Are they growing? Are they

paint this broad paintbrush and say the habitat
across the refuge is good, fair or poor.

Well, is it good for elk and poor for
sage grouse, or is it good for everything?

And in Alternative D, we're hoping to
make it good for everything; promote that
diversity.

What other questions did we have?
I had a comment concerning sage grouse;
do our homework.

We did go through the plan, and when
we're talking about fire and talking about
restoring that fire, definitely looking at sage
grouse habitat.

The last thing we want to do is do some
type of management action that's going to affect
a species that's now been listed as a species
that's warranted for including on the threatened
and endangered species list.

So definitely as we're developing our
prescribed fire plans, working with our wildlife
biologists, working with the state, identifying
those core areas that are sage grouse habitat,
not only leks and breeding grounds, but also
that winter habitat that's extremely important,
and in the plan, identify those areas and make sure that we protect them from wildfire occurrence so that we do not have an impact on a sage grouse for the future. 

What else?

MS. SHANNON: Roads.

MR. CRAWFORD: Roads.

What am I supposed to say about roads, Laurie?

MS. SHANNON: There seemed to be some question, I think, about how many roads were actually -- or I think I heard a question that we're closing 670 miles of road. I think that's -- and our ownership of roads, and whether we have looked at roads that are petitioned or not.

MR. CRAWFORD: Okay.

Alternative B, it talks about closing 106 miles of roads.

Alternative C, I don't believe we proposed any road closures in that.

MS. SHANNON: Right.

MR. CRAWFORD: In Alternative D, it is 23.

Did we look at petitioned roads? No,

MS. SHANNON: Any other questions for those guys?

MR. BERG: I guess the one thing that I would like to add, and I took it to be somewhat of a question from Bernard, you talked little bit about the positive value of wilderness.

And we do address a little bit of that in our economic analysis. But also, as part of this planning process, we're charged with going back and looking at those proposed wilderness areas and evaluating those, as we did in the late 1970s, to determine if they still maintain those wilderness values. So, that's what we have done in alternative D.

The three areas that we're proposing to not include as proposed wilderness areas, we felt those didn't meet the criteria as well as they could. But again, that's somewhat subjective, and that's why we're looking for comments from folks like you out there.

So, yes, we do consider that as part of the process, and that's kind of evaluation process that we have to go through for each one.

MS. MATHER: Any other questions for these guys?

MR. PIPPIN: You guys got me inspired.

But the original Fort Peck Game Range, which is the CMR now, had a management practice, and grazing was part of that.

And what I wonder is that when you look at this new plan, are you going back and realizing that grazing and those things were there?

The people that were on that land were there 40 years before they even thought about doing this, before they became a game range.

They had been there for 75 years.

And so that's why your prescriptive grazing really has me kind of concerned because that is a break from tradition, 150 years of tradition. Why would you change that now, because these ranches are built on that inception.

So, are you managing this in a consistent manner with the original Executive Order? And have you taken time to sit back and
We have been to court three times --
four times? Four times now over this issue, and
each time the courts have said, yes, the U.S.
Fish & Wildlife Service is meeting the mandates
as outlined in the Executive Order.
There is a priority established for
those forage resources on the refuge, and the
priority is, sharp-tail grouse and pronghorn
antelope first; secondary wildlife to provide
for a balanced ecosystem out there, and then
third, what's left over is to be equally shared
between wildlife and livestock, okay.
So, you know, yeah, there has been a
long tradition of interaction between the local
ranchers and grazing on the refuge.
With the passage of the Improvement Act
in 1997, even before that, when the Fort Peck
Game Range was converted and changed to a
Natural Wildlife Refuge, it fell under the sole
jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service.
From 1936 to 1976, it was co-managed
between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the
Bureau of Land Management, with the Fish &
Wildlife Service having responsibility for the
management on a National Wildlife Refuge
System.
Anything you want to add, Bill?
MR. BERG: I was just going to touch on
prescriptive grazing.
There seems to be quite a bit of
confusion and concern about the prescriptive
grazing that we're proposing to do.
And actually, we have been involved
with prescriptive grazing not only on CMR for
several years, but also refuges throughout the
country.
In a nutshell, what it is, we're using
livestock to manage habitat for wildlife. And
if you look at some of the permits we currently
have on CMR, the permits are issued annually for
the same time period, for the same number of
livestock year in year, out year every year.
So if you think back about some the
plant issues that Barron mentioned where those
animals are seeking out the same plants year
after year, same time of year, there's a
tendency for those species to decrease on the
landscape.
Those same species are the ones we're
...
So, we're at 35% right now. So just another 15% gets us to that 50% that we have outlined in Alternative D. 
And basically the way we have been able to move to prescriptive grazing on the refuge now is as ranches sell to a nonfamily member, we take that permit, and we take that habitat unit, and we roll it into the Prescriptive Grazing Program. 
That's how we have it outlined right now in the Draft Plan, is to continue to use that process as ranches sell to a third party. 
We're continuing to transfer permits within the family. So, if a rancher wants to transfer his ranch to a son or daughter, we are still doing those generational transfers of that permit. We're only talking about those ranches that sell to a nonfamily member. 

MS. MATHER: Lesley?
MS. ROBINSON: Lesley Robinson. 
I was just wondering, how are you planning on handling, then, the private lands, the private AUMs that are in the CMR and then the privately held state leases within the CMR?

MR. BERG: This plan only applies to federal lands within the refuge. 
If a permittee has a state section or a private inholding, so to speak, those would still be at the discretion of the landowner or the leaseholder owner. 
And we have got several examples of those, but we've also got examples where, say a permittee currently has a state lease or a private parcel that's outside the normal grazing units, oftentimes we'll transfer those AUMs into the one that's being grazed, you know, with their herd, so to speak, so it's not an inconvenience to stick 20 head in for two months or something like that. 
I'm guessing that's the way it's going to occur in the future. 
You know, there's a little bit of an effort going on to maybe shift around some of those state lands so they are better situated within the refuge, or adjacent to it, which might accommodate some of those changes also. 

MS. MATHER: Yes. 
MIKE BRYANT: My name is Mike Bryant, B-R-Y-A-N-T, right here in Billings. 
Actually I have a couple of questions...
was a rancher up on the Bench, I probably wouldn't. So, I don't know where Garfield County ranchers or Commissioners stand with that. And the other one is a Catch-22, depending literally on which side of the fence you are on. Bison is either livestock, or it's wildlife. And I think the courts are going to take that into consideration.

But, if you are issuing livestock permits, then I think you need to be aware somebody's going to say, well, I'm going to bring my livestock bison down here and try and get a grazing permit out of it.

I don't know what -- what's Glenda? Is she BLM? Is she wildlife or livestock or what? MR. CRAWFORD: She has a livestock permit.

MR. BRYANT: And before I spend a lot of money on a jet boat, I'd like to know if you guys are going to restrict the river use or not.

So, thank you.

MR. CRAWFORD: Those are your questions.

Our sense is, like with the limited archery permits, limited nonresident permits in the state licenses, it seems to have stabilized pretty good.

If people from out of state want to come to Montana and hunt the Breaks, there's ample opportunity for them to find an outfitter that can supply those services.

And we kind of look at that as, you know, reaching that whole audience. There are some people who like to hunt that way, like the opportunity to have somebody help them out with the hunt, versus the individual who might come in and do it on his own, so to speak.

So, that's why we are at 11. We've got no plans to increase that to 40 or set a cap, but that will be something that's kind of evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

We've probably got 15 or 20 that have asked if they could get a permit. If we sense that there is a vacancy, for example, in a hunting district where there's no outfitting opportunities available for the general public, it might be that we would go out and advertise right now.

So, you asked if they could get a permit. If we sense that there is a vacancy, for example, in a hunting district where there's no outfitting opportunities available for the general public, it might be that we would go out and advertise.
Occasionally we'll see sheep east or south of sheep in the refuge. Based on the current attitudes about putting landowners over the course of a year, and it's County historically has some sheep permit and stuff like that.

Sheep Conservation Plan for the whole state. We worked with the state, and at the we hope to address that in the near future from a commercial standpoint.

The question about sheep. You are correct that there is extensive sheep habitat in Garfield County. We went through a pretty lengthy process here a couple years ago to evaluate that and determined that it was suitable as probably some of the better sheep habitat that we have on CMR.

We worked with the state, and at the same time, the state was developing a Bighorn Sheep Conservation Plan for the whole state. They plugged in some criteria that suggested that we not -- or anybody, whether it's them or us -- not reintroduce sheep within approximately 14 to 15 miles of a domestic sheep operator.

The reason for that is disease transfer problems with wild sheep getting in with ewes and stuff like that.

The area we're looking at in Garfield County historically has some sheep permit holders close to that area. We did kind of a cursory review of the sentiment in Garfield County. Both us and the State talked to several landowners over the course of a year, and it's probably not the right time to do that, just based on the current attitudes about putting sheep in the refuge.

Not to say that it won't happen in the future. Our hope is that they get there on their own, but they haven't done that yet. Occasionally we'll see sheep east or south of the river, but they haven't taken hold in that area, so we're kind of on hold a little bit there with that proposal.

The comment about bison being livestock or wildlife. Glenda Reynolds, an active permittee in Garfield County, currently has a permit on the refuge to run bison as livestock. She's the only one. But that's just considered a class of livestock, no different than what BLM does in similar situations.

MR. CRAWFORD: Should he buy a jet boat?

MR. BERG: Oh, a jet boat, yeah. That's been an off-and-on topic for years. I question that, too, whether or not I should buy one, because there's a lot of great opportunities on the river.

You know, there was a time when -- again, when permits for archery elk hunting, there was no cap on them; they were unlimited.

We started seeing some conflicts with jet boats on that river; elk leaving islands, being pushed out of those river bottoms because of the dust bowl level of some of the boats that were being used.

We considered it based on what were seeing upstream with some of the wildlife use in the river bottoms there. What we fell back to here a couple years ago, because it was kind of a hot button topic issue, and again because the permits got limited, and we're not seeing the
And then we will be receiving comments, as we mentioned, until November 16th. So, you have plenty of time to review the document and submit comments. Again, we encourage you to do so.

And then the winter will really be spent with Laurie and her team compiling the comments, responding to them, and then making needed revisions to the plan.

Anything else?

(No response.)

MS. MATHER: Thank you all very much for coming, and thanks for the great comments.

(Whereupon, the hearing was concluded at 8:25 p.m.)
WHEREUPON, the following proceedings were had:

(Mimi Mather opened the meeting and made introductions.)

MR. CRAWFORD: I'm just going to give you a brief overview of the CCP process, how we've gotten to where we're at today, hit the highlights of the alternatives, and then we'll open it up to comments.

So we started this back in January of 2007. We've done 14 of these meetings. We've received about 24,000 comments during our public scoping, a couple hundred when we went out and talked about the alternatives. We've had numerous meetings with our cooperators. And we've taken all that information and kind of thrown it together into this draft CCP/EIS that has been turned out to the public.

This is kind of the timeline that we've been through, and we're right here (indicating) with the draft going out onto the street. After the comment period, basically, the staff will be sitting down and wading through all the comments and addressing those comments for about the next, oh, year and a half or so and then hopefully release the final in the fall of 2012 --

MS. SHANNON: No.

MR. CRAWFORD: Oh, summer of 2012 -- spring, summer, fall.

MS. SHANNON: Winter of 2012, we'll have the
here (indicating) about step 5, with the draft document. You know, after public scoping -- or after public comments, there's a chance that we could go back to this stage (indicating) and then go back through. Hopefully, we've got some good alternatives out there that's covering the full range of stuff that we've heard during our other meetings and we've captured all that, and so we've got, you know, four really good alternatives that cover all that.

So I'll give you a brief rundown on each of the alternatives. We have Alternative A, which is basically the no-action alternative. It's where we keep operating like we're currently operating under the 1986 EIS. So we'll have just a few changes. We'll continue to manage the habitat on the Refuge within those 65 habitat units that we currently have. We'll still gradually implement prescriptive grazing like we've been doing. We're currently prescriptively grazing about 35 percent of the Refuge. We're doing that as ranchers sell that have grazing permits on the refuge; if they sell to an outside party, a non-family member, we hold those permits and enroll those units into prescriptive grazing. We'll keep managing big game under the population objectives that we identified in the '86 EIS, 2.5 elk per square mile and 10 mule deer per square mile. We'll keep the 670 miles of roads and we'll continue to protect the 155,000 acres of proposed wilderness.

Alternative B, we're calling this the wildlife emphasis alternative. And this is where we're working in partnership with our cooperators and partners to basically provide this diversity of wildlife across the Refuge. This is kind of like the wildlife species emphasis, where we'll be focusing on big game, non-game, maximizing those populations, maximizing diversity, and then we would limit economic uses if they're having a negative impact on either those wildlife populations or those habitats that support them.

We've got these maps scattered around the room of the various alternatives. So this (indicating) is Alternative B, the western part of the Refuge. We show where we're expanding wilderness areas and proposed roads to possibly close. This (indicating) is the eastern half of the Refuge.

So kind of the main themes of Alternative B are, we're going to do a lot of active management of the habitats that are out there to really produce that optimum wildlife food and cover. Again, implement prescriptive grazing on 50 to 75 percent of the Refuge over the next four to seven years; get an aggressive habitat restoration program going on the river bottoms, work with Fish, Wildlife & Parks to provide a quality hunting program; sustain populations of big game and habitat for non-game; close about 106 miles of roads; and expand acreage in the proposed wilderness areas by 25,000 acres.

Then we move on to Alternative C, and this is the one we kind of titled the public use and economic use alternative. This is basically where, again, we're managing the landscape in cooperation with our partners and cooperators to promote maximum compatible wildlife dependent uses. And wildlife dependent uses are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation. And those come straight out of the Improvement Act. We're still going to still protect wildlife populations and habitats to the extent possible. We're going to minimize damage impacts to wildlife habitats by using a variety of management tools to enhance diversity and to promote public and economic opportunities.

And, again, this is the map. You won't see any expansion of wilderness and you won't see any proposed roads to close under -- Well, excuse me. There are a couple wilderness areas that will be closed. There is no expansion of proposed wilderness areas.

So kind of the main points of this alternative: again, provide opportunities to maximize those recreational opportunities; maintain balance numbers of big game and livestock on the Refuge; expand and maximize hunting opportunities; improve access to the boat ramps; and eliminate four of the proposed wilderness areas which total about 35,000 acres.

Then we move to Alternative D, and this is our proposed action alternative. This is what we're calling the natural process or the ecological processes alternative. This is where we're going to, again, in cooperation with our partners, kind of use natural dynamic ecological processes. And when we say "ecological processes," what we're referring to is fire, grazing, flooding. Those are kind of the three things that shape the habitats out there on the Refuge. We're also going to do some active management to restore some of the degraded habitats on the Refuge until we get them to the point where we can let the natural processes take over. We're going to promote, restore, and maintain biological diversity, integrity, and environmental health. And then once those processes are restored, then we're going to go to more of a passive management approach. In this alternative, we propose to close a few roads, propose to eliminate a couple of wilderness areas, propose to expand some others.

The main points of this alternative are, economic uses
will be limited when they're injurious to ecological processes; apply those management practices that mimic and restore that natural fire/grazing interaction that occurred for thousands of years in the short-grass prairie; using fire and wildland herbivory, elk and deer, or prescriptive livestock grazing on 50 to 75 percent of the Refuge, similar to Alternative B; again, maintain health and diversity of all species; do some road closures on about 23 miles of roads; and then the proposed wilderness will expand six of those units for 18,000 acres and eliminate three which totals 26,000.

Some of the hot-button topics that have been a recurring theme throughout this process is the prescriptive grazing. We've gotten a lot of questions: What is prescriptive grazing? And, basically, it's using grazing as a management tool. So you're going into a unit and you're saying that grazing naturally occurred in this unit, and this is the benefits that you get from a habitat standpoint for these species.

A good example of that is mountain plovers. Mountain plovers like to nest in prairie dog towns, and prairie dogs like to occupy areas that have very short grass. And so if we identified an area where we wanted to expand mountain plover populations, we would write a management plan that basically used fire and grazing that would allow.

alternative was; and, if we were wanting to meet a specific wildlife objective in there, we looked at the road densities and evaluated whether we felt they were having an impact on those wildlife and if we could achieve some different population objectives by maybe closing a road permanently or closing it seasonally, and so that's what we did there.

And then another topic that we've heard quite a bit about is bison restoration. Anybody that's been following the news in Montana, as you know, there's quite an interest in bison, both from a restoring of wild population in another part of the state and also the concerns that go along with that. And what we've said all along for our planning process is that we recognize the interest in bison. Bison are a Montana trust wildlife resource species, they're not a federal trust resource species at this time. Federal trust species are those that are classified as threatened or endangered migratory birds or anadromous fish.

A lot of folks have asked, well, what happens if bison become classified as threatened or endangered; does that then change what you're proposing in your management plan? And my response is, not really. You know, we've got gray wolves and grizzly bears right now that are listed, and we don't have any proposals in the plan to reintroduce those species to the Refuge either. So I really don't see that changing the bison classification would really have an impact on what we're proposing to do in the plan at this time.

What we said in the plan is that we support Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in moving forward with development of a bison conservation plan or a bison restoration plan, and if they choose to look at those areas around the Refuge, we'll support and work with them in any way that the Refuge can contribute to that proposal.

So, we're here to hear from you guys, to hear your comments on our plan. We ask that you address items that are specifically in the plan. We ask that you speak clearly and stick to your allotted time frame so that we have an opportunity to hear from everyone. We have numerous ways of commenting. You can give your public testimony today, you can write your comments on the form that we're handing out in the back and drop them off as you go, you can send us an e-mail, you can send us a letter. All of those, you know, are ways you can comment.

There is no one comment that's weighted more than another; we treat all comments the same. And it's not a voting contest. So we're not going to sit there and keep score of how many people support expanding wilderness and how many people support eliminating wilderness. What we're looking for are those succinct comments that we
might have overlooked in this planning process that will help make this a better plan. The comment period is scheduled to end November 16th.

And that's about all I've got, so we'll open the floor to comments. I appreciate everybody coming out today.

MS. MATHER: So like I said, I'll be calling folks up. I've got the list, we'll go in order. I'll also call who is on deck so you can be ready to come up.

Just a few rules: We'd like you to keep to three minutes. I'm going to be kind of a strict timekeeper. I have some cards when you're down to one minute, 20 seconds, and then when time is up. And then I just come over and nudge you. But this wasn't a problem last night; most people kept to under three minutes. Please, we're recording all the comments, so if you wouldn't mind stating your name, and, if it's a tricky spelling, spelling it for us, that would help our court reporter. And then finally, just in order to keep things running smoothly and respect one another's opinion, we're asking that you refrain from cheering or applauding someone's comments.

So I'll go through the list. Again, if you'd like to sign up, there's another list in the back with Mike. And like Barron mentioned, on the back of this sheet (indicating), there's opportunities where you can write comment. And, again, on the table with Mike back there, there's a comment folder where you can stick that in.

So first up is Roger Jenkins, with Kerry White on deck.

MR. JENKINS: I've never hardly ever needed a microphone before, but that's fine. And having worked with court reporters, I have a great deal of respect for your efforts.

My name is Roger Jenkins, and I guess I have -- I have some questions and some requests for clarification.

In Montana here, we're blessed with all kinds of different sorts of lands. I mean, we have national forest land, national park land. My understanding is that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages our wildlife refuges. So I guess I'd really like to hear from the staff, what sort of is the overriding management philosophy of a wildlife refuge compared to, say, a national forest, for example? That's one question I have.

Another request for clarification is that when you talk about elimination of wilderness or we want these new wilderness areas, my understanding is that you're talking about how you want to manage that land. There's really no elimination of congressionally designated wilderness; I guess that would be the case, right? Because you cannot, in and of yourself, take away wilderness, you know, or...
Species reintroductions and management of species that Habitat and wildlife. The draft CCP and EIS addresses the of motorized transportation.

Will we be able to have multiple-use access in there as in be removed from wilderness, will they be reestablished?

down on the river in a more concentrated area and take prairie dog towns are next to the water containment MR. WHITE: Okay. The first question is, will MS. MATHER: Verbally ask.

Is it then to write down our questions and hand them that would be some worthwhile clarifications.

My name is Mark Good. I work with the Montana MS. HOLDEN: Hi, my name is Janelle Holden. I

goose and pheasant management or the bobcat and I'd like to voice my support for prescriptive burning within the Refuge for the benefit of sage grouse, sharp-tail grouse, mountain plovers, and hooved animals. I'd like to ask that the final plan reduce or at least not increase the number of roads in the refuge areas. And I'd also like to ask that it increase the wilderness areas and not reduce. I think the plan says now we actually are going to reduce the amount of wilderness area.

And then one other one is, I like birds a lot. I understand there are about 236 species of birds on the Refuge, and I'm wondering how you're planning to meet their needs, since there's such a diversity, which we would like to keep. And are there any conflicts that exist in the plan for the birds?

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Thank you.

So Janelle Holden, and Larry Barnard on deck.

MS. HOLDEN: Hi, my name is Janelle Holden. I work for the Wilderness Society here in Bozeman.

As I said last night, we're fairly happy with the proposed alternative, except for the fact that there is this decrease in wilderness acreage, which we think we should be going the opposite direction, especially in our prairie ecosystems.

But tonight I had a couple questions, one in particular, about roads. It seems like Alternative B and Alternative D have a pretty significant difference, 106 miles of road versus 23 miles of road. And I was wondering if you could address sort of what criteria you used in terms of ecological processes versus wildlife habitat to come up with those numbers or what were some of the reasons why you decided to reduce roads in each of those alternatives, so that we can get a better understanding of what our range of alternatives are.

Then the other question I have is about Alternative B, in terms of manipulating habitats. I'd like to know a little bit more about what kind of crops you would plant in Alternative B and synthetic methods for increasing wildlife habitat and what that might look like specifically to the CMR Refuge.

That's it. Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Larry Barnard, with Mark Good on deck.

MR. BARNARD: My name is Larry Barnard. I've lived in Montana for 60 years, and I hope to live here another 60 years. I love this place, and I want to remind everybody in the room that this is not Nevada, this is a very unique place. Everybody in the world knows who we
I have not read through the entire EIS, and so some of this stuff is, I'm sure, spelled out in that, and I apologize for -- So I'm going to ask this more in terms of questions, I think, than comments. I had several.

One is looking at the couple of areas that, or the three areas that are being proposed -- wilderness areas that you're proposing to eliminate. The Beauchamp area, I understand it's partly because of the -- there's a two-track that runs through. And I know it's, again, probably not as dramatic as what some people think wilderness areas ought to look like in terms of mountains or even the rugged Breaks, but I think probably in terms of its wildlife value, it's probably more valuable than some of those other areas. But it seems to me, in terms of the criteria of wilderness, that it meets those, just in terms of size, naturalness, sense of solitude, and it seems to me the imprint of man is unnoticeable there. So, again -- I mentioned this before, but if you would look at that criteria and reconsider those areas. And I think the Hill Creek one, I know there's an inhaling in there. I think that might be one of the issues, but, you know, wilderness doesn't apply to that private land, but private lands also shouldn't disqualify it from being considered as a proposed wilderness area.

Another issue that I wanted to bring up is just to and figure out how to benefit from that.

Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Mark.

Ben, with Steve on deck.

MR. ERICKSON: Good evening, I'm Ben Erickson. I currently reside in Belgrade, Montana. I spent my grade school years in Lewistown, Montana, and my junior high and high school years in Miles City, so I'm a bit familiar with the country you folks are talking about doing some revisions to.

I also happen to have had some great-uncles that lived on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. My mother is a Chippewa Cree Indian, and those were her uncles. If anybody here is from the Hi-Line and you know any of the Donneys, Richard or Clifford, those were my great-uncles.

So I've got a little bit of a stake in what's going on up there, too, from a family viewpoint.

A couple points of concern that I have with what's going on: Any time we get into wanting to expand more wilderness area, one of the things I noticed about Alternative D was, several of the small roads, which I think Kerry White pointed out, were slated for closure.

What concerns me about that is, those roads -- almost all of those roads lead down to the water. The few roads that are left remaining open are going to cause -- or have the
potential to cause user conflict. In other words, you're
going to have more people using the fewer roads. So what
you're going to have then is, you are going to have some
resource damage. In working with the Forest Service on
some of the travel management plans, we've coined a term
called the cram-down effect. When you cram enough people
down into a small enough area, you truly will damage the
resources there, and then that just opens the floodgate to
close that off permanently to people. So that's a big
concern of mine.

The other concern I have, of course, is grazing. As I
said, some of my family has ranched, some of my family
still does, and some of my family farms. I know how
difficult it is for the ag producers to make it in today's
world. Part of the reason why federal grazing permits are
so important to the rancher, which I think is overlooked
way too often, is that due to past tax practices --
originally, we called it the estate tax, but now it's
commonly referred to as the death tax -- forces a farmer
or rancher to sell off part of his property to pay for his
taxes or his inheritance to pay for the land he inherited
from his father or to pay the inheritance tax his children
are going to have to come up with when he passes on. So
what that leaves the farmer or the rancher the alternative
with is picking up grazing leases from federal property.

I think it's important that those grazing leases are
protected, and I think that these people have a right to
their way of life, too. Earlier, another gentleman said,
hey, these guys gotta get used to the changing times.
Well, it's true, times do change, but, at the same time,
it's never ceased to amaze me that with some of the things
that are going on in northeastern Montana right now, that
people in southwestern and western Montana are the ones
that are proposing the changes in northeastern Montana.
They don't live there. They don't have to deal with the
day-to-day life, the day-to-day expenses and hardships
that these people do.

So I guess in closing, I would just like to say,
thanks for letting us have an opportunity to comment on
this, and I'm not in favor of any additional wilderness in
this area.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Steve, with Glenn on deck.

MR. HUNTS: Hello, my name is Steven Hunts. I'm
a 15-year resident of Bozeman, a hunter and a fisherman,
as well as a lifelong conservationist.

I'm going to confine my comments to Alternative B,
because I consider that to be the best alternative. In
regards to evaluating habitat by target species, I'm
concerned with the way that this is being done right now,
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MS. MATHER: Okay.

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private landowners that go onto the Refuge, those should
be closed or there should be open access for all, it seems
to me. And I don't know the situation, so maybe you could
clarify that.

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Bozeman was, I went quickly to the website. In the
history section, I read something that just resonated with
me so nicely, and I'm just repeating -- I'll just read one
line, or, actually, three lines, because I think it sums
up what I think the emphasis should be.

This is from the Executive Order which established the
Refuge. And what you say on your website in the history
section is, you say that the natural forage resources
therein shall be first utilized for the purpose of
sustaining in a healthy condition a maximum of 400,000
sharp-tailed grouse and 1,500 antelope, the primary
species, and such non-predatory secondary species in such
numbers as may be necessary to maintain a balanced
wildlife population.

Well, clearly, to do that, the land needs to be
preserved in as pristine and natural state as possible.
And the only way I see that really happening to its
fullest is to have the maximum amount of roadless area
designated wilderness and as few roads as possible. I
mean, most of us who love Montana and travel widely know
that roads are just about everywhere. And if you look
statistically at wilderness, we only have 3.7 percent of
the state designated wilderness. And in the eastern part
of Montana, where the Charlie Russell Wildlife Preserve
is, there is less than, I believe -- I wrote this down,

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it's just incredible. There is literally only
32,000 acres of wilderness. And with that in mind, it
just seems so obvious to me that what is needed in this
Refuge is the maximum amount of untraveled area that
wildlife can prosper in, and, as well, those who want to
hunt, fish, hike, horseback ride are free to do so.

I compare -- I use one example here which I'm very
familiar with, and that's the Red Rock Wildlife Refuge.
That refuge, which is in the very southern part of our
state on the Idaho border, the majority of the land in
that refuge is wilderness, and, yet, there's ample
hunting, there's canoing, there's hiking, there are roads
that circle the refuge, and it works very well. I ask you
to think about that.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Bob.

Dave Stevens, and George Baldwin on deck.

MR. STEVENS: I'm Dave Stevens. I'm a wildlife
biologist with Stevens Wildlife Consulting.
I am very much concerned that the Fish and Wildlife
Service is losing their way in what the refuges are for.
Refuges are for the preservation of wildlife species and
management of wildlife species. I support Alternative B.
The CMR is a national treasure, and it should be
maintained like that. The proposed wilderness is too
small. I think all areas that qualify as wilderness
should be wilderness. I hate to see any being reduced.
The prairie ecosystem is not well represented in
wilderness, and it should be.
The road networks are important to get people into
areas, but they also are very hard on wildlife species.
During hunting seasons, people patrol the roads, and the
wildlife, especially species like elk, it's very
detrimental to their population and existence.
I think the grazing should be better managed. I think
that this prescribed grazing is a good idea, because I
think that does more or less represent what the bison did
in the early days, and I think that probably is good, and
I know prescribed burning is good, both of which should be
utilized to the greatest extent possible.
I think fencing, and especially sheep-proof fencing,
should be eliminated. Some fencing is necessary as drift
fences to keep your livestock in the right places, but
that should be a minimum.
I support the restoration of bison. I think bison
need to be in a wild situation in some places, and CMR
seems to be one of the places it should be.
So with that, I do have some questions as to why the
Fish and Wildlife Service is not concentrating on wildlife
like they are in Alternative B. I assume that you already
have your preferred alternative, which is D, as I
gathered, and I hope that doesn't mean that you're on that
and there's not going to be any adjustments to it in the
future.
Thank you.
MS. MATHER: Thanks, Dave.
Rod, and then Dawn on deck.
MR. BALDWIN: My name is George Baldwin. What
drew my interest in tonight's meeting, in part, was the
Charles M. Russell name. My father sat and watched
Charles M. Russell paint, which was okay with the painter
as long as the boys were quiet and behaved themselves. My
father's name is Kenneth Baldwin, my mother's name is
Florence. They were the founders of the Montana
Wilderness Association. So I stand here in that
tradition.
I would like to say that some of the goals here seem
very important, and one of the goals is the preservation
through a refuge, but through wilderness; wilderness which
has a more distinct sense of heritage. And so one of the
things that my father especially emphasized was once you
designate a wilderness, find ways to do public education
and get people to use the wilderness. The Montana
Wilderness Association has an amazing program of
wilderness walks, all of which are educational. They have
two guides which help people understand the territory
they're walking through, and these are always free. So I
would encourage the staff to look very carefully at how
you really intend to use this refuge and these wilderness
areas. I would second those who say the expansion of
wilderness seems like the right direction.
Thank you for all your labor. I see you've been at it
for months. I will study this some more. Thank you.
MS. MATHER: Thanks, George.
Rod, and Dawn on deck.
MR. JUDE: Rod Jude, Gallatin Canyon.
I haven't waded through this entire document yet, but
I will do that and I will send you some written comments.
But I would like to come down on the side of this is all
about wildlife. And so I think more wilderness is a good
thing, less roads is a good thing, prescribed burns is a
good thing, prescriptive grazing is a good thing, and, clearly, less fencing is a good thing.
With that mind, I thank you for coming down here and
spending your time, and I think you're doing a pretty good
job. I think if you take all these comments at heart, we
can come up with a great, you know, piece of work. And
with that, thanks again for coming. I'll get those
comments to you.
MS. MATHER: Thanks, Rod.

Dawn, and then Lesley Robinson on deck.
MS. MONTANYE: I'm Dawn Montanye, with World
Wildlife Fund, based here in Bozeman. Thank you for the
opportunity to comment.
We see, as I think many people in Montana, the CMR as
a treasure, not only for this region, but for the country
and the world. It is a globally significant protected
grassland area that is and has a high number of grassland
endemic species, entire grasslands and, in places, limited
road development, and, because of that, has been
determined as a really key and important grassland area
globally. So we support this effort. We're very much in
favor of the proposed alternative, the focus on
maintaining and supporting ecological processes and
looking at wildlife management and habitat management from
that perspective. Our interest is that we ensure this is
a place where native species do thrive and can thrive in
great numbers.
There was a suggestion earlier for looking at some of
the economic issues related to the loss of grazing. I
don't think that that's a bad idea. I think some of the
economics have been looked at. But I would also encourage
the refuge managers and administration to talk about what
are the economic benefits that come from having abundant
wildlife, having people be able to come onto the Refugee,
wildlife, having people be able to come onto the Refuge, don't think that that's a bad idea. I think some of the favor of the proposed alternative, the focus on road development, and, because of that, has been MS. MONTANYE: I'm Dawn Montanye, with World can come up with a great, you know, piece of work. And spending your time, and I think you're doing a pretty good thing, less roads is a good thing, prescribed burns is a good thing, and even those aspects could be looked into further. So I think that's an important aspect to look at in more depth and to also be explicit about when in some of these meetings and talking to communities, as well. And then I would also echo the interest of extending the comment period. I think that could be important for people that, for whatever reason, whether they're hunting or otherwise, might not be able to comment during the period that's given. So if that's a possibility, I would encourage that, as well. Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Lesley, and Peter on deck.

MS. ROBINSON: I'm Lesley Robinson, Phillips County Commissioner, and I'm also the chairman of the Montana Association of Counties Public Lands Committee. I just want to put into the record the policy that MACo passed at our convention: Montana Association of Counties supports livestock grazing on the Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge at levels that sustain economically sound livestock operations and maintain the ecological health of the resource.

Thanks.

Ms. MATHER: Thanks, Lesley.

Peter, and then Kit on deck.

MR. AENGST: Hi, Peter Aengst, with the Wilderness Society here in Bozeman. Thanks for the great work I've seen so far in terms of the draft.

I had, I guess, three questions. The first, as I think you've heard from several speakers tonight, relates to the preferred alternative and the net reduction of 8,000 acres in terms of recommended wilderness. And we have a concern about that, and I guess my request or my question is whether or not the Service did any sort of analysis looking across prairie grassland ecosystems to see how much wilderness is actually represented, whether as designated wilderness or as recommended or potential wilderness, to get a sense of how important the CMR is in terms of its potential recommended wilderness in terms of upping the representation of prairie and grassland ecosystem types in the National Wilderness Preservation System. So I would encourage you to do that if that was not done, I guess.

The second has to do with climate change. I'll admit closed. But when I read your map for the preferred alternative, what I see is that, almost in every case, the areas for road closures are not at all connected to where you're talking about wilderness additions. So I think I would just ask that you make that much more clear, that the wilderness additions have nothing to do with any road closures.

And then the question, I guess, about road closures is -- I think it was what, 25 or 28 miles of seasonal or permanent miles of road closure. Maybe this is addressed in the draft. How much -- if there's details provided in terms of how you're going to be enforcing that, and for those that are permanent road closures, is that just a gate or is that ripping out and recontouring roads in terms of how far you're going to go in terms of dealing with those permanent road closures?

So thanks, again.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Peter.

Kit.

MR. FISCHER: Hi, my name is Kit Fischer. I'm representing National Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Refuge Association. I just had a few short comments.

First, I'd like to thank the CMR staff and Fish and Wildlife Service for this opportunity.
The first comment, relating to prescribed burning, I am supportive, and our organizations are very supportive, of Alternative D, and in terms of prescribed burning, we are supportive of that. I have some questions in terms of how that would work on the ground. I know that the costs associated with prescribed burns are very high. It's a fairly aggressive prescribed burning situation that looks like it's how this would go in the plan, and exactly how those costs in terms of -- I know that it's hard, even now, to get the prescribed burns off the ground. I think they are very important in terms of ecologically in relation with prescriptive grazing. I think that is a very good way to do it, but some specifics of how that would work.

Secondly, I haven't read completely through the plan, but as far as sage grouse recovery areas, we'd like to see those; you know, if they've been established and how are they being addressed in relation to the current and proposed grazing regime.

Thirdly, I think it would be important to note in this plan that the retirement of grazing leases through willing seller/willing buyer agreements, providing an economic incentive to ranchers to retire those leases, should be noted as a primary means in shifting towards prescribed grazing.

maybe read more, this is a very timid management document, and it seems like it could be much bolder with respect to actually doing what the mandate is as far as optimizing wildlife management on a wildlife refuge. It should look different than just a piece of BLM that's managed primarily for cattle grazing. It should be different management. It should really honestly emphasize wildlife. I think the distinction between B and D is political. I think that in reality, if you maximize wildlife, you optimize processes, natural processes. I don't see how you can have one alternative that supposedly maximizes wildlife habitat and another alternative that supposedly optimizes natural processes. To me, those are the same if you're a biologist, and I think that this is some kind of political word use, where if you call it natural processes, you can take out wilderness and leave in roads. And I don't think you're really doing the job of a wildlife refuge when you do that.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Thank you.

Either of you guys.

MR. AUNE: I guess I didn't sign the right sheet there, so -- I'm Keith Aune. I'm with the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Wildlife Conservation Society works worldwide to preserve wildlife and wild places. We work in 60 countries.

I'm going to confine my comments, because I really do want to say there's been some really good comment that I can support here. But WCS, in looking at this, is really supporting Alternative B. It's very consistent with our mission, and we think it's consistent the title of national wildlife refuge. And so given that you are one of the premier national wildlife refuges, I think the wildlife emphasis makes sense.

I do want to emphasize two other things. One is that we're obviously very supportive of bison restoration. One of the branches on our tree is the formation of the American Bison Society over a hundred years ago. And we are really working hard to look at the ecological restoration of bison, which I think fits really well with your theme of emphasizing ecological processes. But I want to specifically say, I don't know how you can emphasize ecological processes with the absence of a keystone herbivore like bison, and so I really want to encourage you to do that.

The second thing is, I want you to really think about bison and cattle. They are not necessarily an either/or situation, and there's lots of places, lots of examples across North America where agriculture and bison conservation actually fit, and there are ways to do that.
We should keep an open mind about that.
The third thing I really want to emphasize is that if you're thinking about ecological processes and really want to really do a good job of restoring a fully functional ecosystem, you have to be thinking about impending climate change. And that was brought up once, but I want to emphasize it again. From our perspective, bison in that landscape operating as a keystone herbivore working to create habitats for other species, building those important community relationships, actually can enhance resilience of this really critical landscape, and we can't lose sight of that. There are very, very, very few places like this left in the world; not just in North America, in the world. So this is a very, very special place in that regard.

So I want to emphasize that we support Alternative B. We think this is a really critical ecosystem that's still intact, and you are the heart of that system and, as such, should be brave and consistent in your messaging about wildlife.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Yes.

MR. GRIFFIN: My name is Paul Griffin. I live here in Bozeman, and since it seems fashionable at times, I'm fourth generation in the Gallatin Valley on my mother's side.

I could live with either B or D. I think you've done really great, especially considering some work we've seen at other times from other agencies.

I wish you'd expand the socioeconomic data, because we hear at these meetings that this could be devastating or harmful. Well, I think your plan mentions only 42 permittees on the whole Refuge, if I remember correctly. I'm the Paul Griffin that wrote the letter to the Chronicle, by the way, this morning outlining Phillips County's economic connection to the Federal Government. But I wish you would put that in, because it would enlighten people about -- You said there wasn't going to be negative effects, and I really don't think there are. You've spent your money up there, like you said, on your plans. Your people that live up there, they spend money. But as a taxpayer, we federal taxpayers are pouring money into a region of declining population. Just in 2009, the six counties that border the Refuge or have property in the Refuge received $54.4 million in USDA subsidies. So what you guys do or don't do isn't going to have any effect.

So I like B and D, and have at it.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Paul.

Anybody else?

Yea.

MR. GIBBS: My name is Chip Gibbs, and I've lived in the Gallatin Valley for 22 years, but I'm from Malta, and I think I can safely say that outside of maybe Lesley Robinson, no one has spent more time in the Breaks than me. I still have a lot of close ties there. I'm honestly opposed to B, C, and D. If it's not broke, don't fix it. 3.7 percent of wilderness is plenty, and I believe that if we put a vote to the state, people would want more access to the public lands and not less.

The Refuge has done a great job of preserving the species. The amount of time that cattle are exposed on the CMR isn't year around; I think that's a myth that's out there. And no one is a better steward of the land than those ranchers who have access to the CMR. And that would be, I think, lost if it's put in the hands of someone other than the people who are maintaining it currently.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Chip.

Anybody else?

(No audible response.)

MR. CRAWFORD: A lot of great comments and questions. I'm sitting there jotting notes, going, Let's see, which ones do Bill get? I'll answer the easy ones, Bill can answer the tough ones.

The first one we heard was the management philosophy of the Fish and Wildlife Service compared to the other agencies. And that's a great question. We got it last night, as well.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the only federal agency that's mandated to manage for fish, wildlife, and their habitats, as compared to, say, the Forest Service or the BLM, which has a multiple-use mandate, where they're to try to balance all of the uses, economic uses, such as grazing, mineral exploration, off-road vehicle travel, hunting, fishing, you know, all that sort of stuff. So that's basically the primary difference, is, we are here for wildlife and wildlife habitats. It's a very clear, distinct mission that we have, and it was emphasized or strengthened with the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act in 1997. That's basically our organic legislation.

A clarification of wilderness elimination versus proposed wilderness. As part of the CCP process, we are to evaluate all of our proposed wilderness areas to make sure that they still meet those wilderness characteristics that were identified back when they were proposed, and so that's what we did, and we also looked at them as compared to the theme of the alternatives. And it is subjective.
It's basically -- you know, we're using our best hats, as managers, as stewards of the land, to make a judgment call as to where these areas still meeting those characteristics, and sometimes it was a very difficult decision. We threw some of those areas out there to get public comment from folks and to get your thoughts on them, and I greatly appreciate that. And from what we have heard these past two nights, we definitely need to go back and look at some of those areas closely.

We did contract out the economic analysis. We contracted with USGS out of Boulder. They've been used by several national wildlife refuges and other federal agencies to do economic analysis. They are economists. They did look at the loss of grazing or the potential loss of grazing, they looked at the potential revenue that could be generated by expanding public use opportunities, and they plugged it all into their computer models. And I'm not an economist, so I don't understand all of it, but I do feel that they did a very thorough job in looking at the economic analysis of each of the alternatives.

CMR provides less than one percent of the total grazing that is found in the six counties that surround the Refuge. Obviously, as we make changes to the grazing programs, it could have an effect on the individual rancher, that's no doubt. There are several ranchers that rely upon that CMR grazing permit for their ranching operation.

As we move forward, after the CCP is finalized, the next step is developing the step-down management plans, and one of the first ones that will be developed is called the habitat management plan, and that's where the Refuge will look at the CCP and look at what was adopted as the final plan. And in order to meet those wildlife and/or habitat objectives, they will get down and develop a very detailed plan, and working with those ranchers or current permittees in order to implement a prescriptive grazing program, so that we can fulfill our mission and hopefully still meet the needs of our neighbors, as well.

When we were looking at expanding at the wilderness areas, we did not eliminate any roads to expand wilderness areas. We basically confined them so that we wouldn't be eliminating roads if we expanded areas. The roads that we did propose to eliminate, again, it's another subjective call. It was a best management looking at the area and looking at fragmentation, looking at disturbance, and, again, did it meet the overall theme of the alternative.

Let's see, how did we come up with the roads that would be eliminated and not eliminated between the alternatives? Bill, you want that one?

We gave Bill a red pen.

MR. BERG: It wasn't that easy. A couple things we looked at. Under B, you know, with the wildlife emphasis that we had under that alternative, we looked at roads more from a standpoint of creating secure areas for populations or groups of elk, kind of scattering them more across the landscape. And we've done this to some extent already in a few areas on the Refuge, but under Alternative B, we expanded on that to create the security areas where they're not disturbed via motor vehicles and things like that. So we took a real aggressive approach to that management tool under B.

Under D, we tried to compromise a little bit; still closed some areas to provide more security habitat for different species, including pronghorn antelope and elk and deer. There's kind of a common theme out there that if we can reduce the visual and traffic impacts, mainly during hunting season, by closing some roads, create some valleys or coulees in between where those animals aren't getting disturbed, we can keep those animals spread out over a larger landscape. So that was kind of what we looked at. There's several studies, you know, nationwide where that's been shown to impact use of certain areas, by big game species especially.

Again, some of the road closures were also dependent on the type of land ownership that was involved. I'm guessing about five miles was closed because of the fact that the private land ownership that wasn't refuge lands did create that exclusive use situation where a private landowner closed that road. And that was one of the questions Corey's dad had. We've tried to do that over the past several years, not allow for an exclusive use, but where a road does access either state land or private land, by law, we can't close that road; you know, we can't deny historical access to that. So in some of those situations, there is somewhat of an exclusive use. But, say, where we had a road that was totally on the Refuge, but there was a private parcel off the Refuge that created that exclusive use, we then did close the road so that, you know, it was the same for everybody, so to speak. I'm not sure that answered question.

Should I go on here?

MR. CRAWFORD: Give the authority for managing the lake and the river and the jet boats.

MR. BERG: A question came up last night also about jet boat use and our authority to manage that on the river, and it came up earlier during the scoping process also, if we were to determine or evaluate the impacts of, say, large jet boat use or large boats that have high-decibel motors on them that affects the use of those river bottoms by wildlife. If we were to determine or
came up with the fact that those areas were not being used as much as they should be because of that motorized use, which would limit that activity in certain areas, no different than we do a road. There's some joint jurisdictional issues there that we would have to coordinate with the other agencies, mainly the Corps of Engineers, the State of Montana, not much unlike what's being done on some of the rivers where they restrict motorized use during certain times of the year. So that would be a coordinated effort between several groups. What we chose to do after the scoping process was to monitor some of the use on the river itself. We're in the process of doing that, just to get a handle on it. Over the years, we have noticed a pretty significant increase in motorized use on the river, and also on the lake, but mainly on the river where those river bottoms are so important to wildlife, especially later on in the season.

MR. CRAWFORD: Some of the other stuff that we heard today. Glenn, make sure you see me before you leave. One thing that a couple of people resonated on was Fish and Wildlife Service losing their way, species management versus habitat management. And I can tell you that as a staff, we wrestled in formulating Alternative B and Alternative D. All of us went to school, got our wildlife biology degree; you know, that's what it says, wildlife biology. It doesn't say habitat biology. And so, obviously, you go on to get an advanced degree, 99 percent of us study big critters with fur and teeth, you know. I studied coyotes and wolves, okay? So I'm a large carnivore guy. Very few of us go out and study plants. And so it's a lot easier for us to relate to things with fur than it is to winterfat and saltbush and chokecherry and buffalo berry, except for people like Bob. Bob is the exception to the rule. And so as we're formulating this plan, it was like, okay, do we concentrate on wildlife? Do we concentrate on habitat? When you're forming objectives and strategies, if you increase winterfat and buffalo berry on the Refuge, are you doing good things for wildlife? Well, maybe we should measure wildlife and make sure that by increasing those plants, we are doing good things. Well, it's a lot easier to count plants than it is to count wildlife.

And so we kept wrestling back and forth, and what we decided on was Alternative B would have this wildlife concentration twist to it. And we were basically using what Olaus Murie had identified when he came out here in 1935 and did his original biological survey, where he said the western part of the Refuge was really important for elk and the Service should concentrate on elk in this area; and the Mickey-Brandon Butte/Timber Creek area is really good for bighorn sheep, and the Service should concentrate on bighorn sheep management here; and the southern part of the Refuge and the western part of the Refuge is really good mule deer habitat, and the Service should emphasize that; and the Service needs to expand sharp-tail grouse management over on the eastern side. So that was kind of the basis that we used to form Alternative D. When we went to do Alternative D, we decided to take a little different spin, saying, yes, wildlife is very important, but what drives the wildlife species? You know, it's those ecological processes and it's the habitat. So we wanted to put more emphasis on habitat, monitoring habitat, management, implementing processes, and basically "build it, the wildlife will come" kind of approach.

So, you know, as biologists, we're conflicted between those two, which one's best kind of a thing. And what we tried to do was try to strike a balance. We went through one phase of the plan, where we had no wildlife objectives in Alternative D, it was all habitat objectives, and we said, No, we really can't do that; we need some wildlife objectives in D, we need some plant objectives in B. And so that's kind of how we ended up at that point. So I hope that -- It's kind of a long, roundabout way to address that point, but I hope that helps to clarify B and D.

Let's see, did we look at analysis of prairie grassland ecosystems and wilderness and how much is protected? No, we did not, to be perfectly honest. We looked only at our areas inside the Refuge and based those decisions on, in our minds, were those areas still meeting their wilderness characteristics?

Climate change, we heard that last night. We do have in the document, on page 84 and 85, some objectives for climate change. A lot of research-type projects, looking at building resilience. Resilient habitats are better adapted to dealing with climate change than habitats that aren't resilient. We are looking at prescribed fire, the effects of prescribed fire and smoke, what does that contribute, versus wildfire and smoke. And there's a couple of pretty good studies out there that shows that through prescribed fire, you actually sequester quite a bit of carbon. And so, yeah, you're putting smoke into the air, but you're also sequestering lots of carbon into the soil that it's bound up for a long time. And we would like to expand that research and do more of it.

MR. BERG: There was a question raised about bighorn sheep, and I thought maybe I'd just give the group
hope that -- It's kind of a long, roundabout way to one phase of the plan, where we had no wildlife objectives tried to do was try to strike a balance. We went through those two, which one's best kind of a thing. And what we habitat. So we wanted to put more emphasis on habitat, that was kind of the basis that we used to form couple of pretty good studies out there that shows that aren't resilient. We are looking at prescribed fire, the climate change. A lot of research-type projects, looking B and D.

If sheep were to move in there on their own, that would At this time, it doesn't appear that there is support for that from the landowners that live in that area. I think potentially in the future that could happen. If you'll look at the sheep industry -- domestic sheep industry, it's kind of decreasing as far as numbers of sheep in that part of Montana, so the potential is there. If sheep were to move in there on their own, that would probably be the best-case scenario, versus doing an actual reintroduction. But we're hopeful that that will occur at some point in the future.

There was a question raised about like we talked about. Then that pasture or that unit or area would then be used as kind of a rotational system with existing permitees. So a little bit different policy on how we handle those kind of permits.

MR. CRAWFORD: I think we had one more question that was looking at possible food plots in some of our river bottom restorations. In B, where we're talking about synthetic methods, we're looking at using farming to help restore those areas; basically, go in and clean them up of weeds, and then after a couple of years we could go in and plant native vegetation. So we'd consider some type of alfalfa or cereal grain crop that refuge staff would plant under Alternative B, basically so we could go in there and clean up the weeds and then put it back to a native grass/shrubland mix after that.

Under Alternative C, we'd basically be doing the same thing, except we'd use cooperative farmers. And, basically, cooperative farmers are permitees that come in under a special use permit, plant an identified crop that they then harvest, but they're putting all the time and energy into planting and maintaining that crop. Their return is basically harvesting that crop. And at the end of the contract period, we have a field that's weed-free that we can then go back and restore native plants to.

In Alternative D, we're not proposing to use food plots. We'd just basically go in and, through the use of fire and herbicides, reduce the weeds in those areas and then go back in and follow up with a native planting. So that's the difference in B, C, and D in the river bottom restorations.

I think we've covered most of the questions.

Again, we appreciate everybody coming out, and we'll be here if you want to talk one-on-one with any of the staff members. Several of our folks are in the back.

Randy is the wildlife biologist, Mike's the fire management officer, Matt DeRosier is the station manager at Sand Creek, Dan Harrell is the biologist out at Sand Creek, and Bob Skinner is the habitat biologist in Lewistown. So we're all here to address any questions that you may have.

Thanks.

(The proceedings were concluded at 7:13 p.m.)

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unrelated party and is used for a different purpose, whether it's recreational or paleo or just the fact that they want a scenic place to build a cabin, we do not transfer that permit to the next owner. So what we would do, then, is put it in the prescriptive grazing regime, like we talked about. Then that pasture or that unit or area would then be used as kind of a rotational system with existing permittees.

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spend the next year and a half or so looking at those comments that we received during this period, and addressing those comments, and making changes to the document as appropriate. So why do we do this? Why do we spend years and years and year and thousands of dollars to go through this process? And the first is basically it's a requirement that was a part of the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act that basically said all refuges will have a completed CCP by 2012. The next, it's just a very important document. It's set up to provide management, direction, and guidance that's based upon the refuge purpose and the mission of the National Refuge System. It also outlines the vision statement, goals, objectives and strategies to achieve those purposes of mission, and to guide that future management. It's accompanied by some type of NESA document, either an environmental assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. For CMR and UL Bend, just due to the complexity of issues that we're dealing with, we did an Environmental Impact Statement. And then, again, it provides that long-term guidance. Most plans are good for 15 years, and so as managers come and go, and the staffer changes, basically that road map has already been prepared for the future staff members that come on-board, and so instead of having a new manager come in and basically saying, Well, I don't like that. We're going to do something different. We've basically have got something in place for them to follow.
landscape in cooperation with our partners to emphasize abundant and diversity of wildlife using a combination of natural ecological processes, such as fire and grazing, but also some of those synthetic methods, such as farming, tree planting, flooding. We'll encourage wildlife dependent public uses. And those are hunting and fishing and wildlife observation, wildlife photography and environmental education and interpretation. And we'll limit economic uses when they compete for habitat. And economic uses are stuff like commercial outfitting, grazing, anything that generates kind of an income. So we got some maps. Hopefully, people had an opportunity to look at them when they came in, but this is basically what the refuge would look at you under Alternative B with closing some roads, expanding some wilderness areas. This is the west half of the refuge. This is the east half of the refuge. Some of the common points that are in Alternative B is actively manage and manipulate habitats to create productive wildlife, food and cover. Implement prescriptive grazing on 50 to 75 percent of the refuge within four to seven years. Taking an aggressive approach to restoring the river bottoms. Work with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to provide quality hunting opportunities and sustain populations of big game and habitat for non game.

processes alternative. This is our proposed action as well. And this is basically we're again working with our partners. We're going to use these natural ecological processes. And those ecological processes are primarily fire and grazing, and some active management. So we're mixing in a little bit of Alternative B to restore and/or maintain the biological diversity, biological integrity and biological health. And that comes right from the Improvement Act. And then once these natural processes are restored, we'll take more of a passive management approach. And we'll still provide for a quality wildlife-dependent public uses and experience. And we're going to limit those economic uses when they're injurious to either the habitats or to the processes. So this is what a map looks for Alternative D. And we've got some proposed expansion of some wilderness. We've got some proposal eliminating of some wilderness. We have some roads that we're proposing to close. Again, on the east half, same thing. The summary of Alternative D, economic uses will be limited when they're injurious to ecological processes. Apply management practices that mimic and restore natural process. Again, that's mostly fire and grazing. Use fire and wild unulgate herbivory and/or prescriptive livestock grazing on 50 to 75 percent of the refuge to mimic that historic interaction; and work with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to maintain and diversity of wildlife species; do some road closures on about 23 miles of roads; and expand six of the proposed wilderness areas for a total of 18,000 acres, and eliminate three for a total of 26,000. So we'll have a little bit of a net loss there in proposed wilderness. Some of the hot button topics -- this is our third night as Mimi said. Some of the common themes that we've heard is prescriptive grazing, what is it? And basically when we're talking about preventative grazing, we're talking about using livestock in order to meet a very specific wildlife and/or habitat objective. And an example that I like to use is, say, we go in and we identify an area that's got some prairie dogs. There's a potential that we could expand that prairie dog town. By expanding that prairie dog town, we could possibly get some more ferrets to move in there. We could create opportunities or burrowing owls and mountain clovers to nest. And so we would want to go in there and graze that area heavily to reduce that overall grass cover to encourage those prairie dogs to expand. Once the prairie dogs expanded, then those other wildlife species are going to come, and then promote, you know, the expansion of the habitat for those species. So that's one use where we would use prescriptive grazing to meet a specific wildlife and/or habitat objective. Another could be to reduce the threat of wild fire. Might be a spot where we can't use prescribed fire due to in-holdings or very
difficult to get into the area and control it. We could go in there and use livestock to graze that area and reduce the overall grass cover and reduce the threat of wildfire. Prescriptive fire. We've had a lot of questions about that. How will it be used. We've talked a lot about the ecological processes of fire and grazing historically.

Fire would come through the area. As the plants burn, you've got that flush of lush growth. You have the bison and deer and the elk will kind of follow those fires and move from patch to patch to patch. So we've been working with some fire ecologists and doing quite a bit of research, looking at the historic fire frequency, and trying to restore that natural fire frequency back onto the landscape, and then restore that natural movement of those animals from patch to patch.

And to go there is to benefit those plants that are fire adaptive so that they have a chance to grow up, reach maturity, produce fruit, reproduce and expand. Wilderness. As part of the CCP process, we're to look at evaluating our wilderness areas, and make sure that they still meet those wilderness characteristics which were identified when they were originally proposed. Our areas were proposed in around the mix 70s. And so as part of this process, we wanted to evaluate those areas and make sure they were still meeting those wilderness characteristics. It is subjective. You know, there's some things we can look at look. We can look at guidance in the actual wilderness law itself. We can look at our policy. But a lot of it is a subjective call.

And so that's why, you know, we throw these alternatives up there. We're talking about expanding and/or eliminating. And we're looking for comments from you, the public, to give us your input because I'm sure there's stuff that we missed when we were looking at those areas.

It's the same thing with the closing of roads. Some of the roads that we proposed to close are in areas where the public doesn't have access to those roads. And so it creates an exclusive use for the neighboring landowner to come in and use the refuge, which is not fair to the public.

And so some of our road closures are hoping to alleviate that situation. Others are to expand continuous blocks of habitat to allow wildlife to move freely from area to area.

And then the other comments we've heard quite a bit about is the bison and bison restoration.

And what we chose to do in the plan is say that we would support Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, if they brought forth a proposal to reintroduce bison somewhere in and around the refuge, that we work cooperatively with them in seeing in what role the Fish and Wildlife Service could assist in that process. But we weren't going to initiate a bison restoration project on our own. We feel that we need the State to step up and to do that as a State-managed wildlife species.

So those are kind of what we've heard for the past couple of nights. Now we're going to turn it over to you guys. Let you guys give us some feedback.

We would ask that you address items that are specifically in the plan. Speak clearly. Stick to your allotted time frame. There are numerous ways to provide comments: Providing on oral comment is just one way tonight. You can also write down your comment on a piece of paper that was handed to you as you came in the door, and leave it on the table as you leave. You can send us a written comment to the address that is in the planning update. Laurie said, please, do to the send them to her personal email account because it will get full in a hurry. There's a special email account to send those comments to. And that way, they will get properly cataloged and put in there. If you send it to Laurie's email, she'll probably delete it.

This is not a voting contest. There is no one form of comment that gets more weight than others. We consider all relevant comments the same. It doesn't matter whether we get one comment or we get a hundred thousand. They're all treated based upon their merit.

The comment period is scheduled to end November 16. We have received numerous requests to extend that period. And we're taking that under consideration at this time. And we have not made any decisions. So I would please plan to have your comments submitted by that November 16th.

So that's it. We're going to take a few minutes and set up the podium here, and then turn to over to Mimi to call the speakers up. (Recess taken.) MIMI: So here's how Part Two is going to work. We're going to limit everybody to three minutes. I'm going to call folks off the list. We will go in order. I'll call the next person, and also announce who's on deck, so you can be ready to go.

We're going to be strict about the three minutes. I have some timecards here, so I will let you know when you have one minute left, 20 seconds left, and when time's up.

We just ask that you refrain from applause or cheering, so things can run smoothly and respect one other's opinions.

If you do just have a question, we urge you to come up and ask your question. These guys back here: Bill, Laurie and Barren will be taking notes.

And then we'll need about 15 minutes at the end and they will respond to all the questions that they have received.

So with that -- and the first name I can't read very well -- I think it's Derrick -- Dyrck VanHyning with Dan Bennett on deck.

One more thing, will you please state your name. And if it's a tricky spelling, spell it for our recorder.

MR. VanHYNING: My name is Dyrck VanHyning from Great Falls -- spelled D-y-r-c-k VanHyning. I'm a food broker.
Now that will be your toughest name for the evening. So thank you for coming to Great Falls. I have basically two questions and they revolve around -- the first one prescriptive grazing and the second one is the wilderness study areas.

And I'm an interested public in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument on grazing. And I -- in the monument, I work on grazing issues and oil and gas.

And if I was a permittee, I guess, at this point, I do not understand prescriptive grazing because if I'm running so many head of cattle, and I have a plan -- this plan always will be changed based on the rainfall. But when I put cattle in a certain pasture and when I pull them out and so forth, and I know that long in advance, but it's still based on the rainfall.

But on prescriptive grazing, I understand your example, but I don't know that I'm going to put my cattle on a particular piece of land, I would think, until after the rainfall.

So that's my first question: How would I know in advance that I'm not going to have to find additional pasture.

And the second question is on the WSA's. And I have read through page 139. I think it's written well. I think it's very easy to understand. And I love your photos.

These WSA's were set by Congress. How is this process going to eliminate and add to certain areas?

And that's the end of my questions.

MIMI: Dan Bennett with Wes on deck.

And for grassland birds, that would be about the last straw.

So I would appreciate if someone could address at the end of this what the thinking is on how we're going to benefit grasslands bird here and keep them alive.

Thank you.

MIMI: Wes and Art on deck.

MR. MURRAY: My name is Wes Murray, M-u-r-r-a-y.

And I come to you tonight as a sportsman who has been in the CM Russell for 40 years. I've been there when CM Russell cow range was administered by the BLM, and one of those individuals that fought hard to see that the US Fish and Wildlife Service would take control of it, and it would be managed as a wildlife area. And this is very important.

Also, one of those people that back in the 70's sat down with the maps and looked at it, came up with these wilderness areas, and I cannot support any proposal that would remove any of the areas.

I do really appreciate the additions that have been made. We looked and studied to see what would be the best. Part of that came from the tremendous pressure that has been put on the area. In the 50's an elk herd was transferred from Glacier, from Seeley, from Yellowstone in the Gardiner area into the CM Russell. It was done by private individuals with the hope of -- it would flourish in that area.

Today we have a flourishing elk herd, but that elk herd is seeing tremendous pressure off and on. And part of the reason we went with the wilderness study areas, trying to relieve some of the road pressure that was on there.

In the 70's in the early 70's there were 200 bow hunters in the state of Montana. And within a couple years that became 2,000. I think we have 14,000 bow hunters in the state of Montana now.

The pressure from the open roads -- prior to what the Fish and Wildlife Service -- has caused those elk herds to shift. There never used to be elk on the south side of the river. There was not a sustainable herd in the Bear Paws. Those elk were put out of the range by pressure.

So anything -- I totally support the road closures in Plan B. It's a tremendous asset to the wildlife range if we can continue and support that.

You know, prescriptive grazing is great if we can work it out. I know it's still an economical factor. And it will have an economical impact on the area.

I am very concerned on the issue of the prescriptive burning. There are certain pockets in the refuge that if you were to destroy that area and those travel ways, you would cut the movement of elk.

There was a fire in the early 2000's on the CK Ridge coming on the Nicholls Coulee. Prior to that fire, there were elk everywhere on that area.

Since that fire, there's no elk on that area -- never seen an elk in that ridge.
I would like to say if we can't, you know, go with something like Plan B, that we at least get to Plan A where we are right now. Thank you.

Mr. Dolman: Good evening. My name is Aart Dolman. A-a-r-t D-o-l-m-a-n. And that's -- I'm Dutch and an American citizen. But, also, I'd like to have some questions because -- pertaining to water use and watercraft. I did not see too much of this in the plan.

But I would like to be clear that I floated the Missouri River from Fort Peck all the way here into Great Falls and different parts since 1969. And when I first came to this area, I was a young professor of history so I'd like to identify myself on that point.

And the question that I have pertaining to the uses of water craft is that I've noticed over the years the multiplication, you know, the tripling or quadrupling, what it is, of water usage and also boats that are getting faster and faster, and creating, therefore, a greater wake, and interferes certainly with not only with the water integrity, but also with the neighboring vegetation integrity of its shore.

So, therefore, my question is directed this way: Does the US Fish and Wildlife Service, you know, have a management responsibility on the river?

And if so, you know, where does it go from Fort Peck, and how is it related to the riparian areas.

My second question is are there any statistics that is recorded on the usage of river boats on the river? Do you keep a head count or watercraft count? Is that increasing or is that decreasing?

And my final question is Did the draft plan address the impacts from motorized watercraft? Because this is also the type of watercraft -- is also changing very drastically as our technology changes.

And when I first started out, a person was really glad to do this with a screw propeller. And now we have jet boats, which not only increasing the speed, but also the size of the watercraft that they carry, ATV's on, and landing on the shore, and use that land, also. And that has a great impact.

I thank you very much for the time and for my questions.

Mr. Nicholson: I'm Bob Nicholson, N-i-c-h-o-l-a-s-o-n, and I'm a member of the Missouri Wilderness Association.

I didn't get a chance to read the environmental impact statement or the draft plan, but part of my question has been answered, but it's been mentioned in there about the road density in the refuge, which I gather is 670 miles. And then Plan B, I see they're going to eliminate 106 miles.

The rest of my question is How do you plan to manage off-road vehicle use.

Thank you.

Mimi: Mark with Leurie on deck.

Mr. Good: My name is Mark Good. No E on the end, just plain Good -- not that Good.

Anyway, you know, I talk to people. It seems like there's always a lot of confusion about what -- how National Wildlife Refuge is different from other public lands, or how they're managed differently.

And I think, in listening to you, and reading, it seems like it is pretty clear. The guiding principal, management, and that is that it's in about enhancement and protection of wildlife. And that mission seems pretty clear.

While commercial and recreational use is allowed on the refuge, priorities include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

And other uses such as camping, outfitting, livestock grazing, bicycling, horseback riding, and motorized vehicle use are all secondary, and only allowed where they are compatible with the primary mission of the refuge.

Now I know that there are some who wish it were otherwise, who I think, there's a few who probably wish the whole refuge would just go away. But that's not going to happen. And that's the way it is, so I think it's through that lens, that mission, that you've got that those decisions ought to follow.

So let me go on and say something about wilderness. I think it's often that our high plains are characterized as being boring or no monotonous or empty, but I think anybody that spends time in the refuges, certainly knows that they're not boring, not monotonous, in fact, quite diverse.

And I know with the dam, certainly it is not the landscape that Lewis and Clark saw. And it's not teeming with wildlife in the same way it was when they came through, but that landscape is still vast and so impressive. And I think with the restoration of wildlife that has occurred over the years, decades, that there just isn't anything like it in, I think, the eastern half of the state.

And I know people generally don't associate wilderness areas with prairies, but -- and they are under-representative in the whole wilderness system. But I think as writer Wallace Stegner said, "The vanishing prairie is as good a place as any for the wilderness experience to happen;" and "is as worth preserving for the wilderness idea as the alpine forest."

So I just want to make the point that I think designating wilderness within the refuge reinforces that mission of the refuge by providing blocks of undisturbed land and quality of habitat.

And I think it also provided security for big game and helps to keep wildlife within the refuge.

I know there have been concerns by some of the landowners about the wildlife going outside the refuge.

I think all the areas that -- within the refuge that are proposed are -- they are all small, and they're all -- most all pretty equally accessible. At least the ones I have been to.
But I am concerned, though, as I mentioned this before about the three proposed areas that be being eliminated because I think they all fit the criteria, in size and naturalness and primitive character, and human activities are there -- are pretty negligible, and certainly want to provide that sense of solitude. So I just ask you to reconsider, and I think it's -- think about how to make this plan work for the communities and for the people using them, but I think that the wilderness part of it fits that mission. Thanks.

MIMI: Laurie. Mel on deck.

MS. RILEY: My name is Laurie Riley. Laurie is spelled L-a-u-r-i-e. Riley is R-i-l-e-y.

I'm representing the Missouri River Conservation District Council.

First of all, I'd like to say congratulations on a huge effort. It certainly is a very comprehensive document. And it's -- clearly has required thousands of hours of work and research. And we're very appreciative of the work that's gone into the plan.

I have not read the entire document. I'm only, I would say, well into Chapter Four.

And tonight I have more of a question than I do a comment. And it could be that the question is answered later in the document and I just haven't gotten there yet.

My question involves the discussion and use of sentinel plants and monitoring. And the Council has some concerns about monitoring.

And like several of these folks, I don't have any comments. I have some questions.

I guess one comment, I think it would be good if you would address this oil and gas issue. Although it's not a part of the CCP, if you can explain to folks here what the status is of that piece of using the protocol and where else is it being used. Are there any mention of the use of volunteers.

Therefore we have required thousands of hours of work in that regard. ATV's are legal motor vehicles on public roads, on most public roads, in the state of Montana. And I'm wondering how their use becomes -- if there's increasing use, you'll begin to see the CMR become an island. But it's a possibility that it could become an island because the BLM does manage for multiple uses, and it is possible that oil and gas development could come close to the CMR and affect the wildlife in the CMR.

So the point that I wanted to make is that the CMR is an absolute gem. It's a gem for Montana. It's a gem for the United States. And it's a gem world-wide in terms of prairie conservation.

And I hope that in your planning efforts you consider the impacts that other land management agencies and private landowners may make that would affect the resource down the line.

So, thanks again for all your efforts on this work and for bringing me to Great Falls.

MIMI: Thanks Janelle. Jim with Randy on deck.

MR. McCOLLUM: My name is Jim McCollum, M-c-C-o-l-l-u-m.

And like several of these folks, I don't have any comments. I have some questions.

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And like several of these folks, I don't have any comments. I have some questions.

I guess one comment, I think it would be good if you would address this oil and gas issue. Although it's not a part of the CCP, if you can explain to folks here what the status is of that piece of using the protocol and where else is it being used. Are there any mention of the use of volunteers.

Therefore we have required thousands of hours of work in that regard. ATV's are legal motor vehicles on public roads, on most public roads, in the state of Montana. And I'm wondering how their use becomes -- if there's increasing use, you'll begin to see the CMR become an island. But it's a possibility that it could become an island because the BLM does manage for multiple uses, and it is possible that oil and gas development could come close to the CMR and affect the wildlife in the CMR.

So the point that I wanted to make is that the CMR is an absolute gem. It's a gem for Montana. It's a gem for the United States. And it's a gem world-wide in terms of prairie conservation.

And I hope that in your planning efforts you consider the impacts that other land management agencies and private landowners may make that would affect the resource down the line.

And tonight I have more of a question than I do a comment. And it could be that the question is answered later in the document and I just haven't gotten there yet.

My question involves the discussion and use of sentinel plants and monitoring. And the Council has some concerns about monitoring.
next several years, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and all federal agencies, are going to be facing extraordinary pressures from a budgetary standpoint. And I think you need to consider how you would use citizen volunteers to accomplish some of your work in the future, what kind of things the public could help you on, and to get more volunteer involvement on carrying out refuge programs. And I may have some more questions once you start answering these that have been given to you.

Thanks.

MIMI: Thanks, Jim. Randy?

MR. GRAY: My name is Randy Gray. That's with a G-r-a-y as opposed to -e-y.

I'm a retired lawyer from Great Falls here. Was former mayor of the Great Falls. Served several terms on the BLM RAC for North Central Montana. I'm currently a member of the National Advisory Board for American Prairie Foundation.

Tonight I'm wearing a hat on behalf of myself and my kids. I don't represent any of the previous mentioned affiliations. And maybe representing my as yet unborn grandchildren if I'm lucky.

I guess I commend the Agency for coming up with the process you've come up with, and certainly the Preferred Plan B.

I echo Mark Good's comments about the importance to note that the Agency, this Agency, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Refuge Service of the United States, the mission of that agency and those

refuges is to protect and enhance wildlife. And they're not conflicting with the problems that conflict the US Forest Service and BLM, which are multiple-use agencies. I think that's an important ground rule for the public to understand what's happening here.

I generally support the overarching concept of reintroducing prescriptive grazing, so long as it's coupled with prescriptive fire. And I think over time, that those two tools, used in conjunction, can mimic the process that occurred geologically and historically out there of the ungulate species of bison, a split hooved critter, in conjunction with fire, on that particular prairie landscape.

So over time, I think as cattle are managed with more prescriptive use and as fire is managed with more prescriptive use, those two tools can be a proxy for what natural conditions were out there.

And I mention that in particular because over time -- this plan will be in effect for 15 years -- but we have to look out beyond 15 years, whatever the plan might be now -- over time I would encourage the reintroduction of bison species. I certainly agree that the state Fish, Wildlife and Parks should be principal involved with that, probably should be even the agency reintroducing those.

But over time, over the next four or five generations, or excuse me, decades, I think there should be bison back on that landscape, and using ungulates and cattle right now in conjunction with fire can proximate -- can be the proxy for preparing that landscape for more bison being on that landscape.

I think the importance of this whole concept here, as I think the Agency has it right, I see the refuge in this case using cattle rather than cattle using the refuge. And I think that should be a motto that you should take a look at your future management with because I think you're on the right track doing that.

I do note, and I've not gone through with a fine-tooth comb, but I would sure like there to be some comment about aggressive weed management should be part of what's being looked at in the overall management plan for the next 15 years.

And on a personal note, I do note that this last, well, about ten days ago, my wife and I went out to the Slippery End for the third year in a row, slept in my camper in the back of our pickup, and listened to that wonderful elk bugling occurring all night long.

Over the course of my time with the American Prairie Foundation I have literally taken hundreds of visitors from this country and elsewhere to this landscape out there. And the gem that we have, the unbroken prairie that you are the heart of out there, is important for future generations of all Americans.

And I'm a little short so I'll hold onto this. Anyway, I just want to thank you for coming, and putting so much effort into this, because it is, as many others have said, a gem. So I want to say that I am for Alternative B because of the very title of this management area, which is wildlife refuge.

I do have a question. And you did kind of touch on it a bit earlier, but most of us think of wildlife as the game animals or birds. And I know that the refuge is way more than that.

So I am hoping, as you have said, that we also include other species, other non-game species, in particular the prairie dog areas.

I don't know how many of them are there now or how many then might be, but it would certainly contribute to the health of the wildlife refuge.

I also want to make a comment about the difference between cattle grazing and buffalo grazing. I'm not totally familiar with this on hand, but I have heard that buffalo do a whole lot more seeding of grass than cattle do, just because of their hoof shape, and also their activity. Cattle are very slow moving and buffalo can tear things up a bit, which seeds grass a lot easier.

So anyway, I just wanted you to know that I'm interested in both of those things.

Thank you.

MIMI: Anybody else? Okay. I'll turn it to Barron and Bill to respond to questions.
MR. CRAWFORD: We tag team these question and answers. I take the softball, and Bill takes the hard ones. So that’s the privilege the being manager.

Prescriptive grazing. Do not understand how it could impact permits need to know in advance.

That is something that we’re definitely aware of. And as part of this CCP process, we’re going to be developing kind of this umbrella document that introduces this broad concept for how we’re going to manage the landscape. And we actually get down to putting actions on the ground. We spell that out in what’s called a Habitat Management Plan. And right now under the ’86 EIS, we have 65 individual habitat management plans. And those management plans were developed in concert with the permittees that were grazing on those 65 habitat units. So basically the refuge sat down with those permittees and said, you know, the reductions that we feel we need to make in order to benefit wildlife, how can we fit this into your operation, or how can we accommodate you in your operation.

We will go through this same process provides once this CCP is finalized and we start developing those individual habitat management plans. We’ll sit down. We’ll look at the area — it won’t be 65 units. It will be something larger. So we’ll have multiple permittees that we’ll be working with. And we’ll basically say, you know, in this area, this is what we want to do. This is how we see using cattle as a management tool to accomplish that. How can you guys help us do that.

---

done quite a bit of bird work in Alaska, is very interested in birds, works with the Audubon group quite often. Is kind of formulating how she’s going to fulfill her new role. We did look at grassland bird species as being an important part of this plan.

A lot of the fire and grazing was developed to try to restore biological diversity, not only of the plants, but also the insects that rely upon those plants, and then they will also attract the various bird species.

You got a whole suite out there. You’ve got birds that prefer, you know, bare ground to birds that prefer very thick cover.

And so the idea is to try to create that gradient of habitat types across the refuge so you meet the needs of all the various bird species.

We’re also going to look at not only the breeding birds, but the migrant birds as well. That river corridor provides important habitat for a lot of migratory bird species. We don’t have a lot of information on that, so we’re going to spend quite a bit of time looking at those corridors and determining, you know, how important they are to birds moving up and down that river.

Management responsibility on the river, how it relates to riparian. Does the plan address impact on boat use.

MR. BERG: I told you. I could use a little forewarning.

This came up during our scoping meeting. And it’s one of the things we considered as part of this plan. We’re not quite to the stage where we can flat out say that there are impacts occurring from boat use on the river.

But we have seen that same increase that the one gentleman referred to in the last 15, 20 years. The boat size has increased significantly. The river is not any kind of a deterrent anymore to boat use. It used to be upper end of reservoir was kind of a delta, where it was shallow and things. Now with the jet boats that they have, it’s not a deterrent.

So what our plan is to do, and we’ll probably have to do a little bit better job of explaining this in the document, is not having the data to make that determination, not only from a use standpoint, but also the impacts it might have an wildlife.

We’re proposing in the future to adopt a monitoring system to see what kind of use we do have. We’ve done some preliminary work with cameras, trying to put those in strategic locations so we can identify not only the numbers of boats, but the size, and things like that.

We’ve heard a few complaints from hunters that hunt the river bottoms, camp on the river bottoms, those kinds of things, where these big jet boats will actually disturb game at times when they’re being hunted, that they notice. So it’s a use that we’re going to look into so — we’re just not there yet as far as documented impact so...

MR. CRAWFORD: Page 232 talks about boat use if you’re interested in the plan.

MR. BERG: I thought I’d go right on to the mineral withdrawal.
MR. CRAWFORD: Management of ATV's and then oil and gas.

MR. BERG: Currently on the refuge, ORV's are allowed on numbered routes only. And they have to be street legal. So it's no different than in the town of Great Falls here. And I assume that's a legitimate or similar law where if it's street legal, as a motorcycle would be, with a license plate, brake lights, I think some form of signal for left and right, and I think rearview mirror, those vehicles are also allowed on numbered routes, as are pickups, two-wheel drive and four-wheel drive, and so forth.

Fifteen years ago or so, we saw a tremendous amount of off-road use, not only from ATV's but pickups. Over the years we've been fairly aggressive at managing that kind of use. We enforce our off-road regulations pretty hard. And we think it's in check pretty good right now. We don't have any areas where ATV's or ORV's can be used anywhere off-road. It's all the numbered trail system.

The only exception to that is on the ice at Fort Peck Lake in the wintertime. We do allow snowmobiles and four-wheelers to travel anywhere on that lake surface, and most of it's related to ice fishing.

So even though we see an increase in number of ATV's that hunter's and recreationists use in the Breaks, most of it's replacing what they would have used in a pickup or, you know, in the past. So we haven't seen the impact from it like some of the other agencies have, you know, in the mountains, or, like, off-road use on BLM.

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The one thing we have seen is probably five years ago, the BLM actually draining federal minerals off the federal estate, the potential or the technology is there to where we could probably develop those same federal minerals off-site and not impact the refuge itself.

But getting back to Janelle's comment that the BLM is considering leasing federal minerals immediately adjacent to CMR an surrounding area, you know, that's a valid concern.

If you look at Phillips County, it's probably the hottest gas and natural gas field in Montana right now. Huge number of wells. It's not in the southern part of the county where it affects the refuges as much as it is in the north. But it could come that way. The one thing we have seen is probably five years ago, the BLM was proposing to lease several thousands acres in Garfield County. There's kind of a potential vein that runs northwest/southeast, kind of towards Hacksbee Point/Hell Creek to the southeast. And at that time, the BLM chose not to lease those potential minerals because of the proximity to the refuge, and some of the other resource values that are there, paleo, the Breaks habitat, things like that, so --

Once in a while we have an ability to influence those decisions, even know it doesn't directly affect the lands we manage. So I think that kind of hit where you are coming from.

MR. CRAWFORD: Do the shed antlers.

MR. BERG: Shed antlers. All right. I wasn't where you're coming from there, Jim, but --

MR. MCCOLLUM: I'm not an antler picker, but I know a lot of people who are.

MR. BERG: Yeah, It was our mistake not putting it in all the alternatives.

If you're familiar with refuges, they're more restrictive than other public lands. And part of the reason is because we've got a real definitive mission. There isn't anything that you can pick up on a refuge legally, whether it's a piece of driftwood, an antler, paleo, you know, dinosaur bone, or something like that.

On refuges, all those things are owned by the government. And it's not legally -- legal to pick those up, unless specifically authorized.

We treat antlers the same way. Why do we think antlers are important to the ecosystem out there? And I'm sure a lot of you have seen it, but it's one of those things that's hard to quantify, but you ever find an antler that's been on the ground for a year or two, pretty obvious what's going on with that antler. Critters are
chewing on it, whether it's mice or squirrels, or whatever. So we've kind of taken the position that that stuff cycles back through into the ecosystem, and it's good for it.

But the other, probably bigger reason we don't allow it, is the timing of the year when most of that activity occurs. Springtime, the animals are stressed already, coming out of the winter. You've got some calving going on or fawns being born, so it's something we don't allow, and don't plan to in the future.

Some refuges do. Some game management areas allow it, as we all know. But they time it so it doesn't impact, you know, the main purpose of the place.

MR. CRAWFORD: Bob, I'm going to put you on notice and I'm giving the microphone to you next, you're going to answer sentinel plant questions, so get your thinking cap on.

We had one other comment concerning proposed wilderness areas set by Congress, and how can we add and eliminate.

There's two types of wilderness on CMR. We have designated wilderness, which is the UL Bend, and that's designated by Congress passed a law that says this area will be set aside as wilderness and brought into the wilderness preservation system.

The remaining 15 areas on the refuge are called proposed wilderness areas. Okay. Proposed wilderness areas are those areas that have been identified by the Agency, in this case the Fish and Wildlife Service, that they meet the wilderness characteristics as outlined by the Wilderness Act.

We went ahead and we proposed them to our agency in Washington, D.C., our director said, yes, I concur these areas should be considered for adding into the wilderness preservation system.

It then went to the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary then said, yes, I concur these areas should be added into the wilderness preservation system.

And that's where they sit until Congress then acts on it by passing a law, bringing them into the wilderness system.

So during that time when they've been approved by our Agency and by the Secretary's office, they're to be evaluated every now and then. And what the Service has decided is we will evaluate those areas every 15 years when you do a CCP to make sure they're still meeting those wilderness characteristics.

So these areas that we're proposing to add, we'll have to go through that process again, and we'll send the recommendation to our director; our director will either say yes, I approve, or, no, I deny; if they say that they approve, it then goes to the Secretary's desk; the secretary will then say, yes, I agree or I disagree; if they agree, then they sit there as proposed wilderness waiting on Congress to take action.

The same process will be used if we decide to eliminate a proposed wilderness of the area. We'll send that recommendation to the director; the director will say yes, I agree, or I disagree; if they disagree, then it stays as proposed wilderness. If they agree,

And if you can restore those processes to the point they're doing well again, then other plants tend to follow.

And so we don't necessarily feel that range practices are appropriate in all cases for us. And we are working on this with a team of people that includes some range folks to publish our particular version of this indicator plant.

It is an old concept. Alda Leopold called them diagnosis plants, said every area has plants that are diagnostic. And that would be another good name for them. And this is a long topic so that's all I can say at the moment.

MR. CRAWFORD: I think we covered all the questions. I will turn it back to Mimi.

We'll be sticking around if folks want to come up and talk to us one-on-one.

You heard from Bob, our habitat biologist. We've got Randy Matchett in the back. He's our senior wildlife biologist. Dan Harold's next to him. He's a biologist out of Sand Creek. Matt deRosier is a station manager at Sand Creek. Nathan Hawkaluk is station manager at Jordan.

Who else is here? Joanne, in cognito. Joanne is a biologist in our Lewistown office. So quite a few folks here. Grab one of them if you've got questions.

And thanks again for everybody coming out.

MIMI: That's all I have, too.

(Meeting adjourned)
CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

BE IT KNOWN that I, Anne Perron, RPR, a duly appointed, qualified acting Court Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of Montana, do hereby attest as follows:

That I was duly authorized to and did report the public hearing of in Great Falls for the CM Russell Refuge CCP;

That the foregoing pages of this transcript constitute a true and accurate transcription of my stenotype notes of the comments of said meeting.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 19th day of October, 2010.

_______________________________
Anne Perron, RPR

Agamenoni & Frank
603 Strain Building
Great Falls, MT 59401
(406) 727-7272
PROCEEDINGS

I would like to welcome everybody here tonight. I
know it's bad planning on either our part or Pheasants
Forever. I am not sure who scheduled their meeting first.
We will say that we did and that they should have changed
their's, but I think everybody for coming here tonight and
missing the Pheasants Forever banquet.

I am going to do a real quick power-point
presentation—it will be about twenty minutes—and then I
will give it back to Minnie and she will go ahead and call
folks up to go ahead and give their public comments.

I am going to give you a little bit of an overview
of the CCP process, where we started, where we are now,
and where we go from here, so we basically started in
January of 2007. We started holding public scoping meetings
at that time, and we held fourteen of those meetings and we
collected over 24,000 public comments.

We have had numerous meetings with our
cooperators, and our cooperators are the U.S. Army Corp of
Engineers, the Bureau of Land Management, Department of
Natural Resources and Conservation, the six counties, county
commissioners, that surround the refuge, the Missouri River
Conservation Districts, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks,
so this is kind of the time line of where we started and
where we are at, and so basically, you know, we are right
here with the release of the Draft.

MS. MATHEE: Thank you for coming this evening.
everybody. Can we get started?

This is our first public meeting of--of this week.
We were up here two weeks ago, had--had three big days for
that segment, have three more.

The purpose of the meeting is really for the Fish
& Wildlife Service to collect your comments on the Draft
CCP, so the way it's going to work is that I will turn the
floor over to Barron who will give a brief presentation
about the CCP and CMR, and then there is an opportunity for
you to comment.

There was a list in the back where a number of you
signed up. I will be calling you who are on that sign-up
sheet, invite folks to come up here and--and offer their
comments. I will tell you more about that after Barron's
presentation, so let me just introduce the folks that will
be sitting on this panel: Barron Crawford, who is the
project leader, his deputy, Bill Berg, and then Laurie
Shannon is the CCP planning team leader.

Could we have the lights.

(A discussion was then had off the record.)

MR. CRAWFORD: Well, since everybody decided to sit
in the back I hope you will use this microphone. I took a
shower this morning so I don't have to worry.
Final CCP and EIS, Charles M. Russell and UL Bend National Wildlife Refuges, Montana

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1 After this we come to the Final and then the
2 record of the decision, so we have been doing this for now
3 the past three years, and some people may be wondering
4 well, why are you spending so much time on this, and there
5 is several reasons, the first being, is that it's mandated
6 by Congress.
7 Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge
8 System Improvement Act in 1997 and everything that's in
9 there. They said all refuges will have a comprehensive
10 conservation plan by 2012, then, so there is about 548
11 refuges and there are several of them that are in the same
12 boat as ours—trying to finish all these plans by the
13 deadline.
14 The other key part of the CCP is that it provides
15 management direction and guidance based upon refuge purposes
16 and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. At
17 managers come and go, as we do, this basically provides a
18 road map for incoming new managers. That's in there to say,
19 okay, this is what the public has provided as far as
20 comments into this planning process, and so they basically
21 have a road map outlined for them.
22 It outlines the vision, statement, goals,
23 objectives, and strategies for future management, and,
24 again, this plan covers a fifteen-year time period, and it's
25 accompanied by some type of additional document, either

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1 environmental assessment or environmental impact statement,
2 and due to the complexity of this unit that we are dealing
3 with here on the CMR we went ahead and did an EIS, and then
4 again this provides that long-term guidance, again, fifteen-
5 year plan.
6 It doesn't mean that you have to wait fifteen
7 years to go back and revisit. You can, if something new
8 changes, go back, revisit the document and go through this
9 process again, so this is just another draft that kind of
10 shows how the CCP process works, and, again, we are down
11 here at the bottom, the public comments.
12 The next phase, moving on up, to preparing the
13 Final. That is not to say that if we don't receive a bunch
14 of comments on something that we might have overlooked that
15 we can't go back to Step No. 4 here and revisit it.
16 So basically we had four alternatives, and the
17 Alternative A, which is the no-action alternative, and this
18 is basically keep doing what we have been doing since 1986
19 when our last EIS was prepared with some minor
20 modifications, but basically we continued to manage the
21 refuge under the sixty-five established habitat units. We
22 gradually moved toward prescriptive grazing as we are doing
23 now. If a ranch sells to a non-family member we would take
24 that habitat unit and roll it into the prescriptive grazing
25 program.

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1 We managed big game under the target level of the
2 1990 BWS which is 2.5 elk per square mile and ten mule deer
3 per square mile. We maintain access on approximately 679
4 miles of roads that are out of there, and we have continued
5 protection of 135,000 acres of proposed wilderness, so then
6 we get into our action alternatives, and we have three of
7 these, and the first one is what we kind of coin the
8 wildlife-habitat emphasis alternative, and this is basically
9 where you are managing the landscape in cooperation with our
10 partners for the abundance and diversity of wildlife
11 population using both natural and ecological processes, and
12 some people—they say what's that mean, and the free-
13 ecological processes that kind of shape the Missouri Breaks
14 are fire, grazing, and flooding, so these are what we talk
15 about in natural processes.
16 Then we talk about synthetic methods and there we
17 are referring to fire, tree planting—that sort of stuff.
18 We continue to allow wildlife plan and public uses. Those
19 are hunting and fishing, wildlife photography, wildlife
20 observation, environmental education, and interpretation, and
21 we limit economic uses when they compete for habitat
22 resources.
23 In the back we got some maps and if you want to
24 spend some time afterwards talking to the staff we will be
25 here, but they basically show what the refuge might look

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1 like under the various alternatives, and here where we have
2 the higher color that's where we hope to expand
3 wilderness. The red we will be preparing to close roads, so
4 that's the west half of the refuge, and this is the east
5 half of the refuge.
6 Quite a few wilderness expansions, quite a few
7 road closures, under Alternative B, so, so, so, so we
8 continue to act, we manage the wildlife habitats to create,
9 predict, and track the wildlife food and cover, and that's
10 using those various ecological processes or synthetic
11 methods.
12 We are getting really aggressive in moving towards
12 prescriptive grazing so we want to prescriptively graze
14 about fifty to seventy-five percent of the refuge within
15 four to seven years, so right now we are prescriptively
16 grazing about thirty-five percent.
17 We do an aggressive restoration on the river
18 bottoms. We work with Fish, Wildlife & Parks. We provide
19 quality hunting opportunities and habitats for non-game.
20 We closed about 106 miles of roads, and we expand
21 wilderness, promote wilderness, about 25,000 acres in six
22 units, and in Alternative C we find this is another public-
23 use and economic alternative, and again it's manage the
24 landscape with our partners to emphasize maximum compatible
25 wildlife plans and public uses, hunting and fishing, wildlife
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1. photography, observation, da, da, da, and economic uses
2. while we protect wildlife population and habitat and we
3. minimize damage impacts to these habitats while using a
4. variety of management tools to enhance diversity, public and
5. economic opportunity, so we would basically be expanding
6. public and economic--public and economic opportunities as
7. long as they didn't cause serious damage to the habitat out
8. there, and this is what a map would look like.
9. There is no proposed expansion of wilderness.
10. There is no proposed closing of roads. There is proposed
11. elimination of a couple of wilderness areas, and the main
12. points to this are to maintain balanced numbers of big game
13. and livestock, try to strike that balance, expand and
14. maximize hunting opportunities, improved access to boat
15. ramps, and then eliminate four proposed wilderness areas for
16. about 35,000 acres, and then we move to Alternative D, which
17. this is our proposed action.
18. This is what we call the natural processes or the
19. ecological processes, and, again, we use those ecological
20. processes in active management to restore and/or maintain
21. the biodiversity, biointegrity, and environmental health,
22. and those three things came right out of the Improvement Act
23. as to what we are supposed to be doing on a national
24. wildlife refuge, so once those natural processes are
25. restored we use kind of a passive management approach.

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1. We still provide for quality brought in the public
2. uses and we limit those economic uses when they are
3. injurious to the ecological processes, so basically when
4. they are causing harm to the plants or the other habitats
5. that are out there, and then in this map we try to strike a
6. balance.
7. We expand some proposed wilderness areas, we
8. eliminate some others, we close a few roads, so the key
9. components to this one we are basically using fire plus wild
10. ungulate herbivory, that's basically grazing by elk, deer,
11. and by prescriptive livestock grazing on fifty to seventy-
12. five percent of the refuge the same as Alternative B but
13. with a move to prescriptive grazing at a slower pace. We
14. wanted to achieve that in about a three-year period.
15. We have worked with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, again,
16. to maintain the health and diversity of all species. We
17. close about twenty-three miles of roads and we expand six
18. wilderness areas for a total of 18,000 acres but we
19. eliminate three for a loss of 26,000, so it's, Mimi said, we
20. did three meetings three weeks ago and kind of hot button
21. topics that we heard at those meetings were prescriptive
22. grazing, what is it, and a short answer is you basically use
23. livestock in order to meet a very specific wildlife and/or
24. habitat objective.
25. One example is that is say you wanted to increase

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1. the nesting area for mountain plovers. Mountain plovers
2. like very, very short, short grass. They--they love to nest
3. in prairie dog towns, and so we might go into an area that
4. has a prairie dog town and we might go in there and use
5. livestock, graze it heavily, to hope to get the prairie dogs
6. to expand and then create more nesting habitat for mountain
7. plovers.
8. Another example is an area where we have a high-
9. yield building where we are unable to use prescriptive fire
10. due to the risk of it leaving the refuge or causing some
11. other damage, let's say, to sage grouse habitat. We might
12. use livestock to go in there and graze that area and reduce
13. the wildfire risk while still protecting that habitat for
14. sage grouse.
15. Prescriptive fire--how will it be used? We spent
16. the past several years working with several fire ecologists
17. and range ecologists from across the country, they mapping
18. the historic fire frequency of the refuge, and using that
19. data that we collected to go into those areas and try to
20. restore that historic fire occurrence.
21. There are several areas that based upon that fire
22. mapping we saw that fire should have been there like
23. every seven or fourteen years and some places haven't seen
24. fire well over sixty years and so we used prescriptive fire
25. where you go in there and you intentionally put fire on the

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1. ground under ideal conditions, basically under a condition
2. where you write a plan. It's just like a prescription you
3. get from your doctor, and, again, it's to achieve a very
4. specific objective.
5. Wilderness--again, we are mandated under the
6. Improvement Act to look at our proposed wilderness areas and
7. evaluate those every time we do a CCP so it is kind of
8. subjective. We basically go in there and look and make sure
9. our areas are still being the wilderness characteristics
10. which they were set aside for.
11. We are using this period to solicit comments from
12. folks to see, you know, did we make the right calls in some
13. of those areas. Are there some things that we overlooked
14. that we need to go back and reconsider? The same thing with
15. the roads. We have to look at the roads out on the refuge
16. and determine whether they are impacting our ability to meet
17. our wildlife and/or habitat or public-use objectives.
18. We are seeing several comments concerning county
19. roads or-or county-petitioned roads and what we have chosen
20. to do is to not address the petition issue as part of the
21. CCP. It's a bigger issue that is really outside the scope
22. of the CCP and needs to be addressed separately and so as we
23. start developing our transportation plan, which will be done
24. after this is signed off, that's where we will look and see
25. if there is any issues, and it's basically going to come
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down to a legal interpretation as to does this road meet all
the requirements to be a county-petitioned road and, if so,
than move on from there.

We did receive several comments both during public
stopping and throughout concerning bison. If anybody has
been reading any of the local newspapers everybody knows
that bison is a hot topic. I will say it as I have said for
the seventeen other meetings so far we are not—not
proposing to reintroduce bison. We do have in the plan that
if Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks puts forth a proposal
to reintroduce a free-ranging bison herd somewhere around
the refuge we will work cooperatively with them to see what
role the Fish and Wildlife Service may play for those animals
being on the refuge, but as far as the Service is concerned
we are not going to take the lead and we are not going to be
bringing bison in.

So we are here tonight to hear from you. Mimi
covered a little bit. We ask that you address items
specifically in our Plan. You know, we like very detailed
comments. To sit there and say I am opposed to expanding
wildlife that really doesn't help us. If you say I am not
opposed to expanding wildlife into Antelope Creek because
da, da, da, da, da, that is very specific and that helps us
considerably.

There are numerous ways for you to provide your
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comments to us. One is by giving your public statement
today. Another one is that you were handed a comments sheet
as you came through the door and you can write your comment
on that and leave it at the back table as you have. You
can send written comments to the address that's in our
planning update, or you can send those to the E-mail
address.

This is not a public contest. Okay? If we get
10,000 comments to two comments the 10,000 comments don't
win, so we treat all comments equally. There is no one from
another that weighs more heavily than others, so again,
you are all treated equally, and we have a sixty-day
comment period that ends on November 16th.

We have received several requests for extending
that. I have not taken action on that. Several requests
have requested a sixty-day extension. I can almost
guarantee you there will not be a sixty-day extension, so we
are asking folks to please go ahead and get your comments in
in a timely manner.

That's all I got–it over to Mimi.

MS. MATHER: Okay. It's your turn to take the
mike. Let me show you quickly how this will run, the later
part of the meeting, I have a list of everyone who's
tapped up so far and I will call the names off the list. I
will call who is next and who is on deck so you can be

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ready. We would like you to come up here and speak into the
mike.

We are--do have a court reporter so if you can
state your name so he can get that for the record that would
be great.

Some people have said I just have a question.
That's fine. If you just want to come up and ask one
question please we encourage you to do it.

Bill, Ben, and Laure will be up here taking
notes so after all the comments today we will take a few
minutes to respond to those questions and the comments that
they heard.

If you are inspired by somebody else's comment and
your name is not on the list go ahead and sign it in the
back or I will just ask if when we are to the bottom of the
list if anybody else has any comments.

The other thing is we are limiting you to three
minutes and we are going to be strict about that so Brett--
Brett will be the timekeeper over here and if you are--when
there is only one minute left he will let you know. We will
let you know when there are twenty seconds left and when
time's up, and then we ask you at that time to sit back
down.

If you have a letter or something like that feel
free to read a portion of it. If you can't get through in

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three minutes please stick it in our comments box.

So with that first on our list is Bob Pink with
John Jensen on deck.

MR. PINK: I will pass for now.

MS. MATHER: Okay. Bob is going to pass so John
Jensen with Carl on deck.

MR. JENSEN: Thank you very much for your time and
all these public hearings. They are a very informative
process.

My name is John Jensen. I am a Fergus County
Commissioner.

Some very specific comments related to the Draft
EIS that we've been reviewing in our office.

Scientific data. We feel that the Plan lacks some
significant scientific data. There is no--there cannot be
many decisions made in looking forward.

Regarding the water resources on XVII, Page XVII,
the wildlife population both on and off the refuge are affected
by water quality and access to water. How many water
sources off the refuge have you studied and so where is the
data?

Our data shows that you have approximately twenty
percent of the habitat area for Hunting Districts 416 and
417.

Again, you blame livestock grazing for degradation
I. Wildlife hold on the CMA and off.

On Page 85, under Climate Change, we want—we want to know if all the climate resource objectives came from one publisher and the publisher's name was Karl, et al, 2009.

Last but not least. Roads. The big issue with roads in this Plan is the fact you are ignoring the legalistic permitted county roads in this document and the fact that there is very little mention of $14,071 roads. Also, on Page 10, we request that you remove the red mark at the river's edge on Road 201. As we understand, that was a printing error. We want to make sure that gets removed.

Okay. I know Barron in his comments, in his opening comments, stated that roads would be part of the transportation plan. We feel that this is not strong enough. There needs to be mention of who do we petition--county roads as well as 847 or 174 recognized in this CCR.

In closing, we will present all of our aforementioned topics along with some additional comments in writing. We oppose this Plan as it lacks scientific data and the apparent driving factor is not managing for multiple uses including livestock grazing as well as access through duly-mentioned county roads.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr. Mather. Thanks, John. Carl. Mark Good on...
1. One of my concerns was the Service reintroducing
2. bison. The Service has no intention of restoring bison on
3. the refuge either free-range grazing or fenced herding, but
4. then we have a document dated October 28th of 2007 from the
5. Department of Interior that is just a couple quick lines out
6. of there—
7. MS. MATHER Time is up.
8. MR. SELSTAD: What’s that?
9. MS. MATHER Time is up.
10. MR. SELSTAD: Is it really? I guess we will—
11. will get all these comments in a written form to you.
12. (A discussion was then had off the record.)
13. MS. MATHER: Mark Good and Laurie on desk.
14. MR. GOOD: Hi. I thank you for the opportunity to
15. make comments.
16. Let me start by saying I—I think there are little
17. things that you go over here and I have sat in on some of
18. the other meetings. I think there is some confusion about
19. how the national-wildlife-refuge lands are managed typically
20. from lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the
21. Forest Service and maybe at the end you could clarify that,
22. but if you could look at a minor thing, the guiding
23. principle of a refuge is enhancement and protection of
24. wildlife and all other uses are secondary.
25. I know some people who don’t like that. They wish

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1. the refuge could maybe return to the way it was in the
2. 1970’s, but I don’t— I don’t think that’s going to happen,
3. and—and the reason they have got refuge national wildlife
4. refuges are popular. They are popular with the American
5. people and I think they are popular with— with Montanans, so
6. let me also say a word about wilderness.
7. I think Montana’s high plains are too often cast
8. in kind of negative terms, as sort of boring and bland and
9. sort of empty, but I think anyone who has spent some time on
10. the refuge knows the refuge isn’t boring and would mention
11. the fact it’s quite the reverse, and I know with the dam
12. it’s maybe a different kind of landscape than maybe Lewis
13. and Clark saw but it’s still a landscape that’s vast and
14. impressive.
15. I think with the restoration of wildlife which has
16. occurred over the years there isn’t anything like it in the
17. eastern half of the United States. It’s something we ought
18. to be proud of.
19. I just want to make the point that I think
20. designating wilderness within the refuge reinforces that
21. mission, mission of the refuge, by providing large blocks of
22. undisturbed and quality habitat. It also provides security
23. for big game and helps to keep wildlife within the refuge.
24. I know that disturbs some of the adjoining landowners.
25. All of the proposed areas are relatively small and

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1. I know some are hard to get to because of access issues with
2. some of the adjoining landowners, but the three proposals
3. that you are proposing to eliminate all fit the criteria
4. that they were there in the first place or designated or
5. suggested in the proposal in the first place in terms of
6. size, primitive character, activities is negligible, and
7. they provide a sense of solitude. They are all under-
8. represented in the Natural Wilderness Preservation System,
9. so I guess I would like to ask that you reconsider
10. eliminating East and West Benchamp, what I wrote down,
11. probably not as dramatic as what some people think of in
12. terms of a wildlife refuge. It’s probably grazing. Take
13. the Hell Creek access. There isn’t any access right now.
14. There may be in the future.
15. The point is that that land still—still maintains
16. its wilderness character, it hasn’t changed, and I would
17. hope to keep—keep that as recommended.
18. Thanks.
19. MS. MATHER: Thank you, Mark.
20. Laurie with Jannelle on deck.
21. MS. LORRER HI. My name is Laurie Lorrier. I have
22. a couple of questions regarding the prescribed burns that
23. are recommended in I think Alternative B.
24. First how does this process improve the wildlife
25. habitat and what would be the optimum result of--of using

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1. this process, and I am not sure if it’s in conjunction with
2. the prescriptive grazing or prescriptive burns itself.
3. Second, what would be the impact of—of the
4. prescribed burns on grazing, on recreation, and then also
5. what would be the impact on invasive weeds, and then,
6. finally, have these proposed burns techniques and the
7. grazing been used successfully in— in other wildlife-
8. management areas?
9. So those are my concerns and questions. Thank
10. you.
11. MS. MATHER: Thank you, Laurie.
13. MS. HOLLAND: I am Janelle Holdren with the
14. Wilderness Society out of Bozeman and I am going to echo
15. things that Mark Good said.
16. I think it’s really important that the smaller
17. proposals in this area are kept as proposals in this area.
18. A couple of years ago I went on a trip with some other folks
19. who are here in this room to look at the Burnt Lodge
20. Wilderness Study Area and some other proposals in this area
21. that adjoins the CMR, and all of us who were on that trip
22. hiked into that area and really found that it has a lot of
23. solitude.
24. It provided all the wilderness character that we
25. looked for, and I noticed, I think, in Alternative C it's
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1 recommended for removal, so I wanted to make sure that that
2 rejections the proposal, in this as well as East and West
3 Bearcamp Creek. I know there is a road dividing those two
4 proposals in this area but smaller areas provide people with
5 more opportunities to get out into those areas because
6 there is some access to those wilderness areas and I think
7 those should be kept within the Plan. 8
8 We will, of course, be providing a lot more
9 detailed comments in written form but that’s what I have to
10 say.  
11 MS. MATHER: Thank you, Inezelle.
12 Roger Lee Eersion on deck.
13 MR. LOHRER: Thanks for the opportunity to speak
14 here.
15 I recently read a report, a study, I think it was
16 called, "Banking On Nature," talking about the amount of
17 money that the various refuges raise for the local economy,
18 and, if I read the report right, it said that the CMR brings
19 in $14,000,000 annually by visitors, many of them out-of
20 state visitors, and I think that this should be emphasized
21 in your decision on what you do to preserve the unique
22 qualities of the CMR.
23 I am a fairly recent person living here for just a
24 few years but I am amazed at what a fantastic place this is
25 and I just think that everything you can do to keep it at

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1 least as pristine as it is now or improve it by continuing
2 to consider those certain wilderness areas to be included 1
3 think it’s just going to benefit everybody in the community
4 in the long run.
5 Thank you.
6 MS. MATHER: Thank you, Roger.
7 MS. STUHAN: Could you repeat your name for--
8 MR. LOHRER: Roger Lohner, L-o-h-n-e-r.
9 MS. MATHER: Thank you, Roger.
10 Lee Eersion. Dave Snyder on deck.
11 MR. EVerson: Thank you. My name is Lee Eersion.
12 I am a Petroleum County Commissioner.
13 I feel like I am going to be a voice in the
14 wilderness. I am opposed to any more wilderness and I have
15 several reasons. For one thing, I don’t understand what
16 advantage to any of these areas wilderness is going to be
17 the way you are going to manage it anyway. You are not
18 going to allow any roads to be built. You are not going to
19 allow any off-road driving. I don’t understand what
20 advantage it will be to the Service to have a declared
21 wilderness.
22 Also as far as the country is concerned if it’s a
23 wilderness area and a wildfire starts and that wildfire
24 happens to start in a real explosive fire situation if
25 we can get in there and put that fire out before it gets too

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1 big. we can control it.
2 We have had several examples of fires that have
3 started on the CMR and have gotten so big that they were
4 uncontrolled. The adjacent landowners are the ones who
5 really suffer the brunt of having one of these big
6 wildfires.
7 Road closing. Road 315 is proposed for closure in
8 all but Alternative C. On your map it shows this road has
9 some of the most spectacular views of any of the roads on
10 the CMR. Who is going to be able to travel that road if
11 it's closed and see that view?
12 I feel that wilderness is only for a select few
13 and those that wish to view some of the CMR without having
14 to hike are left out. For example, what about the
15 handicapped people? How are they going to see some of
16 these?
17 The CMR is spectacular, there is no way of getting
18 around it, and I would like to be able to see this
19 it and not just a select few.
20 Thank you.
21 MS. MATHER: Thank you, Lee.
22 Dave Snyder, Joe Eckhardt on deck.
23 MR. SNYDER: I am Dave Snyder. I have a question
24 or two and a quick comment.
25 Forty-three years ago I began to view this

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1 country. My poor wife feels so sorry for me.
2 I spend a lot of time down there, a lot more time
3 down off the CMR and the same ground, then I do at home
4 probably but you see a lot of country.
5 It looks like we have to choose an alternative.
6 We are looking at four different alternatives, A through D.
7 One comment I have got is Alternative A is the one I like
8 out of all of them. I have heard that you are kind of
9 swaying toward Alternative D. I don’t know if that’s true
10 or not.
11 If that is true one of the concerns that I have
12 about Alternative D on my sheet here, Page 10, it says,
13 Predator control with the U.S. Department of Agriculture
14 would be eliminated and predators would be managed to
15 benefit the ecological integrity of the refuge. Limited
16 hunting for mountain lion or other furbearers or small
17 predators would be considered only after monitoring verified
18 that population levels could be sustained.
19 That bothers me a little bit. Limited mountain
20 lion hunting and--and predator control with the U.S.
21 Department of Agriculture would be eliminated.
22 In the last ten years it’s hard to find mule deer
23 populations, bird populations, and elk numbers are pretty
24 good, but predator control—that—that—that worries me the
25 most.
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That's my comments, and I would really like to see some more predator control and more mountain lion hunting opportunities.


MR. ECKHARDT. My name is Joe Eckhardt and I appreciate this opportunity to speak tonight.

I would like to submit that I am deeply concerned with regard to the refuge using the phraseology ecologically and in doing so not considering the economic impact of that management mechanism to the independent private businesses, primarily livestock producers, who would be likewise injured by the same events of drought or whatever event is going to cause this ecological injury to the CMR, is probably very likely to be sustained on neighboring private land, and the--the reason for my concern over this is that by nature of grazing domestic livestock is rather inconvenient if not economically unfeasible for that producer to transport those livestock over however many miles it might take to get to someplace that wasn't ecologically injured by whatever the event is and I just think that there can be harmony in using good stewardship practices and in recognizing--I would submit that I recognize that the limitation of domestic grazing is by far the most efficient management tool available but it's also--

its use has deeper repercussions to the viability of this local economy which has been sustained for decades by the local livestock producers.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER. Thank you, Joe.

Kirk. Tim Faber on dock.

MR. DUNGBACH. Hello. My name is Kirk Dungbach. I am a local rancher out at Roy.

A discussion was then had off the record.

I would like to say that I believe in the ecological value of conservation grazing and I believe that the CMR does also, and I--and I think that's shown by what they try to do with grazing, but I would like to suggest that for the CMR's benefit from this type of grazing the rancher must also, and the rancher must clearly not support prescriptive grazing, and my question to you guys is why not come up with the range help that supports your goal and then help the rancher meet that and let the rancher have some stability.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER. Thank you.

Tim Faber and Mary Friez on dock.

MR. FABER. I am Tim Faber. I am an Eastern Montana native. I just spent a little bit of time in the

1 Susquehanna Wilderness. I have done a lot of observations there, one in particular the regeneration from the 1988 Canyon Creek Fire. It's a changed environment. It's--it's a really interesting case study--how the landscape has regenerated and the wildlife population has flourished because of it, but I am always glad to get get to home to Eastern Montana for some reason--I guess the beauty of the landscape, the variety of wildlife species. Maybe--maybe Wallace Stegner here can best sum it up as--as he remembers the Great Plains.

Across the empty valleys poaches the pushing and shouldering wind, a thing you tighten into as a treat tightens into fast water. It is a gassy, clean, exciting wind, with the smell of distance in it.

It blows yellow-headed blackbirds and hawks and prairie sparrows around the air and rattles the short tails of meadow larks on fence posts. In collaboration with the light, it makes lovely and changeful what might otherwise be characterless.

It is a long way from characterless; overpowering would be a better word. For over the segmented circle of earth is denoted the biggest sky anywhere.

There is no haze, neither the woolly gray of humid countries nor the blue atmosphere of the mountain West. Across the immense sky move navies of carmine, fair-weather clouds, their bottoms even as if they had scraped themselves flat against the flat earth.

The drama of this landscape is in the sky, pouring with light and always moving. The earth is passive. And yet the beauty I am struck by, both as present fact and as revived memory, is a fusion: this sky would not be so spectacular without this earth to change and glow and darken under it.

Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a country that in its good moments was more beautiful.

But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.

I guess the point I need--need to make here quickly is that we need to protect this landscape. We need to protect the diversity of animals and wildlife species.

It's a changing world out there--climate change, change in economics, change in the use of our land, and I am concerned about the use of our land and how it affects our wildlife species, and I think the CMR has done a good job of managing, in particular, wilderness study areas which are managed as de facto wilderness, and I would like to see that continued management.

That's preservation of our landscape and our...
I will be echoing some of what Tim Faber just said in that not this summer, but the previous summer I had the good fortune to be a group who went to the Burnt Lodge Wilderness area, the wilderness study area, and we needed a good guide to get us there. We had Dennis Long who worked for the BLM for many years, and it is an example to me of so much of what a wilderness area should be.

If a wilderness area is supposed to be natural and have relatively little human presence it qualifies. It has unconfined recreational activities, possibilities like camping and hiking. It provides solitude.

The group that we were with walked its gentle slope overlooking this marvelous valley, creek through it, that ran down to the Ferris Peak Reservoir. We saw forty bighorn sheep there. It was an awesome sight.

It does deserve its designation as as a wilderness area.

On the way there we passed some historically significant sites. I don’t know that there are any there on.

Clint Loomis with Kit Fischer on deck.

MS. LOOMIS: Thank you. Appreciate the opportunity to talk. I need to say up front, I am for maintaining the wilderness areas, and the diversity of the species is extremely important. I don’t know who else is going to talk for the species if we don’t have some kind of voice out there.

I also agree that this economy in here is tied to agriculture and to the rancher and the polarized question that’s happened on the part of the Friends of the Missouri Breaks, the polarized question that happened between those for or those against, if we can find a way to merge some--some ideas that were made by a rancher to try and bring together best practices.

I think the CMA is just as an amazing piece of land and it’s been managed extremely well. The question that I would like answered is, is stretching as far as being able to get out there and monitor roads and access and who becomes in a new road and where it goes.

If it requires closing roads to do a better job of managing then I think we need to close those roads. If they can be managed and people kept, as--as--as this individual said, you know, so people can see the beauty of the land that’s one thing, but if it’s not manageable then I suggest that we back off to what is possible to control, as far as

the Burnt Lodge Wilderness Study Area but there are some on the way, and there are definitely prairie-dog villages on the way back so if I don’t know the rest of the wildlife that’s there but it is certainly a valuable area as a wilderness, and I think it should be preserved.

I have another question that goes with that in that--prairie dogs that are there in that area. As I understand it, part of the mission of the refuge or a refuge is to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife. Generally it seems that more attention is given to game species than non-game species such as prairie dogs.

I know for some prairie dogs--for some prairie dogs are just considered varmints but well over a hundred species are associated with black-tailed prairie-dog habitat, including four species, their original concerns, such as the burrowing owl, the swift fox, the ferruginous hawk, and mountain plover.

My question to you is with the increased threat of this botanic plagues that is wiping out entire towns how are you planning to manage the contained existence of prairie dogs, plagues, and plague control?

Again, thank you.

I think the wilderness should be preserved--all of it.

MS. MATHER: Thank you, Mary.
It can be understood why these are being discussed, one, because of the road issue, and the other because of private land holdings. I think it's important to note that there are other established wilderness areas in the State that have these same characteristics.

For example, the Great Burn Wilderness I know has private land holdings. Also, you know, our biggest concern is the general public's support at the same time is for what Fish & Wildlife Service is planning to do with the Prescriptive Grazing. We see this as an excellent way to meet wildlife habitat and management goals.

Through attrition and retirement of grazing leases on the refuge it's clear that decreases in grazing will happen. Grazing is secondary use. Wildlife do come first on this refuge and we need to closely monitor those populations.

I had a question that I would like clarified. Talking to sportsmen's groups in terms of how buck-gee ratios have been where are they exactly and were they—what are the proposed changes, especially in the preferred alternative? Also how would sage-grouse existing, the impending listing of sage grouse, impact future grazing on the refuge, the land adjacent to the refuge, and how would this relate to grazing?

Thank you.

livestock grazing. We manage wildlife and wildlife habitats. One of the questions is what's the difference between the National Wildlife Refuge System managed under the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service compared to the BLM and the Forest Service.

It's really simple. We are the only federal agency that is mandated to manage only for Fish & Wildlife and their habitats. Okay? The BLM has what's called a multiple-use mandate so they are to strike a balance between providing habitat for wildlife, providing economic uses such as logging, grazing, mineral extraction, public uses such as hunting and fishing and off-road activities, and so on and so on.

Our only mission is fish, wildlife, and wildlife habitats so therefore we hire mostly wildlife biologists, a few ecologists, but the vast majority of us that are in this field have a degree in wildlife management, wildlife biology.

There are some folks that have range degrees. I have a couple on staff. Biology degrees, zoology degrees, but those are—it's mostly our background and mostly what we focus. The sentinel plant concept is not new. If you go back through the literature you will find stuff that talks about indicator plants, or what's another term, Bobs?
Climate change was brought up. There are things that are changing fast out there. We have no control over that. Our goal is to have wildlife and plants as healthy as possible so that they are resilient to these changes. We have no control over that. Hopefully, this is a short-term and, when I say short-term, you know, I am thinking a century, but we can see the trend reversing and hopefully we will have those plants in a better state that they will be able to come through this and then as conditions change, we can adapt and continue.

Man, I really wish my fire-management officer was here. I look myself for giving him leave this week. We had some great questions on prescribed fire. How are they going to improve wildlife habitat? The impact of prescribed fire on grazing and recreation and the impact on invasives. We have had prescribed fire and grazing have been used in other areas.

Do you want to answer some of those, Bob, or do you want me?

MR. SKINNER: I can do a little bit.

MR. CRAWFORD: Okay.

MR. SKINNER: I don't think I can think of all those but from the history studies we have come to learn that fire was more frequent and less intense in the past. That would allow the seeds to germinate and that means that it burned frequently.

come through and pick the ice-cream plants, okay, so as folks came in the room tonight they went to the back table. How many people automatically went to the brownies? Okay. I am a selective grazer. I love brownies so I automatically went to the brownies.

Now, if you had four different kinds of brownies, there would probably be one of each. Okay?

Now, that doesn't mean that I am also not going to eat the cookies but I am going to focus on the brownies because those are my favorite.

That's what these animals do as well. They go out there and they focus on their favorite foods first. When you get the fire to come through there it makes everything brown, brown grazing. It comes with everything on equal footing, and so the grazers eat everything equally, and so it gives all three that I call ice-cream plants a chance to actually grow, so the two actually do work in combination.

What we are looking at is if we do a prescribed burn, we are actually hoping to attract grazers to that area, and there have been several studies that have demonstrated that, and what Bob was talking about, what we are looking to hopefully create on the refuge, is what's called patch burning, and so you go out and you set up this rotation where you are burning these patches and therefore you are moving the grazers to these different burn patches, and they are then grazing less frequently on the unburned areas.

It's been demonstrated mostly in tall grass, native plants to respond they will clip out the more invasive plants.

Now, smooth brome, as everybody knows, is highly invasive and if it does get established it is very hard to control so it is something we have to take into consideration when developing these burn plans.

I think I touched on all of those. I think the next ones are for you, Randy.

(A discussion was then had off the record.)

I will let Randy talk about--where is he--there he is. I will let Randy talk about blairs and plague. And how he is going to manage for that.

MR. MATCHETT: On the prairie dog and--and plague thing I have actually been working on that for the last
twenty years and have learned quite a bit how it does work.
1. One of the species on the top of our list that's dependent
2. on prairie dogs is what's driven a lot of that and that's
3. been the black-footed ferret
4. Plague is a real tough biological issue to deal
5. with. Right now they have only two ways to to work with it
6. or the main way to work with it is applying the insecticide
7. that reduces flea populations, flea...for it, so
8. there is a lot of work actually nationwide trying to--
9. learn how to manage and live with plague for recovery of the
10. black-footed ferret, so I am not sure where the lady is that
11. talked about prairie dogs and plague but yes, it is being
12. worked on diligently but it's a real tough nut to crack.
13. (A discussion was then had off the record)
14. The male doe buck-to-doe ratio under Alternative
15. A is current management. That means twenty mature bucks
16. per hundred does where those have been the last ten years or
17. so. That's what prompted the refuge having a short three-
18. week season in an effort to try to improve those buck-
19. doe ratios were.
20. Under Alternative B I think we had--under the
21. definition of a mature buck it is sub set of adult bucks
22. which are bucks that have at least four points on one end.
23. Alternative B called and named thirty-five, forty adult
24. bucks and adult bucks are all bucks older than yearlings.

way, so that will be the challenge we face with these
1. individual habitat plans--to sit down and work something up.
2. It's not going to be the same as it is today where
3. the permits are the same area year in, year out, the same
4. period of time. It's probably going to shift around a
5. little bit more, recognizing that, you know, you can't take
6. there was one comment about grazing on the north side and
7. shifting that person all the way over to Garfield County.
8. We haven't done that.
9. We have shifted from the north side in Phillips
10. County directly across the river in Fergus County but, you
11. know, in that situation it was more workable, but there were
12. some other things involved with that, so hopefully that
13. answers your question there.
14. Dave Snyder, you brought up the question about
15. mountain lion hunting. During our public scoping meetings
16. we received quite a few comments about us considering a
17. mountain lion season.
18. You know, I have been involved with Fish, Wildlife
19. & Parks' mountain lion season tag process, tag process,
20. things like that, for years. I don't think we want to
21. propose a mountain lion hunt as nearly as competitive as
22. some of the hunting districts that currently exist in
23. Montana
24. It's one of the charges we are given is to

In Alternative C there really is no buck-to-doe
1. ratio specified and in Alternative D we are calling for
2. twenty-five total bucks per hundred does which is lower than
3. what we had achieved under Alternative A.
4. MR. CRAWFORD: Okay. Thank you, Randy.
5. You want to talk roads?
6. MR. BERG: Sure.
7. MR. CRAWFORD: Okay.
8. MR. BERG: Touch on a couple of other things too?
10. MR. BERG: Kirk, you brought up a comment about
11. maintaining some stability for ranchers and, you know, this
12. plan, the way it's written right now, lets you get down to
13. the nexts and bolts of individual habitat units, but that
14. will be something that we do with each individual habitat
15. management plan.
16. Where we have a unit that doesn't--isn't conducive
17. to prescribed burning or management like that where we are
18. going to use cattle as a prescriptive tool to manage habitat
19. that would be the challenge between the managers of existing
20. permits to put together that plan that provides some of
21. that stability you are talking about. Obviously if we put
22. together a--a grazing treatment that only allows grazing one
23. year out of five, you know, a rancher couldn't depend on
24. that--just can't gear up to use cattle as a treatment that
25. maintain quality of hunting opportunities. I see some real
26. negative with some of those units, not all of them, but it
27. gets to be a pretty competitive camp-on-a-track-type thing
28. overnight.
29. You know, we have to take into consideration some
30. of the things with winter, you know, big-game habitat,
31. disturbances we might have on that,
32. To back up a little bit, before we propose any
33. kind of a season on a national wildlife refuge we have to go
34. through a pretty extensive hunt package it's called and one
35. of the things that's critical to that is having the
36. biological data in that hunt package to show that we can
37. truly support some kind of a hunt with mountain lions or
38. waterfowl or deer, whatever it is, so we are kind of under
39. the microscope when it comes to opening new hunting seasons.
40. If we were to propose a mountain lion season for
41. next year we would get shut down in two weeks or something
42. like that so we are initiating a study this winter. Randy
43. and......are going to put collars on cats. That will
44. kind of give us that baseline data that if it looks like we
45. think it does there might be an opportunity for a limited
46. type hunt.
47. Now, whether that's one-day or five-day or ten-
48. day you know, we don't know at this time, and, the other
49. comment about eliminating USDA predator control, currently
VOICE: How successful do you guys feel you are in managing the roads that are open now without the offshoots constantly being, you know, pushed into the wilderness?

MR. BERG: I think we are doing pretty good, and some of the other folks in here can attest to that but, you know, I have been here about twenty years and when I first came here we made a pretty good effort to number all our roads. They correlated real nicely with the maps. Anytime there is a junction of one trail leading off another we have a post there with a three-digit number on it so it’s easy-

easy to tell where you are.

Our rules are that you can’t travel on anything but a numbered road. We seasonally close some of those depending on wildlife objectives, but I think we have been real successful in controlling the cherry excursions type thing you are talking about. We went through a process to close some of those cherry chutes down, mainly for wildlife sampling, provide better security habitat for big game in most cases—not that we don’t have off-road problems still, but I think we have dealt with it pretty well.

The thing that’s encouraging to me is that, you know, we get as many complaints from the users out there as we get.

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1 on the refuge we have areas that we carte blanche allow predator control by USDA, and, to be honest with you, some of those predator issues aren’t there they used to be. You know, we don’t have the sheep producers, mainly in Garfield County, like we used to. What we will do is we will go back and look at those areas, probably cancel some of those, you know, carte blanche authority to go in and currently gun coyotes, not to say that if we have a rancher producer that’s having some trouble with livestock that we won’t allow some type of predator management on his ranch.

We don’t control any predator management on State or private lands. That’s beyond the scope of this document here. That also applies to—to hunting regulations, public abuse, and those kinds of things. I think Clint brought up the public-access stuff in road concept is the way I read here. One of the things that we try to do is not only use our road management to influence big-game populations but we have also looked at roads from a public standpoint and we have had situations not so much in like Petroleum and Fergus and Phillips County but you get over into Garfield and to some extent McCone where there would be a road that came off a main county road off the refuge right-of-way and whether it passed through private or—most cases it was private—it got closed on the

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1 outside, you know, quite a distance from the CMR boundary.

2 We didn’t want to create any kind of exclusive use on the refuge, on a refuge-numbered road, by only one individual or that individual controlling who got to use that road, so what we did is where that occurred we basically closed the road to the boundary for everybody, not only the general public but also the private landowner that had access, exclusive access prior to that, so it was a tough nut to crack, but I think for the most part it, you know, I think 11 it was fair to everybody.

12 The other thing along those lines is we are working real diligently trying to secure rights-of-way where we do have public-access issues. We have acquired some land in certain areas where we are able to pick up a public right-of-way off a main county road across private land, in some cases BLM, to gain that access for the public to the CMR, not to say that, you know, there are several areas on the refuge where we need better access. Hopefully that will be a—a thing we accomplish.

21 I don’t think we want to answer more questions.

22 (A discussion was then had off the record.)

VOICE: Bill, can I just ask a question about roads?

25 MR. BERG: Okay.

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1 you know, I think is a plus in my mind.

2 VOICE: Thank you.

3 MR. CRAWFORD: I think the last question I had was about sage-grouse listing and how livestock grazing could be impacted. If you look at the listing package they excluded livestock grazing as being an impact to sage-grouse.

4 population so right now there is no guidance coming down as far as livestock grazing in sage-grouse areas.

5 The only guidance that comes down is looking at the use of prescribed fire and fire suppression in those core sage-grouse areas, whether it’s hot or wintering habitat, and it is reflected in our plan where we will avoid using prescribed fire in those critical sage-grouse areas and we will suppress all wildfires that threaten core sage-grouse areas, but there is no guidance right now from the ecological branch of the Service concerning those and livestock and sage-grouse.

8 We will be here. There are several staff members here tonight that will be more than happy to answer your questions. Neil Xander is in the back, wildlife biologist, Jackie Fox, Beverly Shinnar, Dan Harrell. You all met Randy and Bob. Judy is sitting back there. Matt’s in the back.

25 We appreciate everybody coming out. If you got more specific questions grab one of us. We will be happy to
answer them.  

Thanks.

(The hearing was then concluded at the hour of
8:20 p.m., this 12th day of October, 2010.)

CERTIFICATE

I, Harry G. Rauch, a Certified Shorthand Reporter,
within and for the State of Montana, do hereby certify that
I took down in stenotype the proceedings had on the subject
hearing at the time and place hereinbefore set forth and
that the foregoing fifty-three (53) pages constitute a full
transcript of my notes of said proceedings.

Dated this 18th day of October, 2010.

Harry G. Rauch
TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Charles M. Russell and UL Bend
National Wildlife Refuges

The TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS at VFW, 11 South Main Street, Jordan, Montana, on the 13th day of October, 2010, beginning at 2:00 p.m.

PANEL:
BARRON CRAWFORD  Project Leader
BILL BERG          Deputy Project Leader
LAURIE SHANNON    Planner
MIMI MATHER       Speaker Facilitator

1  PROCEEDINGS
2  2:00 p.m.
3  MS. MATHER: Okay, folks, let's get started in a timely start. Please have a seat. Plenty of room up front.
4  Well, thanks, everybody, for coming this afternoon. This is our second meeting this week, and we have two others after today.
5  The purpose of the meeting is for the Fish & Wildlife Service to collect your input on the draft CCP, the Comprehensive Conservation Plan.
6  My name is Mimi. I'll be facilitating this meeting.
7  And I'm up here with Barron Crawford, CMR's Project Leader; Bill Berg, the Deputy Project Leader; and, Laurie Shannon, who is the CCP Planning Team Leader.
8  The way the next two hours are going to work is, Barron will give a brief presentation on the CCP and describe the alternatives and the highlight points of the plan.
9  Then we'll turn it to you and open the floor for public comments.
10  Keep in mind that we want to make sure we give everybody enough time to speak, so we're going to limit the time of your comments to three minutes.
11  So, if you all have a lot to say, start thinking about how you can narrow your comments down to three minutes. There's plenty of other ways that you could submit your comments other than up here at the mic.
12  So, with that, I'll turn it to Barron, and then I'll give you an explanation of how the comments are going to run afterwards.
13  MR. CRAWFORD: Thanks, Mimi.
14  Steve, can you maybe get the first couple of rows of lights and figure that out. Maybe this will show up a little bit better.
15  I'm going to give a brief overview of what we have been doing for the past three years. Talk a little bit about the CCP process, where we're at and where we're going.
16  So, we started basically in January of 2007. That's when we held the first public scoping meetings. We did 14 of those all together. We got about 24,000 public comments did during that time.
17  We've had numerous meetings with our
cooperators, and we've kind of taken all of that 
and rolled it up into this Draft document.

So this is kind of just an outline of
the CCP timeline. You know, preplanning, public
involvement, scoping, alternatives, and then the
Draft.

And then from here, we'll hopefully
move on to a Final CCP and EIS.

So, basically we do a CCP because, for
one, we're mandated by the National Wildlife
Refuge System Improvement Act. It basically
says all refuges will have a completed
Comprehensive Conservation Plan by 2015.

And so there's about 548 refuges in the
United States, and a little over, what,
two-thirds of those are already done. So the
rest of the refuges are working trying to make
that deadline.

But the main point of what a CCP does,
is it provides management direction, guidance
that is based upon the refuge purposes and the
mission of the Wildlife Refuge System.

It kind of provides a road map for
managers as they come and go. In the past, as a
new manager would come in, they would have new
ideas, and so they would take off and implement
those, and the refuge management would go one
direction. And that manager would leave, and a
new manager would come in, and they would go
back the other direction, and so there was a lot
of inconsistency in management.

With this plan in place, it will
hopefully provide the stable, long-term
guidance. So it outlines a vision statement,
goals, objectives and strategies for that future
management.

It's accompanied by some type of NEPA
document. Most of the time it's an
Environmental Assessment for the CMR. Due to
the complexity of issues that we're addressing,
we did do an EIS. That's why the document is so
large. Sorry about that.

And again, it provides the long-term
guidance for the management over that 15-year
period.

So they are 15-year plans. They have
to be updated, renewed, revisited at the end of
that 15-year period.

So, this is just kind of a flow chart
as to the steps that are involved in a CCP. And

we're down here at the bottom with the Draft
Plan and NEPA document. Hopefully we can move
into this next step, prepare and adopt a Final
Plan.

But there's nothing to say that based
upon the comments that we receive during this
period, that we might not go back to this step
right here (indicating), and go with an all new
alternative and start back again with another
round of scoping meetings.

So, that's kind of how this works. It
doesn't always flow like this. Sometimes you go
back and then go forward.

Hopefully we've thought this through
enough, and we've covered everything, and maybe
we just have to do a little modification to the
alternative that ends up in the Final Plan.

So we came up with four alternatives.

Basically we have the Alternative A, which is
"No Action", which is basically continue doing
what we have been doing since 1986, when the
last EIS was developed.

There would be a few changes. You
know, some of those changes we've been doing
here along the way.

But the basic concepts of this
alternative is you continue to manage the refuge
under the 65 habitat units that are out there
that where established when the refuge was
co-managed with BLM.

We continue to move towards this
gradual implementation of prescriptive grazing,
and as a ranch sells to a nonfamily member,
holding that permit and enrolling that unit into
a prescriptive program.

We would still manage big game to
achieve those target levels that were identified
in '86 of 2.5 elk per square mile, and 10 mule
deer per square mile.

We'd keep open the 670 miles of roads
or so that are out there, and we'd continue with
protecting the 155,000 acres of proposed
wilderness.

So then we came to our action
alternatives, and the first one was what we
coined the "Wildlife and Habitat Emphasis", and
threw a bunch of big biological words in here
just to make us look smart.

But it's basically to manage the
landscape in cooperation with our partners to
emphasize the abundance and diversity of wildlife populations using both balanced, natural ecological processes. And when we talk about ecological processes, the three big ones out at the Missouri branch are fire, grazing and flooding. Then we're also looking at synthetic methods. And synthetic methods are like farming, tree planting, maybe some pumping to recreate some of those floodings for cottonwood regeneration.

We'd continue to encourage wildlife-dependent public uses. And those are hunting and fishing, wildlife observation and wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation. And back in the back, we've got several maps set up that depict the various alternatives, and if you want to take a closer look at those, you are more than welcome to.

But basically under this alternative, we would be expanding a couple of the proposed wilderness areas. These are shaded in the light orange. We would be closing -- proposing to close several cherry stem roads. The same thing over here on the east half.

So, kind of a synopsis of this is, we'd implement prescriptive grazing on about 50 to 75% of the refuge. Right now, we're prescriptively grazing 35%, so we would get a little bit more aggressive in moving towards a prescriptive grazing program. We would do that within about a four- to seven-year time period.

We'd do some active restoration of the river bottoms. We'd continue to work with the State to provide quality hunting opportunities for big game, and then we'd also look more to strive for providing habitat for nongame. The big one for this alternative is we'd close about 106 miles of roads, and we'd increase proposed wilderness areas by 25,000 acres in six units.

The next alternative we came up with was Alternative C, and we're calling this one the "Public Use and the Economic Emphasis".

And basically this one is to promote maximum compatible wildlife-dependent public uses and economic uses while protecting wildlife populations and habitats, to the extent possible.

And for this one, again, we're going to use those natural ecological processes of fire, grazing and flooding and active management - farming, tree planting - to restore and/or maintain the biological diversity and integrity and environmental health. And then once we have those processes restored to the best of our abilities, we'll take more of a passive management approach.

We're still going to provide that quality wildlife-dependent public uses. But the big one here, is we would limit economic uses when they are causing injury to either our ecological processes or to those plants that we're trying to get to going in a positive direction.

So again, last map, a couple of proposed expansions of wilderness areas. Not as much as in B. A couple of eliminations of some proposed wilderness. A couple of proposed road closures. Same thing here.

So this one is economic uses will be limited when they are injurious to our ecological processes.
We would apply management practices that mimic and restore those natural processes of fire and grazing. We’d use fire and grazing, both wild ungulates and/or prescriptive livestock grazing on 50 to 75% of the refuge.

We would move to prescriptive grazing at a slower pace. We would do it over about a 9- to 10-year period versus a four- to seven-year period under Alternative B.

Again, we would work with Fish, Wildlife & Parks to maintain health and diversity of all wildlife species.

Close about 23 miles of roads, and we'd expand six of the proposed wilderness areas, for 18,000 acres, but we'd propose eliminating three from a reduction of 26.

So, this is about the fourth meeting?

Fifth?

MS. SHANNON: Fifth meeting.

MR. CRAWFORD: Fifth meeting.

We’ve heard quite a few comments. Some of the hot button topics that we’ve heard, prescriptive grazing, what is it?

I had a gentleman ask me a question last night about conservation grazing. I found that a very unique term. Kind of liked it.

What we define as “prescriptive grazing” is basically using grazing in order to meet a specific wildlife and/or habitat management objective.

So basically we’re going to go out there. We’re going to look at an area. And the example that I like to use, is let’s say we have an area that’s got a prairie dog town. It’s got some mountain plovers nesting on it. We want to expand habitat for nesting mountain plovers.

Mountain plovers like bare areas with very little vegetation. So that’s a case where we could go in, graze an area really heavily.

Hopefully get the prairie dogs to expand. That would then open up areas for mountain plovers to then occupy new nesting areas.

Another example is where you have sage grous Lex, or you have wintering habitat for sage grous, and it has a high field buildup in that area.

And we obviously don’t want to go in there with fire and ruin the habitat for sage grous. We could use livestock to go in there and reduce that hazardous fuel load, and then protect that area from wildfire.

So, those are two examples of how you use prescriptive grazing to manage specific wildlife or habitat objective.

The other one is prescribed fire. How will it be used?

We’ve been working with fire ecologists for the past five years now that have been looking at mapping the historic fire frequency occurrence on the refuge. Starting to get a pretty good map in some places as to what that occurrence was.

It’s highly variable, as you can imagine, based upon the soils, based upon the topography, based upon the slope. It ranges anywhere from about every seven years to several hundred years.

So, the idea is to go into those places that have frequent fire and put it back on the ground. Several of those spots haven’t seen fire in 60 or 70 years.

So the challenge is, is to go in and put a light, cool fire through there to reduce some of that fuel load, reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfire, but yet also keep it to a point where it’s manageable so you keep it within this designated area.

We touched on wilderness. You know, basically as part of the CCP process, we’re mandated to look at our proposed wilderness areas and to make recommendations as to whether those areas still meet those wilderness characteristics in which they were set aside for.

It is subjective. You know, we basically look at the Act and look at the reasons that those areas where set aside for proposed wilderness, and we make a judgment call.

And that’s why you see under Alternative B no areas proposed for elimination, and under Alternative C, you see more areas proposed for elimination.

We looked at it as to what was kind of the emphasis of that alternative, and then could we say, okay, yeah, this area may not fit well under this alternative. There’s a possibility that, you know, maybe we should consider dropping it from proposed wilderness.
The same thing with roads. We looked at the roads on the refuge and decided -- or tried to make a subjective determination as to, are those roads impacting our ability to manage wildlife? Are they providing necessary access for the public to get in and enjoy the area, or to access a favorite fishing hole or a hunting area?

You know, it doesn't lead to -- the lake doesn't lead that a private in-holding. Those are the sorts of things that we looked at in determining what roads should be proposed for elimination, and which ones shouldn't.

And then the final one was a lot of comments on bison. And I can stand here and say that as long as I'm manager of CFR, there will not be any free-ranging bison on the refuge, which is two more days.

But, what I can honestly tell you is that in the plan, we do not propose to reintroduce free-ranging bison, okay? That is a State-managed wildlife species.

It is in the plan, because at the time of our developing it, the State was proposing, or was looking at the possibility of proposing bison restoration in and around the refuge.

So what we put in the plan was that if the State brought forward such a proposal, that we would work with them and evaluate the refuge to see what role the refuge may play in fulfilling that State plan.

And it’s no different than what we do working with the State to fulfill their Bighorn Sheep Management Plan, or their Elk Management Plan or their Prairie Dog Management Plan. So, that’s the same thing there.

So, as Mimi said, we’re here to take your comments today. We ask that you come and use this microphone so everybody in the room can hear you.

This other microphone goes to our recorder up here so she captures everything.

We ask that you state your name; spell it if it’s not a common spelling, and go ahead and give your comment.

There are other ways that you can also comment. There was comment sheets handed out in the back. You can write on that and drop it at the table when you leave. You can mail that in. You can send Laurie a nice letter. You can send her an email.

There’s no one comment form that’s weighted more heavily than the other one. We treat all the comments the same, whether they’re written, whether they’re emailed, whether they’re spoken.

And it’s not a voting contest. So, you know, it doesn’t matter if one person says something, and 1,000 people say something totally opposite. We look at the value of that comment, and we weigh it on that value alone.

So, that's all I've got. I appreciate everybody taking time out of your very busy schedules today to come out here. It's been great working with everybody. Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Okay, it’s your turn. So, let me explain how the comments will work. I have got a list of everybody that signed up. I’ll call folks off the list. I will call who’s next as well as who’s on deck so that person can be ready. Feel free to come sit in our on-deck seats.

Again, you have three minutes. We're going to be strict about that time frame so we can ensure that everybody has a chance to comment.

Once you’ve spoken for two minutes, and you are down to one minute, Brad will hold up the "one minute" sign. He's also got one for when you have "20 seconds left". At that point, we really need to start wrapping up.

And then there’s a “time is up”, at which case, we would like for you to hand the mic back to me, and I'll call up the next person.

Some of you have said that you just have a question. That's fine. Come on up to the mic and just ask your question.

We're going to break -- we're going to stop at 3:45 so that Barron has an opportunity to address a number of the questions and comments as a way to close the meeting.

So, one other thing I ask, just to respect one another's opinion.

And to allow things to move quickly and smoothly, please don't interrupt one another as people are giving comments, and please hold back on applause and cheering.
So with that, we can start. I've got Karen Taylor up first, and Tony Phipps on deck.

KAREN TAYLOR: This isn't going to be easy in that time limit, but anyway.

These agencies keep saying they're going to involve the public, yet they have a release out that says "not for public release".

They keep doing all these decisions with no scientific data, without the public input. They've eliminated all kinds of grazing, put people out of business. I know that because we just lost our ranch.

Okay. The government poisoned the wolves. Now it's the fault of the ranchers that we don't have wolves. They reintroduced them.

They keep saying they want native everything, but that's not native wolves. There are people who can prove that they are not true wolves.

The government still have the buffalo slaughtered. Somehow that's the fault of the ranchers. But I would like to know how come the buffalo can graze, but cows just seem to destroy the habitat?

They have been taking the grazing rights and, like I say, putting us out of business.

MR. PHIPPS: I'll pass.

Okay, Jack Murnion, and Edla on deck.

MS. MATHER: Thank you, Karen.

Tony Phipps?

MR. PHIPPS: I'll pass.

MS. MATHER: You'll pass.

Okay, Jack Murnion, and Edla on deck.

And again, Jack, if you could spell your name for the court reporter.

MR. MURNION: I'd like to get my glasses.

I was one of the Garfield County Commissioners. I will confess my statement to the economic impact of Preferred Plan D to the taxpayers of Garfield County.

Page 316, Part 5 of this Draft CCP states that I believe in '07, there where 1800 -- 18,872 AUMs in the refuge, at a rate of 1720 an AUM for an income to CMR from grazing of $324,598.40.

When this income to the CMR ends under Preferred Plan D, and I quote from Page 5 -- from Part 5, Page 330,
"Alternative D will generate 2.1 million more in local output, 25 additional jobs, and $69.6 thousand more in agriculture income as compared to Alternative A."

I submit that the economic impact data in this study book is flawed.

I submit that I would embrace any business in our part of Montana that could give up all revenue of $324,598.40, and promise over $2 million in local output.

Is this the same economic thinking that has our great country trillions in debt? And one further comment. Page 14 in this book. "All the issues excluded on Page 14 as outside of this Draft CCP and EIS should be addressed, as our information from Congress suggests that this plan cannot further destroy our rural economy."

that are going to get up and talk -- I'm just going to say I've been here 26 years in the county, and we are all practitioners. None of us get to be a theoretical person.

So when you talk about roads and all the things that go into a piece of property, we're the ones that are falling in a hole or digging some hunter out of a hole. We deal with the real situation. We have real animals that need something to eat and water to drink.

So, these papers and charts and computers that the theoretician people work with, the bureaucracy people work with, they're all very neat and tidy, and everything is done in three minutes, of course.

And we are put in the situation of three minutes to defend what we think would be best, but we're living out here a lifetime.

Everybody in these nice outfits and nice salaries will drive away, and then people can talk. We go home to the real.

So I would say of the alternatives that we're looking at, let's go with Alternative A that we can maybe deal with.

The people that are sitting in some big city in a basement with a computer and can be as odd as a $3 bill ought not to have a word to say about the things that affect us, like predators. If they want one, come and get one. Take them home. Put it in a cage. Look at it.

But the people that have been part of the history, and most of us have been from the time of so many generations, we're not just people that have come out here to get away from the city.

And we have it a lot better than our ancestors had it. But for heaven's sakes, when you say "partnering up", listen to what the partners have to say, if we are the partners. Maybe we aren't.

So it's a very difficult topic, but I would say, please pay attention to the people that actually live here.

MS. MATHER: Mike, and I believe it's Skip Olson on deck.

MIKE McKEEVER: My name is Mike McKeever, M-c-K-E-E-V-E-R.

I've three questions or five questions, whatever I have to ask.

And first I would like to say, Edla, we
out running the livestock right now.

So, I guess I'm kind of wondering if
we're going to be compensated for it? Because
we will have to -- we'll have to do something
for the additional livestock we'll be running.
I'm sure that we would have to pay a
trespass fee in the event that our livestock
strayed out to CMR lands and took up residence.
Also, another thing, State lands. I
think there's 36,000 acres within the boundary
of the CMR of State lands. I think this is what
I read. And I'm wondering if this is just
another takings?

Your proposal to protect State lands.
What is your proposal to protect these State
lands for the schools without the bidding
process?

You say on Page -- I think it's 329,
"If permittees no longer
retained their grazing
permits, the Service will
work with the DNRC to
assume these permits."

And part of it says "providing the CMR
has the funding to do it".

Are we, as individuals and private
landowners, going to get a buy like this from
the state, or is this just a special perk for
the CMR at the school's expense?

And water rights. I guess I'd like to
know who will end up with the rights when the
impoundments are removed? I think this is
Page 75. I would like an explanation of that --
Page 175.

I guess a real brief comment here.
As I read over these preferred
alternatives, A is the one I would prefer, of
course. But there's lots and lots of
consideration for private property rights of the
adjacent landowners.

We got prescribed fires out of control;
normal annual grazing permits, but prescribed
grazing as well as introduction of native
species by the partners, and, of course,
increased predator populations. These changes
make for a very unfriendly neighbor relations to
the adjacent landowners.

My solution to this would be fence
the entire refuge.

Predator type, pay a recreation tax to
the counties, and then you can study it; you can
burn it; you can let the predators have what's
in there, but you won't be bothering us.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Thank you.
Skip, with Karla Christensen on deck.
SKIP OLSON: Olson, O-L-S-O-N. First
name Norman, N-O-R-M-A-N.

This is going to be short, as they
say. I'm going to read just a couple of things
directly from this magazine.

Would you hold that, please.

MS. MATHER: Yes.

MR. OLSON: Just to get your
attention.

This is the "Effect on Riparian Areas",
Page 276, Alternative B.
"If wolves where to
naturally recolonize the
refuge, the presence and
management of wolves on the
refuge would provide
predational pressure on
wild ungulates, which would
benefit riparian health by
I would like to go to the budget, expense, income. Some of you have a budget sheet.

Quick costs. They talk about costs to this community on the refuge. 1.1 million acres minus, say, 250,000 for the lake.

An AUM in this country is worth 50 bucks, at least. That's costing you 8 to $10 million a year in income for this -- for the surrounding communities of the lake.

They said 8 to 10 million. That's at 50 bucks an AUM. That's what it's costing you to let the cattle come off of that.

We're a broke nation. We even try to permit -- create something are becoming a minority in this country, as you know.

Some of you have a budget sheet. I hope I can find mine before I run out of time.

Hang on to that, would you? That might give me time to get my glasses out.

MR. OLSON: Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Well, we'll pause for a minute.

MR. OLSON: Yes.

MS. MATHER: If you look in the budget sheet, be reminded that these are in thousands of dollars.

The bottom of the page of Alternative A runs from 49 million. Alternative D goes 76 million. This is over a 15-year plan.

I'd like to highlight a couple of things. The biggest enemy that we have on this is range and invasive species.

We are getting covered up from the north by thousands of acres of weeds. And you guys that aren't familiar with that, I have extensive experience with weeds on the CMR. I don't know if I have time to talk about them.

You know, if you look at them proposals, they're going to spend $8 million building a building. I'm sure you're going to want to jump right out and help them pay for this.

There's $4 million in there to buy land.

And I'll give you some comparisons. The highest amount on any of those proposals is to take care of the range with native species is 120,000 over 15 years. Compare that to spending 425,000 taking pictures.

Compare that to spending 400, 500, 400, 200 millions of dollars letting people hunt.

Why the hell does it cost 338,000 to let somebody go hunting on the refuge?

MS. MATHER: Skip, you're about out of time.

MR. OLSON: Okay.

I don't know where to go with this budget thing. It amazes me.

Their number one responsibility, as anybody is, has, that's a caretaker of range of the land that we're hearing being used is to take care of the range. That is not their priority. And when they don't take care of the range, they won't have a refuge.

Look at the numbers. I guess that's where I'll stop on the budget. It's astounding to see.

25 new employees for Alternative D.

There's new buildings proposed for Jordan, Fort Peck.

MS. MATHER: Time's up, Skip.

Want that back?

MR. OLSON: Sure.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Skip.
Karla's up, with Jerry on deck.


My concern is the bison that someday may be running on our range. I have a couple of questions that I would like to be answered at sometime today.

One of them is, all of the proposals that are in this book talk about bison. And if they are restored to areas outside of the refuge, and the animals migrate onto the refuge as State-managed wildlife species, as stated in the book on Page 92 and Page 93.

Now, my question is, where are they expected to migrate from?

My second question is, can bison raised as domestic livestock become wildlife when they wander onto the CMR? And then my third question is, do domestic bison as livestock have grazing allotments on the CMR? And if so, where are those grazing allotments located?

Okay, I'm really concerned that bison are going to slip in the back door.

Where are the bison going to come from?

Do we bring them out of the Park, which was suggested, and have to fight with BANGS, brucellosis for the next -- until we are all out of business?

I don't think so. We don't like that situation.

And that's my comments for now.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Jerry.

JERRY COLDWELL: Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Eric, with Dean.

ERIC MILLER: Good afternoon. My name is Eric Miller. It's E-R-I-C; M-I-L-L-E-R, and I am from Jordan, though not originally.

This is going to be pretty straightforward.

In your introduction -- or in your vision statement -- and I'm going to paraphrase this -- you state that you will use adaptive management rooted in science to protect and improve the health of the refuge, wildlife and habitat.

So my question to you today, you're talking about making significant wildlife and habitat changes through all four of your proposed actions that will alter five regimes, livestock grazing and water dispersal systems.

So, with those comments, do you have any local or regional short grass parent prairie-based research documentation from unbiased articles or university research professionals that has been refereed and peer reviewed journal publications that you can provide to this community and the surrounding communities that you're going to impact by these changes?

Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Eric.

ERIC MILLER: Mm-hmm.

MS. MATHER: Dean, with Mark Good on deck.

DEAN ROGGE: Has the community referenced the Garfield County Growth Policy as required by the state of Montana, or any of the other five counties' policies surrounding the state of Montana?

THE REPORTER: Can you please spell your last name for me.

MR. ROGGE: R-O-G-E.

And regarding the use of sentinel plant
The refuge also contributes, makes an economic agriculture’s not important. It is, and it will don’t think that’s a trend that’s going to getting bigger and bigger, more mechanized, and the east declining. I don’t think there’s growing; the economy’s growing by most measures, of the state and western part of the state, move

What I have also noticed, is across the country, and I think by most Montanans.

lands or Forest Service lands, and that the National Wildlife Refuge, that lands are managed

understanding and determining the historical results, and are they long-term?

MS. MATHER: Mark Good, with Janelle on
deck.

MARK GOOD: My name is Mark Good. I’m from Great Falls. I work for the Montana Wilderness Association.

It’s my understanding that as a National Wildlife Refuge, that lands are managed differently from, say, Bureau of Land Management lands or Forest Service lands, and that the

guiding principle for management on the refuge is the enhancement and protection of wildlife.

Now, I know a lot of people don’t like that; they wish it where different, but I don’t think that’s going to change.

Refuges are pretty popular. Maybe not here, but they’re popular by Americans across the country, and I think by most Montanans.

What I have also noticed, is across the state, it seems the economies, both eastern part of the state and western part of the state, move in kind of divergent directions with the west growing; the economy’s growing by most measures, and the east declining. I don’t think there’s anything mysterious about that, as you have seen agricultural getting -- farms and ranches getting bigger and bigger, more mechanized, hiring fewer and fewer people; easier access to commercial places like Billings and so on. I don’t think that’s a trend that’s going to change.

Now, that’s not to suggest that agriculture’s not important. It is, and it will continue to be, and it’s not to be insensitive to those who will use this refuge for which it’s important.

But I do want to make the point that the refuge also contributes, makes an economic contribution to local communities.

First, their staff. And it’s kind of direct through employment and surfaces in products they purchase.

Indirect, you could look at things like hunting. I think they’re figuring, the EIS was

about 100,000. I might be wrong about that.

But, you know, that’s a significant number, and I haven’t seen any economical calculations, but I bet it would be more than what most people think.

But I also want to talk about some of the other uses that I don’t think get a lot of talk for which our refuge is supposed to be managed, and that’s things like wildlife viewing and environmental education and interpretation.

I mean, you can look at a place like Slippery Ann, where you do get a lot of people showing up.

Wildlife viewing is increasingly popular. I think things like -- which is increasing interest in like history, prehistory, paleontology, and even hiking. And I think that more could be done to attract people to some of these gateway communities which would help them.

And I know that that’s, you know, maybe in a small way, but maybe that’s an important way, too, to help stabilize local communities so that they can keep schools and other things and other services.
And I was wondering, do we have any past 6,000 years? This alternative, which says that, 1935?

So, that's why I'm here today. Thanks.

I feel fairly wealthy because of public lands. I live in town, and it's a way for me to feel like I own a piece of America. The 1.1 million acres of the CMR is a pretty rare treasure, and it's one that I own and you own, and everyone else in America owns, and that's a pretty amazing concept.

So, I wanted to say today that, I haven't been able to get through the entire CCP yet, but what I have read so far, I think the Fish & Wildlife Services has done an excellent job. I think they provided a good range of alternatives to consider.

We're not very happy with some of the proposals that they made about wilderness, the boundaries that they've changed in the proposed alternative, so we're asking for them to keep the proposal that they have already and perhaps expand it, because prairie wilderness areas are very rare. There's not very many of them in the country.

And this is a real gem for Montana.

It's a gem for the nation, and for the world.

records for the past 6,000 years that says what these lands looked like?

You know, as we go, progress comes change. And if we're going to go backwards in time, I don't see how any of us are going to benefit from that.

And another thing, too, you didn't address climate change 6,000 years ago, or even back in 1935, so I would like to see some more research or some more current monitoring to help with this CCP.

And then there's another one in Chapter 3. It says 50% of the plants species you are to maintain, and I was wondering how you were going to have these plant species increase in size when you don't have any control of your wildlife?

I work for a Conservation District, and we just did a planting in a creek bottom of over 1,000 trees, and we did not fence this out except for the cattle were not allowed to graze in this, and we're lucky we got two trees left because of the wildlife damage. So, I just don't see no emphasis on any of that.

The other thing, I notice wolves are listed on both the endangered species and also the reintroduced species, and I was wondering how come both? Either they are endangered, or that was just a reintroduction of species.

And I have lots and lots of other comments, but I'll send them in writing.

Thank you.

I concur with the ranchers and those volunteers.

I would like to ask the question, that most of you people that are here from Wilderness Society and from the U.S. Fish Wildlife are on payroll. The rest of us are here as volunteers.

And there's quite a difference in the time and the effort that can be put forth from people who are on payroll versus people who are trying to make a living out here.

I concur with the ranchers and those who have got up and stated that we should have
no change and go with Alternative A, or less
than that.

The other thing I would like to do is
ask that those who have made written comments,
please bring a copy by the "Jordan Tribune" so
that we can get your exact comment.

Thank you.

MS. MATHER:  Thank you.

Okay, that is the end of my list.

Does anybody else have a comment?

Come on up.

RALPH GRIINK:  Ralph Grink,
G-R-I-N-K.

I only have one question that hasn't
been asked.

On Page 66, halfway down the left
column, it says,
"Prescriptive Livestock Grazing."

"We will construct
boundary fences where
absent, potentially expand
boundary fences to include
partner lands that share
the objective and

strategies."

So, this means you're going to grab all
the BLM land there?

MR. CRAWFORD:  We will make note of
that and answer it here in a bit.

RALPH GRIINK:  Thank you.

MS. MATHER:  Thanks, Ralph.

Anybody else want to comment?

Come on up.

FLOSSIE PHIPPS:  Flossie,
F-L-O-S-S-I-E; P-H-I-P-P-S.

My concern is the public land need a
lot of roads and needs the roads left open so
the public can use them.

If it goes through private property,
the private property owner should remember he
got to his place on the roads -- on these roads,
and he knew that it was public land beyond the
road before he ever bought his place.

So, I think they have no right to close
those roads going through their land into public
land because that is for the public to use.

The roads have been there long before
the landowner was, or before any of us ever
were, these roads have been there.

We need those roads left open so we can
continue to use them. And as a rancher, we do
need them open for going out and riding for our
cattle and using the horse trailer to haul our
horses and things,. And so it's very important
that we keep the public roads open to the
public.

MS. MATHER:  Okay.

One more?

JEANNE KIRKEGARD:  I just have a
request.

I was just going to request if we could
have an extension of 30 days on this CCP to
review it? I received mine like a month late
compared to everybody else in my area that
received it, and that's --

MS. MATHER: Any other comments or
questions?

Oh, one more.

JOAN D. WATSON: My name of is Joan D.
Watson, W-A-T-S-O-N.

My only comment is in reading the
scoping results from quite a long time ago after
they had the scoping meetings, and Barron
referred to this a little bit in his opening

comments about the 24,000 responses that were
received in writing.

There where 23,867 of them. 81 of them
came from individuals. So, that is the Earl
Isaacs, the Leo Coles, the Joan Gibsons that
took time to sit and write a letter.

23 of those comments came from public
agencies. Five of those where the surrounding
counties.

There where three Conservation District
groups involved in that. Our own was the only
local one.

So that's 8 out of the 23 that had
local community interest at heart.

The other 23,753, I believe is the
number, was a single form letter sent out by
members of the Wilderness Society.

So, I'm encouraging every one locally
here to write a letter or have some input into a
public letter and get as many people to sign it
as we can. That apparently stood out in their
mind, and obviously it would.

And guess where the weight is going to
go? It is going to go to the squeaky wheel.

So, I would encourage every one of you
to write a letter. I don't care if it's one sentence, "I am in favor of Alternate A". Sign your name and send it in.

It doesn't take much to at least show where your support and your interest lies. And obviously the Wilderness Society is on the ball, and we are not. So, let's get in gear. Make some comments.

We're going to try maybe too, through the Chamber of Commerce, get a local state corner meeting together, and maybe we can get some input, and maybe we can come up with a letter that has some clout and has some meaning.

And so I'm encouraging each and every one of you, make some comments. Give them to Dean Rogge.

Dean Rogge has worked his butt off on this project. The local Conservation Board, Monte Billing is here as well. Talk to those people. They're knowledgeable.

Talk to the people that have been permit holders for a long time. The John McKerlicks, the Harold Isaacs, the Coles, the Phippses.

But if you want to, I'd say go with Alternative R. Let the ranchers run it. We'd be a lot cheaper. Hell, we have do. We can't afford these millions. We don't make that much.

That's all I have.

MS. MATHER: Thank you.

Okay, I'm going to turn it over to Barron to respond to questions you've heard.

MR. CRAWFORD: Bill and I have this range of activities. He takes the hard ones.

I'm just trying to figure out which ones Bill's going to get.

Let's see. I was trying read through my notes here real quick and see what kind of questions we got.


Basically when we met with the DNRC, and we were talking about limited prescriptive grazing, there was a comment from the State that there's a possibility that those State lands could become unattractive then to the current permittee, would have the impact on the local school district, what was the refuge willing to do to ensure that there wasn't an impact on that school?

And what we said is that we would be willing to pick up of those leases, and as we put on the statement, "depending upon budgets".

As everybody knows, our budget is year to year. We're not guaranteed any old funding. You know, it's pretty much Congress passes a funding bill. Sometimes it's passed before October. Sometimes it's passed after December. But the bottom line is, we don't know how much funding we're going to get. So we had to put that statement in there that says "depending upon current funding".

Now, come reality, is the CMR ever not going to be funded out of the federal budget? There's a possibility if they decide to abolish the National Wildlife Refuge System. If they did that, I'm sure this land would probably be turned over to some other agency, such as the BLM. So that then, you know, it would fall upon the BLM; it would fall upon a different management strategy.

The bottom line is, we made the best assurance to the State that we could make given...
the constraints that we have to deal with.

So, I think they understood kind of the dilemma that we're in, and they were respectful of that, and they felt that we addressed it adequately from their standpoint.

Some of the bison issues.

Talk about bison that migrate on the refuge. Okay. Again, you know, we're talking about if the State moved forward with their proposal, okay, State Fish, Wildlife & Parks moved forward with the proposal to reintroduce bison somewhere in the state, somewhere in the local area, and those bison moved onto the refuge.

So in the plan, we addressed how we would work with the State for managing those animals, okay.

It is a valid concern. You know, how do you deal with bison and livestock together? It's been done down in the Henry Mountains area of Utah. So, there is one example there.

It's being done up in -- adjacent to Grasslands National Park in Canada. So there are examples out there of how bison herds and cattle herds can get along in the same area.

Let's see. State land species, where they come from? A great question.

Obviously everybody's heard, there's quite a bit of talk about the bison quarantine facility over in the western part of the state where they are taking bison out of Yellowstone National Park, putting them in the bison quarantine facility, getting animals through that program that come out, quote, "brucellosis free", and then the state is looking for a place to put those animals.

I think in their charter, is they look to go to federal, state or tribal lands. They did send proposals around last year for the first group of bison coming out of the facilities. There where a couple of tribes that expressed interest in taking those animals. There where no federal or state agencies interested in taking those animals, Fish & Wildlife Service being one, so they ended up going to Ted Turner, and that created quite a stink.

So, the State is trying to figure out what they're going to do with these bison that have in Lewistown is plenty.

Taking fences out and reducing water. How are we going to manage livestock? That's a great question.

And obviously this hasn't been thought out all the way. You know, we're throwing stuff down on paper as to what we would like to see under this umbrella management plan.

And one of the things, is we would like to remove interior fences. We would like to see animals move across the landscape. We would like to see riparian areas restored by restoring the natural water regimes as they flow down to the river.

Now, when we get to developing what's called Habitat Management Plans, and those will be done after this CCP is finalized, that's where what I like to call the "boots meet the dirt", okay. That's where the refuge staff sit down with our partners, our neighbors, our permittees, and they figure out how we're going to implement, or how we're going to achieve our wildlife and habitat management objectives.

And if we're talking about using livestock as prescriptive grazing, and we're
talking about removing water, we're talking
about removing fences, that's where we're
expecting our partners, our neighbors and our
permittees to step up and say, "Well, wait a
minute. How are you expecting us to use
livestock as a management tool? We're going to
need this, this and this."
And that's where we need to have a
meaningful dialogue back and forth across the
table so everybody knows where everybody else is
coming from, and we can all reach some type of
resolution of how we're going to work together
to accomplish this.

MS. McKERLICK: Isn't that kind of a
lopsided partnership, though?

MR. CRAWFORD: Is it a lopsided
partnership?
If we're both sitting at the table and
talking --

MS. McKERLICK: But you already have
this thing that you're going to go by for 15
years.

MR. CRAWFORD: This is the umbrella
plan that throws out all the ideas of what we're
looking to do.

published. We're looking -- we have done a lot
with fire history folks for several years now.
And let's see. Is there more to that
question?
MR. BERG: Peer-reviewed research.
MR. SKINNER: Our plans of the, well,
principal direction we're heading is the patch
burn grazing. It's been published by Sam
Hildegard extensively.
And we work closely with (inaudible) CS
people as appropriate, and their work is
published.
And then if you look at our sentinel
plants, which are also called indicator plant,
or diagnostic plants, or focal species, or
deceasers of some plants, and you go to a place
like Hooper's Holler, there's thousands of
references related to those types of things.

MR. CRAWFORD: Answer the question
about use of sentinel plants to develop where
it's been used, and the scientific basis or the
historic basis for those selected plants.

MR. SKINNER: In our job, which is
wildlife management, our primary directive is to
manage for wildlife diversity. That's our
marching orders.
And plant diversity is the foundation
of the wildlife food web.
And sentinel plants or diagnostic
plants or indicator plants, or focal plants or
deceasing strips, of course, are the first
plants to vanish.
So in order to maintain diversity, we
look to those in particular because they are the ones that are sentinel.
They are also highly palatable to all
herbivores. They're (inaudible) and buck
grasses. They're especially valuable for
wildlife for seeds, fruits, insects, and part of
the advantage and strategy to get those back is
to return to (inaudible) practices that occurred
that were apart of their past, which is this
patch burn grazing and total ungulate
management.
Also, because it's a little narrower
than total plant community, monitoring is
accomplishable. It's very difficult to manage
all species. Is that an answer?

MR. CRAWFORD: Sounds good. Thanks,
Bob.
And so that's what we're looking to do, is make these plant communities as healthy as possible so that they can either adapt or withstand change as it continues to move from one end to the other.

AUDIENCE: Where is your scientific data on what you just said?

MR. BERG: Mike McKeever asked about wolves endanger rancher dues.

MR. CRAWFORD: There's talk about wolves are -- wolves do have a dual status.

This is outside the scope of the CCP, but the question was asked so I will address it. Wolves up in the Glacier area naturally migrated into the United States from Canada, so they were protected under the full auspices of the Endangered Species Act. Wolves brought into Yellowstone were reintroduced. They were classified as an experimental and nonessential population, which

1. gave them a different set of protection under the Endangered Species Act.
2. So that's how you have wolves up in the Glacier area declared as fully endangered, because they were a natural migration into the area, versus wolves brought into the Yellowstone, which were reintroduced and fall under the experimental and nonessential designation.
3. But again, wolves are outside the scope. We are not doing anything with wolves. I think that's all the questions I had. Did I miss anything, Bill?
4. MR. BERG: Mike McKeever asked about payment in lieu of taxes.
5. MR. CRAWFORD: Oh, that's a Bill question.
6. MR. BERG: You know, I wish we had control over that, Mike.
7. In Montana currently, the federal agencies are paying about 30% of entitlement to the counties.
8. In eastern Montana, when we hit 50% of entitlement, which is determined by Congress, they're the ones that basically set aside that moment for payment in lieu of taxes, where I bought equity, as far as comparing it to private lands and the taxes that are collected on those properties.
9. So, it's something we don't control.
10. Obviously some money that's generated on the refuge does come back to the local communities in the same format, but typically just the big oil-producing refuges truly put back more than what that land would bring if it was in some other ownership. So, it's something we don't control at this time.
11. Another question Mike had, explanation of water rights.
12. We're currently going through a Compact Commission. We've got a deadline of October 15th to file with the Compact Commission, which is the review board for water rights in and around CMR.
13. At that time, what they'll do is take all the water rights that are filed on the various tributaries. Obviously some will be overappropriated, but that's kind of their job to make that cut and determine, you know, who is going to get what share of what water right that
riparian restoration project similar to the one that was brought up by the conservation person here, and we've seen some excellent results in that.

We expanded that study to the Department of (inaudible) Project onto the refuge for Chef Bay and Valentine Creek to kind of broaden the study area a little bit, and I guess would be another example of other conservation lands or practices where we've partnered up with the adjacent landowner.

What else?

MS. SHANNON: Roads is the last thing.

MR. BERG: Okay, a question came up about roads.

One of the things we've looked at pretty closely here in the last few years is there's situations where we don't control the public access off the refuge. There's not a legally identified access road coming off the main county road.

In situations where the public access is cut off before it gets to CMR, what we've done is also stopped the use of that road that's not accessible to the public on the refuge.

With the exception where that road runs to private land or State land, those roads remain open where historical roads access those properties.

So, what we're trying to avoid there is creating an exclusive use of that public road on CMR that's only accessible to a few people because of what's going on off the refuge.

We've attempted in several areas where we have got access issues where the public can't get to large blocks of CMR, we've actually purchased rights of way from landowners either as part of a land purchase or a sale to us, that kind of thing, which has resolved some of that, but that will be an option in the future for us to try to do that where we can.

MS. MATHER: Okay, folks, that's it.

We have a number of CMR staff, most of them are at the back, in addition to these two up here, so you if you do have additional questions, please grab one of them.

We will be here for another half an hour or so. Thank you very much for coming.

(Whereupon, the hearing was concluded at 3:45 p.m.)
Welcome everybody. I'm going to give you a brief overview of each of the years, kind of tell you how we got to where we're at, overview of what we've been doing for the past three years, kind of tell you how we got to where we're at, and give you a brief overview of each of the alternatives. Take about 20 minutes or so. Just a real brief run through here.

So we started this process, basically, in January of 2007. We had a series of public scoping meetings; 14 of those. Had several meetings with our coopers. Those coopers include the six counties, the Corp. Of Engineers, the Bureau of Land Management, the DNRC, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the conservation districts. I knew I'd forget somebody.

This is kind of the time line that we've been working under. We're right now at the release of the draft CCP. That's that 400 page document that everybody's been reading. We hope to be able to release the final CCP. This time line is a little out of whack, but we'd like to have the record of decision signed off on by the summer 2012.

So basically why do we do CCPs? The first reason is the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires that all refuges have a CCP completed by 2012, and there's about 548 national refuges in the system, and about -- out of those about two-thirds of those are completed, all pushing towards the 2012 deadline.

The other reason is basically that this provides that critical management direction and guidance that's based upon the refuge purposes and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It outlines a vision statement, goals, objectives and strategies for that future management. It's accompanied by some type of NEPA document, either an environmental assessment or impact statement.

Due to the complexity of issues here at the CMR, we went ahead and did the Environmental Impact Statement. The key is that we provide the guidance for that 15-year plan. It basically provides that road map to guide that future management.

This is kind of the eight steps that are involved in putting together a CCP, and we're done here at number five. Hopefully, after we're done with the public hearings and we've gathered the comments, we then move into stage six, which is prepare the final plan. However, after the comments there is a possibility that we could go back to step four and look and maybe develop a new alternative, and then come back out and present that alternative. But hopefully we've done our jobs well and are able to move on to the next step.

So now I'm just going to give you kind of a brief nutshell here of each of the alternatives. We have four of them. The first one was the No-Action
Alternative, and this is basically where we're going to keep doing what we've been doing, with just a few modifications, since the 1986 EIS was passed. Basically, we'll continue to manage the refuge in the 65 habitat units that we have out there now, we'll continue to gradually move to prescriptive grazing as the ranch sells to a non-family member. Big game will be achieved to achieve the target levels that were identified in the 1986 EIS. We'll keep the approximately 670 miles of roads open, and we'll continue protection of the 155,288 acres of proposed wilderness.

Then we had three action alternatives. "Alternative B" was the one we kind of coined the Wildlife Habitat Emphasis. And, basically, this one is managing the landscape with our partners to emphasize the abundance and diversity of wildlife populations using both balanced natural ecological processes, such as fire and grazing, flooding and synthetic methods, such as farming or tree planting. We also encouraged wildlife and public uses, and those are hunting and fishing, wildlife photography, and we limit economic use when they compete for habitat resources.

In the back we've got some maps that depict the various alternatives. Under this alternative pretty substantial increase in proposed wilderness areas, substantial recommendations for some road closures. Same thing here on the east side of the refuge.

Kind of some of the highlights of this one is we actively manage, manipulate habitats to create productive wildlife food and cover. We implement prescriptive grazing on about 50 to 75 percent of the refuge within a time period of four to seven years. We get aggressive in restoring the river bottoms. We work with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks to provide quality hunting opportunities and sustain the populations of big game, and also the habitat for non-game species. Close approximately 106 miles of roads, and expand the acreage of proposed wilderness by 25,000.

Then we move to "Alternative C," and this is kind of the Public Use and Economic Emphasis. And this someone again manages that landscape with your partners to emphasize and promote maximum compatible wildlife while protecting wildlife populations and habitats to the extent possible. We minimize damage to wildlife habitats while using a variety of management tools to enhance the diversity of public and economic opportunities.

And again, the map. Very few road closures, no road closures, just a couple seasons proposed, no injury to the habitats or to the ecological process.

Under this alternative we did propose expanding a couple of proposed wilderness areas. We did propose to eliminate a few as we got a few recommendations for some road closures. Same thing here on the east end. So under this alternative, the main points of it, economic uses would be limited when they are causing injury to ecological processes for the habitats out there. We'd apply management practices that mimic and restore natural processes, use fire and grazing whether its with wild or livestock, so prescriptively to mimic that historic interaction. Work with Fish Wildlife and Parks and maintain health and diversity of all species.

Do about 25 miles of all road closures. We'd recommend expanding six of the proposed wilderness areas for about 18,500 acres, but also eliminating three for a loss of 26,000.

So we've been doing several of these meetings now, and it's kind of the hot button topics that we've been hearing, prescriptive grazing, what is it? And basically it's using livestock to achieve a specific wildlife and/or habitat objective. One example is that let's say you have an area that is an important sage grouse breeding ground or important sage grouse wintering ground, and we've got a large grass buildup

expansion of wilderness. There is a couple of suggestions to eliminate some wilderness in proposed C, some proposed wilderness areas.

So the main bullets for this one is manage habitats to provide more opportunities for recreation, maintain balance numbers of big game and livestock. Work with Fish Wildlife and Parks to expand and maximize hunting opportunities. Improve access to boat ramps and recommend eliminating four proposed wilderness areas for reduction of 35,880 acres.

And then we move to "Alternative D," and this is our Proposed Action Alternative. We coin this one the Natural Processes or the Ecological Processes. And, again, working in cooperation with our partners, using those natural economic processes of fire, grazing, flooding, and active management, tree planting, farming in a balanced responsible manner to restore and/or maintain biological diversity, biological integrity and environmental health.

Those three things right there come right from your Improvement Act as to what we're supposed to be doing here. Once we've restored those natural resources we take a more passive management approach. We still provide for those quality wildlife-dependent public uses and experiences, and we limit when they are either injurious to the habitats or to the ecological process.
in that area, and we can't use prescribed fire, or we
don't want to use prescribed fire because of the
potential impact on that sage grouse area. We could
use livestock in a prescription to go in there and
reduce that fuel load to protect that area from a
wildfire event.
Prescriptive fire, how will it be used? We've been
working with five ecologists across the refuge now for
the past five years, and along with some rain
scientists to look at the historic fire frequency on
the refuge, and we started at a very close level and
have been working our way down to the very fine scale
level. And what we found is we've got several areas on
the refuge that historically burn within about a seven
to 14-year time period. We have several areas on the
refuge that maybe burn once every several hundred
years, so we have quite a range.
And the idea is to go in and look at those areas,
determine that historic fire frequency, and try to
restore that back to that landscape. Some areas burn
more frequently than others, some burn hardly at all.
So it's using prescribed fire to put it back into
that historic fire condition. Several of those areas
that historically burned in that 7 to 14-year period
haven't seen fire in 60 or 70 years, and that's why

bison. I can just come out and say that we do not have
a plan from the Fish and Wildlife Service to
re-introduce bison. What's in the plan is based upon
talks by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks where they
were considering, or they were looking to consider,
evaluating the possibility of reintroducing bison
somewhere in Montana. If such a proposal went forward,
and if such a proposal identified areas around the
refuge, we wanted to have something in our plan that
addressed that. So everything in our plan is based
upon Fish, Wildlife & Parks taking the lead and pulling
together a bison proposal. So the service will not be
re-introducing wild bison or creating a fence bison herd
on the refuge.
So as Mimi said, we're here to gather your
comments. There are several ways to comment. One is
through your public testimony today. The other is by
one of the forms that was handed out to you as you came
in the door. You can write your comment on that, drop
it off as you leave today, or you can mail those back
to us. You can send us a written letter. The
addresses are on those forms; they are in the document.
You can send Laurie an e-mail. She doesn't get nearly
enough e-mails at work. And right now our comment
period is scheduled to end November the 16th. We have

you'd use prescribed fire to reduce the fuel in that
area and put it back into that condition.
As part of the CCP process, we're mandated to look
at our proposed wilderness areas and to evaluate those
areas to see if they are still meeting those wilderness
characteristics in which they were set aside for. So
part of it is a subjective call on our part as to
whether those areas still meet those wilderness
characteristics in which they were established. And so
in some of the alternatives, that's why we proposed
expanding some areas and others we proposed eliminating
some areas. A lot of it is based on the main topic of
what that alternative was, and then the other is,
again, a subjective examination of those -- those
areas.
The same thing with roads. We look at roads. Some
of the roads that we proposed to close are roads that
cross private property before entering the refuge, and
there's either limited public access or no public
access, and so, therefore, we can't create an exclusive
use on the refuge, so those roads were proposed to be
closed. Others, it's a fragmenting of the habitat, so
it would allow animals to move more freely. Others
it's a maintenance type issue.
And then bison. Quite a few talks concerning
received numerous requests to extend that comment
period. We are evaluating those requests, and a
decision will be made in the next couple weeks, but
right now there's still four weeks left, and so the
service is not entertaining an extension at this time,
but a decision will be made within the next couple of
weeks.
So we're going to open the floor up to you guys,
and if you want to ask a question, go ahead. We'll
take all those questions down and answer as many of
them as we can at the end of the meeting. Thanks.
Ms. MATHER: While these guys are
rearranging up here, I'll explain how we'll run the
next portion of the comment period. So I've got a list
of everybody that signed up. I'll call the folks off.
I'll call up who's up next and who's on deck so you can
be ready. What we'd ask is you come up here, speak
into the microphone, please state your name and spell
it. We've got a court reporter recording the
proceedings.
As Barron mentioned, if you just have a question,
that's fine, come on up and ask your question. Barron
and Bill will be taking notes, and we'll have about
15 minutes at the end so we can respond to the
questions they heard. Other than that, three-minute
You can send Laurie an e-mail. She doesn't get nearly together a bison proposal. So the service will not be and if such a proposal identified areas around the cross private property before entering the refuge, and of the roads that we proposed to close are roads that expanding some areas and others we proposed eliminating characteristics in which they were established. And so characteristics in which they were set aside for. So at our proposed wilderness areas and to evaluate those characteristics in which they were established. As Mimi said, we're here to gather your say, why don't we just leave it the way it is? Environmental Impact Statement, which is no action. Was it a hundred thousand for the employees to park on, or was it less? Why are you cutting trees down for pipets? How many pipets do we have at Medicine Lake? And I'll reserve the rest of my time.


NANCY HEINS: My name's Nancy Heins. I'm from Fort Peck, H-e-i-n-s. I had one basic question. Last fall we had a tremendous deer problem around the Fort Peck area, and I ask, who is responsible for the deer, CMR or the Corp? And I have not been able to get a straight answer, and I really would like to know that.


MR. GARWOOD: Yeah, my name is Ron Garwood. I'm a Valley County Conservation District supervisor, immediate past chairman. And I've -- the conservation district gave me permission to speak for them. And I have a -- have a written thing here from them that I wrote up.

I've been hunting out on the CMR since '57, and it was a Fort Peck game range at that time, and -- and it's much the same now as it was then, except we don't have near the roads to drive on anymore. Ever since the Fish and Wildlife Service took it over in '76 they've been closing off roads, and the reason they're closing off roads is they're putting in these proposed wilderness areas out there, which we don't need out there. Anyone that has ever driven through that country can see that it's protected out there. No one's going to move out there. It's rugged country.

And why do we have to have wilderness areas out there? When they do that, they have to close off all the roads within that area, and as hunters, it's hard for us to get around anymore. If we get something, it's hard to get them out to keep from spoiling, and so I'm not too happy with the Fish and Wildlife Service over that.

The board -- the board of supervisors of the Valley County Conservation District are in favor of option "A" of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, which is no action. And most of the people that I've talked to about this say, well, why don't we just leave it the way it is? And most of Montanans, I believe -- I feel, believe that way, and especially native Montanans, and I consider myself a native Montanan because I was born and raised here, and I'm still here. I'm a native Montanan. And there's a lot of us here that are that way, and I think we feel the same way.

We would like to ask for a 30 to 60 day extension of the comment period. Probably about two, two-and-a-half months ago I sent my card in to the Fish and Wildlife Service to get my big book. Well, it still hasn't showed up in the mail. I guess we'll have to blame it on the postal service, but, anyway, I would still like to get that. One minute left?

But we are elected officials charged with overseeing soil and water conservation in Valley County, and I feel that the farmers and ranchers are the true conservationists [sic] in this country. It isn't these environmental groups that are causing problems for us. They have money, big, free money. Tax free money is given to them to sue the Fish and Wildlife Service to do things. They either sue or they threaten to sue to get things done, and I don't think it's right or fair. There's enough wilderness area out in the CMR right now; we don't need anymore. We don't want free roaming bison on the CMR. We do not want wolves on the CMR, and we feel that prescribed burning on the CMR is just asinine. I can't believe that they're even considering this out there. When they go out there and fight fires, they get backpacks on. Good gosh, you know, and
they want to go out there and start up a prescribed fire? We can't trust them.

Ms. Mather: Ron, we need to interrupt.

Mr. Garwood: Anyway, we, the Valley County Conservation District supervisors, ask the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to respect Valley County and be a good neighbor by considering Alternate A and keeping the management the same as it has been for the last 25 years. And, once again, we thank you for the chance to talk. And I have got to know Bill Berg, pretty good guy, and I even kind of like Barron now, even though the first time I seen him I knew he was a company man and he wasn't going to listen to us.

Mr. Crawford: I like Ron too.

Ms. Mather: Thanks, Ron. Dave Pippin, Janelle Holden on deck.

Commissioner Pippin: Hello. My name is Dave Pippin. I am a resident of Valley County, third generation Valley County resident. As we journey through a new CCP and EIS plan I think it's really important to know and understand what public land comprises of.

Ballentine's law dictionary describes public land as "Such lands as are open to sale or other disposition under general law." In the passing years some have come to think that the changing of this definition may have eliminated many acquired rights and benefits that were acquired in an earlier time, long before the CMR.

This is not the case. The CCP/EIS a document that has far reaching consequence and is of great importance to decide and evaluate all the existing rights on the CMR held by individuals and local governments before a new policy is set. It is also important to note that the FLWA, NEPA, Taylor Grazing Act and many other executive orders all address existing rights in various ways, and all have a savings clause that demand that existing rights will not be extinguished because of the enactment of new federal policy.

It should be further noted that the Data Quality Act directs the Office of Management and Budget to issue government-wide guidelines that provide policy and procedural guidance to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility and integrity of information, including statistical information disseminated by federal agencies.

I believe that a comprehensive, independent study on prescriptive grazing and burning are required if you truly are to have an accurate, workable document. I believe that the number of visitors visiting the CMR is a figure that is too high, as it includes many people that are not really visitors to the CMR, per se. I also question whether an accurate EIS statement has been done in a completed form. An environmental impact statement is a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act for federal government agency significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

A tool for decision making, an EIS describes the positive and negative environmental effects of proposed agency action and cites alternative actions. Several U.S. state governments have also adopted "little NEPA"s. State laws imposing EIS requirements for particular statement actions. Montana has many of these and are -- and all are not listed in this coordination process.

A full financial note of the cost to local economies is essential if we are to be treated fairly and be in compliance of the law. Surely a land mass that had 70,000 cattle on it in 1984 and only has 18,000 grazing cattle on it in 2010 is a very considerable loss of value to the counties compromised by this reduction in livestock production.

Partitioned roads and historical RS2477 right of way have not been documented and identified on CCP document maps. The fact is that coordinating status was not granted to the counties around the CMR but was offered to other organizations that have less standing than the counties have. Almost all federal policies address existing rights in various ways, and have a saving -- I'm on the wrong page there -- require that local governments have coordination and not only be offered cooperative status.

These federal policy requirements should be observed and honored. Valley County has a Resource Use Plan which was not coordinated within the formation of this proposed CCP plan. Not once has the U.S. --

Mr. Page: I'll give two minutes of my time to Mr. Pippin.

Ms. Mather: I'm afraid we don't do that.

Mr. Pippin: In conclusion, I support plan "A". No change should be your only consideration with a strong emphasis on addressing and correcting many of the items that were done in the past. The assumption that we will address these items with other documents or at a later date, or maybe it will just go away is totally unacceptable in a document that has the far reaching effect such as this.

Most people know that the points that I have
21
1 Alternatives that support managing the refuge or
2 wildlife. Thank you.
3 
4 MS. MOTHER: Thanks, Janelle. Leonard
5 with Jason on deck.
6 
7 LEONARD SWENSEN: Okay. First of all,
8 I'm Leonard Swensen. My grandfather homesteaded here
9 over a hundred years ago, been involved with the CMR
10 for 30 years in sharing grazing, and there's been -- if
11 fact, it's been 40 years, and there's been 30 years
12 prior to that, that other ranchers have enjoyed
13 grazing.
14 
15 I'm not sure I share the excitement of nearly
16 three years you work to get 450 pages drawn up. I
17 haven't read through all of those, like our health bill
18 people. I didn't read over the overview, and I guess I
19 thought A was the best one. Usually you have four
20 alternatives, have a preferred one, we have the public
21 meetings, and then you choose the one you want anyway,
22 but it's our chance to sort our horn a little bit here.
23 
24 And the most important thing to me is, is that
25 renewable resource we have, and it's grass. When we
26 hear you talk about burning it, it really bothers me.
27 It's a renewable resource here on Earth and to use
28 wisely. When you don't graze it properly, lightning
29 hits or else you come along and have to burn it. It's

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29 hits or else you come along and have to burn it. It's

23
1 -- this is the best fire prevention you have. And it's
2 -- grazing is the best for the habitat for the
3 wildlife, as your own range specialists from North
4 Dakota had in a magazine here.
5 
6 Talk about wilderness; to me it's the same as waste
7 land. It's already a wilderness, it's not going to
8 change when it's a study area out there. It's used only
9 a couple months out of the year by the majority of
10 people, and they don't even get to it.
11 
12 There's going to be more fires than what you know
13 what to do with because of the grasses this last year.
14 I think the Interpretive Center in Fort Peck is great.
15 I think the James Kip Recreation is great where the BLM
16 helped people to view it. The elk bugling view area is
17 great, but I often wonder how many more people had
18 enjoyed the beauty of the refuge if you had left the
19 roads not closed.
20 
21 A little history about Lewis and Clark, keep
22 hearing about them. They saw very little of the CMR, a
23 little bit by where Ron Garwood lives, the rest is in
24 the lake right now. When it was a game range, Charlie
25 Russell would have been really proud to have it named
26 after him. Now I think he's turning over in his grave.
27 I'll skip ahead here a little bit.
28 
29 BLM built reservoirs, developed grazing systems,
years ago, and so I kind of have an outsider's
perspective. And looking around it seems to me like
the CMR and the ranchers don't have such a good
relationship. I'd like to tell you what would happen
if you treat the ranchers as partners and gave them a
sense of ownership.

The ranch I live on is on BLM right now. About 10
years ago the BLM looked at Timber Creek but didn't
kick the cows off. They said, let's make it their own
pasture. My mother-in-law built fences, my
mother-in-law came up with a rotation system so if a
pasture gets grazed in the spring of one year it has
16 months to recover from a spring grazing. The
results of this cooperative effort is that today that
creek works the way the BLM wants it to.

That's where BLM's involvement in the project ends,
but not the ranchers. We're still monitoring those
sites, so we have our fingers on the poles. We were
implementing a program to control creeping foxtail on
our own initiative because we know if that gets that
creek, we will no longer be able to have the sections
that were supposed to be managing for.

I know the CMR has a problem with noxious weeds. I
think you would have fewer problems if the ranchers
were treated more like partners, because on our place
with Scott on deck. And. Again, if I can ask you guys
to hold your applause. Thank you.

MARK GOOD: My name's Mark Good. I work
for the Montana Wilderness Association. I'll bet I
don't get an applause. I'm from Great Falls and I just
want to -- I think it's worth talking about the mission
for a bit about the refuge.

As a national wildlife refuge it's supposed to be
managed different from other BLM and forest service
lands, and as a guiding principle, the refuge is to
manage for the enhancement and protection of wildlife,
and I think it's through this plan that these decisions
have to be made.

I know a lot of people don't like a refuge, maybe
some would wish it just to go away. But it's not, I
don't think it is anyway, and I think the reason is
because wildlife refuges are popular with the American
public, and I think popular with most Montanans. I do
think it would be maybe more productive to make this
refuge work for local communities that surround here.

I think it's no secret that the population of the
eastern half of the state has been decreasing. I don't
think that's a trend that's likely to change, and maybe
this refuge, as other protected landscapes, have taken
advantage of these landscapes and then with their

we found some Russian fireweed and we went after it;
you know, we tried pulling it and mowing it, and that
doesn't work. We had to spray it, and we didn't want
to because there's frogs that live in that creek. But
my mother-in-law, she was really careful and made sure
she was spraying individual plants, and there was lots
of patches, and it was not close to a road. She had a
lot of work, but she -- she sprayed and sprayed the
next year, and we made sure our success in that in two
ways.

Number one, the frogs are still singing, and when
mom went all she needed was a little bitty spray can,
and it only took her one day. You can't get those
results with your weed strike team because you've got
65 habitat units to manage, but the ranchers will do it
for you if they have a stake in it. That wasn't on
mom's land, but it was on her ranch. It was a state
section of BLM grazing land, but it was on her ranch.

Don't matter what you want to accomplish. If you
want more salt bush or maximilian sunflowers, fewer
noxious weeds, whatever you want to accomplish, the
ranchers can do it for you, cheaper than anybody you
can hire, and they will do it for free, in fact, they'll pay you. Thanks for listening.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Jason. Mark's up

communities. Economics are pretty simple; people care
where they live and make a preference to live in places
with some economic or some environmental values, such
as protected landscape.

I think the refuge -- it should be noted, too, that
the refuge does make a direct contribution to local
communities; I think through employment, through the
purchase of goods and services, and then, of course,
there's hunting, which is a big activity. I think
there are a hundred thousand hunting visits. I don't
know the exact -- how much -- either of those
activities contributes locally, but I bet it's more
than a lot of people would think.

Other than this part of the refuge mission is just
some of the environmental education and interpretation.
Out here there's the Interpretive Center, and so I
guess maybe a question too is, I don't know what that
translates into dollars, but I think it's worth asking
or thinking about; what other kind of activities could
be done -- interpretive activities that could be done
on the refuge? Maybe bring people to the refuge. I
think at some places access is an issue, people don't
now how to get there or where.

In the case of Slippery Ann you probably have too
many people there, and maybe there's a way of directing

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<td>some would wish it just to go away. But it's not, I want to -- I think it's worth talking about the mission with Scott on deck. And. Again, if I can ask you guys results with your weed strike team because you've got and it only took her one day. You can't get those to because there's frogs that live in that creek. But doesn't work. We had to spray it, and we didn't want you know, we tried pulling it and mowing it, and that</td>
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<td>with managers of the surrounding land managers, not in isolation under a vision. Local comments and concerns should be weighted more than comments that come from Tennessee. That's how FLPSA works. To choose any alternative but A is going to guarantee litigation, and the problem with that is the tax payers are going to be paying for both sides. It is plainly evident that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should stick to fish and wildlife and not range management. When the overtly negative social, economic and cultural and resource -- and the resource impacts are logically evaluated, Alternative A is the only alternative that would be acceptable. To select any other alternative would be to make a choice not based on scientific method, credible research or relevant data, but based on pseudoscience and preliminary science of the worst kind. Thank you. MS. MATHER: Thanks, Scott. John with Maxine on deck. JOHN BRENDEN: I don't think I need that microphone. MS. MATHER: Can you state your name? JOHN BRENDEN: My name is Senator John Brenden. I represent District 16, which is six counties up in. It's B-r-e-n-d-e-n. You know, I don't</td>
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My name is Maxine Korman, M-a-x-i-n-e, K-o-r-m-a-n. My husband and I own a ranch in Valley County, in Hinsdale. I've got a document I am going to submit for the record. It contains the certified copy of our declaration of acceptance of land patents that are recorded with Valley County Clerk and Recorder. That's proof of our title as against even the federal government, including the pertinences. And those impertinences include Rs 223 stock water rights and the associated easements, which is recognized as the ownership of the fee or the inheritable right to use.

All the enabling documents in the game range and the wildlife refuge contain the savings provision, as has been previously pointed out, which says, "Subject to valid preexisting rights, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has historically ignored and continues to ignore the existence of private rights." That would include grazing rights. The term grazing rights appears in the Stock Grazing Homestead Act statute. That is defined as an easement, the right to use and take from the land of another.

These rights predate the game range and now the wildlife refuge. Nowhere in this document or in any of the documents that CMR has ever put out is there a recognition of those rights, and there's never been any action to protect private rights, but rather to ignore them and extinguish them. This plan, I believe, is nothing more than a vehicle to advance treasured landscape and national monuments with the Antiquities Act, which ignores the United States Supreme Court law. All lands to which private rights and claims attach are not public lands. And the U.S. Court of Claims recognizes these lands as fee lands.

I would ask you provide the Valley County Commissioners with the documentation that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has authority to turn these lands over to intranational or international management authority and jurisdiction. Also, since wolves and grizzlies and bighorn sheep pop up in all but one proposed plan, I can only assume we intend to use endangered species as a method to regulate us out of business.

In here I point to a particular part in Title I of the United States code. It has to do with laws enacted into positive law, and I'm also asking you provide the commissioners with when that title was enacted into positive law, so, in fact, the Endangered Species Act can be applied in Valley County or in the sovereign State of Montana. Thank you. Thank you.


Gene Etchart: Name is Gene, G-e-n-e, Etchart, E-t-c-h-a-r-t, address, Glasgow, Montana. My first suggestion to this group is that this thing should be moved so that the person that's trying to deliver a message can talk to the audience, as well as to you people.

I'm wondering what I'm doing here. I'm 93 years of age. I was born and raised in this county. My first six years was living on a ranch, and now it's with the CMR. I spent about a page getting at my credentials. Before that I'd like to make one other observation.

I think your time frame is too short. Everybody that's come up here is trying to rush through to have this fellow allow him to keep talking, and I think that's wrong. If you've got an important message, I think it should be important to you people to listen to it, and not only that, but for the neighbors to understand what he has to say.

Now, I lived all -- all my life in this county. I operated several ranch units; some of you people are familiar with them. I'm going -- I'm going to try to speed this up a little bit, but I can remember the days before the Taylor Grazing Act and before the Fort Peck Game Range. I can remember when the Air Force come in here with their bombers and wanted to move the ranchers out, all that sort of thing.

I'll digress here a little bit, but I remember that someone talked about the content of your proposal. I think all four of those say nothing. I think they are written in such a way with elastic words that the Fish and Wildlife Service can do anything they want to in the future under any one of them, and that's -- that's my opinion. I read them, I try to say, what does this mean? Well, I think it means that you and I could have differing opinions, and either one could make the argument that it's in here.

But at any rate, I have been on several grazing boards of the BLM. I was the chairman of the BLM's National Advisory Board Counsel for 10 years. I have the distinction, which I doubt if anybody else in the room has, is I have an citation from the Secretary of Interior as a conservation award for Man of the Year, something of that nature.

I remember that when the first announcement on the Fort Peck Game Range was made, I can remember that, and I remember there was acceptance, generally. I think everybody thought it was a good idea. And I remember my father seemed to approve of it. FDR was a popular
BAILEY, JR., who was a fish and game commissioner here in Montana, plus a legislator, he and I on a different schedule were commissioned to go talk to Senator Metcalf. And Senator Metcalf looked me in the eye and he said -- 15 seconds.

MS. MATHER: 15 seconds. Count down.

GENE ETCHART: He said the game range would be administered under the Taylor Grazing Act, and he said, you go back and tell your friends and your neighbors and your people that that's the way it's going to be. And fish and game -- Fish and Wildlife never adhered to that at all, and it comes back to the points somebody else made. I don't think there's anybody alive that remembers that, except that he gave me the commitment to bring it back to you people that it would be administered under the Fish and Game Act, or rather, the Taylor Grazing Act, and he said, tell your friends they've got no problems.

MS. MATHER: Thank you, Jim. Steve?

STEVEN PAGE: My name is Steven Page.

I'm a local rancher. For the record, I would like to state that I fully support, since we have no other options than to support one of the options, I would be in favor of option "A".

I have a number of things that I would like to say,

but I think I would just be repeating a number of points that have already been made. But one of the things that I was noticing as I was reviewing your handout, and no one has mentioned it at this point, is it would appear to me as though we are saying that if a pack of wolves show up on the CMR, they'll remain on the CMR, and you have no intention of controlling wolf populations because you stated that you are going to eliminate your relationship with the USDA predator service. And so I guess I have the question to ask you. Do you intend to allow wolves to survive on the game range? Thank you.

MS. MATHER:  Thanks, Steve. Did anyone else have a comment or a question before Barron answers questions?

SCOTT CASSEL: Yes.

MS. MATHER:  Can you please come on up?

SCOTT CASSEL: I have to come up to ask a question?

MS. MATHER:  Yep.

SCOTT CASSEL: What congressional authority exists where you guys assert the right or convince me that you have the right to expand or change wilderness areas without the authority of Congress?

Thank you.
GENE ETCHEART: Can I have two minutes?

MS. MATHER: No. Do you have a question?

I can't give you any more time. They'll be plenty of

time afterwards.

GENE ETCHEART: I think I have a picture

that you'll all enjoy.

MS. MATHER: Would you like no hold it up

and share?

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Ask a question with

it, Gene, and it will be fine.

MS. MATHER: Go ahead.

GENE ETCHEART: The thing I wanted to say

is that --

MS. MATHER: Gene, our recorder can't

hear you from there. Gene, I'm giving you 30 seconds

this time. Believe me, I love a story teller as much

as anyone else, but this is not the venue. 30 seconds.

GENE ETCHEART: The thing I wanted to say

is the Fish and Wildlife Service has been too modest on

the size of this CMR, and I have a picture that I think

will illustrate that and I need both hands here to get

at it. But this is a picture. Can you folks see it?

There's six beautiful elk if that picture, and they are

grazing in a horse pasture at the stone house. And

that's 15 miles north of the nearest CMR boundary. The

Barron's got a number of questions to answer.

GENE ETCHEART: If they were cattle on the

refuge --

MS. MATHER: Thank you.

MR. CRAWFORD: I'll have to admit, this

has been the most lively meeting we've had out of the

six, so I appreciate you guys making it interesting.

To address John's comment about how many years am I

going to be around? I'm around one day. Today is my

last day, officially, as an employee of CMR, and I am

proud to say I'm going back to Tennessee, my home

roots, glad to go back to family.

I've enjoyed my time immensely here in Montana, but

as you all spoke, the pull of home is very strong, and

the pull to my home is extremely strong. So I took the

opportunity to go back and to be two hours from the

farm that I grew up on and have the opportunity for my

children to have the same experiences that I had on

that farm.

So, Kenneth, this is a CMR meeting. We don't

manage Medicine Lake, so I'm sorry, I can't answer any

of your questions about Medicine Lake. That's Jerry

Rodriguez up there, and so I don't have any idea what

the budget is. I don't have any idea what their master

plan is. I don't know about their parking lot and I

sportsmen tell me that deer like the private land

section better.

Now, if these deer are 15 miles off of that, just

think if you take 200 miles --

MS. MATHER: Did you have a question,

Gene?

GENE ETCHEART: Well...

MS. MATHER: Okay. Thank you for the

picture.

SENATOR BRENDEN: I have one question.

Why do you treat us so rudely when you're working for

we the tax payers?

MS. MATHER: Okay. I'm going -- I have

no intention of treating you rudely. I'm actually

trying to treat everybody fairly. This is about our

sixth or seventh meeting, and we've handled them all

exactly the same. I'm now turning the mic. over to

Barron to answer questions.

GENE ETCHEART: I still didn't make my

point.

MS. MATHER: You'll have time afterwards,

Gene.

GENE ETCHEART: My point is that those

seven or eight elk were off the refuge.

MS. MATHER: Gene, with all due respect,
Refuge System, and the key word there is "national". Okay. Our policies stretch from the Eastern United States all the way to the Hawaiian Islands, Alaska, all the way to Puerto Rico.

There was lots of talk about FLPMA, the Federal Land Protection Management Act and Taylor Grazing. Those two laws apply to multiple lands; the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. They do not apply in managing a national wildlife refuge system.

Let's see, what else do we have here? Grass is a renewable resource. That was an interesting concept, and there is — there is lots of uses for grass out there, it's just not used to be eaten by various animals, it's used as nesting cover. It's used for a whole variety of insects, and the idea that we're striving for in this plan is to create to diversity out there. You have short grass, you have tall grass, you have forbs and you have shrubs, and, therefore, you're providing these microhabitats for a whole wide range of species from mountain plovers all the way up to sharp-tailed grouse. Both of those require different types of habitats in order for them to raise chicks and be successful.

What else do we have here? What other kind of

interpretive activities have we done? We do have -- we had -- we had a person that was stationed at Fort Peck that was an outdoor rec. planner that worked with the Corp staff on taking programs to schools, and unfortunately we lost that position about three years ago and have not filled it back. What we have done is converted a person in our Lewiston office from admin. position to a manager/traine position with part of her duties being environmental education outreach, and been working in mostly the Lewiston district right now because that's where she's based out of. Hopefully in the plan we've identified the need for additional outdoor rec. planner, environmental education type planners that could assist with taking environmental education programs to the schools.

Other things we identified in the plan was the building of various interpretive trails, a couple of them here on the east end of the refuge to interpret the natural and historical resources of the area.

No, we're not going to introduce wolves. What we state in the plan is it involves naturally colonizing the area. We would work with Fish, Wildlife & Parks to identify a management plan for them. We are not going to consider hunting those species if they do migrate on to the refuge. We do have in there that we will authorize the taking of wolves that are causing livestock deprivation. The canceling of the service with Avis, USDA is mostly for coyote control, that's being done on the southeast portion of the refuge at this time.

I had a question as to what authority do we have to expand wilderness. What we're doing is we're talking about proposed wilderness. We're not talking about designated wilderness. Only Congress has the authority to designate wilderness. Within the refuge we have CMR and we have UL Bend. UL Bend has designated wilderness on it. All the other areas are proposed. Proposed means they've been evaluated by the service, they've been approved by the service, they've been approved by the Secretary of Interior, and are waiting action by Congress.

Since they have not been designated, the service can go back during this planning process and reevaluate those lands and determine whether they still meet that wilderness characteristic, and make a recommendation back to our director's office and then up to the secretaries office. According to our policy, we do manage proposed wilderness as if it was designated, so we maintain those characteristics until Congress goes ahead and acts on that.

I think we had one other one that was about the cross fences down in Harper's Ridge. And that was on exclusion. It wasn't an interior type fence that divided pastures, it was a habitat exclusion that burned up in a fire, and since it is in a proposed wilderness area, we weren't going to go back in and rebuild that exclusion, so we went ahead and took that fence out.

RON GARWOOD: Excuse me, Barron. That isn't in a proposed wilderness area over there on the north side of Harper's Ridge.

MR. CRAWFORD: It's just outside of it, but it was a fence no longer needed for management, and it was non-functional. It was laying on the ground, Ron.

RON GARWOOD: I know that, and excuse me, one question. And in the fires of 2006 when you were fighting fires on the south side of Harper's Ridge and it got away from you and burned on the north side, that's when it burned those up, and now you're taking out cross fences.

MR. BERG: But that fence is not needed anymore for livestock management. That's the reason we're taking it out.

I just wanted to expand a little bit on Steve's
question about USDA permits. Under current management we've got a couple blanket agreements with USDA to go in and remove predators that cause trouble for livestock, mostly sheep, in the area around Hailey Point, Garfield County. Some of those sheep no longer operate in that area. There are no sheep out on the tip of Hailey Point like there used to be.

What we're proposing to do is to take those off the table. When depredation problems do arise, we'll address those individually as they come up. And, for the record, the wolf that was shot down in Timber Creek a few years back, we actually issued a permit authorizing the taking of that animal on the refuge if it occurred there, so -- and it wasn't taken on the refuge. It ended up being taken several miles up Timber Creek, but just so you understand how we're proposing to handle that in the future.

If wolves did move onto an area and they could get along for a period of time without causing depredation problems, you know, our policy would be not to go in and kill them just for the sake of killing them.

We'll be around afterwards here. Several staff people here. Bob Skinner, somebody had a question about the sentinel plant concept. There's a lot of different names for sentinel plants, and maybe Bob can give you a better idea what those plants are. Matt DeRosier is in the back there, west end Sand Creek manager. Aaron Johnson up here in the front is at Fort Peck, closer to home. Paula Gouse is in the back, Jared Eatmon in the back.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: I've got a quick question. I'm sorry. Is this a cooperation or a coordination with Valley County?

MR. CRAWFORD: Valley County was one of the cooperating agencies on this planning effort. They were included in the county group. They weren't always represented in the meetings because they had other county commissioners from some of the adjacent counties that were represented.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: But cooperate or coordinate?

MR. CRAWFORD: Cooperating?

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Do they have coordinating status and will they?

MR. BERG: You know, I guess in my mind there's not much difference. For example, on -- something came up on roads here earlier where we're not proposing to address some of the -- like the 2477 issue, petition roads, some of those things. That's going to be part of the road management plan that we

do, which is a subset of this. In an instance like that, the counties would be a cooperating agency. We work directly with them, probably more with the counties than anybody else, and some of the adjacent land owners that those roads effect, so in that case they would be a coordinating agency. Coordinating where they have a say, and you have to listen, instead of cooperating where they say but you do what you want.

And the reason for that, as you define it -- I've never heard it defined that way -- the fact is some of those roads that proverb [sic] the refuge have petition, so we legally would have to address those on the refuge because there's another entity that has a legal identifier to that road.

COMMISSIONER PIPPIN: Valley County has a further question that never was addressed in the responses to questions. We've repeatedly brought up the issue of valid, preexisting rights.

Now, when you read the cases in the United States Court of Claims where people have been forced to file a claim against the federal government for the taking of their property under the Tucker Act. The court recognized that under the prior appropriation doctrine ranchers, for example, owned vested water rights, and the court said the rancher owns the fee. That's because the federal government in 1866 passed a statute for vested water rights and rights of way according to local law, custom and decisions of courts.

MR. BERG: Well --

COMMISSIONER PIPPIN: Let me finish, please, sir. Now, well before a BLM was created there were grazing rights recognized, bought and sold, passed on in inheritance. Traditionally this agency has said, you know what, if you go to a family, we'll let you pass the permit down, but if you sell the place, nope, the permit doesn't go. You haven't addressed that the court recognizes that the permit is not property, and that property exists independent of the permit. And the court has said, cancellation of a permit does not extinguish the property.

Valley county's question is because we've got letters in our file, we've got responses back that pretty much say, nope, we say there are no private rights, what -- my question is: What is it the county has to do, short of calling for an Office of Inspector General oversight, to get Fish and Wildlife Service --

MR. BERG: That might be the best avenue in this case.

MR. BERG: Because this isn't the venue or the plan that's going to address that issue. In regard to water rights, we have an expert, Gene Etchart. If you have a water rights issue we can't address, I'm sure Gene could help us with that.

Thanks.

MS. MATHER: That's it --

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Have I got any time left? I'm all washed up.

MS. MATHER: You can talk to staff.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: This was supposed to last until 3:00.

MS. MATHER: We'll be here until 3:00, if you have any questions of the staff.

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CERTIFICATE

STATE OF MONTANA )
COUNTY OF VALLEY )

I, Kelley A. Barstad, Official Court Reporter of the Montana Seventeenth Judicial District Court, and Notary Public for the County of Valley, State of Montana, residing at Glasgow, Montana DO HEREBY CERTIFY:

That I was duly authorized to and did report the foregoing proceeding. Said testimony and proceedings were reported and transcribed by me with a computerized transcription system.

That the foregoing transcript of this matter constitutes a true and accurate transcription of the proceedings which were heard.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have herewith set my hand and affixed my notarial seal this 30th day of January, 2011.

Kelley A. Barstad
Certified Shorthand Reporter
My commission expires 2-2-14
Thank you for coming. If you take a seat, we can get started here. Somebody's lights are on across the street, a white Taurus. Anybody's? Okay. Thank you all for coming this evening. My name's Mimi. I'll be facilitating the meeting this evening. I'm up here with Barron Crawford, CWRS project leader, Bill Berg, the deputy project leader, and Laurie Shannon, the planning team leader for the CCP.

The purpose of today's meeting is for the Fish and Wildlife Service to collect your comments on the conservation plan, the Draft CCP, as we've been calling it. We'll start the evening with Barron giving a presentation on the CCP, and then we'll turn it over to you.

Most people have signed up who want to give a comment. If you want to sign up later, that's fine too. Keep in mind, though, we're going to be limiting it to three minutes, so if you've got a lot to say, start thinking about how you can streamline your thoughts and get it down to three minutes. With that I'll turn it over to Barron.

MR. CRAWFORD: Thanks everyone for taking time out of your evening to come here tonight. I've been asked to speak a little bit slower as I go through this, which shouldn't be a problem for me. I'll just pull out the southern twang out here a little bit, draw stuff out. So we're going to talk about the CCP for the Charles M. Russell and the UL Bend National Wildlife Refuges.

We started this process back in 2007. We held 14 public meetings, collected about 24,000 comments. We've had numerous meetings with your cooperators, and now we're at the point where we've developed this draft document where everybody has had a chance, or is having a chance to review.

This is kind of the timeline of what we've been doing and when we've been doing it. So right now we're in the fall of 2010 with the draft out. Hope to have the final CCP out by the winter of 2012 with a record of decision by that summer. So basically we do a CCP for several reasons. The first is it's mandated by Congress.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 said all national wildlife refuges will have a CCP completed by 2011, so there's about 548 refuges. Right now about two-thirds of those have completed plans. The rest of us, like CMR, are working feverishly trying to make that 2012 deadline. We've received some comments from folks about why are you rushing through this. It's basically to meet this deadline.

So there's several key elements to a CCP. The first one is it provides that management direction, gives guidance. It's based upon the refuge purposes and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Refuge managers come and go, some stay longer than others. As new managers come in, they basically have a management plan to guide that management, and so there's not an abrupt change, you know, based upon the thoughts or ideas of a new manager coming on board. It outlines a vision statement with goals, objectives and strategies for that future management.

It's accompanied by some type of a NEPA document, either an environmental assessment or impact statement. And due to the complexity of issues we're dealing with here at CMR, we went ahead and did an Environmental Impact Statement, and that's one of the reasons this document is 400 some pages long. And the last thing is it provides that long term guidance for that 15-year period. There are 15-year plans. At the end of that time period the process starts over again.

So this is where we're at. There's kind of eight steps. We're down here at number five. After public comments, after we've evaluated those public comments,
move up here to number six, and then you implement the plan, you monitor and evaluate. That's one thing I haven't mentioned at some of the previous meetings is the services adopted in this policy called adaptive management.

So one of the comments we received is it seems like there's a lot of vagueness in this plan, and being accused of doing that on purpose. Well, like, yeah, we have done that on purpose because we'll be employing this strategy called adaptive management. As you gather information, as you do make changes, you evaluate those changes to make sure you're meeting those goals, and then you adapt. So that is a component that is built in to this planning process.

So we have four alternatives. "Alternative A" is the no action. It's basically keep operating as we've been operating since the 1986 EIS was completed. There would be a few minor changes. We continue to manage on the 65 habitat units like we're doing now. We'd gradually implement prescriptive grazing like we're doing now. We'd manage big game to achieve the target levels that were identified in that '86 EIS, 2.5 elk per square mile, 10 mule deer per square mile. We'd keep the 670 Miles Of Road open, and we'd continue to provide protection to the 155,000 acres of proposed wilderness.

seven years. Right now we're grazing about 35 percent. We'd get aggressive in restoration on the river bottoms. We'd work with Fish Wildlife and Parks to provide quality hunting opportunities, sustain populations of big game, and habitats for non-game. We'd close about 106 miles of roads, and we'd expand acreage in the proposed wilderness areas by 25,000 acres.

So the next alternative, "C," was what we coined the Public Use and Economic Emphasis. And this one again we're working in cooperation to manage the landscape to emphasize and promote maximum compatible wildlife dependent uses and economic uses, while protecting wildlife and habitats to the extent possible, and we'd minimize impacts to wildlife habitats while using a variety of tools that enhance the diversity of public and economic opportunities.

So under this alternative you don't see any road closures, no proposed expansion of any wilderness areas, and recommendations of eliminating a couple of wilderness areas. There's one.

So kind of the main points of this one is manage habitats to provide more opportunities for recreation. Work with Fish Wildlife and Parks to maintain balanced numbers of big game and livestock. Expand and maximize some hunting opportunities. Improve access to boat ramps and then recommend eliminating four proposed wilderness units for a loss of 35,800 acres.

And then the last alternative, "Alternative D," is the one that's called our proposed action. We've coined this the Natural Processes or the Ecological Processes, and, again, working with our partners, intensively use those natural ecological processes of fire and grazing in a balanced, responsible manner to restore and maintain the biological integrity of environmental health.

And that phrase comes straight from our organic legislation as to what we're supposed to do on a national wildlife refuge. So once those processes are restored, we'd take a more passive approach. We'd still work to provide those quality public uses, and we'd limit those uses when they are causing injury to either the plants or habitats out there.

So on this map we've got expansion of a couple of wilderness areas. We've got proposed to close a couple of roads, and we've proposed to eliminate a couple of wilderness areas, proposed wilderness areas, here and here.

So main points here, economic use would be limited when they are injurious to the natural processes.

wilderness.

So then we've got three action alternatives. The first one we've coined the Wildlife and Habitat emphasis. And basically this one is we're managing the landscape in cooperation with our partners to emphasize an abundance and diversity of wildlife that uses both natural ecological processes, such as fire and grazing, and synthetic processes such as farming or tree planting.

We encourage wildlife and public uses such as hunting, fishing, photography and wildlife interpretation, and we'd limit economic uses when they compete for habitat resources.

So outside the door as you were coming in we had several maps set up, and these maps depict what the various alternatives might look like, so under "Alternative B" we've got expansion of some proposed wilderness areas, and we've got some suggestions for some road closures.

And this is the east half of the refuge. So some of the main points of "Alternative B" is we'd actively manage, manipulate habitats for productive wildlife food and cover. We'd get aggressive in moving towards prescriptive grazing. We'd want to be prescriptively grazing 50 to 75 percent of the refuge within four to
Apply management practices that mimic and restore natural processes, and those natural processes again, fire and grazing. Use fire and grazing whether its with wild or livestock, so prescriptively to mimic that historic interaction.

Again, work with Fish Wildlife and Parks to maintain diversity of species. Close about 25 miles of roads, so quite a difference, and then recommend expanding six of the proposed wilderness areas for 18,000 acres, but eliminate three for a loss of 26,000. So kind of strike a little bit of balance there between B, C and D.

So this is our seventh meeting for this round. We've had a lot of good comments. Some of the hot button topics or questions that we've received during this is what is prescriptive grazing. Kind of a lot of questions surrounding that, and the basic way to answer that is prescriptive grazing is using livestock to meet a very specific wildlife and/or habitat objective.

So one example of that is say we have an area that's important for wintering sage grouse, or it's an important sage grouse lek, and we've got heavy grass coming into that area and there's a threat of wild fire that could come through there and eliminate that sage grouse habitat. We would use livestock to go in there and graze that area to reduce that risk of wild fire instead of using prescribed fire.

So that brings us to prescribed fire. How will it be used? We've been working with fire ecologists and range ecologists from across the country mapping the historic fire frequency of the refuge, and what we have found is that it's highly variable across the refuge. You've got some areas that historically burn on an average of every 17 to 14 years. You've got other areas that saw fire maybe once every 500 years. And so the idea is to go into those areas that burn frequently that haven't seen fire in several decades, write a prescription.

The prescription would let you know as to what conditions you would use fire, temperature, humidity, fuel moisture, wind speed, wind direction, and you would go ahead and use that fire to restore that area to its historic fire frequency.

Wilderness. As part of the CCP process we're mandated to evaluate our proposed wilderness areas. Part of that evaluation is to make sure that they are meeting their wilderness characteristics in which they were established. Some of it is subjective. You look at it and you make the best guess based upon what the alternative is trying to achieve. That's why you see a diverse recommendation as far as areas to keep and areas to recommend for elimination or for expansion.

The same thing with roads. We looked at roads, looked at the alternative, the major focus of the alternative, and determined which roads are impacting our ability to manage that area, which one does the public not have access due to private land ownership off the refuge, which ones are cherry-stem roads that just lead out of ridges that fragment habitat.

And then the last subject is bison, and I've been consistent in my message. The Fish and Wildlife Service is not proposing to reintroduce bison on the refuge. The sections in the document that talk about bison are in there in case Montana Fish Wildlife and Park develop a proposal that looked at restoring bison somewhere around a refuge. We would work cooperatively with them to see what role the refuge may play, but the Fish and Wildlife Service is not going to take the lead in reintroducing bison on the CMR. We are not going to create a fenced herd. Okay.

So now we're at the point where you guys get to tell us what you think. What I would ask is that we're here to address the items that are in this plan. I know a month ago everybody was here to talk about the monument and treasured landscapes. That is not what this plan is about. This plan is about management of the CMR, so I would ask that you keep your comments focused on that.

Numerous ways to provide comments. You can get up, give it to us orally, you can write them down, drop them as you walk out the door. You can send Laurie an e-mail, you can drop them in the mail box. It's not a voting contest. There's not one form of comments that weigh more than the other, and we'll consider all the relative comments that we receive. So with that, I'll turn it back over to Mimi and you guys. Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Thanks. Just real quickly just let me explain how the comment portion of the evening will run. I've got a list of everybody that is signed up to comment. I ask -- I'll read who's up next as well as who's on deck so you can be ready. If you could come up here, speak into the microphone and spell your name. We've got a court recorder recording the proceedings for the meeting.

Again, we're going to keep it to three minutes. That's what we've been doing for the last six meetings. That's what we're going to do tonight. You can not sell or give away or barter your three minutes to somebody else, so please keep it to three minutes.

Brett's my time keeper back here. Once you've spoken...
for two minutes and only have a minute left, he has a
one minute sign. He's also got a 20 second sign and a
time up sign.

I know some of you mentioned you just have a
question. That's okay. Please come up and just ask
your question, if that's all it is, and not a comment.
When we're done -- if somebody else's comment inspires
you and your name's not on the list, don't worry, I'll
ask once I've gone through this list if anybody else
has a comment or question, and then Barron and Bill
will respond to the questions they heard and the
comments.

The only other thing is we ask you refrain from
applause and cheering so we can move through these
comments smoothly. With that, our first is Janelle
Holden, and I've got Mark on deck.

JANELLE HOLDEN: My name is Janelle
Holden, J-a-n-e-l-l-e, H-o-l-d-e-n. This is my seventh
of the seven meetings that the Fish and Wildlife
Service has held, so I've sort of been on tour, and I
want to start my comments by saying that I really
appreciate the way the Fish and Wildlife Service has
put these meetings together, and I hope they continue
to do the same for the final comments.

It's easy for agencies -- I've been to a lot of
agency meetings, and it's very easy for agencies to
chicken out, so to speak. Agencies often can host an
open house type format where they put staff around the
room, and you can go and ask them questions, but I find
that those are a lot less productive, and get a lot
fewer comments than the meetings that have been set up
by the Fish and Wildlife Service this way around, which
provide a presentation and then a format for
commenting. And then what's really important is that
they are answering the public's questions at the end.
You don't often get that in public meetings, so I
really appreciate that.

The staff has been professional, sometimes in
difficult circumstances, and I thank you for that. So
one of the things that we've heard from a lot of people
during these meetings is concern about changes in the
proposed wilderness areas and the refuge. There are a
lot of people who really treasure these places, they
find a lot of value in them, they find all of the
things that make wilderness wilderness; solitude,
quiet, recreation, opportunities, just an awesome view
of a landscape that is under represented in our
national wilderness system.

So I think the comments demonstrated how much
people love and care about the CMR, and they recognize


it is a gem for Montana and it's a gem for the United
States, and actually a gem world wide.

So with that, I just want to conclude by saying
thank you to Barron. This is his last day on the job,
and I think he's done an excellent job as manager, and
I wish him well on his way to Tennessee, and I hope
that his final meeting will go smoothly. Thanks.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Janelle. Mark with
Mike on deck.

MARK MANOUKIAN: Three minutes. The lead
document was only 22 pages and we got three minutes.
Okay. For the record, my name is Mark
M-a-n-o-u-k-i-a-n.

The CM Russell Wildlife Refuge is a part of the
Fort Peck watershed. The watershed comprises over
3.3 million acres. Private lands account for
36 percent of that watershed. The BLM compromises
29 percent of that watershed, and CMR is 21 percent of
that watershed. I think that's an important figure for
your document as it reflects the breath of the resource
we're talking about.

You say there's over 250,000 visitors that visit
your refuge each year. I'd like to know the methods
and materials in which you determine that number. You
talk about excessive livestock grazing. The record
decision allocated a hundred thousand AUMS on the
refuge, 60,000 for wildlife, 40,000 for livestock,
currently based on pages 203 through 206. 73,000 AUMS
used by elk, mule deer and wild tall deer. At the same
time you've reduced grazing by 90 percent since the
1980. I question the decision. I encourage you to
read Where the Buffalo Roamed - Or Did They? by
Richard H. Hart. He has some interesting aspects on
grazing prehistory.

You're working with Samuel Puhlendorf on the
sentinal plant monitoring. I have a degree in Range
Science from the people's University of Bozeman. The
ARS, BLM and USGS have a way to interpret range land
health, technical reference 1734-6. I would encourage
you to look at that, and to hire somebody to figure out
a way to monitor range lands, or you make a fallacy of
range science and the art of range science.

For years the service has -- this is under
endangered species -- has argued about the management
responsibilities with the Army Corps of Engineers on
salt seed located on Cedar. Now that it has jumped the
pool level on the southern part of the refuge, when I
was fishing this summer, the drainage systems and the
uplands are now well inundated with salt seed. We also
found it several miles within Phillips County, a long
ways from the service or the river system, so that is being translocated great distance at this point and time.

The services indicated additionally there is cheat grass and Japanese brome within the refuge just like all lands in Montana. The services indicated the desire to use fire vegetation management on the refuge. Both cheat grass and salt cedar are fire responders. Without comprehensive methods to control salt cedar it appears the legacy will result in continued invasion of this species.

In addition, Eurasian watermilfoil has been found in several locations in the reservoir and the main stem of the Missouri River. Prescriptive grazing -- all grazing plans are prescriptive in nature. Using grazing for the purpose of manipulating vegetation or wildlife habitat with regard to animal -- without regard to animal performance is targeted grazing. I think you are grossly confused as in the use of prescriptive versus targeted grazing, and that targeted grazing can be found on the fish and wildlife web cites. Thank you for coming today.

MS. MATHER: Thanks, Mark. Mike's up with Troy on deck.

MIKE SJOSTROM: My name's Mike Sjostrom.

irrelevant and should be stricken.

Also, the Six County Fort Peck Lake Group requested an extension on the comment period, and we would like that to be on record again and request that you take that into consideration. Thank you.

MS. MATHER: John with Craig on deck.

RONNIE KORMAN: My name's Ronnie Korman.
Every one of these ranchers in here have a land patent, and if they bring that land patent up into their name, that's proof of our title against the federal government, including all apprentices. All enabling documents contain the savings reiznium, subject to valid, preexisting rights.

All ranchers has water rights and grazing rights on the CMR. Lands which has private rights and claims attached is not public lands. Nowhere in this document of this plan that you have do you recognize to protect then private rights. I'm going to ask you also, are you going to coordinate with the county commissioners in this county, or are you just going to go along with, as you are doing at this time cooperating with them? Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Craig. Mark on deck.

CRAIG FRENCH: My name is Craig French, F-r-e-n-c-h. Nothing special there. My main concern, as touched on by Mark, is the salt cedar and your plan on trying to curb that spread. I see that as the most invasive species that we are faced with in south Phillips County. It has made it up to our place, and we are actively curtailing that. I blame it on two theories, heavy equipment and elk and/or birds, but can't really prove either one.

And then I never had this plan, but they also said I might as well speak, but I wish that the main emphasis would be on land. I attend several meetings where it's either the buffalo, the ferret, prairie dog, the sage hen, doesn't seem to matter, we just go from one animal to the next. But if focusing on land and water management was the focus, those animals are geared up to take care of themselves, and if they can't, extinction is a natural process. That's about it. Thanks.


MARK GOOD: My name is Mark good.
Nothing special about that either, G-o-o-d. I'm from Great Falls. I work with the Montana Wilderness Association. I just attended some of these meetings too, and I think it's helpful to explain a little bit more about the purpose of the wildlife refuge and how
1 it's managed differently from other forest service and
2 BLM lands.
3 Certainly my understanding of a national wildlife
4 refuge, the guiding principle for management is the
5 enhancement and protection of wildlife, and other uses
6 are secondary; compatible but the primary mission of
7 the refuge. Now, I know some people don't like that,
8 wish it were different, but I don't think that's going
to change. Because wildlife refuges generally aren't
9 popular with the American public, and I think popular
10 with most Montanans.
11 That said, I think it would seem that it might be
to possible to figure out how to make the refuge maybe
12 work better for some of the surrounding communities. I
13 think although I think it's also overlooked that the
14 refuge makes significant contributions to local
15 economies; I think first through employment, purchases,
16 goods and services, and of course interpretive centers
17 and activities such as Fort Peck, but probably in a
18 more indirect way through hunting, wildlife viewing,
19 people coming through.
20 And while these are significant, I think more could
21 be done in terms of creating an economic contributor,
22 and that might be the landscape itself, which I think
23 helps make a community an attractive place to live.

21 there by holding and attracting residents. I think
22 economics are simple, people care where they live and
23 act on that preference.
24 During the past few decades the western part of the
25 state has been the job growth, while the eastern
26 Montana has been in the bottom of the ten states
27 actually losing population, and I think that's the
28 surrounding landscape. I think it's also important to
29 remember it hasn't always been that way, but the
30 attraction of mountains, mountainous areas is a
31 relatively new phenomenon.
32 The problem is that I think prairies are too often
33 viewed as monotonous, boring, but I think those that
34 know the refuge and surrounding lands know it's quite
35 diverse, and in my mind a whole lot more interesting
36 than mountains to the west. My position is that
37 people's appreciation for lands develop, and I don't
38 think it would take a major reversal of American
39 attitudes towards prairie to help to maybe attract
40 people here.
41 In a country with over $3 million people it would
42 only take a tiny fraction that would need to develop
43 this appreciation for places like the refuge, so I just
44 want to say I think more should be done to promote the
45 refuge, and I don't think there's a whole lot of down

46 side to doing that. Again, we appreciate you guys for
47 holding the meetings, and thanks.
48 MS. MATHER: Richard, Leslie on deck.
49 RICHARD DUNBAR: Richard Dunbar, Phillips
50 County Commissioner and rancher. I'd just like to hit
51 a few topics. Roads. You say in the scope -- outside
52 the scope of your document, in your documents you say
53 outside the scope of your documents we're going to talk
54 about roads, but in the document you're proposing
55 closing up to a hundred miles of road in one
56 alternative. As you know, Phillips County has
57 petitioned county roads down in the CMR, and we
58 recognize all roads that we have petitions on.
59 Livestock grazing. There's grazing permits on the
60 CMR. These grazing permits must be kept as they
61 currently are so the ranchers using these allotments
62 year after year know their livestock, get acquainted to
63 them so they know where they are located at.
64 Prescribed burns. When we were in Bozeman, I don't
65 know if it was Bill or Barron made the comment that
66 prescribed burns put carbon back into the ground. I
67 found no one to tell me any information that that is
68 anywhere -- that that happens. All the information I
69 find is that it puts carbon in the air and they're not
70 very cost-effective. You got to spend a lot of money
71
72 to set up a prescribed burn. Grazing will do the same
73 thing for a whole lot less dollars.
74 Wilderness. Phillips County opposes anymore
75 wilderness areas, and I have some minutes from the
76 commissioners minutes, May 8th of 1974, and I'd like to
77 read them -- portions of them. "Protest against the
78 burnt lodge wilderness proposal for the Charles M.
79 Russell National Wildlife Range. In view of the
80 impending action of creating a wilderness area in and
81 out of the confines of Phillips County, we feel as due
82 to the county commissioners in our neighboring county
83 that the following point should be considered: 33
84 percent of the area lies in Phillips County and grazes
85 approximately 300 head of cattle for six months. The
86 economic value of this area lies in its grass, which is
87 a reasonable resource. It provides a substance for
88 game, for the hunter, livestock for the rancher,
89 therefore, feed for the nation. The area provides this
90 with no noticeable distraction from its essential
91 nature.
92 The scenic value of this area is a vast emptiness
93 that soon calls for lack of variety and comfort, except
94 for the hardiest of those in pursuit of communication
95 with nature. This area shows little change since its
96 creation, and if left as it is at its present, shows
little change, if any change, in the future, as this is
the main point in creating a wilderness area. It
appears the desired result is already assured by the
very character of the area itself, without changing its
present status in any way.

It seems pointless to take land from which there is
some use and change it to an area for which there will
be no use. Therefore, we protest any new designation
or restriction as being not only not necessary, but not
in the best interest of the citizens of this county,
state or nation. Board of county commissioners, Lester
Wilke, Duane Compton, Dan Garrison. That was said
35 years ago and it's the same today. Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Leslie, Jim on deck.

LESLIE ROBINSON: My name is Leslie
Robinson, R-o-b-i-n-s-o-n. I'm a rancher from out
south, and a Phillips County Commissioner. I want to
hit a little bit on the economics that are in the
document. Your proposed or preferred alternative is
"B," and in that alternative it calls for all of the
current staff positions plus seven additional
positions.

It says, "Alternative D" would generate $2.1
million dollars more in local output, 25 additional
jobs, $569,600 more in labor income compared to

"Alternative A", which is the current alternative, but
that's excluding livestock. So I want to hit a little
bit about the economics you have in your document about
livestock.

One job for every 1350 AUMs of livestock grazing,
in Phillips County that's 4,849 AUMs, which is
25.7 percent of the AUMs on the CMR. That creates 3.6
jobs, $199,303 of production and $385,500 in total
economic output.

I don't think that you should be excluding the
grazing when you look at your complete picture, and all
of the increase in staff positions would have little or
no impact on Phillips County where decreasing grazing
would have a large impact on Phillips County. The
document says, however, considering that the refuge
currently supplies less than one percent of all AUMs in
the region, the regional cumulative effect of the
refuge management actions, which combined with economic
effects of other land management, changes would be
next, I believe. I question if 3.6 jobs and $385,500
in economic output is negligible for Phillips County.

Therein, also you say in the document there will be
some increases in the level of visitation, so to me
that means that the only real increase in the economic
output is only from the seven additional jobs on the

I would like to see a copy of the study that says
that carbon is sequestered with a prescriptive fire.
Also in your document it says, "While there are no
requirements to base management decisions on public
opinion, the Service values and considers input from
the public." I know there is technically no
requirements, but I would suggest that you take the
input from the public as a -- seriously when you do
your plan. Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Jim?

JIM ROBINSON: Jim Robinson,
R-o-b-i-n-s-o-n. If I speak for three minutes, that's
three minutes more than I've probably spoke all my
life. I want to start off with the wilderness. Most
of this country is pristine the way it is. Why protect
it? For some reason, it seems like when things start
getting protected, they don't stay that way. It
happened with the prairie dog. It's been protected and
now there's no prairie dogs anywhere.

The grazing. Prescriptive grazing. If I get it
right, if you have an area that wants grazed, you could
call us up and say we need 700 head of yearlings for
three-and-a-half weeks to graze it, and it might be in
south Phillips or it could be at Jordan. It's not

going to happen. It's not economical and it's not
feasible for us to do.

As far as grazing and wildlife, ever since the
inception of the CMR, or since the Fish and Wildlife
Service has taken it over, the grazing permits have
been out, and as far as wildlife populations, they
haven't. I mean, we've got more elk than we know what
to do with. There's mountain lions down there, a few
bears once in a while. I mean, we get white tail mule
deer, you name it, it's there. There's even wild
turkeys that have shown up.

And as far as the weeds, we do have a problem with
salt cedar. It's starting to creep up the drainages.
We've seen it outside the CMR, and we were the
recipients of that from the CMR. And one more thing
before I leave. Three years ago at the scoping meeting
in here the questions were asked on the buffalo, if
there were plans. The answer was no. I asked about
livestock grazing and the reply was, it would always be
there in some form or another, and then after the
meeting the biologist by the name of Bob Skinner sat
down next to me and said your answer, or your grazing
question was not answered correctly. He said,
eventually as new species such as buffalo are
introduced onto the CMR, livestock grazing will be
eradicated. Thank you.

MS. MATHER: Jim was the last person on my list. Before we answer questions, is there anybody else that has a question or comment that didn’t get a chance to come up? Okay. Please do send in or e-mail your comments.

MR. CRAWFORD: All right. As Janelle said, this is my last day as manager of the CMR. I have accepted a job going back home. I leave Monday to report as refuge manager of Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge back where I grew up. Bill Berg will be acting project leader for an extended period of time, so I’m officially passing management of the refuge over to you, Bill.

MR. BERG: Gee, thanks. What I’ll try to do is go through the notes I have here and try to answer some of the questions that I made note of, and if there are any other ones that Laurie or Barron picked up on that I didn’t put an asterisk by here, we’ll pick up those shortly after that.

The first one was asked by Ron Korman. We had this question earlier today, whether or not counties would be considered coordinators or cooperators, and there was a little bit of confusion there. As part of this process, we formed a cooperators group. Barron mentioned those participants earlier in the presentation. The intent of that group was to sit down with us and help us draft this plan. I’m not sure what the distinction is, Ron, between cooperators and coordinators, but the example I gave earlier was that when we get further along with some of the stepdown plans, for example, the road management plan that we’ll develop, we will truly be a coordinator with the counties, and the main reason for that is, based on what some of the commissioners brought up, is the fact that some of the roads on the refuge are petitioned county roads, and it would be good for both our agency and the counties to clear up, you know, which roads are truly county roads, which roads are refuge roads, and so forth, and in some cases it’s going to be one in the same. I don’t know if that answers your question, Ron.

MR. KORMAN: Well, coordinator is equal status, right?

MR. BERG: I think what we should do is let me go through the ones that are marked, and we can talk about that more at the end, and maybe you can give a better explanation of what you mean by that, if that’s all right?

MR. KORMAN: Yeah.

MR. BERG: Okay. Another topic that's come up time and time again, and we've been asked to kind of give an explanation of refugees versus other federal public lands, and again it was noted during the earlier presentation, but refugees have a specific mission, that being wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Most of the other federal agencies, BLM, Forest Service, to some extent, Bureau of Reclamation have more of a multiple mandate, so, for example, on BLM lands, whether it’s grazing, timber harvest, mining, all those uses on those types of lands have equal weight with wildlife or recreation, and so forth.

On refuge lands it’s real specific. It’s more similar to how the national parks were set up for public recreation. Refugees were set up for wildlife and wildlife habitat, so quite a difference.

The other thing that comes up, too, is also the grazing programs that we have on refuges versus grazing programs and other public lands. On BLM lands, those grazing rules and regulations fall under what’s called the Taylor Grazing Act. Quite a bit, I would say more liberal, or maybe that’s not the right choice of words, but quite a bit of different types of use are allowed under Taylor Grazing versus grazing on a national wildlife refuge. All the grazing we do is for the purpose of improving habitat, in the long run. So quite a difference there between the agencies.

We don’t do any timber harvest, for the most part, except on some of the eastern refuges where we’re doing it for habitat reasons. Most of the mineral extraction is not allowed on refuges, but it’s just kind of a totally different target that we’re looking at.

Okay. Jim Robinson brought up the prescriptive grazing not being economical or feasible for a permittee. And we recognize the fact that prescriptive grazing is going to be a major change for some of our permittees.

Currently, we have several units or habitat units on the refuge. Barron mentioned we had 65. We’ll probably have fewer than that, but probably larger units in the future. The challenge we’re going to face with our existing permittees when we transition into this prescriptive program is that we’re going to have to sit down with individuals that have current, existing permits where we don’t have another management tool to use on that landscape, or we might even use a combination of the two.

What we’ll do is, you know, we realize we can’t go in and say, okay, five years from now we want 500 head of yearlings to run for two months on the refuge. We know that’s not the possibility with the livestock...
industry that boarders or currently has permits on the
refuge. So that will be our challenge to sit down and
not only make it workable for you guys so that when we
want to use cattle as a tool to manage habitat or to
improve it, we're going to have to set it up in such a
manner where it still fits your operation.

But I’ll be honest with you, there are quite a few
permittees we have right now that are strictly a small,
cow/calf pair operation. They might calf back home,
keep their cattle in for about a month, and then turn
them out onto the refuge for three months, bring them
back in or shift them to another pasture. It’s not
going to be that consistent, same pasture every year.
It might be the one next to it, or slightly or a little
bit further away, or it might be a bigger pasture,
depending on how it’s set up. I think that will be the
big challenges for our managers to actually sit down
and try to coordinate that.

You know, we’re going to try to plug in some other
tools to manage habitat out there. One of the things
we talked about was doing some prescriptive grazing,
which will influence the use of that area, you know.
When it starts to green up, we will actually move some
of the young lets into those areas that have been
burned, which theoretically will take the pressure off

that defoliates the plant, actually knocks it back. It
doesn’t totally kill it out, but it thin it out, and
we’re hopeful that that will become adaptive to the
plants we have here in Montana. It’s actually working
in the southwest fairly well, so we’ll continue to
treat noxious weeds. With the lake the way it is and
the fluctuations in water levels, and, you know, stuff
coming down the Musselshell and Missouri River, it’s a
tough one to deal with.

Just matter of fact, or the way it grows and where
it grows, it’s a tough one to deal with. We’ve got a
real aggressive noxious weed program going on with some
of our spotted knapweeds, and some of those things that
are fairly common in some of the upper river bottoms.
Spurge is a little bit less of a problem, but we do
have some spurge too, which in my eyes is even more of
a concern than some of the knapweed.

But just as an example of what can be done, I
think, with some of the noxious weeds, you know, the
agency has spent millions of dollars on salt cedar over
the years, our agency and others also. And now there’s
a real effective biological control agent, if you’ve
ever been through any of the parks in North Dakota,
Medora and the one to the north, those hill sides used
to be yellow with spurge, and now there’s an insect

that actually keeps it in check pretty good. So we’re
hopeful something like that gets going with the salt
cedar and it’s not as big of an issue down the road.

Excellent question. A lot of disagreement with
what we consider wildlife health or wildlife habitat
health versus good range condition. In my mind, or in
my mind, if you’ve got good wildlife habitat you’ve
also got good or excellent range condition, but the
reverse of that isn’t always true. You can have a
pasture out there that’s totally, a hundred percent of
the vegetation is removed at the end of the year, and
it can still be an excellent range condition, if you’ve
got all the components there.

The challenge we face as wildlife managers is we
can’t just manage for, you know, a slate or a list of
species that are there but are not providing the cover
that are required for winter habitat, the following
spring nesting, which is usually the previous year’s
growth, and also some of the species that are often
looked at from a range condition standpoint aren’t the
tones that are most important for wildlife.

Bob’s done some real good work on what we’re
calling sentinel plants. A little bit of confusion
about that. Sometimes they call them diagnostic plants
or indicator plants, but those are some of the species
like salt brush, salt bush, winter fat, some of your
shrubs that are important to mule deer that truly are
as or more important to some of the wildlife species
than the common forage plants or the grasses out there.

We all realize that elk, you know, are a little
more adaptive and probably utilize that forage out
there more similar to cattle than, say, deer, but, you
know, we're charged with managing that habitat for a
lot more diversity of species than just those two, so,
you know, we have to look at those other plants to make
sure that they are in enough abundance to provide the
needs for some of those other species.

I'll do the carbon sequestration question, since
I'm the one that made the comment. I've taken kind of
an active role in the climate change issue for the
service, been on a couple of national teams helping to
develop climate change policy. One of the things that
was the first topic that came up when we were
developing our current climate change policy for the
service was the use of prescribed fire, and what
effects would prescribed fire have on potential climate
driving conditions.

So working with Bob we started doing a little bit
of research, and we came across a professor by the name
of Tom DeLuca, and Tom was in Bozeman, and Tom was
the prairie landscape again.

Looking through my notes here I came across a
couple other, or one other item. A question came up
from Mark Manoukian, I think, about our 250,000 visitor
use days we reference in the document. That comes out
of a refuge reporting system that we have annually put
23 together, but the basis for that is several places the
24 Corps of Engineers document use on many of their
recreation areas.

We have upwards of 50 traffic counters on roads
leading into the refuge. Those are some of the smaller
bladed or two track roads. It's not an impact science,
but, you know, it's a pretty calculated estimate of
what we think's going on out there. The majority of
those uses are associated with hunting and fishing, to
be honest with you. We are seeing an increase in some
of that just recreational camping, elk viewing,
wildlife viewing type activity, and that's a trend we
see nationwide, so that's increasing, but I would be
safe to say, I think, that number is probably as
accurate as we can get, without more traffic counters
22 or survey type stuff.

We are doing a visitor use survey right now that
will get us a little more data in that area, mainly
like length of stay, amount of money spent, you know,
how far those people have come from, things like that.
So we're expanding on that effort a little bit. Well,
with that, we'll shut it down, and we've got the
comment period. Yeah, I'll let you talk about that,
Laurie, since that date's a little bit questionable.

MR. SHANNON: Okay. The comment period
is November 16th to get your comments in. We have
received several requests to extend our comment period;
however, right now there are still more than four weeks
to go, so it's a little hard to say you need more time
when there's still lots of time to comment. So what we
are going to do is in the next week or so we will make
a decision about if or when, how long we will extend
the comment period. That notice will go in the federal
register. I will put out a press release. I will
notify all of the agencies. I will do everything I can
to get the word out as to how long, if there will be an
extension, okay? So I hope that answers that.

MR. BERG: Yeah, and we're going to stick
around here and answer some questions if anything comes
up. Bob Skinner's the person to talk to about plants.
Paula Gouse from our Fort Peck office if you have
visitor questions or biological problems. Randy
Matchett is our senior wildlife biologist and works
with our ferret programs. Matt Derosier is from our
doing climate research work for the Wilderness Society.
And we got to speaking with Dr. DeLuca and started
talking about carbon sequestration and prairies, and he
became real excited and we started developing a couple
of research proposals wanting to look at how much
carbon could be sequestered in prairie.

Quite a bit of biomass sitting down below those
roots. And how much carbon is released when that is
burned and how much goes back into the soil? It is new
science. There's not been a lot of work on it.

There's been a lot of work in the Ponderosa Pine forest
west of here. Not a lot in the prairie. And that is
something that we're interested in, the CMR is
interested in, and so we're trying to get a couple of
research proposals put together to look at that and to
determine. So on page 419 of the CCP there's four
articles referenced by T.M. DeLuca, and that's where
those comments come from.

Tom, unfortunately, took a job as the head of the
climate program at the University of Wales. He's a
little hard to get a hold of now, but we've been
successful in keeping in touch with him in the past,
and hopefully one of these days one of those research
proposals will get funded and we'll be able to bring
Tom back to the states and have him work out here in

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driving conditions.

So working with Bob we started doing a little bit
of research, and we came across a professor by the name
of Tom DeLuca, and Tom was in Bozeman, and Tom was
the prairie landscape again.

Looking through my notes here I came across a
couple other, or one other item. A question came up
from Mark Manoukian, I think, about our 250,000 visitor
use days we reference in the document. That comes out
of a refuge reporting system that we have annually put
23 together, but the basis for that is several places the
24 Corps of Engineers document use on many of their
recreation areas.

We have upwards of 50 traffic counters on roads
leading into the refuge. Those are some of the smaller
bladed or two track roads. It's not an impact science,
but, you know, it's a pretty calculated estimate of
what we think's going on out there. The majority of
those uses are associated with hunting and fishing, to
be honest with you. We are seeing an increase in some
of that just recreational camping, elk viewing,
wildlife viewing type activity, and that's a trend we
see nationwide, so that's increasing, but I would be
safe to say, I think, that number is probably as
accurate as we can get, without more traffic counters
22 or survey type stuff.

We are doing a visitor use survey right now that
will get us a little more data in that area, mainly
like length of stay, amount of money spent, you know,
how far those people have come from, things like that.
So we're expanding on that effort a little bit. Well,
with that, we'll shut it down, and we've got the
comment period. Yeah, I'll let you talk about that,
Laurie, since that date's a little bit questionable.

MR. SHANNON: Okay. The comment period
is November 16th to get your comments in. We have
received several requests to extend our comment period;
however, right now there are still more than four weeks
to go, so it's a little hard to say you need more time
when there's still lots of time to comment. So what we
are going to do is in the next week or so we will make
a decision about if or when, how long we will extend
the comment period. That notice will go in the federal
register. I will put out a press release. I will
notify all of the agencies. I will do everything I can
to get the word out as to how long, if there will be an
extension, okay? So I hope that answers that.

MR. BERG: Yeah, and we're going to stick
around here and answer some questions if anything comes
up. Bob Skinner's the person to talk to about plants.
Paula Gouse from our Fort Peck office if you have
visitor questions or biological problems. Randy
Matchett is our senior wildlife biologist and works
with our ferret programs. Matt Derosier is from our
Sand Creek, and I see a bunch of people that hunt that area touch base with him if you want some more information. Who else did I miss? Doug, our mountain lion biologist. Actually, Doug is our pilot right now and is probably going to head up a mountain lion study we've initiated with Fish Wildlife and Parks this coming winter. With that we have a lot of cookies back there.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: Before you go, you talk about your partner. Can you identify your partner? You keep talking about your partners and also you talk about the Corps of Engineers. How much talking do you do with the local people?

MR. BERG: Well, you know, I guess the definition of partners is pretty broad. You specifically identify Corps of Engineers. We routinely coordinate our weed control efforts with them. Kind of a rough description of what we do, they treat stuff below the high water mark; we treat stuff above the high water mark. We share data, we map it, we document it, where we're working, we share crews, we share contractors. That would be one of our, I guess, more involved cooperators.

With the counties, years past, we cooperated with the counties to get funds for graveling roads to access the refuge and the rec. areas. I don't think we would have gotten anywhere by ourselves without cooperating with the counties on that effort.

Fire, both prescriptive and wild fire work that we do, state agencies, BLM, forest service, counties. Counties are becoming a huge player in our fire program because of the engines and stuff they have around the counties. We've got a couple of individuals that we cooperate with, like APF, for example, on repairian work on Telegraph and Valentine Creek. We have done some cooperative studies there where they had a grad. student who was trying to restore some repairing areas. Fish, Wildlife & Parks, we deal with them weekly almost on different issues. Don't always see eye-to-eye but we work together as much as we can. Law enforcement effort that goes on in the six county area. Help with almost any law enforcement, working with the counties, BLM, ride in the same trucks with Fish, Wildlife & Parks dealing with law enforcement issues. Help with almost any law enforcement effort that goes on in the six county area.

Why don't we break now and we'll get together with individuals. Probably would be a little easier handling it that way, especially some of the questions that need a little more clarification.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: I would just like to ask one thing before you quit. How come you guys...