

CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE MFP

This document contains land use recommendations for federal lands and resources in six counties of southwestern North Dakota (see Map 1). Public review of these recommendations is a key step in the preparation of the Southwest North Dakota Management Framework Plan (MFP). The Dickinson District Office of the Bureau of Land Management began work on this plan in April 1981 and will complete it by October 1983. The plan will guide the future management of federal coal, oil and gas, and certain federal lands.

The primary reason for preparing the Southwest MFP is to explore the possibility of leasing federal coal. In terms of acres involved and the potential impacts of implementing the land use decisions, lignite coal is the most significant federal resource in the planning area. Before the federal coal can be made available for leasing, a series of complex procedures must be accomplished. These procedures are described in the federal coal management regulations published in the *Federal Register* on July 19, 1979 (revised regulations published July 30, 1982). One such procedure is preparing a comprehensive land use plan. The Southwest MFP fulfills the requirements for this type of plan.

It is important to recognize that this MFP is not a land use plan for private, state, or other (non-BLM) federal agency resources. In the Southwest Planning Area federal mineral ownership is primarily split-estate (see Appendix A). In this situation the BLM administers part or all of the mineral estate but has no jurisdiction over the surface estate. Because the BLM does not manage the surface over these federal minerals, the MFP does not contain decisions for use of the surface per se.

Federal split-estate mineral acres are not consolidated neatly in the planning area. The federal mineral ownership is mixed in with non-federal minerals in a checkerboard pattern, or—where there is a low percentage of federal minerals—there is an irregular pattern.

Except for lands in western Bowman County referred to as the Big Gumbo Management Area, the surface lands administered by the BLM in the planning area are widely scattered, and management decisions are constrained by the limitations of small size (in terms of contiguous acres) and/or poor access. In the MFP this fragmented public ownership pattern will be referred to as "scattered tracts."

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the administration and management of millions of acres of federally owned lands and resources, primarily in the western states and Alaska. Most of these public lands include both the surface and subsurface rights; however, the BLM also administers federal mineral reservations that underlie private, state, or other federal agency ownership.

In North Dakota, the BLM administers approximately 5.9 million acres of split-estate mineral reservations and about 68,000 acres of surface lands (both surface and subsurface rights).

The BLM surface lands in the State are mostly small scattered parcels. There are only two areas in North Dakota where BLM surface lands form somewhat consolidated blocks: in western Bowman County and

northwestern Dunn County. The latter is known as the Lost Bridge Management Area and is included in the West-Central North Dakota Management Framework Plan. The former is known as the Big Gumbo Management Area and is included in the Southwest MFP (see Map 2).

OVERVIEW OF THE AREA

The Southwest MFP area includes Billings, Slope, Bowman, Hettinger, Adams, and Grant counties. In general, the area consists of rolling plains, with the Little Missouri Breaks (Badlands) occupying some of the western portion. The major stream basins within the area include Cedar Creek and the Grand, Cannonball, Heart, and Little Missouri rivers. The planning area is bounded on the south by South Dakota and on the west by Montana.

The population is largely rural. The larger towns are Bowman (2,071); Hettinger (1,739); Mott (1,315); New England (825); and Elgin (930). The county populations are: Billings 1,138; Slope 1,157; Bowman 4,229; Hettinger 4,275; Adams 3,584; and Grant 4,274. (All figures are from the 1980 census.)

The major industry in the area is agriculture, mostly in the form of dryland crops and livestock. Oil and gas exploration and development is prominent in the western portion of the planning area. Coal has been mined in the planning area since homesteading days. Most of the early mines produced very small amounts of coal for local heating use. These mines were operated by farmers and local businessmen and included both surface and underground operations. Most of the small surface mines and all of the underground mines were closed by the early 1960's. Underground mining in North Dakota is uneconomical and impractical because of such factors as federal safety regulations, overburden type, and mining costs.

BLM management responsibility varies throughout the area. For planning purposes there are three major categories of BLM jurisdiction, as shown in Table I. (The acres indicated for these categories are estimates.)

On the BLM surface, the BLM manages both the surface resources and all of the mineral rights. The consolidated lands known as the Big Gumbo Management Area (BGMA), have more potential for multiple-use management than do the small isolated tracts that make up the remainder of the surface lands; therefore, the BGMA was considered separately.

The second category, federal coal, is a major management responsibility for the BLM in the Southwest Planning Area. All of the federal coal under BLM jurisdiction with a high to moderate potential for development, except one 40-acre tract in Adams County, lies under privately owned surface. Throughout the planning area, federal coal is scattered among privately owned coal. Some of this federal coal has been reserved along with all other minerals, some has been reserved with one or more other minerals (such as oil and gas), and on some tracts only coal has been reserved to the government.

Some of the coal in the planning area is already under federal lease. These leased tracts are northwest of New Leipzig and around the Gascoyne Mine.

The third category of BLM planning responsibility involves federal split-estate oil and gas. As with coal, the federal oil and gas ownership occurs in three basic categories: alone, with one or more other minerals, or with all minerals reserved to the government.

Most of the BLM oil and gas in the planning area is already under federal lease, but only a small percentage of the leased areas ever reaches the point of test well or production development. This percentage is increasing, however. Leases expire after ten years if they are not being developed, and they can be terminated at any time if annual rental is not paid. After expiration, the lease areas are reviewed and may be reoffered for lease.

TABLE I
BLM PLANNING CATEGORIES
(Acreage Estimates)

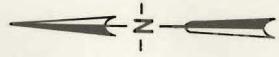
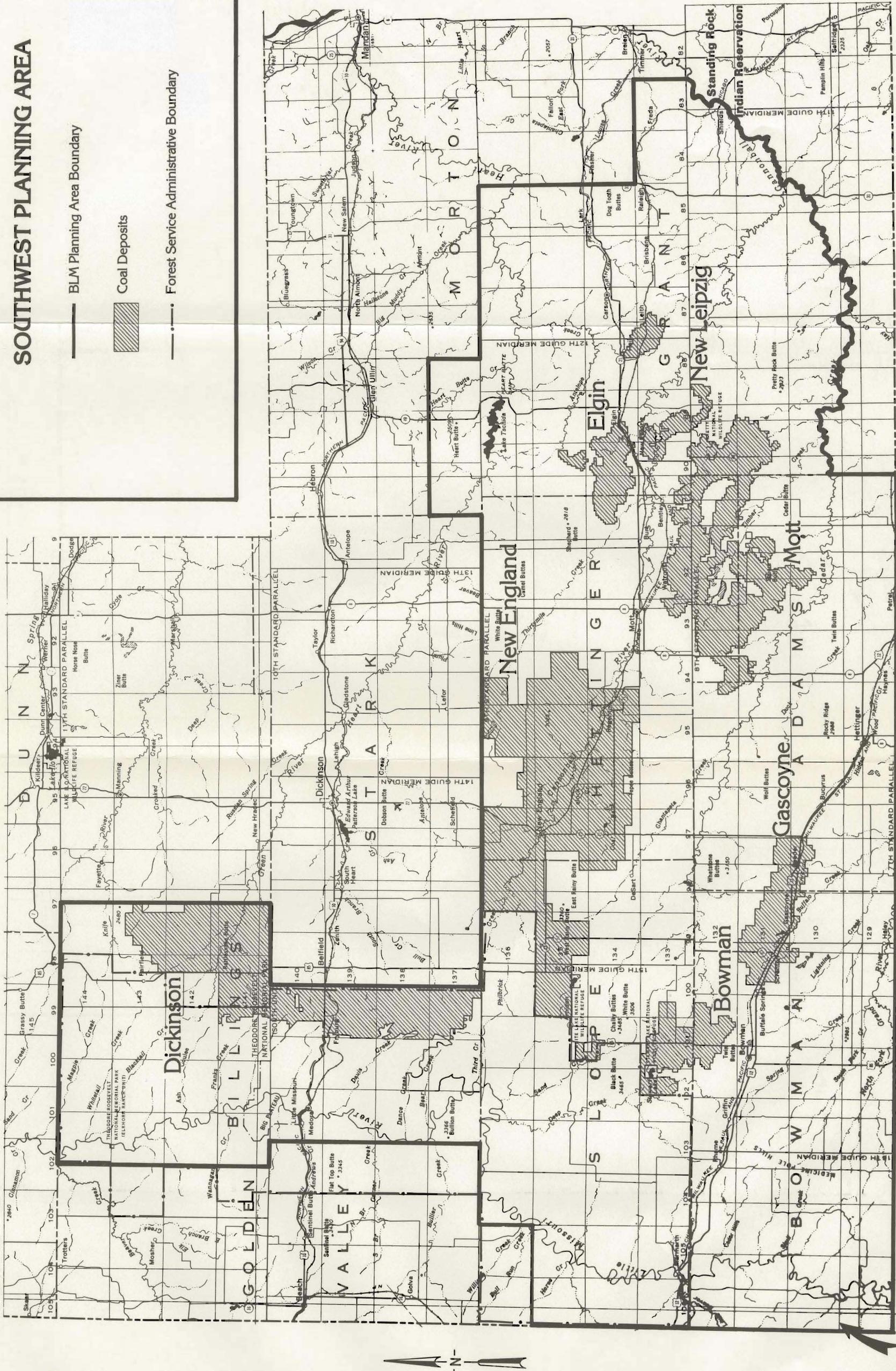
County	BLM Surface	Federal Coal (BLM)	Federal Oil & Gas (BLM)	County Area
Billings	680	50,422	3,965	728,960
Slope	0	99,771	1,894	784,640
Bowman	32,808	198,639	28,435	748,800
Hettinger	0	238,137	8,152	726,400
Adams	80	107,982	5,635	633,600
Grant	604	97,366	13,455	1,070,080
Total	34,172	792,317	61,536	4,692,480

SOUTHWEST PLANNING AREA

— BLM Planning Area Boundary

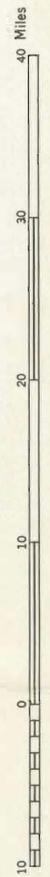
▨ Coal Deposits

- - - Forest Service Administrative Boundary



BIG GUMBO MANAGEMENT AREA

SCALE IN MILES



Within the counties included in the Southwest MFP area, there is a large amount of land administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). As the leasing agent for all federal minerals, the BLM actually issues any leases for minerals within USFS boundaries. However, since the USFS has the surface management responsibility, and mineral development affects the surface environment, the USFS will prepare the land use plan for federal minerals within USFS administrative boundaries (see Map 1) including split-estate mineral ownership (per 1980 Memorandum of Understanding between the Departments of Agriculture and Interior). The USFS also has planning responsibility for all federal oil and gas under surface lands administered by the USFS within the Little Missouri National Grassland.

PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

Land use planning for the Southwest MFP consists of seven basic steps, which are summarized below. We are now at step 6. Each of these steps requires the use of an interdisciplinary team.

STEP 1:	Identification of Issues (see Appendix B)
Issues	The public is asked to help identify issues relating to BLM management in the area. Later steps will be guided by the issues that have been identified.
STEP 2:	Development of Planning Criteria (see Appendix B)
Criteria	Criteria are prepared to guide the development of the plan, and to ensure that the plan will be tailored to the issues previously identified. The criteria also help prevent unnecessary data collection and analysis.
STEP 3:	Inventory Data Collection
Inventory	This includes the gathering of resource, environmental, social, and economic data needed to prepare the plan.
STEP 4:	Analysis of the Current Situation
Analysis	Information on the human and natural resources within the planning area is organized and analyzed, with particular emphasis on BLM-administered resources.*
STEP 5:	Resource Staff Recommendations
In-house Recommendations	BLM resource specialists (such as geologists, and wildlife biologists) recommend to the District Manager how the public lands and minerals should be managed.

STEP 6:	District Recommendations
Publication of Recommendations	After reviewing the resource staff recommendations, the District Manager develops the official land use recommendations for the District. These recommendations are published for public review.
STEP 7:	Land Use Decisions
Decision	After evaluation of public comments, the plan is modified where necessary and adopted, and the land use decisions are published.

Most major planning issues identified through our scoping efforts are related to coal mining and are addressed in the plan. Other coal-related concerns will be addressed at the next level of planning, known as "activity planning." During activity planning these issues will be assessed in more detail, after potential leasing tracts have been identified.

New legislation and policies changed the planning approach of the Bureau from an MFP format to what is now called a resource management plan (RMP). During the planning "transition" the Southwest MFP was initiated.

An RMP integrates an environmental assessment of the potential impacts associated with a range of land use plan alternatives. The RMP is the product of an "issue-driven" planning process. Issue-driven planning means that only those aspects of current management direction that are felt to be issues are examined through the formulation and evaluation of alternative management actions.

The Southwest MFP incorporated elements of the RMP approach in that this planning effort was issue-driven. Public comments obtained through public meetings and brochures were used in the issue identification process. A number of energy-related and land management issues were identified, based on the judgment of the planning team, interagency consultation, and District Manager review.

The direction to resolve issues in certain ways was provided by the Dickinson District Manager, based on existing policy, public desires, and resource capabilities. In addition, planning criteria were developed to guide the resolution of issues (see Appendix B). Impact assessments developed for major planning issues (such as agriculture) are contained in District planning documents, which are available for public review at the Dickinson District Office.

*This information is contained in various District planning documents which are available for public inspection at the Dickinson District Office.

DOCUMENT FORMAT

The recommendations for the Southwest MFP are presented in three basic categories: split-estate minerals, scattered tracts, and Big Gumbo Management

Area. These categories are further divided into specific BLM programs, such as coal and grazing. Preceding the recommendations, the overall objectives for the program are summarized. Each recommendation is followed by the rationale.