

RECOMMENDED PRIMITIVE AREA
MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

to supplement BLM manual
section 6221.06

prepared under BLM contract
52500-CT5-132

by

John H. Schomaker
and
Perry J. Brown

College of Forestry and Natural Resources
Colorado State University

July 1, 1975

The general approach to primitive area management should be conservative in terms of physical alteration and facility development. Since the goal of management is to maintain an environment free of man's influence, any physical alteration or facility development must be carefully reviewed and cautiously approached.

In managing public use, particularly recreational use, the manager should first employ techniques which involve as little overt coercion as possible. For example, if the goals of the primitive area are not immediately threatened, information programs to disperse use and encourage proper wilderness etiquette should be employed before restrictions of numbers and reservations are used to control use.

An entire primitive area need not be managed using a single blanket management technique. It is often desirable to zone the primitive area and to apply management techniques tailored to each individual zone. For instance, in managing public use a single isolated heavy use zone might require closure of campsites while the majority of the primitive area could be managed with fewer restrictions. Likewise, grazing regulations in a zone with particularly vulnerable vegetation and soils might be more restrictive than in a zone with vegetation and soils tolerant of grazing.

Below are policy statements from the BLM Manual section 6221.06 (in all capital letters), management recommendations which interpret these policies and are consistent with the philosophy stated above, and a copy of the Wilderness Act (P.L. 8-577).

POLICY. IT IS BUREAU POLICY THAT:

A. PRIMITIVE AREAS. PRIMITIVE AREAS ARE ESTABLISHED TO PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND ENHANCE AREAS OF SCENIC SPLendor, NATURAL WONDER, SCIENTIFIC INTEREST, PRIMITIVE ENVIRONMENT, AND OTHER NATURAL VALUES FOR THE ENJOYMENT AND USE OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

B. WILDERNESS ACT OF 1964. BLM PRIMITIVE AREAS WILL BE MANAGED TO MAINTAIN THE SAME QUALITY AS LANDS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM.

C. PRIMITIVE AREA EVALUATION. PRIMITIVE AREAS CONTAIN MANY INTANGIBLE VALUES DIFFICULT TO JUDGE FROM AN ECONOMIC VIEWPOINT. EVALUATIONS ARE MADE WITH CONSIDERATION GIVEN TO THE SUBJECTIVE VALUES OF THE VARIOUS RESOURCES, AND NOT ONLY TO THE COMBINATION OF USES THAT WILL GIVE THE GREATEST DOLLAR RETURN OR THE GREATEST UNIT OUTPUT.

D. MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION. MOTORIZED FORMS OF TRAVEL IN PRIMITIVE AREAS ARE PROHIBITED, EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED HEREIN.

E. AIRCRAFT. AIRCRAFT OF ANY KIND ARE NOT PERMITTED TO LAND IN PRIMITIVE AREAS, EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED HEREIN.

F. MOTORIZED EQUIPMENT. MOTORIZED EQUIPMENT IS PROHIBITED IN PRIMITIVE AREAS, EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED HEREIN.

G. ROADS. PUBLIC USE ROADS ARE PROHIBITED WITHIN PRIMITIVE AREAS. HOWEVER, OTHER ROADS MAY BE PERMITTED IN AREAS WHEN ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR ACCESS TO PRIVATE INHOLDINGS FOR NONRECREATION PURPOSES, EMERGENCY SITUATIONS SUCH AS WILDFIRE, AND THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PERSONS. SUCH ROAD CONSTRUCTION IS PERMITTED ONLY UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS AS ARE NECESSARY TO PRESERVE PRIMITIVE VALUES.

1. Road building is strongly discouraged for any purpose.
2. Road construction will take place such that minimal environmental disturbance will occur.
3. Road construction plans will be approved by state director because of the relatively irreversible nature of road construction and alteration.
4. Public use roads existing in a primitive area at time of designation should be closed and evaluated for rehabilitation opportunities.

H. CONSTRUCTION. CONSTRUCTION OF ANY KIND IS PROHIBITED WITHIN PRIMITIVE AREAS, EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED HEREIN.

I. TIMBER HARVESTING. COMMERCIAL TIMBER HARVESTING IS NOT PERMITTED IN PRIMITIVE AREAS.

1. Cutting of live or dead standing trees should be prohibited except as otherwise provided herein.

J. MINING AND PROSPECTING. SUBJECT TO EXISTING VALID RIGHTS, MINING AND PROSPECTING IS NOT PERMITTED IN PRIMITIVE AREAS. EXISTING MINING CLAIMS ARE CLEARED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

K. GRAZING. GRAZING OF DOMESTIC LIVESTOCK MAY BE PERMITTED BY THE AUTHORIZED OFFICER UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS AS HE DEEMS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE PRIMITIVE VALUES.

1. A grazing management system should be developed to minimize the impact of grazing on natural processes. Minimization of changes in plant composition and water quality should be considered in development of the grazing program. A program to monitor the impact of a grazing management system is essential to assess achievement of the objective of preserving primitive values.
2. Permanent facilities and developments associated with grazing activities are permitted only where minimal developments (like spring development) will promote grazing activities which reduce unacceptable ecological impacts.

L. WILDLIFE. HUNTING AND FISHING ARE ACCEPTABLE USES AND ARE PERMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH APPROPRIATE STATE AND FEDERAL RULES AND REGULATIONS. THE DISTRICT MANAGER WILL SEEK THE ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION OF THE STATE AGENCIES IN PRESERVING PRIMITIVE VALUES.

1. State agencies are responsible for managing fish and wildlife and regulating hunting and fishing. The Bureau is responsible for managing the habitat and area. Therefore, the district manager should seek to develop a cooperative wildlife and fish management program with the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

2. In developing this program, the district manager should stress the importance of allowing natural processes to dominate.

In order that the policy of preserving primitive values is promoted, the following actions should be discouraged.

- a. Introduction of non-native species of fish and wildlife.
- b. Introduction of fish and wildlife for sport purposes.
- c. Predator control.

M. WATER STORAGE PROJECTS. WATER STORAGE PROJECTS MAY BE PERMITTED BY THE AUTHORIZED OFFICER UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS AS HE DEEMS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE PRIMITIVE VALUES.

1. Water storage projects are not permitted for recreational purposes.
2. Water storage projects are strongly discouraged for any purpose.
3. Water storage projects will take place such that minimal environmental disturbance will occur.
4. Water storage project plans will be approved by the state director because of the relatively irreversible nature of water storage and alteration.

N. RIGHTS-OF-WAY. RIGHTS-OF-WAY FOR UTILITY LINES AND OTHER PURPOSES MAY BE PERMITTED BY THE AUTHORIZED OFFICER UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS AS HE DEEMS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE PRIMITIVE VALUES.

1. Rights-of-way for utility lines and other purposes is strongly discouraged.
2. Rights-of-way will take place such that minimal environmental disturbance will occur.
3. Rights-of-way plans will be approved by state director because of the relatively irreversible nature of rights-of-way and alteration.

O. FIRE CONTROL. WILDFIRE IS CONTROLLED AS NECESSARY TO PREVENT UNACCEPTABLE LOSS OF PRIMITIVE VALUES, LOSS OF LIFE, DAMAGE TO PROPERTY, AND THE SPREAD OF WILDFIRE TO LANDS OUTSIDE THE PRIMITIVE AREAS. USE OF FIRE ROADS, TOOL CACHES, AIRCRAFT, MOTORBOATS, AND MOTORIZED FIRE-FIGHTING EQUIPMENT MAY BE PERMITTED WHEN NECESSARY FOR SUCH CONTROL.

1. A fire plan will be developed. The plan will be consistent with the points of this section listed below. The plan will specify the conditions under which fires will be suppressed and the routes of access which will cause minimal environmental disturbance. The fire plan will also explicitly define the level at which an unacceptable loss of primitive values occurs.
2. When possible, man-caused and natural-caused fires will be differentiated.
3. Man-caused fires will be suppressed.
4. Natural-caused fires will be allowed to burn except when weather or fuel conditions are such that the spread of fire will cause unacceptable loss of primitive values, loss of life, damage to property, and the undesirable spread of wildfire to lands outside the primitive areas.

5. When fire suppression is necessary, persons and non-motorized equipment will be used unless containment is not possible. Motorized equipment should be used in such a manner that minimal environmental disturbance outside the immediate area of fire suppression occurs.
6. To the degree practicable, damage caused by heavy motorized fire-fighting equipment will be restored to original conditions.
7. The decision to suppress naturally caused fires will be made by the district manager.
8. The decision to use motorized equipment in fire suppression will be made by the district manager.

P. INSECT AND DISEASE CONTROL. ANY CONTROL INSTITUTED SHOULD BE THAT WHICH WOULD BE MOST DIRECT FOR THE TARGET INSECT OR DISEASE AND WHICH WOULD HAVE MINIMAL EFFECTS UPON PRIMITIVE VALUES AND OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE ECOSYSTEMS OF WHICH THE PRIMITIVE AREA IS COMPOSED.

1. No insect and disease control will be instituted except as identified below.
2. Insect and disease control will be instituted if such insects and diseases are directly introduced by man into the primitive area or if such insects and diseases result from man's activities adjacent to the primitive area.
3. Insect and disease control will be instituted if the spread of the insect or disease will cause the undesirable spread of the insect or disease to lands outside the primitive area.

Q. RESCUE AND OTHER EMERGENCY OPERATIONS. IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS INVOLVING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PERSONS, THE USE OF AIRCRAFT, MOTORBOATS, OR OTHER MOTORIZED OR MECHANICAL EQUIPMENT MAY BE PERMITTED.

1. Rescue and emergency operations will be conducted with minimum environmental disturbance when practicable.

R. PUBLIC USE. PUBLIC USE OF PRIMITIVE AREAS FOR RECREATION PURPOSES IS ENCOURAGED ONLY TO THE EXTENT CONSISTENT WITH THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PRIMITIVE ENVIRONMENT. (For Commercial Services, See Section S below)

1. Public use will be managed consistent with the primitive area criteria outlined in BLM Manual 6221.1.11.
2. Public use management requires the consideration of:
 - a. People's impact on the primitive area environment.
 - b. People's perception of the impact of others on the primitive area environment.
 - c. People's perception of other users in the primitive area.
3. To implement a public use management plan the management objectives, which identify the experiences to be provided and the restrictions on use, will be made explicit. The objectives will specify the desirable maximum number of encounters per day between user parties in the primitive

area and the amount of change acceptable in vegetation and animal populations at critical areas. The types of considerations to be made in developing a public use management plan are listed below. Additional considerations and restrictions may be employed by the area manager to meet the conditions of a specific land area.

a. Waste Management

1. Impact of human wastes will be controlled by information programs, limiting numbers of visitors, and facility developments. An information program could consist of a brochure, text accompanying an area map, or regulations on an issued permit. The information provided would specify and encourage proper waste disposal consistent with the management objectives.
2. A minimum distance between waste disposal and lakes and streams will be specified in primitive area regulations when practicable in order to prevent contamination of the water supply. Information programs and sanitary facilities will be consistent with the minimum distance regulations.

b. Litter

1. Impact of litter will be controlled by information programs encouraging the "pack-it-in--pack-it-out" policy. The picking up of litter by all users will be encouraged through information programs.
2. An annual cleanup of the primitive area will be conducted to remove all litter.
3. BLM personnel will actively pursue picking up litter when in the primitive area.
4. Burial of litter and garbage will be prohibited.

c. Firewood

1. Cutting of any standing vegetation, alive or dead, will be prohibited.
2. Open fires will be permitted only where dead and down fuel will not be depleted beyond acceptable limits through campfire use and under conditions when the potential for spread of fire is low. Open fires in areas with little dead and down fuel will be prohibited to allow the natural process of decay to occur.
3. Due to the low impact of gas stoves, their use will be encouraged in all areas.

d. Fish and game

1. When natural fisheries or the primitive area experience is threatened by large numbers of fishermen, the district manager will attempt to seek the assistance and cooperation of the Colorado Division of Wildlife in requiring that all fish taken within the primitive area are consumed within the area.
2. The use of firearms will be prohibited in primitive areas except for the legal hunting of game species.

- e. Vegetation and soils
 - 1. Backcountry campsites and stock hitching areas will be closed if impacts exceed acceptable limits. Minimal indicators of unacceptable impacts are irreversible modifications and impacts which require long periods of rest or extensive active rehabilitation.
 - 2. Removal of live vegetation will be prohibited except for scientific and educational collection conducted with the permission of the area manager.
 - 3. Management will be directed to prevent trails from becoming multiple, excessively wide, or deeply rutted.
- f. Party size
 - 1. The area manager will specify a maximum party size recognizing that large parties (generally exceeding ten persons) have a great impact on the resource and negatively affect the experience of others in the backcountry.
 - 2. The area manager will specify a maximum number of saddle and pack stock per party recognizing the negative impact of horses on the primitive area environment.
- g. Total visitor use
 - 1. The manager should be aware that users generally are limited in where they camp by water availability and that public use typically occurs along trails and near lakes.
 - 2. Management techniques will be employed whenever practicable to disperse users over the available area before total numbers are restricted. Some of the distributive techniques possible are: to advertise under-used or over-used sections of the primitive area; advertise specific attributes of a given portion of the primitive area (e.g., great fishing in a given area); educate users regarding area ecology; inform users of the importance of solitude to others; encourage cross-country travel for experienced backcountry users; open or close trails; limit the number of users of heavily used zones within the primitive area; assignment of campsites and trail routes.
 - 3. Users will be encouraged to camp out of sight of trails and other camps to help achieve dispersed use.
 - 4. The number of parties will be regulated if necessary to achieve a use level consistent with the management objectives. Some management techniques to limit number of parties are: advertise other areas which supply the same opportunities; advertise the overcrowdedness of the area; close access roads and trails; limit camping to designated campsites only; limit people per campsite; limit size of parties; charge an entrance fee; require demonstration of ecological or proper backcountry use knowledge; limit length of stay at sites or in the entire primitive area.

- h. Horse use
 - 1. Tying of horses to trees overnight or all day will be prohibited. Hobbles, pickets moved daily, or no restraints are acceptable.
 - 2. Except for traveling and watering, horses will be kept far enough away from lakes or streams to maintain water quality.
 - 3. The area manager will consider limiting or prohibiting horse use in zones within the primitive area particularly vulnerable to environmental disturbance and in areas where the hiker-horse use conflict is a problem.
 - 4. The area manager will consider the possibility of requiring horse users to pack in feed in areas which cannot support stock grazing without causing unacceptable changes. The feed should be in such a form that viable seeds will not be scattered in the primitive area.
- i. Scientific use
 - 1. Public use of areas containing rare or unique resources protected for scientific reasons will be discouraged or prohibited by not improving access, signing, or whatever measures the area manager deems necessary to ensure protection of the scientific values.
 - 2. Areas of rare or unique resources protected for scientific reasons should be free of public use facilities such as trails and campsites.
 - 3. Scientific use will be regulated consistent with other public use.
 - 4. Grazing will be prohibited in areas containing rare or unique resources to ensure protection of the scientific values.
- j. Educational use
 - 1. Educational use will be regulated consistent with other public use.
- k. Monitoring use
 - 1. A monitoring program will be employed annually to identify changes in the resource base; daily to identify total public use and distribution of public use; as needed to monitor the effectiveness of management techniques and the public response to the techniques.
 - 2. The use of permits to monitor public use will be considered by the area manager. Minimal information sought should consist of size and type of party, length of stay, zones of travel, and location of camps.

S. COMMERCIAL SERVICES. SADDLE AND PACK STOCK OUTFITTERS AND GUIDED BOAT TRIPS MAY BE PERMITTED IN PRIMITIVE AREAS. HOWEVER, THE NUMBER, NATURE, AND EXTENT OF THESE SERVICES WILL BE CAREFULLY CONTROLLED THROUGH REGULATIONS AND PERMITS TO PROTECT THE PRIMITIVE VALUES.

1. Outfitters will be required to obtain a permit for trips into the primitive area. The area manager will specify the maximum number of people and stock per trip and the location of the camps to be used for a trip.
2. Saddle and pack stock outfitters and guided boat trips will be regulated consistent with other public use.
3. Outdoor schools and other commercial services will be regulated consistent with other public use.

T. VISITOR USE STRUCTURES AND FACILITIES. FOOT AND HORSE TRAILS WHICH BLEND INTO THE LANDSCAPE MAY BE CONSTRUCTED IN PRIMITIVE AREAS. FOOTBRIDGES AND HORSEBRIDGES MAY ALSO BE CONSTRUCTED WHERE THEY ARE ESSENTIAL TO VISITOR SAFETY. RECREATION STOCK HOLDING CORRALS MAY BE PERMITTED IF NEEDED TO PROTECT PRIMITIVE VALUES. SANITARY FACILITIES MAY BE PERMITTED ONLY AS NECESSARY FOR THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PRIMITIVE RESOURCE. NO IMPROVEMENTS WILL BE PERMITTED THAT ARE PRIMARILY FOR THE COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE OF VISITORS.

1. Public use structures and facilities will only be constructed to protect primitive area values. Comfort and convenience of visitors is not a suitable criterion for the construction of structures and facilities.
2. When facility development is necessary to protect primitive area values, they will be constructed within the guidelines listed below plus any other criteria the area manager deems necessary to meet the conditions of a specific land use.
 - a. General
 1. Facilities will be primitive and rustic in design (e.g., wood as opposed to metal signs).
 2. Construction of facilities and structures will take place without the use of motorized equipment.
 3. Live materials from the primitive area will not be used in facility construction.
 - b. Trails
 1. Because of the irreversible nature of trail alterations, trail construction will be approached cautiously.
 2. Other techniques of dispersal will be employed before attempting to disperse use through trail construction.
 3. Where practicable trails will be constructed avoiding fragile ecological areas (e.g., alpine meadows, marshes) and with minimal environmental disturbance in all areas.
 4. Where practicable trails will be constructed out of the sight of lakes in order to avoid encounters between trail users and campers.
 5. Trails will be maintained to protect the health and safety of users.
 - c. Bridges
 1. Bridges will be as small and inconspicuous as possible and be of a rustic design.
 - d. Campsites and associated developments
 1. No facilities (e.g., fire grilles, tables, benches, stools) will be constructed at campsites.

2. Information programs will be employed to discourage users from making improvements and developing facilities at campsites.
 3. Multiple firerings at a campsite will be specifically discouraged in public information programs. BLM personnel will remove multiple firerings by scattering the rocks and ash when in the backcountry. An annual program will be conducted to remove multiple firerings.
- e. Sanitary facilities
1. Where necessary to protect primitive values, sanitary facilities will be of a highly primitive nature and primarily open air. Where practicable the sanitary facilities will be self-contained and the wastes packed out of the primitive area. Removal of wastes by flying out containers is discouraged.
- f. Signs within the primitive area
1. Because signs are an indication of man's work, sign construction and placement will be approached cautiously.
 2. Signs will be as small as practical and be of a rustic design.
 3. Signs will not be used for interpretive or educational purposes.
 4. Where deemed necessary signs may be used to indicate trail direction, distances, locations, and regulations (e.g., campsite closure, boundary designation).
- g. Trailhead facilities
1. Development of trailhead facilities and access roads should be approached cautiously because of the increased use which such development encourages.
 2. Development of trailhead facilities will be provided to complement public use of the primitive area rather than for general recreational use.

U. OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

1. In preparation of the primitive area management plan manpower requirements will be considered and provided in order to adequately manage the area. Minimum manpower requirements should provide for successful operation of the annual litter and firering programs, the use monitoring program, the removal of waste disposal containers (if used), and the commercial services permit program.
2. A routine patrol of the primitive area will be maintained and should be provided for in the management plan. The function of the patrol is to ensure compliance of use with primitive area regulations and to carry out the on-the-ground activities required by the management objectives.
 - a. Duties of patrol person
 1. Monitor compliance of grazing regulations
 2. Monitor public use and commercial services to ensure compliance with regulations
 3. Actively pursue the removal of litter and the destruction of multiple firerings.
 4. Do minor trail maintenance.

- b. The frequency of patrols will depend upon the level of use of an area. As a guide, an area that is not grazed and receives little or no public use might be visited only once or twice a season. An area with active grazing and near capacity public use might be visited once a week or more.
3. Active rehabilitation of excessively impacted sites within the primitive area will be considered as an alternative to rehabilitation through natural ecological processes. Active rehabilitation will employ only vegetation native to the area.
4. Historically insignificant facilities present in an area at dedication will be removed and the site returned to as natural a condition as practicable.