RECORD OF DECISION

High Uintas Wilderness Management Plan
and
Forest Plan Amendment

USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region
Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests
Duchesne and Summit Counties, Utah

Introduction

This Record of Decision documents our decision as the Responsible Officials regarding the setting of desired future conditions and other related standards for the High Uintas Wilderness (HUW) on the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests. These decisions include:

1) Statements of the desired future condition for the entire HUW and three condition classes,

2) Standards and guidelines for managing the HUW to sustain ecological processes, and

3) Monitoring plans for implementation of standards

The decisions result in a non-significant amendment to the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache Land and Resource Management Plans to include the desired future condition statements, standards, and monitoring plans. These decisions are made after careful consideration of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for management of the High Uintas Wilderness and other information, including public comment, available to us. These decisions will be applied to all lands on the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests designated as the High Uintas Wilderness.

Authorities to make the decisions in this record may be found in the Department of Agriculture regulations 36 CFR 219, on National Forest System Land and Resource Management Planning and 40 CFR 1500-1508, on National Environmental Policy Act implementation.

Why Amend the Forest Plans?

Both the Wasatch-Cache and Ashley Land and Resource Management Plans provide management direction for the wilderness and specific guidance to use the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) process for wilderness planning. The plans were approved in 1985 and 1986 respectively. At the time, these plans included very general guidance and interim direction for wilderness management. However, perspectives on wilderness management have changed significantly since the early 1980s. A decade later, the existing direction is outdated and insufficient to provide the needed direction to manage the High Uintas considering today's use and the effects of increasing numbers of people. Additionally, each forest plan contains separate direction and standards for its portion of the wilderness. While much of the direction is similar, some is not, which often leads to conflicting and confusing management for both Forest Service employees and wilderness visitors. There is a need to amend the existing direction to provide clear, consistent direction for the entire wilderness. The amendment will direct land managers to 1) maintain a wilderness where ecosystems are influenced primarily by the forces of nature, 2) provide

diverse opportunities for public use, enjoyment, and understanding of wilderness and 3) preserve a high quality wilderness resource for present and future generations.

Defining new forest plan direction for the High Uintas Wilderness began in 1991. The LAC process was a long and difficult one for the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests and for those of you involved since the beginning. The grueling work of the LAC process formed the foundation of much of the analysis contained in the Final EIS. The dedication and commitment of those who participated in the task of developing wilderness management direction is deeply appreciated.

Decision

After careful review of the draft and final environmental impact statements and public comments on both, we have decided to choose Alternative 1 with some clarification. We believe that our choice of a modified Alternative 1 best meets both the intent of the Wilderness Act and the needs and expectations of visitors to the High Uintas Wilderness. This decision amends both the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans. Management Area 1 on the Wasatch-Cache and Management Area i on the Ashley are replaced by this amendment.

It is important to note that the direction for Desired Condition, standards, and the monitoring plan is the same for all alternatives except the No Action alternative. The distinction between alternatives is made by the mapping of condition classes on the land. The details of this programmatic decision are outlined below.

I. <u>Desired Future Condition / Condition Classes</u>

The first part of our decision is the Desired Condition statements for the entire High Uintas Wilderness and the more specific statements for each of the three classes. An important aspect of this part of our decision is how desired condition classes are arranged on the ground. The attached map, which accompanies the forest plan amendment, illustrates this part of our decision.

This brings up an important point we'd like to make about the classes and how they lay on the ground. There are two main reasons for designating land areas to desired condition classes. The first is to help land managers focus management on more popular areas while allowing resources to be allocated as needed to maintain or monitor less popular areas. The second purpose is to heighten awareness of visitors about what they can expect in terms of a wilderness experience in any given area.

Desired Conditions Wilderness-Wide

The High Uintas Wilderness is recognized as an important component of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Bio-physical: Air quality meets federal and state standards. There is no measurable disturbance to water chemistry or biotic components due to acid deposition. There is no measurable degradation to water quality. Stream and river channels are naturally appearing and are maintained by natural flow conditions. The ability of soils to support naturally occurring vegetation communities is not significantly impaired by human activities.

Plant communities, including riparian communities, are affected by natural processes, and maintain their natural appearance. Bare soil conditions may occur. Viable populations of indigenous High Uintas plants

are sustained, with emphasis given to threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) species. The mosaic of plant communities contributes to overall biodiversity. Fire is one of the primary ecological processes serving an integral role in the maintenance of the wilderness ecosystem. The wilderness ecosystem is allowed to be highly dynamic, evolving over time. Smoke is part of the natural fire process and is seen in the wilderness and in adjacent areas.

Wildlife and fish are recognized as an integral part of the wilderness and contribute significantly to overall biodiversity. Natural processes and the forces of natural selection determine the diversity of wildlife and fish habitat and species. Wildlife transplants are limited to indigenous species and considered only when a vacant niche has been identified. Where potential exists for a transplant species to migrate into adjacent management areas, the impacts are included in the environmental analysis. Reestablish indigenous species classified as sensitive. The High Uintas Wilderness acts as a component to maintain indigenous species presently existing in the area. In order to define standards for some wildlife and fisheries desired conditions, baseline data such as for Neotropical bird populations, rate of stream bank erosion, and acres of habitat available to potential TES resident species needs to be collected.

Social: Cultural and historic sites are recognized as an integral component of the wilderness resource. Past human uses of the landscape are understood. Values of cultural resource sites are preserved.

Livestock grazing is recognized as an appropriate use of wilderness. Results of livestock grazing are consistent with desired condition of water, soils, wildlife, and vegetation.

There are opportunities for public use, enjoyment and understanding of the wilderness, through experiences that depend upon a wilderness setting. Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation exist. An appropriate mix of outfitters and guides are needed by the Forest Service to assist in managing and protecting the wilderness resource and provide for the well-being of visitors to the wilderness.

Visitors find clean water and air, and indigenous plant and animal species. Visitors may encounter signs of fire, including smoke, and they are aware of the natural role of fire in the wilderness. Smoke from fire may impair visibility. Historic and prehistoric cultural resources may be discovered. Visitors may encounter administrative personnel. Trails provide recreation access while protecting wilderness values. Results of recreation, including hunting, fishing, and commercial recreation, are consistent with the desired conditions for soils, water, vegetation, wildlife, and social conditions.

Established permitted irrigation impoundments and essential hydrometeorological measuring devices are appropriate uses of the wilderness. They are maintained and monitored using minimum tool concepts. As opportunities arise, relocate water use and prediction functions outside the wilderness. Stabilize and rehabilitate decommissioned reservoirs at a level that more naturally reflects the preconstruction conditions, allows natural streamflow processes to re-occur and at a level that poses no hazard, requires no maintenance or inspection, and requires no permit.

Wilderness dependent research, including Research Natural Areas (RNAs) is appropriate and encouraged. Scientific values of the High Uintas Wilderness are recognized.

Desired Condition Class I

The area (33% of the wilderness) is characterized by an unmodified natural environment. Human induced change is temporary, minor, and less than in Class II and III. Soil compaction and minor vegetation loss associated with human related activities is temporary, discontinuous, and limited in extent to the area of

activity. Human induced changes to soils, water and air quality, wildlife habitats, natural fire regimes, and vegetation do not disrupt the continuity of natural processes within the watershed.

By managing the area to maintain very low use levels, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation are available for the visitor who accepts the responsibility of traveling in small groups, practicing excellent wilderness ethics, using orienteering skills, and spending extra effort to leave no trace. There are few system trails. Appropriate and properly designed system trails that pass through Class I are considered corridors and are maintained. Encounters with other groups and rangers are rare. Both the outfitted and general public disperse use, and practice and provide others with examples of leave no trace camping techniques. Regulations are communicated to visitors primarily outside the wilderness. Few direct contacts by wilderness rangers are made, unless needed to monitor conditions or address problems. Generally, Class I is defined outside permitted livestock allotments, except areas within allotment boundaries that are unsuitable for livestock, vacant, or unused (due to physical barriers or quality of forage). Lakes are generally not stocked with fish.

Desired Condition Class II

The area (58% of the wilderness) is characterized by predominately unmodified natural environment. Some human induced change is evident but will recover. Soil loss, compaction, and minor vegetation loss associated with human related activities are discontinuous and limited in extent to the area of activity. Human induced changes to soils, water and air quality, wildlife habitats, natural fire regimes, and vegetation do not disrupt natural processes within the watershed.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation exist. Compared to Class III, fewer areas of concentrated visitor use occur. In areas of concentrated human use, dead and down firewood is available but may be scarce. Developed, maintained, and signed trails exist. Encounters with other groups, rangers, and wilderness ranger camps are less than Class III but more than Class I. Both the outfitted and general public practice leave no trace camping techniques. Regulations are communicated to visitors primarily outside the wilderness. Where regulation is needed to prevent deterioration of the wilderness resource and visitor experience, it is communicated to visitors primarily outside the wilderness and on-site. Permitted livestock grazing and fish stocking may occur.

Desired Condition Class III

The area (9% of the wilderness) is characterized by a predominantly unmodified natural environment. Impacts could persist from year to year. Soil loss, compaction, and minor vegetation loss associated with human related activities are discontinuous and limited in extent to the area of activity. Human induced changes to soils, water and air quality, wildlife habitats, natural fire regimes, and vegetation do not disrupt natural processes and are not significant within the watershed.

Concentrated use is more common that in Class II, but is managed to augment opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. During peak season and at popular sites, outstanding opportunities for solitude are more limited than in Classes I and II. In more popular campsites, dead and down firewood may be unavailable. Well-maintained and signed trails aid visitors. Encounters with other groups, rangers, and wilderness ranger camps are more common than in Classes I and II. Both the outfitted and general public practice leave no trace camping techniques. Where regulation and management actions are needed to prevent deterioration of wilderness resources and visitor experience, it is communicated to visitors both outside the wilderness and on-site. Permitted livestock grazing and fish stocking may occur.

Visitors may come in contact with water impoundments or snow measurement devices. Repair, reconstruction or stabilization of water impoundments and associated activities (borrow sources, access roads) is performed so the ability of soils to support naturally occurring vegetation communities is not diminished.

Some Important Changes to Alternative 1

As explained earlier, our decision includes some changes to Alternative 1 as displayed in the EIS. We view these changes as minor but important. The scope of the changes and effects to the human environment fall within the range of effects disclosed in the Final EIS. Outlined below are the modifications included in our decision and an explanation of why we made the changes.

The part of our decision which defines the condition classes includes some changes to the descriptions contained in the Draft EIS. First, many of you commented that the description for Class III was of a place "not wilderness." We agreed and changed the desired condition for Class III to describe a place more pristine in nature. Second, there were many comments regarding the proximity of Class I and Class III boundaries. Many of you were concerned with how you would know when you were entering or leaving a particular class. To make the class boundaries more clear, they have been slightly adjusted. Boundaries are generally drawn along topographical features and in relation to historical recreational use areas. As a result, we don't expect that most visitors will need to be concerned with whether they have crossed a class boundary and must now behave differently.

The map attached to the amendment at the back of this document illustrates our decision. It is different than Alternative 1 in three different ways.

First, on the north slope, Burnt Fork and Beaver Creek drainages are mostly changed from Class II to Class I. Several of you pointed out that the preferred alternative in the Draft EIS did not display any Class I acreage on the north slope of the High Uintas Wilderness. Because both drainages are inactive sheep allotments and there are no water use structures, they meet the minimum requirements for Class I status (as defined in the EIS). Therefore we modified the preferred alternative (Alt. 1) to change most of Beaver Creek and Burnt Forks from Class II to Class I. The Class III areas stay the same and areas near Fish Lake and the middle fork of Beaver Creek remain Class II due to active cattle allotments.

This decision will not affect the total number of outfitting and guiding service days available in these two drainages. Current use levels were taken into consideration when making the decision to change these areas from Class II to Class I.

This decision may limit future opportunities for using the currently inactive allotments for rest/rotation grazing from other allotments.

Second, on the south slope, in Grandaddy Basin, some pointed out that areas surrounding Margo Lake (in the northeast part of the basin) and Allen Lake (south of Four Lakes Basin) had been included in very small Class II areas. Since both of these areas can meet Class I standards and are effectively separated from the Class III areas by topography, we have changed these areas to Class I. As a result of this change, some use by the public may be discouraged (especially groups larger than seven people and seven stock). This displacement should not place undue burden on these visitors due to the abundance of lakes in the area.

The third change from Alternative 1 resulted from the use of a Geographic Information System (GIS). The use of this technology allowed for a level of precision in mapping (such as fine adjustments of class

boundaries) that was not used in the Draft EIS. The result of this is that Class III areas were more clearly defined to include those areas most prone to camping, fishing, and other recreation uses. Boundaries for Class III surround areas most suitable/used for concentrated recreation use on the basin floor and do not include the rock slopes or ridge tops of these basins. This more finely tuned mapping resulted in fewer acres being classified as Class III.

The question often came up: why should the desired future condition classes for wilderness ever be anything less than Class I? Isn't managing for less than pristine conditions inconsistent with the Wilderness Act? The answer to this is that it's a matter of scale. When viewed holistically, we believe that the current condition of the wilderness landscape meets the intent of the Wilderness Act. This has been the subject of much debate; we have been criticized throughout this process for merely legitimizing the status quo. We recognize that this decision does not reflect what many define as a purist view of wilderness. It is true that what we're referring to as "desired condition classes" are for the most part, a description of current use patterns of the wilderness landscape. In this case, and in this wilderness, this is somewhat coincidental.

While there are some areas experiencing heavy impacts by use (approximately 9% of the wilderness acreage), there are no large areas (e.g. watersheds) where degradation of resources is a critical problem -- yet. With this decision, we are choosing to acknowledge and accept more concentrated resource use at smaller scales, rather than attempt to disperse use and then try to manage the subsequently dispersed impacts across a larger area. The reasons for this are that first, we don't have any reason to believe we would be successful at dispersing use with our limited resources. Second, we believe that even with current use patterns, the High Uintas Wilderness remains relatively pristine on the larger scale. *Identifying different classes of wilderness does not mean we will not aspire to protect the wilderness resource or be satisfied with what is less than pristine -- at all scales*. Identifying classes of wilderness is a practical means of acknowledging current use patterns, “trouble spots,” etc., so that we can focus limited resources on those areas where management actions will be most effective. Monitoring of all classes will help us identify the critical gap between what we aspire the High Uintas Wilderness to be and what the impacts of current --and anticipated -- use patterns are.

II. Standards and Guidelines

The second major part of our decision is the set of standards and guidelines we have chosen to identify the thresholds of acceptable change to wilderness resources. These remain substantively unchanged from those disclosed on pages 2-9 through 2-17 in the Draft EIS. The 19 standards and 5 guidelines being added to the High Uintas plan direction as a result of the analysis documented in the EIS are listed below.

You'll find the standards are formatted somewhat differently than they were in the Draft EIS. The reason for this is that much more careful scrutiny has been given to the utility of these standards as they were written. It is an important criterion that the standards we identify are not only meaningful, but feasible to implement. Identifying the reason we chose a particular standard is also useful as we monitor and amend our standards and management plan into the future.

Standards (S) and Guidelines (G)

Air Quality

MA-01-001 (S) All classes: Nitrate loading will not exceed 3-5 kg/hectare/yr. Sulphate loading will not exceed 3-5 kg/hectare/yr.

MA-01-002 (S) All classes: Long-term visibility impairment from human activities will not impair long term baseline visual range more than 10% of the 90th percentile in Class II wilderness airsheds. Short term (14 day) visual range impairment from human activities outside the wilderness will not reduce visual range more than 20% in class II wilderness airsheds.

MA-01-003 (S) All classes: Alkalinity will not be reduced more than 10% of the baseline in all surface waters.

Water and Soil Management

MA-01-004 (S) All classes: State of Utah water quality standards will be met for acceptable amounts of coliform bacteria in waters for their specific beneficial uses as defined by the State Standards of Quality of the Waters of the State.

MA-01-005 (S) Class I: no more than 15% of all use areas have erosion class 1 characteristics, 0% erosion classes 2 and 3.

MA-01-006 (S) Class II: no more than 25% of all use areas have erosion class 1 characteristics, no more than 15% have erosion class 2 characteristics, 0% erosion class 3.

MA-01-007 (S) Class III: no more than 50% of all use areas have erosion class 1 characteristics, no more than 25% have erosion class 2 characteristics, 0% erosion class 3.

Vegetation Management

MA-01-016 (S) Permit no more than 10% of the habitat for sensitive plant species to be adversely altered by human uses.

MA-01-017 (S) Alpine vegetation types - 85% of potential ground cover. Aspen vegetation types - 85% of potential ground cover. Riparian vegetation types - 85% of potential ground cover.

Fire Management

MA-01-018 (S) All classes: Prescribed (lightning caused) and management ignited natural fires are managed so fire can play, as nearly as possible, its natural role in the ecosystem. Prescribed fires are managed using plan found in appendix of the HUW FEIS, 1997. (FSM 2324.2)

Recreation Use

MA-01-035 (S) Campsite density: Class I - campsites should be 1 mile apart. Class II - campsites should be 1/4 mile apart. Class III - campsites are 200 feet apart.

MA-01-036 (S) Campsite condition: Class I - No campsites having an SII rating greater than 40. Class II - 10% or fewer campsites have an SII rating greater than 40. Class III - 20% or fewer campsites have an SII rating greater than or equal to 50.

MA-01-037 (S) Terrain permitting, campsites must be at least 200 feet from water.

MA-01-038 (S) Group size: Class I - 7 people / 7 stock. Class II and III - 14 people / 15 stock.

MA-01-039 (S) Length of stay at campsite: Class I - 1-2 nights recommended overnight stay. Class II and III - 14 nights at an individual site.

MA-01-040 (G) All classes: Stock may be tethered to a tree for 2 hours or less if damage is occurring to tree or vegetation at base of tree.

MA-01-041 (G) All classes: Stock cannot be tethered within 200 feet of water sources for more than 2 hours.

MA-01-042 (S) No overnight use or grazing by recreational stock in Chain Lakes Basin (Uinta drainage).

MA-01-043 (G) Litter or waste will be disposed of in an appropriate manner.

MA-01-045 (S) In Naturalist Basin (Duchesne drainage): building, maintaining, attending, or using a fire or campfire unless in a designated campfire location is prohibited.

Outfitted Recreation Use

MA-01-048 (S) Class I - drop camps only, no spike or assigned camps. Overnight group size limited to 7 people, 7 stock. Class II - 1 assigned site per drainage. Class III - drop camps only, no spike or assigned camps.

MA-01-049 (S) Based on outfitting needs analysis for the HUW, permit no more than 7 special-use stock outfitters and no more than 4 special-use non-stock outfitters.

MA-01-050 (S) Maximum available service days for outfitted use by drainage are:

RIVER DRAINAGE	STOCK	NON-STOCK
Duchesne	0	0
Rock Creek	300	200
Lake Fork	350	600
Yellowstone	300	550
Uinta	300	450
Burnt Fork	150	0
Beaver Creek	150	0
Henry's Fork	0	150
Smiths Fork	0	300
E/M/W Blacks Fork	250	300
E/Stillwater Fork Bear	50	0
TOTAL SERVICE DAYS	1850	2250

MA-01-052 (G) Administer and issue outfitter guide permits to meet the following needs criteria:

Criteria A Ability to accomplish environmental and land stewardship education and interpretation goals.

Criteria B Ability to accomplish resource protection and other National Forest goals (i.e. trail maintenance / construction and rehabilitation, and campsite rehabilitation and re-location)

Criteria C Service days actually used as compared to service days authorized. This may reflect either an increase or decrease in authorized service days, but cannot exceed service day ceiling for the wilderness.

Criteria D Documented citizen requests over time for particular commercial services.

Criteria E Ability of the agency to monitor existing permits for compliance with the forest plan and special use permit requirements.

Criteria F Lakes and trail corridors in Duchesne River, Henry's Fork, Smiths Fork and East/Stillwater Forks of the Bear River drainages are **least** appropriate for outfitting operations because the current public use meets or exceeds the desired conditions for that area.

Criteria G Outfitter knowledge of the area, safety, equipment, and quality of business and customer service.

Structures and Improvement

MA-01-055 (S) Class I - no system trails. Class II and III - Trails avoid wetlands. Trails avoid stream crossings where bank gradients are greater than 30%. Trails are designed and maintained so water does not run down the trail.

MA-01-056 (S) Class II and III - Trail switchbacks do not show signs of shortcutting.

Why We Chose Certain Standards

The Class I group size limits of 7 people and/or 7 stock raised many concerns. The group size limits are based on our experience with the impacts associated with various group sizes. Presently, a relatively small percentage of visitors to the High Uintas Wilderness travel in groups of more than seven. Those that travel in larger groups are targeted for educational efforts. For overnight use in Class I, a limit of seven people and/or seven stock will continue to be used to measure the impacts on the wilderness resource. The group size limits are a monitoring tool. Based on the results of monitoring they may be adjusted in the future (up or down) to better achieve the desired condition.

Outfitting and guiding was the subject of many of your comments. Some of you are philosophically opposed to the concept of individuals or businesses making a profit off the wilderness. Others commented that outfitters and guides are being singled out unfairly by the use ceilings accompanying each class description. We have heard your concerns. Wilderness outfitting and guiding is not precluded by law or regulation and is not an inappropriate use of the wilderness. In fact, the Forest Service relies on outfitters to pass along the principles of Leave No Trace and other wilderness ethics. We make no apology for our reliance on and approval of outfitting and guiding activities in the High Uintas Wilderness.

There is no question that outfitters and guides are being treated somewhat differently than the general public under this decision. While party sizes and stock limits apply to all users, service day ceilings are

set for outfitters that are currently not being set for the general public (FEIS, tables on pages II-10 and II-11). In the future, this may change, but for now we believe this is an appropriate step. The ceilings are determined based on our experience with the pattern and history of use in each drainage. Setting limits on permitted uses of National Forest System lands is a common and useful practice.

Limits allow for more effective resource monitoring and can be adjusted (up or down) based on the results of monitoring and the criteria outlined in the Outfitter and Guide Needs Analysis (FEIS Appendix A). It is possible that in the future, as use increases, a permit system may be necessary for the general public visiting the wilderness. Our goal is to avoid that necessity through careful planning, management, and visitor education.

III. Monitoring

The third part of our decision is the plan to monitor our standards to measure the degree to which we are achieving our desired condition. We believe that the monitoring plan included as part of the amendment to the forest plans is not only appropriate and sufficient, but also feasible to implement. As part of each year's work planning process, the forests will identify the monitoring emphases in the wilderness for that year.

A Final Comment on the Decision

Many of you were concerned that this wilderness management direction was not developed using the emerging tenets of ecosystem management. One of our basic assumptions is that the wilderness landscape has inherent functions and processes which are natural and will be maintained. Wilderness is a unique resource, in that it is understood that natural processes will prevail and that humans are visitors. By definition, we are not intent on 'managing' the natural processes inherent in wilderness. Instead our focus is on limiting the degree to which we as humans impinge on those natural processes. The other side of that coin is that wilderness is to be managed for a variety of uses and users. This includes 'users' who may never set foot in the High Uintas, for certainly the wilderness is a national treasure to be enjoyed by everyone, whether they visit, or whether they simply appreciate the concept of preserving wildness. Our decision and our management plan focuses on recreation for practical reasons. Recreation is clearly the dominant human use of the wilderness; it has the single greatest impact on the natural functions of the wilderness resources. Our decision and our forest plan amendment are both proactive and reactive to this fact.

At this time, we do not anticipate a wholesale re-visit of this wilderness management plan as the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests revise their forest plans. However, that does not mean wilderness resources can or will be ignored at the time we revise our plans. The designation of wilderness -- the line on the map -- will not preclude analyses that may be appropriate for revision issues that cross artificial lines. Examples of this may include our look at threatened, endangered, or sensitive species, old growth, allotment management, and the like. Analyses of projects proposed outside the wilderness boundary (e.g. timber sales) will consider wilderness resources as necessary to adequately assess the cumulative impacts of those projects.

What Is Not Included As Part Of Our Decision

Many of the comments we received on the Draft EIS took exception to the scope of the decision to be made as we have defined it. Defining the scope of this decision and analysis was difficult. This is a

programmatic decision which sets the desired conditions, sideboards and standards for subsequent wilderness management activities. To some of you, the ceilings on outfitters and guides appears inconsistent with the programmatic nature of this decision. Our management plan and our decision focus on the level of visitor use and the resulting impacts to the wilderness resource. We believe that identifying a level of use for outfitters and guides is consistent with the scope of our decision.

Many of you raised powerful and important issues related to wilderness management, including the appropriateness of fish stocking, livestock grazing, and wildlife transplants. We agree that these issues are legitimate and relevant to management of wilderness. We did not include decisions concerning these issues for several reasons (see FEIS pgs. I-11 through I-13). There are already in place processes and arenas in which these decisions are made. We believe that these arenas offer a more appropriate means of addressing the details and concerns related to these issues than what we could include as part of this programmatic decision and analysis. It's important to note however, that even though specific decisions regarding these issues are not made in this record, impacts of *all* human initiated wilderness activities must be consistent with the standards which *are* part of this decision and the forest plan amendment.

Livestock Grazing - Grazing decisions will continue to be made in Allotment Management Plans or Annual Operating plans where any adjustments in numbers of livestock permitted to graze or changes in management are appropriate. We recognize there are areas of unsatisfactory range conditions in the wilderness. They are localized and not widespread. Groundcover requirements provided in standard MA-01-015 will begin to address these conditions. On the Wasatch-Cache portion of the wilderness, utilization standards from the 1996 Rangeland Health Forest Plan amendment will also be applied. Even so, we know these problems will not be corrected overnight. Improvements in alpine settings or sites with harsh climatic conditions take time to heal.

Fish Stocking - This issue has been the topic of debate since the early LAC planning in 1991. Judging from public comments and personal conversations, it remains a prominent issue for many. Some support traditional recreational fishing and fish stocking while others believe that within wilderness ecological processes should be allowed to operate freely without any human influence. The issue is complicated because the State of Utah has the responsibility for fish and wildlife populations while the Forest Service has the responsibility for providing and maintaining fish and wildlife habitat.

With the wilderness planning effort as a catalyst, much valuable information about fish stocking has been gained. We now have a much clearer picture of the extent to which the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) stocks lakes in the wilderness. We have recommended to the UDWR that no fish stocking be allowed in Class I areas. We had hoped that by now an agreement with the UDWR for management of fisheries in the wilderness would be complete, but policy decisions for complex issues never come quickly or easily. We view the recent release of the division's Fish Stocking Procedures as progress toward that end. Our commitment to working toward an agreement remains strong.

Wildlife Transplants - Another issue closely related to fish stocking is the transplanting of indigenous species in or nearby the wilderness. Again, the state has the responsibility for fish and wildlife populations while the Forest Service has the responsibility for providing and maintaining fish and wildlife habitat. Forest Service policy also deems it the state wildlife agency's responsibility to determine whether species are indigenous and where they should be transplanted. Because of this, the Forest Service has limited authority and environmental analysis under NEPA is not required. Some members of the public have told us that regardless of this direction, we have a responsibility to involve the public and analyze the issue. We have also heard that our current plan direction requires analysis.

We know that because of recent transplants of mountain goats close to the wilderness, some of you believe we are abdicating our responsibility. We've discussed our agency policy openly in many conversations and letters and we know we share a different point of view about the Forest Service role in decision making for transplants. We will continue our efforts in monitoring the effects of past transplants on alpine habitat to help the UDWR make wise decisions in the future. This policy reflects a change from years past when we played a greater role in analyzing and approving transplants. This shift in agency policy occurred in the last several years, independent from this analysis. The policy shift is recognized in the amendment which deletes inconsistent language about transplants requiring analysis.

Standards and Guidelines from the Current Plans

The forest plan amendment which accompanies this decision replaces all current direction for management of the High Uinta Wilderness contained in each forest's land management plan. The amendment includes the desired condition classes, standards, and monitoring requirements identified throughout the FEIS. The amendment also carries over some existing wilderness-specific standards and guidelines from the forest plans which remain unchanged. These are included as part of the amendment to provide a clean package of standards and wilderness management direction; they do not represent a new decision. Some of the carry over language may have been cleaned up somewhat to provide clarity, but no changes to this language are substantive. Some standards in the current plans were *not* carried forward. These standards were either redundant with Forest Service direction or inconsistent with this analysis or with current agency policy. Forest-wide standards and guidelines (which include the wilderness) are not repeated as part of this amendment.

Public Involvement

Preliminary work on this round of wilderness management planning began in 1991. At that time, public sensing, data collection and initial analysis helped an interdisciplinary team establish preliminary desired conditions and a frame of reference for a more formal analysis. In June of 1994, a scoping document was sent to interested individuals and organizations. A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in the Federal Register May 16, 1995 describing the proposed action and inviting comments. A Draft EIS was published in July 1996 and comments on it were received until September 17, 1996. Upon public request, the comment period was formally extended to October 17, 1996. The Draft EIS or a Summary was mailed to over 250 elected officials, government agencies, organizations, and individuals. In addition, about 800 cards were sent to others on the Forest Plan mailing list announcing the availability of the Draft EIS or Summary for review. Three public meetings were held in Mountain View, Salt Lake City, and Duchesne in August 1996 to explain the different alternatives and management philosophy to the public. Meetings were also held with county commissioners and congressional staff.

The following issues were considered in the Draft EIS:

1. Human overuse threatens the integrity of ecosystem components such as riparian areas, wetlands, lakes, streams, topsoil, and wildlife and threatens potential for reintroduction of extirpated species.

2. Extent to which visitor solitude and primitive recreation experience are affected by other recreationists, resource damage and rules and regulations.

3. Extent to which outfitting and guiding operations are affected by use limits and desired conditions (Class I-III designations).

4. Extent to which systems trails (including signs and bridges) meet wilderness objectives, including: soil and water quality and other indicators of pristine character. In some areas, trails are inappropriate; they duplicate destinations, are poorly placed, and/or insufficiently maintained.

5. Human and animal waste threaten water quality.

6. Exotic (non-native) plant species threaten natural functions of the ecosystem.

7. The extent to which habitat and populations of native, endangered, threatened, proposed, and Forest Service sensitive species of fish and wildlife are protected by wilderness management measures.

8. Extent to which air quality is affected by pollution and management ignited prescribed smoke.

9. Extent to which fire is allowed to play its natural role in the ecosystem.

10. Archeological and historic sites.

11. Research Natural Areas (RNAs).

Sixty-two letters were received on the Draft EIS. Our responses to your comments can be found in Chapter 7 of the Final EIS. In May of 1997, we sent our proposed amendment to those people who had expressed an interest in the High Uintas Wilderness Management Plan. We wanted to provide a "preview" of the amendment even though we expected it to end up in a very different format, blending new direction with existing plan direction. No formal comment period was identified for the preview amendment, although comments were welcome.

Alternatives Considered

The action alternatives (Alts. 1 through 4) varied on the basis of amount and distribution of desired condition classes across the wilderness. Wilderness-wide desired conditions, class specific desired conditions, outfitter and guide permit criteria, standards and guidelines, and the monitoring plans were consistent among each action alternative.

Alternative 1 (as originally described prior to this decision) maintained current conditions across the wilderness except in Naturalist Basin and the west end of the Highline Trail, where it directs managers to bring the area up to wilderness standards. (*Note*: Since this analysis was initiated, progress toward this goal has been made.)

Alternative 2 responds to public comments which suggested that other alternatives may be too restrictive. It is the alternative with the least restriction/highest human use potential.

Alternative 3 was designed to maximize the pristine character of the wilderness.

Alternative 4 attempted to maintain the pristine character of the wilderness while allowing for some increases in human use.

Alternative 5 was the no action alternative. It represents no change from current management direction.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Alternative 3 is the environmentally preferred alternative, designed to maximize protection of wilderness resources and potential for solitude.

Findings Required By Other Laws

The forest plans for the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests have been reviewed and a determination made that this decision is not consistent with current management direction contained in those plans. This decision amends the forest plans of the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests, replacing all current references specific to management of the High Uintas Wilderness with the direction analyzed and documented in the EIS and displayed in the attached amendment. Specifically, for the Wasatch-Cache it replaces pages IV-63 through IV-72; for the Ashley it replaces pages IV-9, and IV-21 through IV-29. The High Uintas Wilderness is now identified as Management Area 01 in both Forest Plans. We conclude that this is a non-significant amendment to our forest plans.

Implementation and Appeal Process

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, Content of Notice of Appeal, including the reasons for the appeal. Notices of Appeal must be filed with Appeal Deciding Officer, USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401 no later than 45 days after legal notice of this decision is published in the Salt Lake Tribune and the Vernal Express. The legal notice will be published on October 15, 1997. Copies of the Notice of Appeal must be filed simultaneously with Forest Supervisor, Wasatch-Cache National Forest, 8236 Federal Building, 125 South State St., Salt Lake City, Utah 84138, and Forest Supervisor, Ashley National Forest, 355 North Vernal Avenue, Vernal, Utah 84078.

Implementation of this decision may occur seven days following publication of the legal notice of this decision in the Salt Lake Tribune and the Vernal Express.

For further information, please contact either: Julie Hubbard, NEPA Coordinator, Wasatch-Cache National Forest (801)524-5188 (Salt Lake City), or Laura Jo West, Forest Planner, Ashley National Forest (801)781-5167 (Vernal).

BERT KULESZA Supervisor, Ashley National Forest	BERNIE WEINGARDT Supervisor, Wasatch-Cache National Forest