



U.S. Forest Service - Thunder Basin National Grassland Plan Amendment Bulletin #4 March 2020

Summary. This is the fourth in a series of updates that summarizes the status of the current planning effort to amend the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan. The bulletin provides updates on comments received during the 90-day draft environmental impact statement (EIS) comment period and development of the preferred alternative for analysis in the final EIS.

Draft EIS Comment Period. The draft EIS was available for a 90-day public comment period that ended on January 9, 2020. Approximately 275 comments were received, with about 50 unique and substantive comments. In addition, the Forest Supervisor received petitions signed by more than 12,000 individuals opposed to the plan amendment. Although no new issues were raised, many commenters offered detailed comments describing how the analysis could be improved. Many also offered suggestions for developing a new alternative. The interdisciplinary team has started the formal response to comments and revisions to the EIS. The response to comments will be published as an appendix to the final EIS.

Preferred Alternative Development. Following review of public comments, the interdisciplinary team developed Alternative 5, which will be identified as the preferred alternative in the final EIS. The Forest Supervisor confirmed that this new alternative would meet the purpose and need for the plan amendment, would be responsive to comments from a variety of stakeholders, and would provide both constraints on management and the appropriate level of flexibility for prairie dog management. Alternative 5 will be described in detail and analyzed in the final EIS.

Estimated Planning Timelines. The final EIS and draft record of decision (ROD) are in preparation for release in May 2020. Those who commented during the scoping period or the 90-day draft EIS comment period may be eligible to object to the draft ROD during the 60-day objection filing period that follows release of the draft ROD. Thunder Basin National Grassland staff will work with the Rocky Mountain Regional Office to review and respond to objections before releasing a final ROD, expected in October 2020.

Project documents are posted at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55479>.

Current information related to restoration work and prairie dog colony management efforts on the Thunder Basin National Grassland is posted at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/MBRTB/PrairieDogs>.