

Comments on Draft RMP/EIS for Carson City District, Sierra Front and Stillwater Field Offices

March 13, 2015

Carson City RMP
BLM Carson City District Office
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701

Dear BLM:

The undersigned organizations have a long-standing and vested interest in access and opportunities on Federal public lands for our members to enjoy hunting and recreational shooting. This vested interest led our organizations to sign a memorandum of agreement (MOU) in 2006 with the BLM. The Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing and Shooting Sports Roundtable (Roundtable) MOU was renewed in 2014. The purpose of the MOU is to build a partnership with the signatory organizations, the BLM, and the other signatory Federal agencies “for planning and implementing mutually beneficial projects and activities related to hunting, fishing, and shooting sports conducted on federal lands.”

With the MOU in mind, we are submitting the following comments on the draft Resource Management Plan/draft Environmental Impact Statement (DRMP) for the Carson City District, Sierra Front and Stillwater Field Offices. Although the DRMP does not propose to close additional public lands to hunting or recreational shooting, we are very concerned over the numerous negative and unsupported statements in the DRMP with respect to recreational shooting and the environmental effects of lead ammunition within the planning area.

Under the heading of **Recreational Shooting** (pages 3-208-210), the DRMP states that recreational shooting is a legitimate activity on BLM-administered lands and that it is “commonplace throughout the planning area and is especially prevalent near areas of high population density,” but it “poses a significant safety risk if not managed correctly.” These two statements are followed by a list of conflicts associated with shooting such as: shooting across roads or trails, not having a backstop, shooting too close to homes or buildings, shooting in areas where there are high levels of recreational activities and shooting in sensitive areas like ACECs. This suggests that the BLM is admitting that it is not managing correctly this popular, commonplace recreational activity within the planning area.

In planning documents associated with the DRMP, BLM acknowledges that more active management of recreational target shooting in the planning area is needed. Page 4-4 of the Socioeconomic Baseline Assessment report indicates that local government representatives participating in economic strategy workshops organized by BLM recommended that the agency “[m]ove shooting areas to less urban areas and enforce the use of shooting areas to prevent environmentally destructive shooting habits in remote areas and promote public safety.” This recommendation, solicited by BLM, is consistent with numerous comments outlined in the DRMP Scoping Report that encourage BLM to consider designating shooting areas throughout the planning area.

Despite BLM’s stated goal of developing “a collaborative, community-based RMP that reflects careful consideration of the local and regional factors unique to the CCD RMP planning area,” none of the

alternatives contained in the DRMP include provisions that would allow the public to comment on the establishment of designated shooting areas throughout the planning area.

Similarly, BLM itself acknowledges the potential benefits associated with designating shooting areas. Page 2-188 of the Analysis of the Management Situation states, “Due to the large amount of urban interface in the CCDPA and the amount of recreation shooting happening near this urban interface, wildland fires pose a significant threat to communities, recreational areas, grazing areas, and wildlife habitat. Possible solutions would be to have multiple designated shooting areas near the urban interface. These areas could be mitigated to help prevent fire starts and potential spread if a fire started.” Again, none of the alternatives contained in the DRMP include proposals to act on this recommendation to identify and/or designate certain areas that could accommodate recreational shooting and improve the management situation.

The management for all recreational activities on public lands is the responsibility of the land management agency. Recreationists and private and tribal landowners in and around BLM-administered lands cannot be expected to take the lead or responsibility for correctly managing recreational activities. The BLM acknowledges the popularity of recreational shooting in the planning area and reason dictates that recreation generally takes place in proximity to populations of people when there is easy access. But the BLM’s response to recreation-associated conflicts is that it will not designate shooting areas. This is perplexing since designation would allow signing of designated shooting areas and identification of them on maps which would assuredly reduce conflicts with other recreational interests, developed sites and special management areas.

The DRMP notes that the BLM “attempts in certain areas to make target shooting safe for the public and environment, often by encouraging target shooting in places where other recreational use is low.” However the DRMP does not explain how the BLM encourages target shooters to move to other places, what the response has been to that encouragement, and whether it has been effective in reducing conflicts. The DRMP also notes that the BLM “relies on the public to encourage safe shooting practices.” Who is the “public” in this instance and how are they to encourage safe shooting practices? In spite of BLM’s prediction that conflicts will increase among recreationalists and that closures of land to a legitimate activity are expected, the DRMP is silent on proactive initiatives that would reduce conflicts and provide for safe recreational environments, with the exception of redirecting shooters to other places.

BLM’s approach to addressing safe shooting practices is also disconcerting due to the lack of information included on its website.¹ Unlike other BLM field offices throughout the country, the Carson City District fails to acknowledge recreational shooting on its recreation page and provides the public with no information regarding the activity or how to partake in it appropriately. This is in contrast to the numerous other recreational activities (camping, OHV riding opportunities, vehicle touring, whitewater rafting/kayaking, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and equestrian riding) that are acknowledged and facilitated on the Carson City District’s recreation website.

There is no discussion in the DRMP of identifying safe shooting sites that would separate recreational activities and providing for man-made backstops (if natural backstops are not available at otherwise good shooting sites), thus reducing, if not eliminating, conflicts among user groups. Redirecting shooters appears to be a very weak management response to a situation that the BLM describes as “a

¹ http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/carson_city_field/blm_programs/recreation.html

significant safety risk if not managed correctly.” We can only conclude that the BLM is making a clear and definitive decision not to exercise its management responsibility for a legitimate and commonplace recreational activity with the intended consequence, as expressed boldly in the DRMP, that “Requests for shooting closures are expected to increase in high-use areas with increasing conflicts between users and concerns over safety.”

The DRMP further states that littering, unsafe target shooting, and illegal dumping “have become major issues on federal lands where recreational shooting occurs” and uses as reference for this quote Responsive Management, 2009. The quote is not tied to recreational shooting issues specific to the planning area of the DRMP. Rather it was a general statement from research conducted by Responsive Management under the umbrella of the MOU. Several of the MOU partner organizations, the BLM and the US Forest Service contributed funds to cover the costs of this research which addressed shooting related issues on Federal public lands. The outgrowth was a Roundtable outdoor ethics education campaign entitled “Respected Access is Open Access” which is being managed for the Roundtable by Tread Lightly!, the premiere outdoor ethics education organization. The goal of the campaign is to promote responsible behavior by all recreationists. There is no discussion in the DRMP as to how the BLM would use the tools of the Respected Access campaign in this planning area to address littering and unsafe shooting practices, including outreach to the recreation community on safe and responsible behavior.

The undersigned are also concerned over the BLM’s inference that illegal dumping is a problem associated with recreational shooting. It is, instead, a problem associated with members of the public who are unwilling to pay the cost of disposing household and construction material in a municipal landfill. Although shooters may take irresponsible advantage of ready targets, this is not an issue that they or other recreationists are obligated to shoulder or resolve. This problem falls squarely on the shoulders of the BLM to resolve with the local municipalities. The undersigned organizations do support BLM’s prohibition against the use of unorthodox (i.e. household appliances) or potentially dangerous items for targets or the destruction of natural resources because of ill-advised placement of targets or the use of such resources as targets, as well as unsafe shooting practices involving shooting across or towards roads and trails.

The DRMP also addressed wildland fire associated with recreational shooting by stating that in a ten-year period 34% of human-caused fires started on BLM-administered lands in Nevada were found to be caused by shooting (BLM, 2011). There is no mention as to how the remaining 66% of human-caused fires were started. There is no mention of how many fires attributed to shooting occurred in the planning area of the DRMP, and there is no data addressing human-caused fires within the last four years. Such generalized statements only contribute to the belief that the DRMP was intended to disparage recreational shooting and set the stage for future closures. The paragraph goes on to state that “The increased popularity and use of explosive targets on BLM-administered lands has also been identified as a major factor in human caused fires”. There is no information supporting this statement, let alone whether this statement has any relevance to the planning area. Furthermore, the statement fails to note that the DRMP is proposing to prohibit exploding targets as an action common to the five management alternatives arrayed in the DRMP. As noted previously, BLM itself suggests that designating shooting areas could potentially address wildfire concerns related to recreational shooting. However, nothing resembling this suggestion was included in any of the alternatives outlined in the DRMP.

Importantly, there is a complete lack of recognition of the partnership that the BLM entered into through the MOU. We have come to believe over the years that while the BLM talks about shooting as a legitimate recreational activity, its management attitude is one of tolerance until such time that an opportunity presents itself to close lands to shooting. The DRMP spells it out: the BLM is unwilling to positively and proactively manage this legitimate activity in the same way and with the same positive attitude it does for all other recreation. Many organizations within the Roundtable have partnered with the BLM in cleanup events at shooting sites on public lands over the years which not only help to keep public lands clean, but also present a unique opportunity for the BLM to reach out to and engage local shooters in future partnership opportunities like “adopting” sites to help promote responsible and safe shooting.

The section on **Recreational Shooting** continues further by stating that:

Recently, there has been a growing public concern about the potential negative environmental and health effects of range operations. In particular, the public is concerned about potential risks associated with past and continued use of lead shot and bullets at outdoor shooting ranges.

The DRMP continues on to address the sources for human exposure of lead and that lead exposure associated with shooting ranges is through lead-contaminated soils. There is no information to explain how this statement is relevant to any shooting range in the planning area and no scientific documentation referenced to support the inference that soils at shooting ranges in the planning area or in general present a measureable risk to human health. This statement can only be interpreted as a condemnation of shooting, not only as a dispersed recreational activity, but an activity at shooting ranges.

There should be no public concern with environmental or health risks of a shooting range when it is properly managed. Nothing in the DRMP suggests that a shooting range, if it exists in the planning area, is not being managed properly. The BLM has the responsibility of ensuring that any concern about any aspect of the design or management of a shooting range on the public lands is addressed. Any such concern is easily addressed by experts in the field. Range evaluations can allay concerns or make recommendations for corrective action. For example, the NRA offers such assistance through its Range Technical Team Assistance program which is just one way MOU partners contribute to the purpose of the MOU. There are also other sources to draw upon. The undersigned can only conclude that the statement is, again, a condemnation not only of recreational shooting, but of shooting ranges as well. We recommend strongly that this entire discussion on shooting ranges be removed from the final RMP.

Also of significant concern to the undersigned are the broad based statements made about spent lead ammunition under the section headed **Solid Waste** (page 3-208). This section addresses unauthorized disposal of solid waste, and lists examples of waste as defined by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Included in that list is “lead from target shooting”. This is a gross misreading of the application of RCRA as it relates to spent lead ammunition. According to the EPA’s *Best Management Practices for Lead at Outdoor Shooting Ranges* (EPA-902-B-01-001), lead ammunition is not considered a hazardous waste subject to RCRA at the time it is discharged from a firearm because it is used for its intended purpose.

Further along, the DRMP states that “Concentrations of lead deposited by target shooters at informal shooting sites can also become a hazardous waste.” There is no citation for this statement or an

explanation as to what conditions spent lead ammunition could become a hazardous waste. EPA's document notes that spent lead ammunition could be subject to the broader definition of solid waste used in RCRA and subject to cleanup if the solid waste poses "actual or potential imminent and substantial endangerment" to public health and/or the environment. The document discusses how environmental risks of spent lead ammunition are site specific and that risks are least when there is low precipitation, non acidic soils, low water table, and low lead mobility. The EPA recommends periodic cleanups that can be accomplished by hosting volunteer cleanups of sites every so many years. The EPA document states that "Collected lead shot and bullets are excluded from RCRA regulation". As noted above, BLM's MOU partners have already demonstrated their willingness and readiness to assist with volunteer support. Consequently this section also needs revision and lead ammunition should be removed from the discussion, unless it is backed up by site-specific environmental data and bracketed by the information we have provided from the EPA.

On page 4-501 the DRMP states that "all alternatives would allow recreational shooting on BLM-administered lands except where prohibited by statute or county ordinance. This would maintain exiting shooting opportunities over the life of the plan." However, we believe that the BLM's self-proclaimed hands off policy of managing recreational shooting by not taking positive actions will lead to what the DRMP predicts as increased requests for shooting closures.

In summary, the sections on **Recreational Shooting** and **Solid Waste** need to be completely rewritten to show how the BLM intends to protect the future of recreational shooting on its lands by managing recreational shooting as a legitimate recreational activity. The DRMP should outline the BLM's plans to engage in fair and balanced management of recreational shooting on par with management of other public uses of these lands, how it will implement the Respected Access campaign, and how it will work with its MOU partners on beneficial projects and activities associated with recreational shooting.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the DRMP.

Sincerely,

Boone and Crockett Club
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
North American Bear Foundation
Wildlife Management Institute