

Planning Nuts and Bolts: Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Alternatives

Now we want to talk about plan goals, objectives, and alternatives. We want to be able to define a vision, goal, objectives, alternatives, all within the planning context. We're going to describe the collaborator roles and the development and the vision of the goals, objectives and the alternatives. We want to be able to write goal and objective statements. We want to be able to describe the role of the alternatives in the planning process, and then we want to talk about the steps in the adaptive management process.

One of the more challenging steps in the planning process wraps itself around the definitions of a vision statement, a goal, a standard, an alternative, an objective, a theme, and a management action. So we want to talk a little bit about what those things are.

So the vision, the vision is, really, an expression of long-term desired condition. The goal, a broad statement of desired outcomes which generally isn't quantifiable. A standard, a description of a bio-physical condition regarding healthy sustainable lands. The alternative, which we'll talk about a little bit later, but they're a grouping of management actions and allocations. A theme, we'll touch a little bit on that, but it's traditionally been used as a general look and feel of an alternative. The objectives, really specific desired conditions for resources with established time frames that are quantifiable and they're measurable. And the management actions, activities that are needed to achieve desired outcomes; they're proactive measures, criteria that will be applied to guide the day-to-day activities.

What you see now is a slide that tries to encapsulate the overall vision, goal, objective, alternative, management action. What you see at the top is a broad vision that covers the entire theme of the plan. And then you see goals; and these goals, while they are individual discreet boxes, really could be one solid line across there that denotes the fact that they are, really those goals are really common to all the alternatives. Some of the goals, some of the alternatives may meet the goals better than others, but they're really common to them all.

You also see objectives that are common to all the alternatives and you also see objectives that are discreet to each of the alternatives themselves. Followed at the very bottom of the chart with management actions and allocations which are the meat and potatoes of an actual alternative.

So let's talk just a little bit about writing a vision statement. So, the visioning process really should include your partners, your collaborators, its jointly developed vision statement really bonds, really makes stronger planning process, and builds supportive relationships. You get some buy-in from not only your cooperators, but also your internal disciplinary team. You want to incorporate any proclamations or any directives that you have related to your plan area; describe how the plan area looks, how it feels, sounds, smells. Include socio-economic aspects of the plan area. And one suggested activity would be for the IDT to actually develop a vision statement in collaboration with your partners and your cooperators.

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So moving on to goal statements. So we talked a little bit about vision, now we're going to talk a little bit about goals. And goals should include your partners, to the extent possible. There have been previous experience, some of the plan starts have kept the goals descriptions, decisions and statements to themselves and other have included to the greatest extent possible, their cooperators and their collaborators.

The goal is more specific and focused than the vision statement. Generally, one set of goals for all of the alternatives. You're going to describe desired outcomes and conditions and in an attempt to integrate resources into a handful of goals rather than having one goal, one or two goals, per resource.

Bobby, if I can interrupt. It's very important as you're writing your vision statement and your goal statements that you're considering this in terms of defining alternatives. One of the things that's important, as Bobby had mentioned, your vision, your goals, they all must be met by any of the alternatives, as Bobby mentioned. Some alternatives might meet some of the goals more than they'll meet others. But, consistent with all the alternatives, they need to meet these, this vision and these goals. And that is consistent with NEPA's Purpose and Needs Statement. So this is very equivalent to that. So, as you're thinking about writing your goal statement, your vision is going to be much more general, but your goal statement's going to dial down a little bit more and you want to be considering that because all your alternatives need to meet all of those goals. So, as you're writing that, think of this equivalent to the purpose and need.

Excellent point. And along those lines, you're going to want to make sure that your track your goals throughout the process to make sure that your alternatives, the management that you're applying, the allocations that you're applying throughout the process, actually do meet your goals. So you're going to want to back-check on that periodically to make sure that you're not violating those by some of your management that you developed.

Let's talk a little bit about the role of the collaborators in the development of the visioning and goals. The questions are well who does it, how does it get done, how do you get buy-off and what are the benefits and the drawbacks. Well, the question of who does it really is up to the BLM plan, the planning team, and who and how many collaborators and cooperators you want to include in that. The larger groups, the larger the cooperator and the collaborator group that's participating, the greater buy-in that you ultimately you may get from them. The challenge being the larger the groups to develop the vision statements and the goals the more time it may take to put those together. The benefit, again, being larger acceptance and buy-in, the drawback being you actually have to spend a little more time coordinating those efforts.

We want to also include standards. And standards, one example is incorporating the land health standards. What is a land health standard? And the definition that we're given is it is an expression of levels of physical and biological condition, degree of function required for healthy lands and sustainable uses. Defines minimum resource

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conditions that must be achieved and maintained. We should note that each state has a set of standards for public health and those standards should be included in the R and P. And the standards are common to all. One question that we often get is, well, would you have an alternative that does not meet a standard like the land health standards and the answer is no.

So moving into the plan alternative. So an alternative is, by definition, a combination of proposed activities, uses, management practices designed to meet stated goals. The contents of the alternative, according to the BLM planning handbook requirements, description of how the alternative meets the plan's goals, how it relates to the purpose and need, objective for each resource, designation of land use allocations, all the allowed conditional or prohibited land uses and management actions that achieve the stated objectives and land tenure and future land acquisition policies, all get rolled into and wrapped up into, a plan alternative. And you should ask your program lead for any additional assistance regarding a particular resource or a program regarding the descriptions, the allocations, or the management actions.

So, the elements of a plan alternative. So you may involve the objectives, you may involve partners, statements regarding desired conditions or resources that are addressed. Your objectives should be quantifiable, so unlike your goals and your vision statement which are broader and more general, your objectives should be quantifiable and measurable. They can include, and should include, established timelines and time frames for achieving. And they also, your objectives, you may have some objectives that are common to all alternatives, you're likely to have objectives that are solely in a single alternative.

Importance of the objectives, well, objectives drive the composition of an alternative. We said they should be measurable. While writing smart objectives, smart being the specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, trackable. Consider including adaptive management, which we'll talk about in just a bit. And monitoring within the objective itself. The indicators associated with land health standards are one possible source of an objective.

Land allocations, so, generally they can be depicted by drawing polygons on a map delineating an area within a certain management focus is an example for each resource. And examples that you guys have on your slide are special area designations, like ACECs, Wild and Scenic River, that kind of thing, can be drawn as an allocation on the map. The management actions associated with those allocations would be open or closed or limited OHV areas. Repairing management areas is another example of a land allocation. And a very, very common example are areas open and closed to mineral leasing and mineral entry.

Statements of management activities are land uses that are either allowed, restricted or prohibited. Also included, these may be specific to certain allocations and certain polygons within the plan area or they might be attached to the entire plan area, so these activities are completely allowed or completely prohibited within the plan area.

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And you want to be sure you tie the land use allocations and the management to specific objectives.

Also, in the plan alternative, you're going to identify areas of land that are available versus disposable, that are available for disposal. These can either be by polygon, which identifies specific areas or they can be by criteria for which the land would be either disposed of or acquired. You want to identify proposed withdrawal areas and rights of way corridors within the plan and specify where and when major leases may or might occur.

Bobby, I think that one of the important considerations as you're putting together the different elements of the plan alternative and developing objectives and this is becoming more and more common, is this concept of adaptive management. So, what I'd like to talk about now is what is adaptive management and some of the considerations that you might have related to adaptive management.

First, the definition of adaptive management. Adaptive management is basically this feedback loop, if you will. It's a learning based decision process that is going to allow for feedback along a decision making line based on certain monitoring that you find. You are going to go out there, you don't know what's going to happen to a resource, you're going to monitor and based on the feedback you get, and the results of that monitoring, you might change how you're managing that particular area. You might consider how certain uses affect a resource where you're not quite certain. You might have some good information on an estimated based on professional judgment, but it's backed up by a monitoring program that can give additional feedback and may, for instance, limit how you allow a use to occur in the future. There is more information from the Department of Interior related to this that you can check out on the website that's shown on the slide.

So thinking of in terms, again, of a feedback loop, it doesn't necessarily start or stop. You've got a certain issue or problem and you're going to try and assess that problem best you can. You have a use that may have certain effects on the human environment. You're going to say, well, we think that use has certain effects; therefore, we're going to limit that use the following ways. We expect that there, therefore, won't be an impact to that particular resource, so it's a recreation use and there's a nearby stream. And we talked about this example in another segment and sedimentation in the stream.

So you say, we're going to limit the recreation activity to outside the wetter season, if you have dry and wet seasons in your particular plan area. And you're going to design a particular way to implement that within the plan to monitor the sedimentation in the stream. You go ahead and do that, get that feedback, evaluate the information and say, is what we expected within this adaptive management program, is this the outcome? If it's not the outcome you expected, you may adjust and say we might limit, then, the time of year that this recreation event happens or we may limit these uses in the future when we do other plan decisions. So, again, it's a way of doing feedback of

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getting information and saying, yes we understand it. For bigger picture issues related to air quality, water quality, effects to historic resources, and other cultural resources, you don't always know the resources out there, for instance, for the things that are underground. And so, you have expectations based on the information on what's reasonable and yet, you're going to do monitoring and feedback and create a plan that says, if we find X happening, we're going to do Y. If we find A happening, we're going to do B and it's again, that way of trying to create a management program that isn't just a decision and then whatever happens, happens but it actually allows for more flexibility in the management of the lands.

So, there is a technical for adaptive management that talks about what it is and how it should be used. Again, you have a lot of information that, and a resource that you can go to from the Department of the Interior to find out all of that.

When you implement the adaptive management program within these objectives, within these alternatives, you do want to make sure you're getting feedback from the stakeholders. If the state Game and Fish is involved in the process, are they committed to doing the monitoring if it's related to recreation, hunting, and fishing? You need to make sure everybody agrees on what the objectives are set up to be and everyone says, yeah at the outcome of this decision, we want this resource to look like this, which is generally what you're going to do when you set up your objectives. Well, everybody needs to agree on that because if, at the end result, you're fighting over how to respond and you don't even agree on what the end result should be, it's going to be really difficult to have success related to the adaptive management.

You also want to make sure that you're setting up the right responses too, based on the information that you get related to the monitoring. So you want to make sure that you've got really feasible alternatives based on the information and the feedback. If you're not, then you may just create another feedback loop where you're going to get the same result that you didn't really want as a part of your plan implementation. So, all of these measures are really important as you're going ahead and setting up the adaptive management program.

As you're going ahead and, then basically, doing the monitoring that (indiscernible) phase of getting the information and tracking the particular use or resource condition and getting that feedback. You really need to be thinking about new information. Getting that information, how are you going to assess it, who are the resources necessary, do you have the right budget and staffing to do that assessment. These kind of adaptive management programs are not good if no one is really reading that feedback information. If you get the monitoring plan from the special user or whatever it is, and no one is there to assess and basically interpret it and give feedback to how you might change your management, well then, it's not really - - there's a stop in that feedback loop process and you're not really having that kind of adaptive management and it's not going to be successful.

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So, in terms of how you incorporate this into your alternatives, you're thinking about it in terms of expected outcomes, you're thinking about it in terms of activities and how you're going to get that information and it feeds right in to the EIS. You're developing an Environmental Impact Statement that is doing a good-faith effort at full disclosure, doing a reasonable --- looking at what's reasonably foreseeable as a result of a particular land use. And adaptive management is a great program to help document what considerations you have up front, your expected outcomes, but then also it assures the public, it assures the agencies, we're going to keep looking at the issue to make sure if what we expected didn't happen, there are things we're going to do and change to better achieve those goals and objectives. So that's an important component that should be a part of the NEPA analysis, especially when you don't know everything there is to know about a particular resource.

Again, to learn more about adaptive management, we've already mentioned Department of the Interior's technical guide, there's a whole website the Department of Interior has on that as well as the national training center's resource center has a lot of information that can be helpful.

So, Bobby has talked about the vision, setting up the goals, looking at objectives and collecting them in different alternatives. Why are we looking at alternatives? The FLPMA and the planning regulations require that you look at alternatives. It's also a requirement of NEPA. When you're doing an EIS, the federal agency, the lead agency, is required to look at a reasonable range of alternatives that could meet the purpose and need, the vision and goals as we've talked about related to your plan.

So, first step in the process; you've got input from other entities saying you need to look at an alternative that is outside BLM's jurisdiction or is not within the scope of the laws that BLM is implementing. Well, you need to explain why they're not within the scope of the BLM action. Any alternatives that you're eliminating prior to looking at detail in the EIS, you need to have a clear explanation. Again, it's that road map to those that aren't a part of the process, here's why there was input and why we reacted the way we did to not include it as part of the EIS. Again, all the alternatives need to meet the goals and objectives, need to meet the --- I'm sorry the vision and goals equivalent to the purpose and need.

NEPA requires that the federal agency include in the EIS a no-action alternative. What would be the no-action? We're going to talk about how you define the no action for a planning effort in just a little bit.

You're supposed to evaluate and compare those alternatives in a meaningful, generally equivalent, analysis so that you're able to really adequately compare those different alternatives and how they effectively meet BLM' planning criteria and considering environmental impacts, how they sufficiently meet the vision and goals. You should also be identifying if there is an environmentally preferred alternative, which one it is. It might not be the one selected based on a number of different issues that we'll talk about a little bit later.

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And of course, you're trying to incorporate adaptive management; you're trying to incorporate different management actions that might avoid or minimize the particular environmental effects. All of those elements should be a part of the alternative's development.

As you move forward, again you're considering collaborator input. You want to do that starting at the NOI. You're asking for input related alternatives. You're alternatives might get more formalized, the development might get more formalized after the initial scoping meetings as your moving forward in the development of an EIS that's going to analyze that. So you're going to be looking at those kind of input.

You want to try and organize the alternatives in different ways. You can develop alternative themes related to that. These themes might have started within the prep plan phase and continue through into the EIS. They might be suggested as a part of the scoping process and you might be developing them there. Make sure you're discussing the ones that were raised by others, but you are not continuing to look at. Make sure you have that scoping report or alternatives report, or alternatives screening report separately that identifies all the other elements that were considered and why they aren't part of the alternatives process. Again, you have some guidance related to the planning handbook and NEPA handbook you should also take a look at to make sure you're considering all the different components of what needs to go into an alternative.

Well, there can be differences among the alternatives. Some EIS that you will see will look at different levels or degrees of protection or particular resources. Of course, there might be certain standards that they need to be met, so there's basically a bare minimum related to meeting those standards. There may be resource bare minimums related to clean water. Again, I mentioned in the segment related to the Clean Water Act, there might be what are called total maximum daily loads. There might be an endangered species issue which says hands off in this area. And so, there may be alternatives that vary related to protections for those resources or contributions related to those particular uses, but there may be a minimum associated with it.

You're looking at alternatives with different ways to achieve certain objectives, as Bobby had mentioned. You have objectives that might be common to all the alternatives. You might have objectives that are particular to certain alternatives. And you may have different management actions that could meet the different alternatives -- or the different objectives related to those alternatives.

Again, you might be considering different mixes of uses. Different mixes of areas that are prohibited from certain uses as opposed to conditional uses. You should also be looking at it in terms of the other resources and effects on the human environment. The important components related to, not only protecting certain areas, but possibly even allowing for restoration for certain resources where there is past degradation. And it's all of these elements that you should be considering as you're putting together the alternatives.

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When you're putting this together in the EIS and within the plan, sometimes the BLM agency is thinking about different ways to characterize the alternatives to discuss them with the collaborators. Sometimes they're named related to the different themes. We talked about on the other slide, you're trying to group this, you have a prep plan, possibly different themes related to the alternatives, so you might want to carry that through as far as their names are concerned.

You also could use a different way to refer to them related to high, low, particular resource uses. Or, of course, you could do the old A, B, C or 1, 2, 3 alternatives. The less subjective you can be related to naming the alternatives, the better. You, again, don't want to indicate or, even if it's not the case, but you certainly don't want to indicate to the public that you've made a decision on a particular alternative. Or characterizing or naming your alternative might give it a bad view point from the public stand point. If you call an alternative the Green Alternative or you call another alternative the High Air Emission Alternative. It already carries with it a connotation that, that might not be the one you're going to pick or that might be the one that's far left or far right in the comparison process. So using as objective a name as possible will help in not creating consternation or offending any particular collaborator in the process.

So how many alternatives are necessary? The answer is seven; No, I'm kidding. There is no answer in NEPA. There's no specific number required as far as how many alternatives need to be in an EIS. The number is a reasonable range, whatever that is. The alternatives must be the best weighed to meet your vision and goal, the different way to meet your vision and goal based on your planning criteria, based on the effects and the possible effects on the human environment. You're considering a number of different issues as you're coming across with the right number of alternatives. The important component is at the end of the process that everybody feels that their voice was heard, that you at least considered whether it should be part of the alternatives and that you've got a good range of analysis in order to create the most informed decision possible at the end of the process. And that's really what the EIS and the plan process is going to reflect. You, of course, also need to include the no-action alternative which might not necessarily be considered reasonable. It might truly be antiquated, it might not meet any of your vision and your goals, but that's the one alternative that has to be in there whether it meets any of the purpose and need or not.

And Ken, can I ask you a question? Regarding the no-action alternative, what would, sort of a brief, summary description of the no-action alternative. Does it mean that they're going to close up the BLM field office or district office and everybody goes home or what is the no-action alternative?

Well, I'll tell you, Bobby, because it's on the next slide.

When the no-action, again, is required by NEPA, but the important component there is it's for a plan process, it's continuing on with the current management of the area. So, it's the existing plan or if there is no plan, it's whatever the existing management is. If there's no management, it may just be the existing resource and its

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state, whatever that is, could be deteriorating or not. So the no-action alternative is one that is looking at what if BLM did not change the plan or did not have a plan. What would happen? They'd continue with its existing plan and whether or not it's a good idea, whether or not it's even legal, it's just a point of comparison. So, that's why NEPA has it in there; it's to say to the public, we acknowledge that doing nothing has, possibly has effects and we want to look at what those are. But we also want to compare that and if we change management in this area, if we change these uses, here's what the effect will be, good or bad, on the environment. And that's an important component of the NEPA process. And it also helps in the planning process for everybody to understand, well, why? Why are we doing this? Why are we changing the plan? Well, there are certain impacts related to no-action that we want to address and that's one of the elements within how you go about communicating, here's what we want to do to change that. You may include elements of the no-action in your other alternatives. There may be elements of your existing plan that might be very relevant and continue to be the best decision from BLM stand point. And that's okay. You may mix and match components of alternatives including the no-action, which is really including what's in the existing plan.

Again, just to remind you, when there are alternatives mentioned, either by through scoping or either by collaborators through the process commenting on the draft, whatever it is, you do need to explain why those have been eliminated. An alternative screening report, as an appendix to the EIS, might be one way to deal with it. Just as long as you have somewhere in the record some discussion of, hey these were brought up either by us or by others and here's why they are not being brought through the process as one of the alternatives in the EIS.

So what do you do to screen out alternatives? Well, we've already talked about the vision and the goals and that, basically, is your purpose and need. But is that it? Because there may be an unlimited amount of alternatives that could meet the vision, could meet the goals. What else are you going to use to look at your different factors, the screening factors, in eliminating certain alternatives? So, what are you going to use? You're going to look at other laws. The laws that we talked about related to endangered species, clean air, clean water, historic preservation. You're also, of course, going to be looking at the planning criteria, spelled out FLPMA, spelled out in the planning regs, spelled out in the planning handbook, spelled out in the prep plan. Dialing it all the way down to what's specific to your field office.

You're also going to make sure, again, that it meets the standards that you've set. The bare minimums related to certain standards. It needs to be feasible. What does that mean? Well, an alternatives needs to be something that BLM could actually implement. So if there are elements or suggestions that you need to include an alternative that has the state manage their lands a certain way, well, that's not something that's possibly feasible from BLM's standpoint. They may get input from the state agency that they'll do this in conjunction with the planning process, but that's not necessarily something that's feasible from BLM's standpoint.

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Other factors, well, again, it needs to be monitored. We talked about smart objectives and one of that is, the "T" in that is trackable. You need to be able to understand how would this land use affect the environment. How would it affect other uses? Can we go out and look at that? If it's something that --- if it's an action that is not possible to track, it might not be something that would pass the screening process. The same thing with adaptive management, and this is a factor, it's not necessarily the limiting factor. So if you have something that's not very adaptable, well, that might be okay. But, you want to consider how it adaptable it is related to changing the action if you get feedback along the way. So it's an important component to consider.

Support by collaborators, again, sometimes you won't get collaborators to agree, but generally, if there is support related to certain alternatives, that is another consideration. If no one likes a particular alternative, you might consider not including it because of that ground swell of concern related to implementation. BLM is thinking about multiple use, sustained yield and they're thinking about it in terms of the different resources they're looking at, but also they're thinking about it in terms of the input from the other federal government agencies, state, local, tribes; that's a requirement of FLPMA, it's a requirement in the planning regs. So all of that needs to be considered as you're moving through the plan process.

And then, the last element is really, sometimes it is professional judgment related to how the particular ID team sees these uses affecting these resources and what might be feasible in terms of affecting the different resources and creating unacceptable impacts on the human environment.

So we've talked about all the different factors that go into developing what is eventually going to become your plan and the alternatives within the plan that are then going to be analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement.