

Factors to Consider

CHumphrey: So why don't you open your Participant Guide to the Factors to Consider for Setting Priorities, and be sure to pay really close attention to what Megan is going to say, because after she explains the initial list of factors, remember that you're going to stop the video and then you're going to modify the list to fit the situation for your own RMP.

MStouffer: Thanks, Cathy. Discussing the Factors to Consider in Establishing Priorities provides everyone in the office with a common understanding of the rationale and justification that are used to select priorities. It's unlikely that everyone will be completely satisfied with the ultimate selection, but at least there will be a shared understanding of how we got there.

Discussing the Factors to Consider may help to identify important geographic areas. These are typically areas with the greatest critical resource trade-offs, political sensitivities, and favorable partnership opportunities, especially for projects that cross political boundaries. They may also include areas that share jurisdiction, which often provide a great opportunity for partnerships.

Identifying and discussing the Factors will explore ways in which different programs, goals and objectives are linked, and how those projects that are cross benefiting can have some increased utility.

The Factors in the Participant Guide are intended to be an overview of the array of possible factors one might consider in selecting priorities. The factors and weight they are given will vary by office. So think about what unique characteristics of geography, resource issues, public interest, commercial opportunities, et cetera, should be considered in developing opportunities. For example, is demand for energy development a high driving force? Are there outside pressures from public or local governments? Particular areas of environmental risk? What sequencing considerations are there?

As you can see in your Participant Guide, the Factors to Consider when Determining Priorities are typically based on Law, Policy, or Regulation; Resource Protection or Use; Risks; Workload Factors; and finally, Working Smarter not Harder, or Efficiencies.

Under the **Law, Policy and Regulation** category, you would consider the major laws and regulations that we follow. In your discussions you don't need to identify every single law or regulation, but you may want to highlight those that are most important to the workload in your office. So, for example, the Mineral Leasing Act may be a major driver of your office's workload, and it's important to consider the requirements and obligations of that law in identifying which tasks are nondiscretionary. In addition, you'll want to identify those executive orders and secretarial orders that have implications on your workload. Manuals, handbooks and instruction memoranda should also be considered.

BHigdon: In the Taos Field Office we identified the new recreation and travel management manuals as a factor to consider, particularly in relation to addressing travel management planning. But also in recent years certain public lands in our planning area have been subject to legislation passed by Congress: the

Galisteo Basin Archaeological Sites Protection Act and the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act, which established new designations requiring the preparation of specific management plans.

MStouffer: DOI or BLM priorities might be included in secretarial orders, but other policies or priorities are more locally driven.

BHigdon: An example of a locally driven priority is BLM New Mexico's Restore New Mexico program, which prioritizes many vegetation and habitat restoration projects. This is a statewide initiative identified as a priority by our state director.

MStouffer: Something else to consider under law, policy or regulation is other federal, state, tribal or local laws, policies or priorities. For example, cooperating agency plans and resources administered by other agencies—BLM's priorities could be affected by another agency's ability and willingness to share projects across jurisdiction or by local agency's priorities for development.

Finally, any existing case law or court mandates may also have an impact on your priorities. Your office may be involved in an ongoing lawsuit or have responsibilities under a settlement agreement. So, make sure to identify any of these laws, policies or regulations that are important in discussing office workload and may help in setting priorities.

Another category of Factors to Consider in Establishing Priorities is **Resource Protection and Use**. It includes those resources that require additional attention and are a major focus of the work that the office does. These might include geographically important areas such as a recreation area or an urban interface area.

BHigdon: When doing Step 2 in Taos, we identified La Puebla, an area less than 1000 acres that's nearly surrounded by residential development where there's substantial interest in developing recreational opportunities, both motorized and non-motorized, but also where we've recently identified significant paleontological and cultural resources that require special management protection.

Fortunately, we make certain that the Taos RMP provides the framework for resolving the inevitable conflicts. So the existing conflicts and public interest in the relatively small area made for important Factors to Consider when developing our priorities.

JMeyer: Our plan designated certain portions of the field office for unique management, such as Bates Hole, which focuses on watershed health and sage grouse conservation. We have a Special Recreation Management Area associated with the North Platte River, a premier trout fishery. And we developed areas where development of mineral resources would be a primary focus. Areas identified in the plan for unique management often stand out as having a high priority during the implementation, so most of the management actions in these unique areas were determined to be a high priority.

It's not a given that all these actions or special areas are a priority, but we found it best to prioritize the actions within these areas first.

MStouffer: Other considerations would be projects or tasks identified to meet important RMP objectives for resource protection such as meeting standards and guides for fuel reduction.

Risk is another factor to consider when determining priorities. This category includes risks to health and safety, the possibility of irretrievable loss of resources, or opportunities and the potential to have increased conflict as a result of not completing projects.

BHigdon: In Taos we identified another area referred to as El Palacio that's adjacent to Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo land where we have another conflict overly ripe for resolution. The public lands in this area are important for traditional uses by the Pueblo and prehistoric pueblo ruins which contribute to the expansion of an ACEC within this area. But this area is also a region-wide destination for OHV recreation. So the sensitivity and the significance of the irreplaceable cultural resources in the area where other valued and often conflicting opportunities occur are important factors for our consideration.

MStouffer: **Workload Factors** are the practical considerations to keep in mind when identifying priorities. Which projects are already under way or funded? Are there any sequencing considerations such as planning before implementation, surveys or monitoring that need to be done before the initiation of a project?

JMeyer: Another part in the workload factor to consider is the capacity of your staff to accomplish priorities identified in the RMP. In Casper, we have a long history of producing energy minerals, oil and gas, coal, uranium, from public lands. When energy prices spike or new technologies create a boom in exploration, our demand workload, such as application for permits to drill, tend to increase very quickly. Meeting this spike in demand in workload may prevent us from working on other discretionary work, such as a habitat improvement project.

MStouffer: The final category of Factors to Consider is called **Working Smarter, not Harder**; or **Efficiencies**. These are the things that you should consider that relate to the implementability of the project. Does it have a high rate of return and a probability of success? Will more than one program benefit from its implementation? And, finally, are there any partners out there that are willing and able to contribute to the project?

BHigdon: Certainly in El Palacio, the area I just mentioned, we needed to consider management not only for OHVs but also for the portion of the area included in the ACEC where cultural paleontological and scenic values need special management attention. We also considered the traditional uses by Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo members. Our implementation level planning for this area will need to be an integrated approach, addressing management and the management of the ACEC among other resource issues.

Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Association have both expressed their eagerness to work with us on site-specific plans. So not only is the efficiency of an integrated approach a Factor to Consider, but it's also the expressed interests by our partners.

CHumphrey: So, Rem and Joe, since you participated in this process before we streamlined it, did you guys have a list of factors that you considered when developing priorities and was there anything else that was a factor that we haven't covered already?

RHawes: You know, we didn't expressly have those factors in the process, but we did consider their input as we went along. I think it's a great development that's been added to the RMP implementation.

The other thing that we built into the process and was a natural and important factor was political considerations. There were a number of things that were brought together that from a natural resource standpoint were important priorities, but then when we looked at those against some interdisciplinary considerations and against some political factors, the priorities changed.

JMeyer: Even though a BLM ID team assigned the initial priorities in Casper, we also went through the priority-setting exercise with our cooperators. The Casper field office is a split estate office. We have about 1.4 million acres of federal surface estate but 4.7 million acres of mineral estate. With this huge disparity in surface ownership, we often must focus on areas with relatively large blocks of federal surface. But we look for areas where we have willing partners, too, who are interested in working across the surface ownerships on a landscape level.

Another reality of split estate is that federal actions often can have significant impact on non-federal lands. Our cooperators are very concerned about the economic impacts planning decisions can have. As a group, we placed priority on completing RMP actions that local economies depend on. This can include anything from mineral development to grazing lease renewals to recreation enhancements.

I believe the key to success in implementing an RMP is the same recipe for success in nearly any project: clear and effective communication.

CHumphrey: Now that you have an overview of the categories of Factors to Consider when setting priorities, as promised, it's now going to be your turn to make the list yours. What we'd like you to do is stop the video and discuss the specific factors that would apply for your planning area, and you probably shouldn't change the categories, but the individual factors under each category can be personalized to fit your planning area. Don't worry if something doesn't fit into a specific category, as long as you discuss the important things that will help you prioritize your work.

You need to have management involvement for this exercise because they will provide clarity and direction on factors that are most critical for your office to consider, and that's going to help you guide the discussion.

Now, of course, you should have maps of the planning area spread around, and there is a couple ways that you can start this. You can either use a computer and a projector and you can project and modify the list that we provide you in the participant guide, or another thing you could do is you could have five flip chart pages, each with a category on it, put it on the wall, and write the specifics on the flip charts.

So, be specific. Identify important geographic areas. List your specific BLM priorities or commitments, laws, handbooks. Take your time. Be thorough. If you have a complete, agreed-upon, well thought-out list, then it's really going to make your prioritization task easier and faster.

When you have a solid list, come on back and we will continue with the rest of Step 2. So we'll see you in a bit, and good luck!