Priority and Magnitude

CHumphrey: Welcome back. Now you have a good list of Factors to Consider in Establishing Priorities for your plan, and the next thing you're going to do is you're going to determine the priority and magnitude of the work that you identified back in Step 1. There are a couple of different ways that you can go about doing this, but before we get into the specifics, let's go over the definitions of priority and magnitude just to make sure that we're all on the same page.

Open your Participant Guide to the Definition of Priorities. Feel free to make notes on your page if it will help you.

Megan, talk to us about priorities.

MStouffer: Sure thing. We've defined four levels of priority: Non-discretionary, High, Moderate, and Low. **Non-discretionary** refers to projects that must be done or funded as mandated by law, policy, health and safety, or court mandate. These are the things you must do. For example, responding to court orders or external proposals such as applications for rights-of-way or drilling permits.

High priority refers to those projects or tasks that should be completed in the next three to five years in order to achieve RMP success. These projects are normally BLM-driven and relate to key planning projects or geographic areas. These are things we should do to meet the goals and objectives of the RMP. Examples might be large restoration projects or travel management plans.

Medium priority projects should include those projects that are not ripe within the short term, which we've defined as the next three to five years. This may include projects that address resources in which irreversible damage to those resources is not as imminent or the risks are not as high as those projects we identified in high priority. These projects would be nice to do and would address the goals and objectives of the RMP, but based on the factors that your office has developed, the cost-benefit would be low and/or funding is speculative. An example might include the development of a seed bank or a habitat improvement project benefiting a non-special status species.

So, finally, **Low priority** projects refers to those projects that are identified in the RMP but are not crucial to meeting the goals and objectives outlined in the RMP or the other factors discussed by your office. These projects have a lesser public profile and are things that you could do if there weren't other conflicting priorities.

CHumphrey: So remember that when you assign a priority to a project, task, or management action, it's not set in stone. Priorities shift as conditions or situations change, and if your Factors to Consider change, then it's logical that your priorities might shift. Projects that are medium or low priority this year may then move up in importance based on changes in available funding, partner interest, new policy, for example.

So don't worry too much about getting all the priorities exactly right. Just make your best guess and then move on. Part of your annual review of the worksheet would be to review the priorities in relation to these factors and make adjustments as necessary.

JMeyer: I have a couple examples of this. One example was when the ARRA funding became available for project work. ARRA funding was an opportunity that allowed us to both create jobs and accomplish work that may have taken many years to get funded through the traditional budget process. If necessary, we did shift staff to lower priority work in order to capitalize on ARRA funding if that project was more closely aligned with the program goals and had a higher likelihood of being funded.

Another example of when we shift priorities is that at times I might reassign staff to complete a NEPA document on a project that may be of a lower priority to BLM but is of high importance to a cooperator, because the federal project may be a key to them completing an action on a non-federal land. A recent example of this was a right-of-way for an access road to an archery range on Casper Mountain. The county road crossed only a small piece of BLM land, and it didn't really provide a lot of additional benefit to public lands, but it was very important to the county to get this right-of-way so they could complete their project at the archery range and improve that road for greater fire protection and access into the area.

CHumphrey: So now that you understand the priorities, the other part of Step 2 is to determine the **Magnitude** of each project. So now I'd like you to turn to the Definitions of Magnitude in your Participant Guide and Megan will explain the levels of magnitude.

MStouffer: Magnitude refers to the workload associated with each project, including both the cost and that it takes to complete.

High magnitude projects are potentially expensive and/or labor intensive. They may also involve a lot of coordination and participation by multiple parties. It's expected that an office can only tackle a small number of high magnitude projects each year. A travel plan might be an example of a high magnitude project. It involves a lot of resources, including an id team and plenty of public interaction.

Another example is perhaps a major right-of-way project. While the funding for the project might be covered by the applicant, there would be some significant staff time involved in working with the contractor that could cause this to be high magnitude.

On the other end of the spectrum, a **Low magnitude** project could be considered inexpensive and easy. These are often regular tasks that are performed by one person with no cost or relatively low cost to complete. This could include compliance inspections for rights-of-ways and mineral developments or perhaps processing fuel permits.

So back to the middle, **Moderate magnitude** projects are those that are neither costly nor cheap and neither time intensive nor quick. No real definition there. In other words, the middle ground. These

projects may be activities that we accomplish regularly but have a cost or funding need or projects that are funded easily but require the involvement of multiple specialists. So, perhaps a habitat inventory or monitoring might be considered moderate, as they don't cost a lot, but they can be time intensive for the specialist.

JMeyer: Be aware that your partners' definition of magnitude, for example, economic magnitude, may not be the same as our definition, which focuses on BLM staff time and budgeting. Even though we have tried to align our available resources with the highest priority at the lowest magnitude, in other words, trying to get the most bang for our buck, at times we may jump priorities simply due to an opportunity, or in case of relationship building, to help out one of our partners.

CHumphrey: So now that you have your refined list of Factors to Consider in Establishing Priorities, you should have a good understanding of the levels of Priority and Magnitude, but if you need to, you can stop the video and make refinements to those priority and magnitude definitions.

The next thing it will be time for is to talk about how to assign priority and magnitude for each project, task or management action. There's a couple ways that you can go about it. Megan is going to first describe a method that she's had luck with as well as some other options. Just remember, there's no one right way to assign priorities. There's different offices that have been successful doing it different ways. So what we're going to do is give you some options, but when it gets right down to it, it's ultimately up to you on how you complete Step 2.

I recommend that you do, though, document the process for the project file.