**How to Do Step 2 (Methodology)**

MStouffer: As Cathy mentioned, this is a flexible process, and a different method could work best for each office. You should discuss the different methods and agree on one that you think will fit best.

So one option that is highly recommended is to identify all the nondiscretionary workload first. This can be done in your resource groups or as one larger group. These shouldn't be too difficult to agree on, and we've identified many of them in the example worksheet. So you can cheat off that. Following identification, you can move down the list to high priority projects, medium priority, and then whatever's left over is considered low.

Identifying those nondiscretionary projects and the low priority work might be more of a simple exercise, but what makes a high priority? Remember to first look at that list of Factors to Consider that you developed for your plan when trying to figure out what those high priority projects are. Most likely you'll identify more high priority projects with high or medium magnitude than you can actually handle in one year. So you'll need to edit your list to filter out those projects that are really the highest priority.

BHigdon: In Taos, we split into resource groups we used in Step 1 to identify management actions in the RMP. In these groups, first we identified the nondiscretionary work, as well as projects we thought were high priority. We also identified a few mediums and lows based on these discussions.

When all the groups were finished, each presented their priorities to the entire team, including our field manager. We discussed the high priority projects and any potential medium projects and made adjustments where necessary. By the end of the report out, almost all the projects had priorities identified. What was remaining were considered low.

CHumphrey: So, Rem, Joe, how did you do your priority setting?

RHawes: Well, in our case, for the Hassayampa Field Office in Phoenix, we started out first tackling it by resource. So each resource specialist came together with their program of work and their priorities. Then we approached it in an interdisciplinary way, and simply through that process, priorities changed.

After that, we went through it in a geographic way to highlight things geographically, and that, too, set a change of priorities. And then finally, there was the external and political considerations that we looked at, and, surprise, surprise, priorities changed yet again. But it was going through that process that was so important in being able to set those priorities for the RMP implementation plan.

JMeyer: Cathy, we started our priority setting with a small team of BLM specialists. Since we had already identified the work, we simply assigned priorities to the matrix. Then we repeated this process over with our cooperators following a process similar to what Brad has outlined, but we distributed our cooperators amongst the various resource groups so they could participate in the process as well.
CHumphrey: Let's talk a little bit about magnitude, Brad. How did magnitude fit in for you? Did you assign magnitude at the same time as priority, or how did that work?

BHigdon: We found that magnitude was often interrelated to our priorities. To us, magnitude really boiled down to the time and money and getting the biggest bang for the buck, as Joe put it. So we did assign magnitude along with priorities.

Our experience with the public during the planning process gave us an indication as to where area or site-specific conflicts still needed to be resolved through activity-level planning. So resolving conflicts of high interest to the public might not only be an indicator for priorities, but it also can be an indicator for BLM's investment in working with the public to address those issues thoroughly. In this sense, risk management also factors into magnitude.

With that said, on the other hand, high priority didn't always translate to high magnitude.

RHawes: That's a good point, Brad. And in our case, magnitude wasn't as much of a consideration when we did our RMP implementation planning. Priority setting was the focus and was the major part of what we worked on. Frankly, I wish magnitude would have been more of a consideration that we took into account. I think it's a good concept in the new model for RMP implementation planning.

MStouffer: Another way to identify high priority projects is reviewing the maps that you used in Factors to Consider and starting with the projects that were identified in those high priority geographic areas. So, which areas are high priorities—perhaps a highly used recreation area or an area with many resource conflict?. The BLM-initiated projects in these areas might also be a high priority.

CHumphrey: So then what happens after you identify the high priority areas? Do you prioritize the workload within those areas?

MStouffer: You may want to use one of the other strategies that we're talking about here and have suggested to further narrow your priorities after looking at those geographic areas.

So, a third method for identifying priorities is to define a set of criteria that would justify assigning a high priority. You could design this off of the major issues in your office; If it addresses any or a combination of these issues, then you would assign the project as a high priority. For example, if a particular species or watershed is an at-risk resource in your planning area, you could determine that all the projects benefiting this resource would have a high priority.

CHumphrey: So, Megan, how would this set of criteria be different than the Factors to Consider that we talked about earlier?

MStouffer: They might be similar to the Factors. Perhaps they are associated with the major risks that you identified such as all the projects associated with sage grouse habitat protection. Or perhaps
they're external considerations, such as a court mandate or partnership, that you need to consider in your priorities. These can be intertwined with that geographic priority location as well to create a set of criteria that would be considered a high priority.

CHumphrey: And then how would you determine medium and low priority with this method?

MStouffer: Well, it's possible for you to determine maybe a second set of priorities that would help you identify what a medium project would be as opposed to a low priority project. For example, does it connect in some way to a higher priority or is it something that you anticipate to rise in priority as time and conditions change?

So, also consider the definitions of High, Medium and Low. Low is something that you don't think is going to be crucial to meeting the goals and objectives in the RMP. So perhaps identifying these first and then looking at medium properties will help.

Regardless of which method you choose, you need to determine if you want to go through this process as one big group or in resource groups. Either way, it's imperative to share the determinations with the entire group and a manager in order to ensure a shared understanding of management buy-off.

BHigdon: We assigned priorities within our resource groups, then we reported out in the large group to our field manager. He easily helped us to adjust our priorities based on the big picture, as managers tend to do. For example, we anticipated a lot of travel management plans and ACEC and SRMA plans. We were able to prioritize based on geographic areas of concern and plan to combine these efforts into integrated cross-resource benefiting plans, taking a more coordinated approach, even though these would be larger efforts.

JMeyer: Brad, our process in Casper was a little different because we had our cooperators in the room with us when we assigned priorities. The role of the field manager was to balance the priorities of the BLM with those of the cooperators, considering a range of factors, including the economic and political factors.

CHumphrey: And that's a good segue into talking about different ways to use cooperators in the process. Did you use cooperators at the very beginning like that?

BHigdon: Not initially, since we had a good understanding of our some of our cooperators' priorities having just collaborated with them to develop and approve the RMP. You know, their priorities were considered in our initial determinations.

RHawes: Yes, we had a bit of a similar experience, and when we got together, we brought a lot of that background from our cooperators who had spent, in our case, seven years working on the RMP with us. Now, what we are doing in dealing with next year's planning target allocation—planning our budget for
fiscal year 2013—is we’re using input from our cooperators at this juncture, too, and letting that be influenced by the priorities that we’re setting in our RMP implementation.

One example would be we had a project that would be considered low to medium priority, but our non-profit partner, the Black Canyon Trail Coalition, a partner on the Black Canyon National Recreation Trail, received funding through the Forest Service—a significant amount of funding—for a trailhead for this national recreation trail. With that partnership and that funding, we suddenly had the opportunity to make that a higher priority, and we did. So that's an example of how things can become a higher priority for external reasons.

If we were doing it today, we would do more of that, and when we did it, it was primarily a BLM exercise, and we got input informally from our partners. If we were to do it today, we would definitely build them into the process in a more formal way.

JMeyer: Yes, I think one key to successful implementation of the Casper RMP was that we started working on our implementation strategy before the RMP was even done. This allowed us to quickly ramp up an implementation meeting with our cooperators while the entire planning process was still fresh in their mind and they still had a good grip on what the key issues were in the plan. We had our first implementation meeting about four months after the ROD was signed, so our cooperators were still very in tune with the plan and the significant issues.

CHumphrey: And are your cooperators still involved? Do they participate in your annual reviews?

JMeyer: We still get together on an annual basis to review the matrix and look at our priorities to see if they're still in line with what their goals and objectives are, but it shifted a little bit. We don't have quite the same participation we had when we started. It seems like we have more cooperators now at the agency level and at the conservation district level and not as many of the counties are involved.

RHawes: Nowadays we do take partners' and community representatives' and nonprofit organizations' input during our planning target allocation development process. So while it was included informally in our RMP implementation planning process, it's now more formalized as we work on our budget and use the priorities that come from our RMP implementation plan.