

The Wilderness Society\* Santa Lucia Chapter Sierra Club\* Los Padres ForestWatch \*  
Western Watersheds Project

### **Outdated Plan Puts Carrizo Plain National Monument at Risk**

*BLM Side-Steps Federal Law and Fails to Fully Consider Environmental Impacts in Developing  
20-Year Management Guidelines for the Area*

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Bakersfield, CA – Carrizo Plain National Monument (Carrizo Plain), a conservation area that is home to the highest concentration of Threatened and Endangered species in California and the most significant remaining example of the Central Valley’s historic ecosystem, may be at risk due to the Department of Interior’s (DOI) intervention in the planning process. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) withdrew a draft plan to make protection of the Monument’s matchless resources a top priority and appears to be moving in a direction that favors business as usual, according to local activists and conservation groups. A coalition of nine conservation groups representing 3 million members today sent a letter to the California State Office of the Bureau of Land Management, calling on the agency to dramatically improve the planning process.

“My family and I have called this region home for generations, and I am very concerned with BLM’s decision to usurp the planning process and conduct a substandard environmental review using outdated guidelines and biased information as the basis for a 20-year management plan for this unique national treasure,” stated local rancher Irv McMillan.

The Bakersfield Field Office of the BLM has announced plans to develop a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Carrizo Plain National Monument without preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by law. Federal regulations and policies consider the development of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) for a National Monument a “major federal action”, which requires the preparation of an EIS. Instead BLM intends to do an Environmental Assessment (EA), a lesser level of review normally reserved for small non-controversial projects. Furthermore, an EA does not guarantee the same level of environmental review and analysis, or public participation as an EIS. The public and the Monument’s resources could suffer as a result.

RMPs outline the management guidelines for a National Monument for as much as 20 years in some cases. In the case of the Carrizo Plain, BLM intends to rely upon outdated 1996 and 1997 planning documents that pre-date the area’s designation as a National Monument as a substitute for doing a proper review. A Monument designation mandates significantly different management prescriptions not accounted for in the 1996/1997 plans, most significantly, the protection and preservation of Monument objects, such as natural and cultural resources, over other activities. For example, the previous plans allow for additional oil and gas drilling leases, and yet, the Monument Proclamation precludes the leasing of additional lands for oil drilling. A pending application to drill a test well on an existing oil lease in an area known to be habitat for a number of endangered species underscores the need to do a complete environmental review for the RMP.

“There is still time for BLM to do the right thing,” stated Geary Hund of The Wilderness Society. “All we are asking is that BLM fulfill the federal requirements that direct the agency to perform an

Environmental Impact Statement, to fully engage the public, and develop a Resource Management Plan that protects this area as the special place that it is.”

BLM seems to be shifting from a philosophy of conservation, environmental stewardship and public participation for the Carrizo Plain National Monument to one that limits public input and favors resource extraction. This is evidenced by the fact that BLM withdrew a draft version of a RMP for the Carrizo Plain that was endorsed by the public, The Nature Conservancy, the California Department of Fish and Game, the local BLM field office, and the Monument’s public Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) – support noted in the [May 2004 - BLM meeting minutes](#) – due primarily to a provision that would have transitioned traditional 10 year grazing leases to annual permits. In an unusual move, BLM has not reconvened the RAC since December 2004 despite requests from the RAC to meet and discuss the plan.

“The BLM’s recent actions give us pause,” Hund stated. “It is cause for concern when the BLM withdraws a draft management plan developed via a public process that received such broad support. It suggests the Administration is intervening to please special interests, in this case grazing interests, at the expense of the Monument’s resources. An open and thorough planning process for the benefit of the Monument is needed now more than ever.”

The preferred alternative for grazing in the draft RMP that the agency withdrew would have ended the remaining traditional long-term grazing leases and converted them over six years to permits that must be renewed annually.

Hund said, “The purpose of changing the grazing permit system from long-term leases to annual permits is to shift grazing from essentially being a lease holder entitlement to a tool managers can use at their discretion if the science indicates it will benefit native plants and animals. Under traditional leases BLM must allow grazing if the range meets minimum Rangeland Health Standards. These standards are based on things like the amount of dry residual matter on the range, not on how grazing affects the Monument’s native plants, animals and ecosystems.”

“Traditional grazing leases have a place in our County, but not in the Monument which was set aside to protect the unique plants and wildlife of our area,” stated Irv McMillan, a fourth generation rancher from San Luis Obispo County. “Grazing should be used as a tool, something you use only when it when it’s right for the job that needs to be done. Annual grazing permits accomplish this.”

Hund further noted that BLM has developed positive plans for similar National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) units in the past, such as the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA). Under the King Range NCA plan, the BLM established a substantial “backcountry” multiple use zone to fulfill its mission to “manage the King Range National Conservation Area to conserve one of America’s last wild and undeveloped coastal landscapes for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.” In addition, the plan administratively redefined grazing boundaries and made certain expired leases unavailable for future grazing in order to protect significant cultural resources and the natural character of the landscape for which the NCA was established. The plan also protected the natural character of lands with wilderness characteristics, acknowledging that “management of lands with wilderness characteristics is part of BLM’s multiple-use mandate, and is recognized within the spectrum of resource values and uses.” A similar approach to fulfilling the management vision embodied by the establishment of the Carrizo Plain National Monument can and should become a reality.

Located in Central California, between San Luis Obispo and Bakersfield, the Carrizo Plain is the largest undeveloped remnant of California's grassland ecosystem. The Monument boasts dramatic geology – a segment of the San Andreas Fault – and a rich cultural past: Native American cultural sites and rock art that are thousands of years old. The area offers habitat for many endangered, threatened and rare species of animals, such as the San Joaquin kit fox, the blunt-nosed leopard lizard, the San Joaquin antelope and Tule elk – both were hunted to extinction by the late 1800's but were reintroduced in the 1980s.

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For more information on Carrizo Plains and the entire NLCS, please visit:  
[www.discovernlcs.org](http://www.discovernlcs.org)

Conservation groups take action:

<http://www.wilderness.org/Library/Documents/upload/CarrizoPlainLetter20051214.pdf>

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