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BLM to Host Shepherd Ah-Nei Scoping Meeting

BILLINGS -- The Bureau of Land Management Billings Field Office is asking the public to attend a scoping meeting on the Shepherd Ah-Nei travel management plan. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on June 7, 2004, in the Yellowstone Room of the Holiday Inn Grand Montana, 5500 Midland Road in Billings.

Shepherd Ah-Nei, which is north of Shepherd, is popular with local recreationists, including off-highway vehicle (OHV) riders. It has been closed to OHV use since April 23 in order to comply with a civil case judgment. A private landowner filed a lawsuit September 11, 2002, alleging that BLM failed to designate trails as open, limited, or closed when the area was acquired in a land exchange.

According to Billings Field Manager Sandy Brooks, "We do want to offer OHV opportunities on public land in the Billings area. We've put the Shepherd Ah-Nei travel management plan on the top of our travel planning priority list. We had intended to begin the planning process within the coming year, but now we're going to start it immediately and hope to have Shepherd Ah-Nei reopened to OHV use sometime this fall." The area remains open for horseback riding, hiking, and other non-motorized activities.

The purpose of the scoping meeting is to allow the public to identify issues and alternatives to be analyzed in an environmental assessment. Members of the public unable to attend the meeting may send their comments to: Billings Field Office, P.O. Box 36800, Billings, MT 59107-6800. Comments should be submitted by June 25.

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