



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Fire and Aviation
3833 S Development Ave
Boise, Idaho 83705-5354

<http://www.nifc.gov>



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To: State Directors
Attention: State Fire Management Officers

From: Assistant Director, Fire and Aviation

Subject: Greater Sage Grouse Habitat Data for Wildland Fire Management Decision
Making & Reporting of Acres Burned

This Informational Bulletin (IB) is being re-issued to change the access code to public.

This IB describes the geospatial Greater-Sage Grouse (GRSG) habitat data layers to be (1) entered into the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) “situation tab”; (2) entered into the WFDSS as “Strategic Objectives and Management Requirements” shapes for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed lands; and (3) used for real-time acres burned reporting throughout the 2016 fire season. Greater Sage-grouse (GRSG) populations have declined by an estimated 30% since 1985 and wildfire (amplified by non-native, invasive annual grasses such as cheatgrass) has been identified as a significant threat to the long-term conservation of the species. There is a need to provide current information on the location and protection priority for areas valuable to GRSG for use in wildfire decision support.

Note that this IB does not address Gunnison Sage Grouse; nor does this bulletin specifically address habitat data for use in prioritizing initial attack responses to incidents, or for prioritizing incidents within a geographic area.

BACKGROUND

The principles outlined in the Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy (2015, a companion to Secretarial Order No. 3336) promote integrating fire management and natural resources, protecting high priority habitat, and communicating key information to land managers and fire suppression personnel. This IB supports the goals of the Strategy.

WFDSS

The Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) is utilized by all federal agencies to assist fire managers in making strategic and tactical decisions for fire incidents that escape initial attack or exceed the initial response. The WFDSS is a tool that supports the principles in the Strategy. The WFDSS “Intelligence” and “Situation” tabs serve as a repository of geospatial data that is available to develop priorities and actions for incident management; the WFDSS “Strategic Objectives and Management Requirements” shapes associate specific management direction and priorities from Land Use Plans (LUPs) and Fire Management Plans with geospatial polygons and locations on the ground.

Since 2012, the GRSG habitat designations entered in the WFDSS situation tab has been Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH), including habitat in the Columbia Basin area and Bi-state distinct population segments (DPS). In June, 2014 and September, 2015 the Records of Decision were signed amending or revising BLM and FS Land LUPs for GRSG areas outside of the Columbia Basin and Bi-state DPS. These approved LUPs describe habitat designations (e.g., Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs), Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs) etc.), and associated management direction and priorities. However, additional areas exist outside of the LUP designations these areas will be represented using the 2015 United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Priority Areas of Conservation and Current Occupied Range.

Reporting of Acres Burned

From 2012-2014, the BLM reported acres burned of GRSG Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH). In 2015, we reported on acres burned of draft Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFA), Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA), General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA), along with Bi-State and Columbia habitat.

INFORMATION

WFDSS

The following GRSG habitat-related geospatial data layer will soon replace the existing PPH/PGH data layer in the WFDSS situation tab. The layer and associated legend will be available under the “Intelligence” and “Situation” tabs in WFDSS, and acres of each habitat designation included in a wildfire planning area boundary will automatically populate the wildfire decision. The BLM FA-600 Fire Planning & Fuels Division is working to pre-load the LUP GRSG direction as Management Requirements for BLM administered lands at the national level.

LUP Designations as approved by BLM and FS Records of Decisions (Sept, 2015 & June, 2014)¹

1. Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFA)
2. Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA)
3. Important Habitat Management Areas (IHMA (Idaho only))
4. General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA)

¹ Land Use Plan Designations cover both BLM/FS surface and BLM subsurface jurisdiction, along with lands outside of BLM/FS jurisdiction as described in the LUPs.

5. Additional LUP designations - this includes Other Habitat Management Areas (OHMA, in Nevada, NE California), Anthro Mtn (Utah), Linkage Connectivity Habitat Management Areas (LCHMAs, Colorado), Restoration Habitat Management Areas (RHMA, Montana – Billings & Miles City)

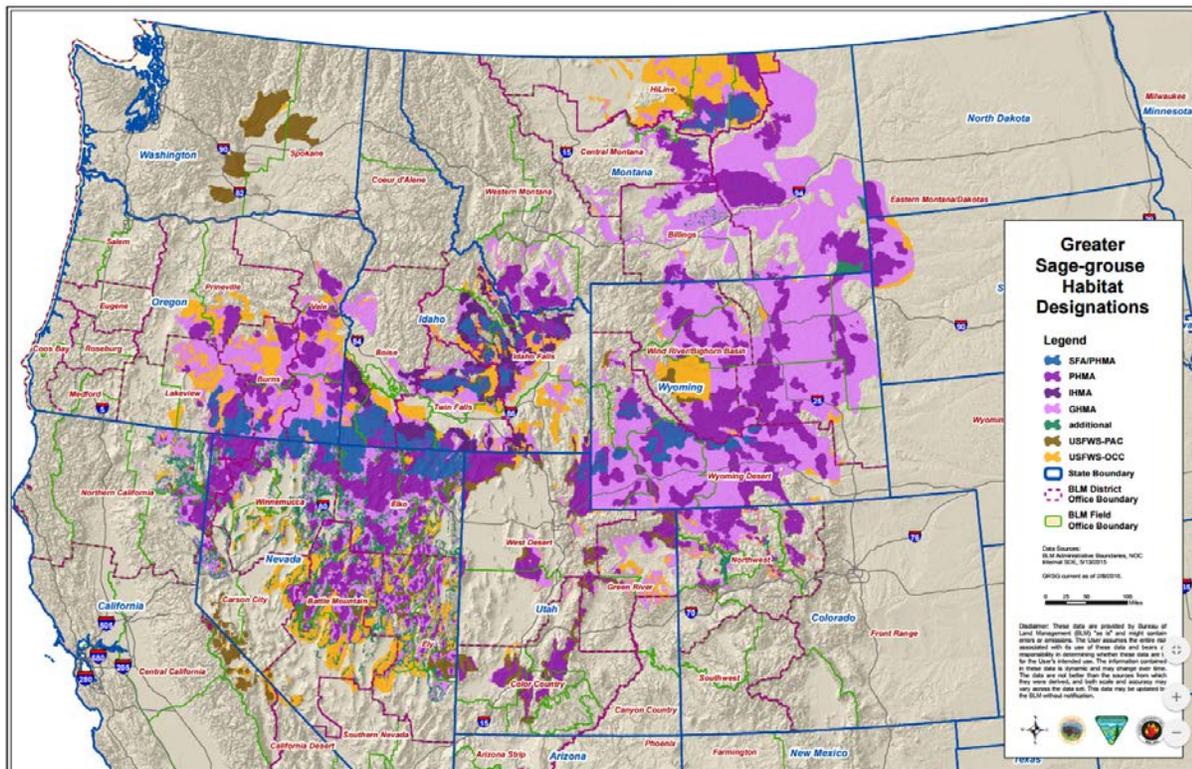
USFWS 2015 GRSG Status Review - Current Range

6. USFWS Priority Areas of Conservation (PACs)
7. USFWS Current Occupied Range²

In addition to the above habitat designations the Coates et al. Concentration Areas will be loaded separately for reference. These areas were identified across the Great Basin by the USGS Open-file Report 2015-1165 ([Coates et al. 2015, Long-term effects of wildfire on greater sage-grouse - integrating population and ecosystem concepts for management in the Great Basin](#)) that was released in September of 2015. On p. 33-34, this report states that targeted fire suppression in these core/concentration areas could help conserve large blocks of the “best” areas for sage-grouse in the Great Basin. The analysis also suggests that reducing cumulative area burned by 75 % in core/concentration areas might result in locally stable sage-grouse populations. This layer is also available [here](#).

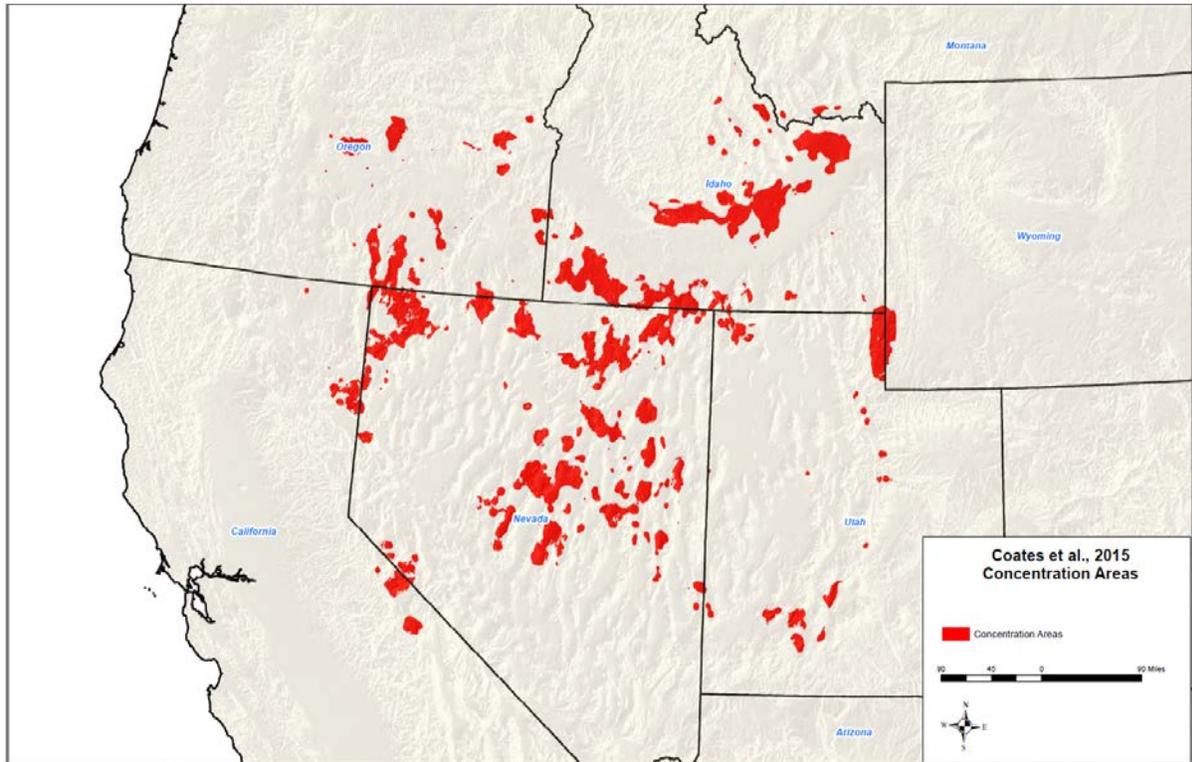
Layers for WFSS:

Map 1: Habitat Designations



² Current Occupied Range (FWS 2015) was created by adding known active leks to the occupied range coverage from Schroeder et al. (2004)

Map 2: Coates et al Data



Additional habitat data not loaded nationally into WFDSS:

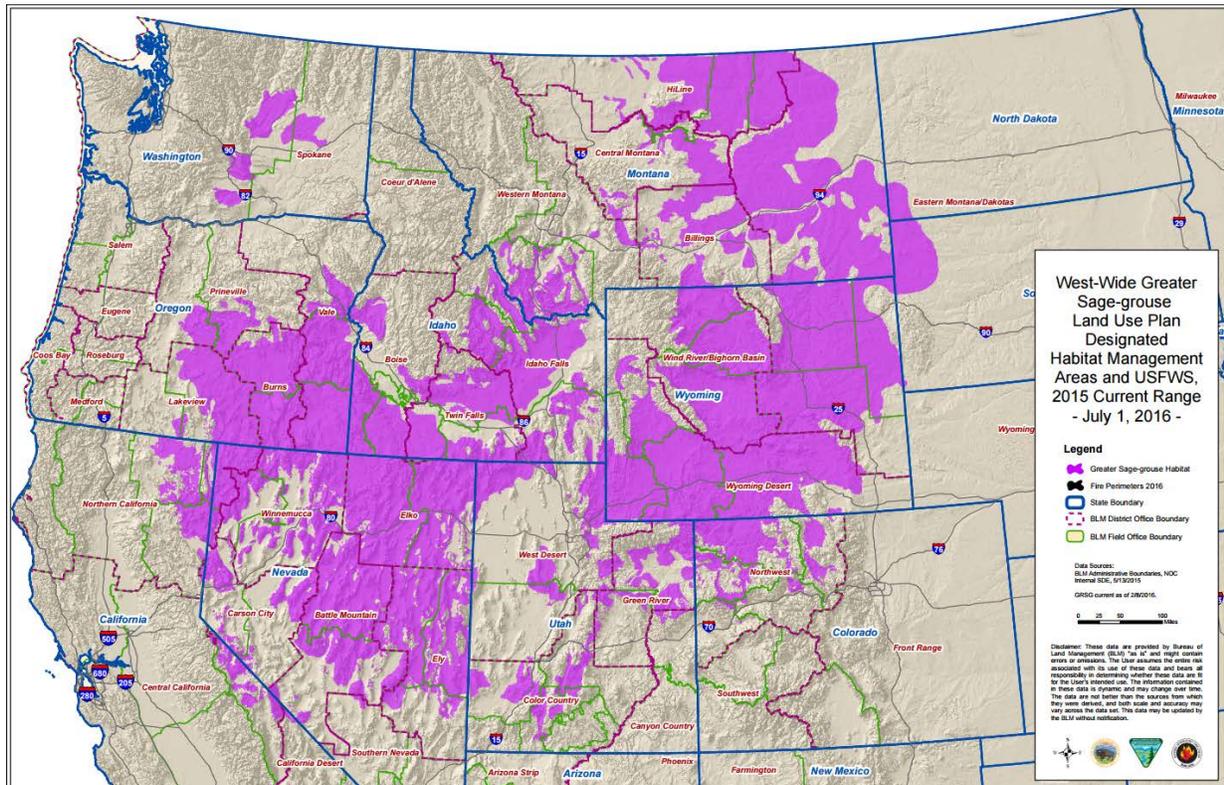
Additional local GRSG habitat data may also be used to develop priorities and further refine response in GRSG habitat, including Fire and Invasive Tool fire operations priorities and Resistance & Resilience Classes (Maestas et al. 2016. Tapping Soil Survey Information for Rapid Assessment of Sagebrush Ecosystem Resilience and Resistance. Rangelands).

Reporting of Acres Burned

For 2016, acres burned will be calculated using the same geospatial data layers described for use in WFDSS, but these layers will be combined into one seamless “GRSG Habitat” layer that does not distinguish between the various habitat designations.

Layer for Reporting Acres Burned

Map 3: Seamless habitat data layer



The seamless GRSG habitat data layer will be intersected with daily fire perimeters to determine acres of GRSG habitat burned throughout the fire season. The daily fire perimeters (updated throughout the western fire season) will come from the Geospatial Multi-Agency Coordination (GeoMAC) products.

The frequency of reports will be based on National Preparedness Levels (PL) to allow for a consistent reporting updates. The following reporting schedule will be utilized for the 2016 fire season (however, this schedule could be altered to provide data more frequently as conditions dictate or upon request):

- National PL 1 and 2 – Calculate acreage burned near the beginning of each month.
- National PL 3 – Calculate acreage burned bi-weekly.
- National PL 4 and 5 – Calculate acreage burned weekly.

Reports will include:

- Tabular reports - acres of GRSG Habitat burned by surface management area (land ownership), and state (the source for land ownership/administrative agency is the BLM NOC's Surface Management Agency data layer). Acres burned reported for the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and other Department of Agriculture lands not covered by the US Forest Service will be listed as "Other Federal Lands" as these agencies do not manage much GRSG habitat.
- Map reports - A map of the western United States displaying the fires and GRSG Habitat will also be provided.

The reports will be posted at: <http://www.nifc.gov/fireandsagegrouse/>. The attachments to this IB include a template of the tabular and map reports.

The reports will provide a close approximation of GRSG habitat burned. Map depictions of GRSG Habitat Designations are in some cases coarse-scale and may not reflect precisely on-the-ground habitat. In addition, the acres burned are calculated from daily fire perimeter and likely contain areas of unburned GRSG habitat. Also, daily fire perimeters are limited to those uploaded in GeoMAC or in some cases WFDSS, and therefore may have a lag time of 10 days, or in some cases significantly longer (i.e., uploaded at the end of the fire season). Therefore, cumulative acres burned will always be underrepresented in the tables and on the maps. Local reporting of GRSG habitat acres burned may vary from those captured through this national snapshot.

For additional information or questions contact Kristy Swartz, Fire Planning Specialist at 208-387-5326.

Signed by:
Ron Dunton
Assistant Director, Fire and Aviation

Authenticated by:
Yesenia Ramirez-Gil
Office Automation Clerk

Attachments

1. Template of tabular report (1p)
2. Template of map report (1 p)