



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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February 5, 2015

In Reply Refer To:
6500 (NV934) P

EMS TRANSMISSION 02/09/2015
Instruction Memorandum: No. NV-2015-017
Expires: 09/30/2017

To: All Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Employees, Nevada

From: State Director

Subject: Revised Direction for Proposed Activities within Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

Purpose: This Instruction Memorandum (IM) replaces mapping direction only and clarifies the paragraph on non-discretionary activities, such as notice-level operations as defined by 43 CFR 3809 issued under IM-NV-2014-022 for Nevada policy on activities in Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) (GRSG) habitat. The direction contained in this IM applies to activities on BLM Nevada administered lands. BLM California will coordinate proposed activities in a similar manner through their organization.

Policy/Action: The Interim Policy set forth in IM-WO-2012-043 identifies the application of policies and procedures to minimize habitat loss in Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH) areas to be applied pending the completion of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendment process described in the Land Use Planning Strategy set forth in IM-WO-2012-044. The Interim Policy also requires the BLM to track and report use authorizations issued or deferred as well as other management actions within sage-grouse habitat.

The Official Management Categories for Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) in Nevada and California (August 2014), as set forth in the attached link, provides refinements to the prior map's delineations of Priority and General Habitat and provides the basis for application of the BLM's GRSG Interim Policy in Nevada. This map (hereinafter referred to as the updated map) is based on the GRSG habitat suitability modeling by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) (Coates et al. 2014). It was prepared in cooperation with Dr. Peter Coates with USGS, the states of Nevada and California, and the BLM. The map underwent peer review and is considered by the State of Nevada, USGS, and the BLM as the best available science on location and suitability of sage-grouse habitat in Nevada and northeastern California. The mapping effort incorporated updated telemetry data (1998-2013), landscape habitat mapping (which includes vegetation mapping as well as topography and land features) and GRSG lek data.

The USGS approach identified a habitat suitability index based on telemetry data, landscape features and vegetation mapping. The habitat suitability was then characterized for importance to GRSG as high, moderate, low, or non-habitat. The lek data included a buffer around leks to develop a Use Index. The Use Index was then intersected with the habitat suitability index to identify management categories for GRSG (table below). The high and moderate categories correlate with the BLM's definitions of PPH and PGH, respectively, for use in this interim policy. The updated map's habitat Geographic Information System (GIS) data has been made available in the corporate database in EGIS. The updated map can be found at <T:\ReferenceState\NV\CorporateData\wildlife\Final State Sage-grouse Management Categories.lyr>. It is important to note that the Nevada state plan also uses this new mapping data, but changes the names of the categories. For purposes of clarity and understanding, the table below should help explain all of the name differences for habitat delineations as of this IM.

USGS HABITAT NAME	NEVADA STATE PLAN HABITAT NAME	BLM HABITAT NAME
High	Core	PPH
Moderate	Priority	PGH
Low	General	Mapped Habitat
Non-Habitat	Non-Habitat	Non-Habitat

When using the updated map for purposes of implementing this IM and considering activities in PPH and PGH, it is important that users “drill down” to suitable scale in order to see habitat categories and not use the map in a static fashion to inform use or mitigation decisions. Outside of the areas identified on the updated map, BLM Nevada District/Field Offices (DOs/FOs) can identify other habitat that needs special consideration. The updated map will be analyzed through the Nevada/Northeastern California Sub-regional planning and associated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes pursuant to IM-WO-2012-044. The final map of Priority and General Habitat will be an outcome of that planning process.

Non-discretionary activities (e.g, notice-level operations) will be tracked by the respective Field Office and will require a completed *Proposed Activities in Sage-Grouse Preliminary Habitat Areas Form* (referred to herein as the “form” and included as Attachment A). Field Offices will not submit non-discretionary activities to the state office. **However**, field offices will need to submit this information in future data calls. For non-discretionary projects, the field or district office will consider current scientific information in considering mitigation options.

The BLM Nevada State Office (NSO) will review all proposed leasing areas, discretionary right-of-ways, and related work to identify whether the area/activities would occur within PPH or PGH. Any parcels that contain a quarter section intersected by a PPH or PGH area will be evaluated as to whether to include it on the preliminary sale list provided to the district offices. The BLM NSO will consider on a case-by-case basis whether or not to include these parcels in a competitive oil and gas or geothermal sale.

BLM NSO concurrence is required for discretionary, ground, or population disturbing activities within PPH and PGH except for emergency activities, data collection and monitoring, permit transfers that do not contain changes in terms and conditions, and routine maintenance of

existing facilities and authorizations. Woodcutting activities do not need to be submitted as long as appropriate Best Management Practices (BMP) are applied although we will need to track locations and amount of wood material removed from PPH and PGH for reporting. These activities that are in areas that are currently not suitable as sage-grouse habitat generally have no effect and do not need form submission.

This IM requires that the state¹ (NDOW and Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, SETT) is conferred with on all discretionary and non-discretionary projects within GRSG habitat in Nevada. Additionally, at any pre-application meeting involving mineral leasing, new road construction or improvements, utility-scale ROW (e.g., transmission lines, geothermal facilities) the state should be invited. For any projects that are outside of these broad descriptors, NDOW consultation should still be undertaken to examine potential wildlife impacts.

BLM Nevada DOs/FOs will first work with applicants to see if the action/activity can be placed outside of PPH or PGH as identified. If that is not possible the BLM Nevada DOs/FOs will seek state input for proposed actions and strive to avoid and minimize impacts to GRSG and their habitats.

After conferring with the state, BLM Nevada DOs/FOs will submit the revised *Proposed Activities in Sage-Grouse Preliminary Habitat Areas Form* (Attachment) for surface and population disturbing discretionary activities that require BLM authorization and occur within the PPH and PGH polygons. Submissions should be made at the time the project is proposed. The form is used for tracking the number and location of proposed projects that may have the potential to impact GRSG and their habitats. The form will also be used to keep the State Director informed about proposed activities that have the potential to impact GRSG.

Once the sage-grouse form arrives in the NSO, it will be shared with state leadership. The state leadership will have five (5) working days to return comments to the BLM NSO. In the event of a disagreement between the state and BLM Nevada on a proposed action within PPH or PGH, the issue must be forwarded to the BLM Nevada State Director, State Wildlife Agency Director, and FWS representative for their review. The BLM NSO retains its commitment to inform Districts within ten (10) working days of the outcome.

The document “*A Report on National Great Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures*,” produced by the Sage-Grouse National Technical Team (NTT) on December 21, 2011 (IM-WO-2012-044 attachment 1), contains the conservation measures to be considered and analyzed, as appropriate, through the land use planning process by all BLM state and field offices that contain occupied Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. The Interim Policy (IM-WO-2012-043) does not require the BLM to develop alternatives based on the recommendations in the NTT Report for projects that are proposed during the interim period, i.e., prior to completion of the RMP amendments. Nevertheless, BLM Nevada will consider the current scientific information in evaluating projects. It is noted that GRSG occur outside of the mapped PPH and PGH and the BLM should consider appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and conservation measures for proposed actions within these areas on a case by case basis.

¹ NDOW is local contact; SETT is Kacey KC, kaceykc@sagebrusheco.nv.gov, ph: (775) 684-8600, fax: (775) 684-8604

The BLM NSO will evaluate proposed activities submitted for compliance with the direction set forth in this IM. This evaluation will consist of reviewing whether appropriate coordination has occurred with the state and if the appropriate BMPs and/or conservation measures have been considered.

The *Proposed Activities in Sage-Grouse Preliminary Habitat Areas Form* (Attachment B) is also available on the Nevada Resources and Planning Sage-Grouse SharePoint at: <https://partnerteamspace.blm.doi.net/sites-nv/nvrp/Sage/default.aspx> in the Shared Documents “*Proposed Projects within GSG Habitat*” folder, and then “*Forms*” sub-folder.

When an activity is proposed, fill out the proposed activity form completely. The instructions for each section are written in blue. The location of the activity should be provided as latitude and longitude or UTM coordinates.

A project area map is also required to accompany the form. The purpose of the map is to track the location of all proposed projects. The map must show the location of the proposed project, the Preliminary Habitat data, and should include any other relevant supporting information. The finished map should be exported as a PDF and named consistently with the name of the project for cross referencing. The project location information must be entered into the EGIS NEPA Project Geodatabase (located at “*T:\NV\GIS_Reference\NV_state_data_user.sde\ilmnvedt.ILMNVDDBO.NEPA*”) as directed in [NV IM 2011-030 “NEPA Project Geodatabase.”](#) The attributes must be completely filled out and the data must be continually maintained to assist with tracking the status of the project. This data will be included in the annual BLM report to the FWS as required by IM 2012-044 “*BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy*”.

The completed proposed activities form and PDF map are to be sent to Kim Dow (Branch Chief, Renewable Resources - kddow@blm.gov), Sandra Brewer (Wildlife Program Lead – sbrewer@blm.gov), and cc'd to Edison Garcia (NV930 Staff Assistant – edison Garcia@blm.gov). Kim and Sandra along with the appropriate program lead(s), will review the forms and if necessary elevate to the State or Deputy State Director level. The state office will then notify the DO/FO of the outcome via email or phone call no later than 10 days after submission of the form. Following BLM NSO review, the completed proposed activity form and PDF map will be placed in the project folder in EGIS by the District.

Activities that are denied, non-discretionary or deferred at the DO/FO levels should be tracked by the DO/FO for inclusion in the annual report to FWS regarding activities affecting sage-grouse. The state office does not intend to review these projects but will identify them in the annual report to the FWS.

All new NEPA documents for projects will be developed and managed in the ePlanning system in accordance with IM-NV-2011-058 “Deployment of ePlanning in Nevada”.

Timeframe: This policy is effective immediately.

Budget Impact: The effect on the budget should be minimal as the policy helps provide a consistent approach across DOs/FOs to managing a candidate species already analyzed in the RMP process.

Background: On December 27, 2011, the BLM Washington Office (WO) announced its national strategy for management of Greater Sage-Grouse. Two Interim Guidance Instruction Memoranda were also issued to provide WO policy on interim management policies and procedures, and land use planning strategy. These are IM 2012-043 “Interim Management Policies and Procedures (Interim Policy)” and IM 2012-044 “Land Use Planning Strategy (Strategy).” In accordance with these IMs, BLM Nevada has initially identified and mapped PPH and PGH.

Additional information about the Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy can be found on the National Sage-Grouse website at <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse.html>

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: No manuals or handbooks are affected.

Coordination: IM-NV-2012-058 was previously coordinated with BLM Nevada District Offices.

Contact: For form or content issues, contact Sandra Brewer, Natural Resource Specialist 775-861-6626 or sbrewer@blm.gov; for GIS questions, contact Dan Kozar, GIS Specialist, 775-861-6519 or dkozar@blm.gov.

References:

Coates, P.S., Casazza, M.L., Brussee, B.E., Ricca, M.A., Gustafson, K.B., Overton, C.T., Sanchez-Chopitea, E., Kroger, T., Mauch, K., Niell, L., Howe, K., Gardner, S., Espinosa, S., and Delehanty, D.J. 2014. Spatially explicit modeling of greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) habitat in Nevada and northeastern California-A decision-support tool for management. U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2014-1163, 83 p; <http://dx.doi.org/10.3133/ofr20141163>.

Signed by:
 Marci L. Todd
 Acting State Director

Authenticated by:
 Edison Garcia
 Staff Assistant

Attachment

- 1- [Proposed Activities in Sage-Grouse Preliminary Habitat Areas Form](#) (2pp)