



## U.S.D.A FOREST SERVICE & BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATE – Sept. 2013



### **SUBJECT: Interagency Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Management**

**Issue:** Interagency Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Planning and Conservation.

**Key Points:**

Widespread Sage-Grouse conservation efforts have been underway since the mid-1990s, when a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed among members of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) to promote Sage-Grouse conservation. A 2000 MOU, which brought in Federal agency partners, was significant in furthering interagency cooperation to conserve Sage-Grouse.

In July 2011, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced its National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat on BLM-administered lands. In late November 2011, the U.S. Forest Service (FS) joined the effort for FS-administered lands. Progress on the strategy includes the following efforts, among many other BLM, FS, and partner efforts:

- In December 2011, the BLM issued Instruction Memorandum 2012-043, Greater Sage-Grouse Interim Management Policies and Procedures and Instruction Memorandum 2012-044, BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy.
- The BLM, FS, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) signed a cooperating agency MOU on March 5, 2012.
- Governor Mead, Governor Hickenlooper, and BLM's Director are chairing a task force instigated by Secretary Salazar in December, 2011. The task force is focused on facilitating coordination of Sage-Grouse planning and state government development of adequate regulatory mechanisms.
- Scoping for BLM and FS planning efforts were completed in March 2012. A scoping report and links to all comments are posted on BLM's national Sage-Grouse website, which also provides links to plans that are available for public comment. It is located at: [http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sage\\_grouse\\_home2.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sage_grouse_home2.html)
- The FS issued interim recommendations on October 10, 2012.
- Cumulative Effects and Disturbance and Monitoring teams have been developed to facilitate consistency in analyses during the planning process.
- Executive leadership within the BLM, FS, and FWS held a productive meeting March 5-6, 2013 in Boise, Idaho to coordinate the on-going planning efforts.
- A data and document-sharing SharePoint site has been established for cooperating agencies' access.
- The first plans addressing Greater Sage-Grouse conservation are currently available for public comment – links to those plans are available on the national web-page.
- All draft plans are scheduled to be available for public comment in September-October, 2013.
- The FS, BLM, and FWS have been and continue to coordinate with state governments that are pursuing a state Sage-Grouse plan.

**Background:**

On March 5, 2010, the FWS announced its finding that listing of Greater Sage-Grouse is warranted, but precluded (Candidate Species standing) by higher priorities. This finding was driven by two primary listing factors: (1) the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of Greater-Sage Grouse habitat; and (2) the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.

The BLM administers approximately 51% and the FS administers approximately 8% of all remaining occupied Sage-Grouse habitats. Currently, the BLM and the FS are implementing a large-scale planning strategy to evaluate and improve the adequacy of BLM Regional Management Plans (RMPs) and FS Forest Plans to conserve and restore the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat on FS and BLM-administered lands. The strategy includes efforts to revise and amend RMPs and Forest Plans, where necessary, throughout the range of the Greater Sage-Grouse (with the exception of the Gunnison, bi-state population in California and Nevada and the Washington State population segment, which will be addressed through other planning efforts). This strategy affects sixty-eight (68) BLM land-use planning units and 20 FS Forest Plans.

Under the strategy, the BLM: (1) issued national policy direction to guide interim actions and future planning and (2) established regional interagency teams to enhance cooperation and coordination and to ensure consistency. Both the BLM and the FS will embed regulatory mechanisms into RMPs and Forest Plans through plan maintenance, amendment, or revision at the state or multistate level. Conservation measures, identified during the planning effort will be designed to be science-based, consistent across BLM and FS lands, and provide meaningful conservation outcomes. This effort commenced in 2011 and is anticipated to continue through 2014. The entire text of the MOU is available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/Partnerships/BLM%20EO13186MOU.pdf>

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