



U.S.D.A FOREST SERVICE & BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATE August 2011



SUBJECT: Interagency Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Conservation

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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. The 2000 MOU, which brought in Federal agency partners, was significant in furthering interagency cooperation to conserve sage-grouse.

Partnership accomplishments include:

(1) publication of *Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment (2004)* and *Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (2006)*; (2) several ecoregional assessments; (3) involvement on state and local working group efforts; (4) cooperation with WAFWA in the development of a 2008 MOU; and (5) a number of other conservation planning efforts for conserving sage-grouse and their habitats.

In addition, the BLM, USFS, and WAFWA developed a Habitat Assessment Framework process for assessing sage-grouse habitats at multiple scales which was completed in 2010. The document is available at: http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife_management/sagegrouse/pdf/SG%20Habitat%20Assessment%20August%202010.pdf.

Most recently, a collaborative effort among federal, state, university, and non-government experts on sage-grouse produced the monograph *Ecology And Conservation Of Greater Sage-Grouse: A Landscape Species And Its Habitats* (2011). The BLM and USFS were two of several federal agency contributors of the monograph. Details on the monograph and how to obtain a copy are available at: <http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov/monograph.aspx>.

The USFS, NRCS, USFWS, and BLM also signed an Interagency Agreement (IA) in June 2011 that focuses on an "all lands" approach to managing sagebrush habitats and sage-grouse. The IA calls for cooperation between the federal agencies and the state fish and wildlife departments, tribal governments, and other partners, to ensure sustainable management of grazing and other agricultural practices, and to restore and enhance sage-grouse habitats in sagebrush-steppe landscapes in the western United States.

BLM (lead)

The BLM administers approximately 50% of all remaining occupied sage-grouse habitats. Currently, the BLM is initiating a large-scale planning strategy to evaluate and improve the adequacy of BLM Resource Management Plans (RMP) to conserve and restore the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat on BLM-administered lands. The strategy will address, if necessary, revisions and amendments 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). Of the 73 BLM land use planning units affected by this strategy, 28

plans are currently in various stages of revision. The remaining 45 units are managed under existing RMPs. Under the strategy, the BLM will issue national policy direction to guide interim actions and future planning; establish regional interagency teams to enhance cooperation and coordination and to ensure consistency; and embed regulatory mechanisms into RMPs 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 lands, and provide meaningful conservation outcomes. This effort commenced in 2011 and is anticipated to continue through 2014.

USFS (lead)

Although the Forest Service manages a small portion of sage-grouse habitat in the Intermountain West (8%), the agency remains committed to sage-grouse conservation through existing laws (NFMA) and regulations. In July of 2010, the Deputy Chief issued a guidance memorandum to Regional Foresters in Regions 1,2,4,5, and 6 regarding restoration and management of sagebrush habitats. The letter directed them to:

- Develop and implement more habitat improvement activities for sage-grouse, and incorporate more sagebrush habitat conservation measures into other resource management activities.
- Continue to integrate sage-grouse, sagebrush, and other resource management, and coordinate these activities with states, other agencies, and adjacent landowners.
- Avoid or minimize adverse effects to sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat.
- When revising Land Management Plans for units with sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat, use the best available scientific information and develop Forest Plan direction to conserve that habitat.
- Where appropriate, use informal discussions with the FWS and established local working groups to better develop projects that could affect sage-grouse or sagebrush habitats, and to more effectively evaluate project effects.

Additionally, most NFS units have completing or will be completing travel management planning, which should aid in protecting and restoring sagebrush habitats.

Background:

On March 5, 2010 the USFWS announced a 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.

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