

# USDA Forest Service Update

## March 2009



### **SUBJECT: Energy and Wildlife Communications and Cooperation (FS, BLM, AFWA, WAFWA)**

**SUMMARY:** The purpose of this two-year project is to provide support for an Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) energy liaison to facilitate cooperation among the participating state and federal land and wildlife management agencies. The liaison will present the collective interests and responsibilities of the state fish and wildlife agencies, the federal land management/permitting agencies, and the energy industry, in order to foster a federal/state/private partnership. The partnership will promote cooperative conservation by facilitating communications and enhancing success in resolving programmatic issues related to energy development and its effects on fish, wildlife and their habitats. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service (FS), AFWA, and Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) was signed in September 2008. Through a signed assistance agreement and the MOU, the parties to the agreements have set the course of work through the first steering committee meeting held in December 2008. The first report-out will occur at The North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in March 2009.

**BACKGROUND:** Much of the increased demand for oil and natural gas has focused on the Rocky Mountain West. This has put energy exploration and development in direct conflict with maintenance of wildlife and wildlife habitat on western public lands. Environmental review and conflict resolution concerning site-specific impacts of individual wells or new oil and gas fields are appropriately handled locally among state wildlife agencies, local offices of federal land management and permitting agencies, the energy companies involved, and the concerned public. However, the ability to balance responsible development of energy resources with maintenance of wildlife populations and habitat over broad areas is often dependent not only on site-specific factors, but on programmatic issues such as laws, regulations, protocols, best management practices, and other policies and procedures that are regional or national in scope. Examples of these issues include, but are not limited to, establishing strategies for sage-grouse conservation, simpler and more timely adaptive management procedures, processes to evaluate current stipulations for protecting wildlife, criteria for identifying critical areas to avoid, and clarifying the role and application of off-site mitigation.

The continuing contention over these issues and the difficulty in reaching their meaningful resolution often is a result of not coordinating at the proper policy level and/or not having all the responsible entities involved. The MOU is a three-way partnership - regionally and nationally - between the federal land management agencies (BLM & FS), the WAFWA and the AFWA, that will allow the collective states to work more collaboratively and effectively with the federal agencies. Together, the state and federal agencies will work more effectively with the energy industry and concerned publics to achieving their goals of cooperative conservation while facilitating development of domestic energy resources on public lands. Shared funding to support the work came from the BLM, FS, AFWA and WAFWA.

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