Secretary Jewell Releases Landscape-Scale Mitigation Strategy to Encourage Dual Objectives of Smart Development and Conservation

Strategy seeks to provide clarity and consistency to more effectively avoid, minimize and compensate for impacts on public lands

WASHINGTON, D.C. – To advance landscape-scale, science-based management of America’s public lands and wildlife, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today released a strategy to implement mitigation policies and practices at the Department that can more effectively encourage infrastructure development while protecting natural and cultural resources.

“This strategy outlines the key principles and actions we need to take to successfully shift from a reactive, project-by-project approach to more predictable and effective management of the lands and resources that we manage on behalf of the American public,” Secretary Jewell said. “The goal is to provide greater certainty for project developers when it comes to permitting and better outcomes for conservation through more effective and efficient project planning. Through advances in science and technology, advance planning, and collaboration with stakeholders, we know that development and conservation can both benefit – and that’s the win-win this mitigation strategy sets out to achieve.”

Under the principles of mitigation, the first priority is to avoid and minimize project impacts through attention to siting and design features during the planning phase. For impacts that cannot be avoided or minimized, the strategy seeks to protect or restore resources of similar function and value with a focus on key conservation priorities in a region, where mitigation investments can have a greater impact. As part of the strategy, Interior will work closely with states, tribes, other federal agencies, and other stakeholders to identify regional conservation priorities that can benefit from coordinated landscape-scale mitigation.

The approach builds on initiatives that have begun across the country to avoid development conflicts and improve conservation outcomes, like the Western Governors’ Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT). The CHAT provides a high-level overview of important wildlife habitat in 16 Western states that will help project proponents during the pre-planning stage and, ultimately, reduce costs, conflicts and surprises during development while ensuring wildlife values are better incorporated into land use decision-making.
“We’ve seen this common-sense approach evolve over time with increasing success. We need to build on those successes to construct a clear, consistent and effective set of policies for the Department that will allow for the kind of clarity and forward thinking that the American people expect,” added Jewell.

The strategy released today outlines four priority areas of ongoing and future work, including geospatial assessments, landscape-level strategies, compensatory mitigation programs, and monitoring and evaluation. The strategy also identifies near-term actions that the Department will take to put the report’s recommendations into practice.

Jewell called for the strategy in her first Secretarial Order in October 2013 (Improving Mitigation Policies and Practices of the Department of the Interior), which directed an evaluation of Interior’s existing mitigation policies and practices and development of a coordinated Department-wide strategy to effectively offset impacts of large development projects of all types through the use of landscape-level planning.

The strategy is the result of extensive outreach to industry, states, tribes, conservation groups, and other stakeholders. The effort reflects the Administration’s commitment (Presidential Memorandum) to more efficiently permit large infrastructure projects, while achieving improved outcomes for communities and the environment.