

## **APPENDIX P - COMMENT SUMMARY AND RESPONSE TO COMMENTS**

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### **P.1 READER'S GUIDE**

#### **P.1.1 HOW IS THIS APPENDIX ORGANIZED?**

This Comment Summary and Response to Comments contains three main sections.

- The first section briefly introduces and summarizes the process of soliciting, receiving and evaluating comments on the Draft EIS. Section 1 also includes a table to assist the reader in finding specific comment letters, facsimiles, and emails that were received on the Draft EIS (hereafter collectively referred to as comment letters; Table 1). Each comment letter received was assigned a numeric identification code, which is the first column in the table. Additional information in Table 1 includes the name of the commenter (whether individual or organization), their address, the date the letter was postmarked/faxed/mailed, and a listing of the letter's substantive comments.
- Section 2 contains photocopies of all letters received by the BLM along with comments broken out (but still contained within the letter).
- In Section 3, individual comments have been extracted from the comment letters and arranged by subject or resource discipline, and the BLM response to each comment is provided. Please note that Section 3 responds to individual comments in the letters received, not just the comment letters found in Section 2; there is often more than one comment per letter.

#### **P.1.2 HOW DO I KNOW THE BLM RECEIVED MY LETTER?**

All letters received by the BLM during the comment period for the Draft EIS are listed in Table 1. If your name appears in Table 1, your letter was received. This table can be used to find your name (or organization's name), the identification (Source Code) number of your letter, and the comments that received responses. The letter's Source Code number can also be used to locate the responses to your individual comments in Section 3.

#### **P.1.3 HOW ARE COMMENTS SHOWN IN THE EIS?**

BLM policy requires the printing of comments from federal, state, and local agencies and elected officials in the Final EIS and responses to those comments. The letters from these agencies and officials are included in Section 2 of this appendix, along with the comment letters received from other individuals or entities. Whenever a comment resulted in a change to the EIS, in most cases, the response to the comment states that the change was made and indicates where in the document the change can be found.

#### **P.1.4 HOW DO I FIND MY COMMENT?**

A specific comment letter (and any responses to the comments in that letter) can be located by looking up the author(s) of that letter in Table 1, then using its Source Code number to locate the individual comments in Section 3 of this document.

### **P.1.5 WHAT OTHER COMMENTS WERE MADE THAT WERE SIMILAR TO MINE?**

Comments similar to one another are grouped together by subject in Section 3.

### **P.1.6 WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE TO MY COMMENT?**

Responses to the identified comments are grouped by subject in Section 3. You can use the Source Code number that was assigned to your letter in Table 1 to help you locate responses to your comments.

### **P.1.7 HOW DO I FIND WHAT COMMENTS ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, ORGANIZATION HAD?**

Table 1 details agency, group, and/or individual authors of the comment letters. Once the agency, group, or individual is located in Table 1, the Source Code number can be used to cross-reference individual comments in Section 3. A listing of the comment letters containing that comment in Section 3 also follows each comment.

## **P.2 SUMMARY OF THE COMMENT PROCESS**

The main function of Appendix P of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) is to provide the BLM's response to comments received on the Draft EIS. This section explains how comments were solicited on the Draft EIS and processed. You will find a detailed list of persons, organizations, and agencies that submitted comments on the Draft EIS in Table 1.

The comments on the Draft EIS that were used to prepare the Final EIS followed the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) and a process established by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, which provide that agencies must "(m)ake diligent efforts to involve the public in ... NEPA procedures" (40 CFR § 1506.6(a)). Although this appendix deals primarily with the comments received on the Draft EIS released at the end of October 2004, the reader should also be aware that substantial public involvement preceded and coincided with the writing of the Draft EIS; this prior public involvement helped to define the scope of issues that has been addressed by the EIS.

### **P.2.1 PUBLIC SCOPING**

Public scoping, typically done prior to the preparation of the Draft EIS, should not be confused with the comments received on the Draft EIS. Preparation of the Draft EIS included soliciting comments from various organizations and the public to determine the scope of the document (see Chapter 5 for more details). NEPA requires early public involvement in the EIS process to identify issues and address any potentially significant concerns related to the Proposed Action. Public and agency involvement continued in various ways throughout this particular EIS process. The Purpose and Need, identification of important issues and concerns by the public and other agencies, and particulars of the Proposed Action were all discussed during public scoping and are detailed in Chapters 1 and 2 of the Final EIS. Public and agency input was extremely important in formulating the scope and content of the Draft EIS.

### **P.2.2 PUBLIC AND AGENCY MEETINGS**

Following the release of the Draft EIS in late October 2004, public meetings were held in Idaho in the following cities to explain the NEPA process, to receive comments regarding the Draft EIS, and to answer any questions related to the Proposed Action and alternatives: Idaho Falls (on December 1, 2004), Pocatello (on December 2, 2004), Boise (on December 8, 2004), and Twin Falls (on December 9, 2004).

### **P.2.3 COMMENT PROCEDURE**

The Draft EIS was released to the public on October 28, 2004. The Notice of Availability initiating the formal, 90-day comment period on the Draft EIS appeared in the *Federal Register* on November 5, 2004. The 90-day comment period ended on February 3, 2005.

Those who received a full or summary copy of the Draft EIS and/or attending the public meetings were given instructions on how to provide comments and where they should be sent. They were advised that comments should be as specific as possible in terms of adequacy of the Draft EIS and/or merits of the alternatives discussed. Individuals that submitted oral comments, either by phone or at the public meetings, were advised that in order for the comment to be considered and included in the Final EIS, it would also have to be submitted in writing.

All comment letters were copied and sent to the BLM's third-party consultant, where they received a source code. The full text of each comment letter, facsimile, or email received from individuals or groups are included in Section 2 of this appendix. Individual comments were extracted from each letter and were organized by subject, primarily into resource or discipline categories. Those comments that were identical or very similar were grouped together and summarized. Section 4 lists the individual comments by subject, the source code denoting the comment letter, and the associated response to the comment. Resource specialists from the third-party consultant prepared draft responses to each substantive comment, which were then reviewed, edited, and approved by BLM.

Consistent with NEPA regulations (40 CFR § 1503.4(b)), this document focuses on substantive comments on the Draft EIS. Substantive comments include those that challenge the information in the Draft EIS as being accurate or inaccurate, or that offer specific information that may have a bearing on the analysis and/or decision. Comments that merely expressed an opinion for or against the Proposed Action were considered non-substantive and thus were identified as a comment not requiring a response. These non-substantive comments were nonetheless valuable in conveying public opinion regarding the project and so were included in Section 3. In cases where the comment was substantive but appeared to indicate that information in the EIS was either misunderstood or unclear, a response was prepared to clarify the information.

Table 1 provides an index of agencies, organizations, and individuals that commented on the Draft EIS. It is organized by source code, and also contains the name of the commenter, his/her associated organization and/or address, the date the letter was postmarked faxed/emailed to the BLM, and a list of numbered, individual comments contained in the letter.

Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment Final EIS

<b>TABLE 1. LIST OF COMMENTERS ON THE FIRE, FUELS, AND RELATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT DIRECTION PLAN AMENDMENT AND DRAFT EIS</b>					
<b>Letter Code</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization/Address</b>	<b>City, State</b>	<b>Date Postmarked</b>	<b>Comment Code (s) Receiving Responses</b>
1	Steven R. Paulsen	506 Center Street West	Kimberly, ID	Public meeting	LG1, LG2, LG3, VR1, VR2, VR3, VR5
2	Karl Ruprecht	649 Lynwood	Twin Falls, ID	Public meeting	LG1, LG4, VR3
3	Lahsha Johnston	The Wilderness Society, Regional Conservation Associate	Boise, ID	02/11/05	AT1, AT2, AT3, AT4, AT5, PR1, PR2, LG5, VR6, VR7, VR8, VR9, VR10, WUI1, WUI2, WUI3, WUI4, WI1, WI3, WI4
4	Kent Fothergill	Conservation Committee Prairie Falcon Audubon	Twin Falls, ID	02/10/05	LG6
5	Jack Depperschmidt	Department of Energy, Idaho Operations Operator, NEPA Compliance Officer		02/07/05	LG1, VR11, VR12, IN1
6	Rick Just	Idaho Parks and Recreation	Boise, ID	01/28/05	AT1, AT6, RR1, RR2, RR3, GM1
7	Timothy C Duffner	Idaho Department of Lands	Gooding, ID	02/08/05	AT6, LG8, VR13
8	Kenneth Sanders	University of Idaho, Twin Falls R&E Center	Twin Falls, ID	01/05/05	AT7, AT8, AT9, AT10, LG9, VR11, VR14, VR15, GM2
9	Patrick A Takasugi	Idaho Department of Agriculture	Boise, ID	02/03/05	AT11, AT12, AT13, AT14, VR16, VR17, GM3

Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment Final EIS

<b>TABLE 1. LIST OF COMMENTERS ON THE FIRE, FUELS, AND RELATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT DIRECTION PLAN AMENDMENT AND DRAFT EIS</b>					
<b>Letter Code</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization/Address</b>	<b>City, State</b>	<b>Date Postmarked</b>	<b>Comment Code (s) Receiving Responses</b>
10a	Katie Fite	Western Watersheds Project	Boise, ID	02/09/05	AT15, LG1, LG2, LG4, LG6, LG7, LG10, LG11, LG12, LG13, LG14, LG15, LG16, LG17, VR1, VR2, VR3, VR4, VR5, VR6, VR18, VR19, VR20, VR21, VR22, VR23, VR24, VR25, VR26, VR27, VR28, VR29, VR30, WUI4, WUI5, WI2, WL1, WL2, WL3, SE1, SR1, GM4, GM5, GM6, GM7, GM8, GM9, GM10, GM11, GM12
10b	Katie Fite	Western Watersheds Project	Boise, ID	02/09/05	AT15, LG6, LG10, LG11, LG12, LG17, LG21, VR6, VR8, VR9, VR11, VR18, VR23, VR24, WL2, WL3
11	Deb Mignogno	USFWS	Chubbuck, ID	02/11/05	VR2, VR3, VR31, WL1, WL4, WL5, W6, WL7, WL8, WL9, WL10, GM13
12	Kelly Adams	Twin Falls District RAC	Twin Falls, ID	02/10/05	A16, LG18, LG19, VR32, VR33, VR34, VR35, SE2
13	Christine Reichgott	EPA	Seattle, WA	02/03/05	LG20, LG21, WL12, AQ1, AQ2
14	Tracey Trent	Idaho Fish and Game	Boise, ID	02/11/05	AT6, VR13, VR16, WL13, WL14, WL15, WL16
15	Tess O. Sullivan	Lava Lake Land & Livestock, LLC	Hailey, ID	02/10/05	VR2, VR5, VR11, VR16, WI5, WL15, WL17
16	B. Sachau	15 Elm Street	Florham, NJ	11/20/04	WL18, GM14, GM15
17	Bob Stoltz	1150 East 3400 North	Buhl, ID	12/10/04	LG15, VR3, VR36, GM14
18	Ted Howard	Shoshone-Paiute Tribes		11/7/07	NAI18, 1-23

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### **P.3 COMMENT LETTERS**

This section contains copies of letters, facsimiles, and emails received from tribes, federal, state, and local agencies, organizations, and the general public during the comment period—November 5, 2004 to February 3, 2005—for the Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Draft EIS. Refer to Section 3 for individual comments, organized by subject, and responses to those comments.

## FMDA DRAFT EIS/PLAN AMENDMENT

### Comments/E-Mails/Letters Received Regarding the FMDA DEIS

(Comment Period Ended 10 February 2005)

Letter Number	Letter Received From/Address	Comment Received Via (US Mail, E-Mail, Other - Explain)
1	Steven R. Paulsen 506 Center Street West Kimberley, ID 83341	Public Meeting
2	Karl Ruprecht 649 Lynwood Twin Falls, ID 83301	Public Meeting
3	Lahsha Johnston Regional Conservation Associate The Wilderness Society 350 N. 9 St. Ste. 302 Boise, ID 83702	Email
4	Kent Fothergill Conservation Committee Prairie Falcon Audubon 780 Falls Avenue #159 Twin Falls, ID 83316	Email
5	Jack Depperschmidt NEPA Compliance Officer DOE, Idaho Operations Office depperjd@id.doe.gov	Email
6	Rick Just Idaho Parks and Rec PO Box 83720 Boise, ID 83720-0065	Mail
7	Timothy C. Duffner Idaho Department of Lands 329 Washington St. Gooding, ID 83330	Mail
8	Kenneth Sanders U of Idaho Twin Falls R&E Center	Mail

	PO Box 1827 Twin Falls, ID 83303	
9	Patrick A. Takasugi Idaho Department of Agriculture PO Box 790 Boise, ID 83701	Mail
10	Katie Fite Western Watersheds Project PO Box 2863 Boise, ID 83701	Mail
11	Deb Mignogno USFWS 4425 Burley Dr. Ste. A Chubbuck, ID 83202	Mail
12	Kelly Adams Twin Falls District RAC	Internal Mail
13	Christine Reichgott EPA 1200 6 Ave. Seattle, WA 98101	Mail
14	Tracey Trent ID Fish and Game PO Box 25 Boise, ID 83707	Mail
15	Tess O. Sullivan Lava Lake Land & Livestock, LLC PO Box 2249 Hailey, ID 83333	Mail
16	B. Sachau 15 Elm St. Florham Park, NJ 07932	Email
17	Bob Stoltz 1150 E. 3400 N. Buhl, ID 83316	Email
18	Ted Howard Director, Cultural Resources Shoshone-Paiute Tribes	Mail



Upper Snake River District

United States Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management

Comments specific to the Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment, Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) should be sent to:

FMDA Project Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Pocatello Field Office
4350 Cliffs Drive
Pocatello Idaho 83204.

Public comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, regarding this planning review will be available for public review at the Pocatello Field Office during business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) Monday through Friday, except holidays, and will be published as part of the EIS. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments (below). Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

I wish to withhold my name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. [ ] Yes [X] No

Please Print Name Steven R. Paulsen CSR Inc. Street Address 506 Center St West City Kimberly State IDAHO Zip 83201 E-Mail (optional) Steven@CSR-Inc.com

Comment(s):

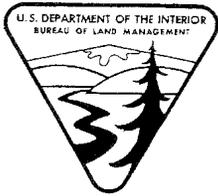
- 1-1 \* Monitor your Restoration Sites for No Less than 5 years
1-2 \* Have/Find Money to Steward all Restoration for No Less than 5 years.
1-3 \* USE ONLY NATIVE PLANTS & SEEDS in your Restorations
1-4 \* Change post restoration Rest period from 2 growing seasons to 5 growing seasons
1-5 \* In your Monitoring change your outlook on Range Condition to Encompass Environmental Health (ie Plant Diversity, No Shrubs in available forage for Cattle Use)
1-6 \* Be proactive in weed control - Enroll burn sites in Restoration in the First Fall/SPRING Post Burn
1-7 \* Remove Cattle grazing Entirely from Sites that are chert

further comments may be written on back of card or on paper sheets attached to this card. (over)

grass dominant.

1-8

\* USE outside resources for Monitoring if in house (BLM)  
Resources are not available.



U pper

S nake

R iver

D istrict

United States  
Department of Interior

Bureau of Land  
Management

Comments specific to the Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment, Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) should be sent to:

FMDA Project Manager  
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I wish to withhold my name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. [ ] Yes [ ] No

Please Print

Name KARL RUPPECHT  
Street Address 649 LYNWOOD  
City TWIN FALLS State ID Zip 83301  
E-Mail (optional) ruprechtik@hotmail.com

Comment(s):

whichever alternative is chosen:

please emphasize native grasses - not acres  
and acres of crested wheat grass

- please rest the replanted land from  
grazing for more than one or two years

Grazing increases cheat grass, cheat grass  
increases fire - please decrease grazing.

A 2-1

B 2-2

C 2-3

3

Terry  
Smith/USRD/ID/BLM/DOI  
Sent by: Terry Lee Smith

To "Lahsha Johnston" <lahsha\_johnston@tws.org>  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Re: FMDA Comments 

02/11/2005 07:55 AM

Lahsha Johnston, Regional Conservation Associate  
The Wilderness Society  
350 N. 9th Street, Suite 302  
Boise, ID 83702

This e-mail is to acknowledge receipt of your comments for the Draft  
Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment  
and Environmental Impact Statement (FMDA) on behalf of The Wilderness  
Society (TWS).

"Lahsha Johnston" <lahsha\_johnston@tws.org>



"Lahsha Johnston"  
<lahsha\_johnston@tws.org>  
02/10/2005 11:11 PM

To <ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov>  
cc  
Subject FMDA Comments

Are attached as a word doc. Please let me know if there is any problem with the attachment. LJ

Lahsha Johnston, Regional Conservation Associate  
The Wilderness Society  
350 N. 9th Street, Suite 302  
Boise, ID 83702  
208-343-8153 x. 12 208-343-8184 fax  
www.wilderness.org



SE ID BLM Fire & Veg DEIS Comments 2 05.doc

10 February 2005

Mr. Eric Limbach  
FMDA Project Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204

**RE: Fire Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment  
DEIS; comments submitted via email (ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov)**

Dear Mr. Limbach:

Please accept these comments on the Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (FMDA) on behalf of The Wilderness Society (TWS). Founded in 1935, The Wilderness Society works to protect America's wilderness and wildlife and to develop a nationwide network of wild lands through public education, scientific analysis, and advocacy. Our goal is to ensure that future generations enjoy the clean air and water, beauty, wildlife, and opportunities for recreation and spiritual renewal provided by the nation's pristine forests, rivers, deserts, and mountains. Our members enjoy the beauty, recreational and educational opportunities provided by the unique landscape of south-central and eastern Idaho.

3-1 The Wilderness Society is supportive of the purpose and need of the proposed action- to  
3-2 create a comprehensive framework addressing fire management on a landscape-scale.  
3-3 However, we feel the analysis is incomplete and lacking in several key areas. The  
analysis document is difficult to follow and repeats good portions of the same, general  
information in each chapter. There is a significant lack of specificity to the proposed  
actions. Further, the impacts of each alternative are difficult to understand because of the  
use of footprint acres vs. treatment acres.

In addition to general support for the overall concept and goals, we would offer the following observations, concerns, and suggestions with the hope that such information proves useful to BLM in crafting a management alternative that promotes ecological, economic, and social sustainability for the landscape of Idaho.

Sagebrush Steppe

3-4 The origins of the analysis appear to be quite clear, satisfy the purpose and need to address fire management. Despite repeated attempts to incorporate the goals behind Issue 2 (sagebrush), the analysis lacks sufficient integration and examination of sagebrush steppe restoration and rehabilitation. These issues seem to be an after thought, thrown in at the last minute and cobbled together as alternative D.

3-4 The complexities of sagebrush steppe restoration seem almost non-existent in the analysis. This is especially true when it comes to the impacts of restoration and rehabilitation through the use of chemical, mechanical and other treatments. The Affected Environment analysis (Chapter 3) is limited to a description / risk / opportunities assessment of the impacts/relationship of fire (Rx, wildfire and WFU) on resources.

3-4 There is no discussion of past rehabilitation or restoration efforts in the area and their success or problems. Likewise, it is unclear how treating every acre of cheat grass dominated landscape (in 10 years) will lead to restoration of the sagebrush steppe under this plan.

#### Mechanical and Chemical Treatments

3-5 These treatments are presented as a significant part of the overall strategy to treat land acres as part of the FMDA. However, there is no real analysis of these treatments. Appendix H is a very short description of some other broad (regional and national) agency guidance documents on these treatments. There is no specificity as to how these treatments will be used or prioritized in the Upper Snake River District.

3-6 For example, the criteria for establishing vegetation treatments (p 2-28) all have to do with location, not vegetation type, class, condition, likelihood of restoration and other key factors. There is no discussion of how to prioritize what treatment(s) will be used and in what circumstances. What constitutes successful restoration? How will prioritization be given to an area depending on the likelihood of it responding to a type of treatment?

3-7 Chemical and mechanical treatments should only be considered if it can be assured that they would - minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, air, or other resources of the public lands, and to prevent impairment of wilderness suitability; minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitats, and especially for protection of endangered or threatened species and their habitats; minimize impacts to recreational and other multiple uses of the same or neighboring public lands; and outside officially designated wilderness, primitive or wilderness study areas, and in natural areas only if the agency determines that will not adversely affect their natural, aesthetic, scenic, or other values for which such areas are valued.

#### Community Protection

The highest priority of fire management must be the protection of people and their homes, and management plans must be structured to support this goal.

3-8 As such, in reviewing the Analysis of Effects on Wildland-Urban Interface (4.3), we do not understand why the Alternatives would prescribe varying levels of treatment to reduce risk to at-risk communities. For example, as detailed in Table 4-31, Alternative B proposed treatment acres are less than half that of Alternative D and less than a fifth of the proposed treatments of Alternative C. As noted in section 4.3, alternatives C and D propose the highest amount of treatment acres and "therefore would make the most progress towards creating fire safe communities." Yet, alternative D, given its bias to maintaining or improving sage grouse habitat, would focus only on Low and Mid-elevation Shrub, Mountain Shrub, and Perennial and Annual Grass cover types.

3-8 We firmly believe that all alternatives should seek to unequivocally place community risk reduction as its foremost goal and prioritize planning and treatments accordingly. In the long term, it is not only the restoration of fire as a natural process that is contingent on safe communities, but the health and viability of ecosystems such as Sage Grouse habitat as well.

Please discuss how the final preferred alternative will maximize proposed treatments to reduce risk to communities-at-risk.

3-9 Prioritizing proposed treatments to target community risk reduction is also of great concern to The Wilderness Society. Has the BLM has taken a first step in narrowing the list of 145 communities at risk within the planning boundary to a short-list of communities at the highest risk of wildfire? It is worth noting that where communities at the highest risk in the Burley and Shoshone Field Offices have largely completed or are completing mitigation plans, none of the highest risk communities in the Idaho Falls or Pocatello Field Offices have completed mitigation plans.

3-10 We would suggest that for communities that have not yet developed detailed mitigation plans, the first step in designing a management plan that addresses fire is to identify the "Community Fire Planning Zone," the area around communities that should be managed for their protection. This zone is sometimes called the "wildland-urban interface," but we prefer the Community Fire Planning Zone (CFPZ) because it conveys the overriding objective of community protection. The CFPZ is that area in and around communities that should be examined for opportunities to improve public safety through infrastructure improvement and fuel treatment to protect homes. Within that zone, it will not be necessary to treat fuels everywhere, but quantifying the extent of that zone can help focus community protection efforts. Beyond the CFPZ, there may still be a need for fuel treatment, but the focus will be on ecological restoration, which may require different kinds of treatment.

3-11 It has been demonstrated that the most effective way to protect homes is to build them out of fire-resistant materials and aggressively reduce immediately adjacent fuels. The simple principle behind this notion is that homes will not burn if they do not ignite, regardless of what happens to the surrounding forest, and it is a very narrow "home ignitability zone" that determines whether a home will burn. Research by the U.S. Forest Service has shown that there are three primary mechanisms for home ignition. First, houses can ignite when shingles and siding are exposed to direct contact with flames from adjacent fuels, particularly flames carried in fine fuels, such as grasses, needles, leaves, and small branches. The second way homes can catch fire is through radiant heat from nearby flames elevating the temperature of structures themselves above their ignition thresholds. Third, the roofs of houses can ignite when exposed to showers of lofted embers. Fuel reduction treatments should focus on these three mechanisms of home ignition. By reducing fine fuels directly within the home ignitability zone, firefighters can prevent flames from reaching the house itself. By thinning small-diameter trees within 60 meters of homes, fire managers can reduce the potential for

radiant heat to ignite a home (Cohen and Butler 1998, Cohen 2000), and by building rooftops out of non-flammable materials, fire risk to homes can also be drastically reduced. Together, these three mechanisms for home ignition can be prevented by focusing on the area directly around individual structures within the home ignitability zone.

3-11 While structure protection demands a focus on the immediate vicinity of the home, there are reasons why treatments may be extended beyond 60 meters. Communities may wish to create “defensible space” within which firefighters may work safely, or they may wish to thin trees to reduce the probability of crown fire in order to protect scenic views or watershed quality. Nowicki (2002) applied rules of thumb developed by fire physicists and fire safety personnel to conclude that community protection zones of 400 meters could provide an area that would allow firefighters to work safely to protect structures. The calculations assumed that an adequate safety zone would be four times the maximum sustained flame length of a crown fire, where the length of a crown fire flame may be twice the height of the forest canopy. Since few communities are surrounded by forests with trees exceeding 50 meters (165 feet) in height, the study arrived at the estimate of 400 meters, or approximately one-quarter mile as an adequate “buffer” width within which to plan fuel treatments.

3-11 In 2003, The Wilderness Society released the report, *The Wildland Fire Challenge* (Aplet and Wilmer 2003) that suggested that a buffer distance of a half-mile may be necessary to provide the latitude needed to adjust community fire planning zones to terrain, taking advantage of natural fuel breaks such as cliffs and rock outcrops. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 generally endorses the half-mile distance but allows that there may be times when the provisions of the law should be extended to 1.5 miles to account for steep slopes, natural fuel breaks, or particularly dangerous fuel conditions. While there may occasionally be situations that require extension of the CFPZ to distances greater than  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile, we encourage the BLM generally to employ a CFPZ up to one-half mile beyond communities.

3-11 If there are situations where extending the width of the CFPZ helps improve community safety, it may fairly be asked here, “Why limit the width of the CFPZ at all?” The answer is that management for community protection may compromise other resource objectives. Treating fuels to protect homes may result in unnatural vegetative conditions that compromise wildlife habitat, water quality, and aesthetics. It is therefore important to limit the CFPZ to the area where it will do the most good to protect homes. Narrowing the width of the CFPZ also helps to focus limited resources (money, personnel) where they will have the greatest impact.

3-11 It is important to emphasize here that this logic does not argue for clearing a half-mile buffer around every community. Rather, the CFPZ is the area within which to look for *opportunities* to treat fuels to protect homes. Not every type of vegetation will need to be treated, and there are some vegetation types, such as chaparral and subalpine forest, within which thinning will be only marginally effective at lowering the probability of

crown fire. There, the focus must be on ensuring that assets are constructed of fire-resistant building materials rather than on treating fuels.

Management within the CFPZ consists of actions that minimize the threat of fire to homes. Obviously, paramount among those actions is aggressive suppression when fires start. The CFPZ is a place where, ideally, fire is excluded. This task is enhanced by sufficient suppression infrastructure, such as hydrants and access roads, as well as suppression forces ready to attack at a moment's notice. It is also enhanced by fuel treatments, such as mowing and pruning, that minimize fine fuels that contribute to rapid fire spread.

Fire exclusion, however is only an unachievable ideal. We will never be able to keep fire out of the CFPZ completely. Accordingly, precautions must be taken so that, when fire does eventually burn, that fire poses a minimal risk to homes. Such precautions include reducing tree density (thinning) to reduce the heat output during fires. Reducing heat output may keep homes from igniting and give firefighters the space they need to protect structures. Fortunately, many of these precautions have been formalized for public education through programs such as FIREWISE.

Historian Stephen Pyne (2003) has called fire in the CFPZ “a dumb problem to have” because it is preventable. Within the CFPZ, we know what must be done to minimize fire risk; we simply need the will to do it. Pyne imagines a future in which

“...good sense prevails and the frontier reaches an equilibrium in which a working replacement of a rural landscape emerges. Although no doubt shaped by urban values this replacement will be a lived-in landscape, one that finds people as active agents in shaping the fire regime of their surroundings, not simply passive victims and whining litigants.”

3-11 Becoming an “active agent” can be achieved in two ways. First, homeowners must manage their property to minimize risks to their homes and their neighbors. Second, community members, including the Bureau of Land Management (and the Forest Service) can work together across ownerships to develop plans that meet community fire protection needs. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process, described in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, provides an excellent opportunity for citizens and agency managers to work together to achieve common goals for the CFPZ. The BLM should be part of every CWPP process involving communities whose CFPZ overlaps with BLM managed lands. Where these processes have not already begun, we encourage the BLM to take the lead in pulling stakeholders together to develop these plans.

#### Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) Assessment

3-12 Our analysis of the condition class approach shows that the data needed to assess the condition of vegetated landscapes are not available and that while the concepts behind mapping efforts are sound, at least for some vegetation types, they cannot be applied to existing data. Too little is known about historical and current vegetation conditions,

especially vegetation structure, and the scale of available data is too coarse to produce accurate and meaningful results.

3-12 Reviewing the DEIS confirms these reservations about the FRCC assessment approach in general. Not only are assumptions used in the model expert opinion and therefore speculative, precious little site-specific research on the historic range of variability (HRV) is offered to provide any sort of context for assessment results. We believe that until the data “required by the methodology” are compiled, any results from applying that methodology should be viewed with skepticism.

3-12 We therefore would ask that BLM discuss in far greater detail the data used in the FRCC Assessment, where applicable data was lacking, how these data gaps were accounted for, and the extent to which site-specific scientific research and analysis either supports or contradicts assumptions made.

### Wilderness Resources

3-13 The Wilderness Society is concerned about wilderness resources and the potential implications of this plan to those wilderness resources. When considering actions in WSAs (Wilderness Study Areas), lands with wilderness characteristics<sup>1</sup> (WC), or eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) the lands should maintain the attributes of naturalness (similarity to the natural ecological variability) and wildness (freedom from human control, i.e., “untrammeled”). A dilemma arises when managers consider manipulating wilderness or proposed wilderness to restore natural conditions; wildness (untrammeled conditions) is compromised for naturalness (natural conditions). Although we recognize that there may be circumstances which would require treating WSAs, lands with wilderness character, and Wild and Scenic Rivers, we do place a high burden of proof on those proposals and actions.

### Treatments in Wilderness Study Areas, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, and Wild and Scenic Rivers

We suggest that two threshold questions must be answered before intervention/treatment/restoration should be undertaken in WSAs, WC, or WSR.

1. *Is* intervention/treatment/restoration appropriate in this case?  
If this is answered affirmatively, then the “minimum requirement question
2. *What* intervention is appropriate in this case?

Usually, the first threshold can quickly be accepted or rejected by the application of a procedural screen: For example, “What does the IMP allow for fire treatment, restoration, etc?”

In order to address the first threshold, a set of questions must next be asked that evaluate context. They examine the role of the WSA, WC, or WSR in the larger system:

---

<sup>1</sup> According to current BLM policy (IM 2003-274), The BLM may continue to inventory public lands for resources or other values, including wilderness characteristics, as a part of managing the public lands and land use planning

1. Is the WSA, WC, or WSR itself a large landscape ecosystem that is on a clear trajectory of degradation that will continue without human intervention?
2. Is the WSA, WC, or WSR critical to the function of the larger ecosystem outside the WSA, and is its unnatural condition a threat to the integrity of the larger landscape?
3. Are there especially rare or valued elements within the WSA, WC, or WSR that are at risk without intervention?

A possible example might be action taken to control weed invasions in the 2.3 million acre Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho. Much of the lowland country surrounding “the Frank” is highly degraded by weeds, and many people would view it as a tragedy if such degradation spread to the wilderness. Taking action there may be necessary to protect a vast ecosystem. Some of the WSAs in the planning area are relatively small in comparison (160 – 9700 acres) and would not qualify as a landscape ecosystem by itself.

3-13 The second question refers to WSA, WC, or WSR that are so degraded or so important that their degradation is a threat to a larger ecosystem. An example might be an abandoned mine that is poisoning an entire downstream ecosystem. There, reclamation and restoration may be justified due to the magnitude of the threat.

We strongly believe that before we “trammel” the wilderness resources, we need to be sure that conditions are on a deteriorating course that will get worse without our help. Therefore, what criteria will the BLM use as a baseline for determining that conditions within WSAs, WC, or WSR are on a deteriorating course?

#### Use of Minimum Tools

Of particular importance in this plan will be the use of minimum tools in WSAs, proposed wilderness and lands with wilderness characteristics. For example, strong arguments can be made for non-mechanized thinning in proposed wilderness areas, as dense thickets of small trees are unnatural artifacts of anthropogenic fire suppression (Fulé, 2002), the anomalously intense fires they may fuel would be equally unnatural (Allen and others, 2002), and the natural fires that thinning would facilitate would soon burn remnant stems and slash destroying any evidence of “trammeling”. Similarly strong arguments can be made in defense of wildness attributes.

3-13 When conducting vegetation treatments within WSAs, WCs, or WSR BLM should minimize use of tools according to BLM Manual H-8550-1 Interim Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review. The plan (FMDA) states that “Method of application and equipment used would be carefully planned”. In the context of this plan we ask, what does this mean? Will the BLM Field Office consult with wilderness staff? Will a minimum tool analysis be conducted?

#### Wild and Scenic Rivers

In reviewing this document it was unclear whether or not BLM can assure the public that the decisions made from the final plan will not affect the field office’s ability to manage

3-14 11 stream segments that have been identified eligible for future suitability studies for Wild and Scenic River designation and whether or not any actions, i.e. restoration would affect that suitability study.

It seems fundamental that the following questions should be clearly answered in relationship to the FMDA. What will the agency do prior to treating an area identified eligible for a WSR study or directly adjacent to? Will you consider minimum tool analysis?

#### Treatments in Wilderness Study Areas

3-15 Aside from using the FRCC model, we would like to know what other scientific data was analyzed and included in the decision found in Alt. C that states plant communities outside of vegetated lava (approx. 50% of WSAs) are 6.7 times more likely to receive treatment. Additionally, what evidence and/or scientific data exists that proves such treatments will actually restore the area to a "more" natural state, thus maintaining or enhancing the wilderness values of the area?

We have similar concerns with Alt. D. Again, aside from using the FRCC model, what other scientific data was analyzed and included in the decision found in Alt. D that states plant communities outside of vegetated lava (approx. 50% of WSAs) are 6.1 times more likely to receive treatment. What evidence and/or scientific data exists that proves such treatments will actually restore the area to a "more" natural state, thus maintaining or enhancing the wilderness values of the area?

3-15 The document assumes that treatments that would occur in the vicinity or within WSAs and effects would be positive. Again, we assert that a high burden of proof of need is necessary before any treatment is done within these areas. We question whether or not there is significant scientific data that proves restoration to this particular ecosystem with such a large footprint would be successful. Where else has such a large scale restoration action in a similar ecosystem been successful? It also brings us to ask, do you know, and with what relative certainty, that treatments to WSAs will maintain or enhance the wilderness values of the area?

3-15 We recommend that before acting in WSAs, WCs, or WSR, treatments should be done in adjacent areas of appropriate size and with similar vegetation type using minimal tool techniques and methods. The area then needs to be closely monitored over a period of time that would allow for verification of success and effectiveness of treatment

3-14 Although use of earth-moving equipment may be used in WSAs, per approval of field office manager, what is the line of communication established to assure that those uses would not be done before approval from FO manager?

#### Potential Impacts to Wilderness Resources Due to Treatment

As an example, restricting motorized use to existing roads for prescribed burning and fuel reduction operations (excepting emergencies) in these areas must not be compromised. Despite the relative harshness of the climate, the soils, vegetation, and wildlife of the

3-14 landscape have proven to be, in many cases, extremely fragile. Allowing vehicles to travel off-road in all but the rarest of emergency circumstances is ill-advised in that obliteration of such routes, once their use has been fulfilled, is anything but certain. In addition, off-road travel, once begun for whatever purpose, would be all but impossible to manage after the fact. Such illegal travel would not only further fragment the landscape, it may very well also increase fire danger through exhaust sparks and heat.

#### Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve

3-16 The Wilderness Society provided the following comments in July of 2004 to the BLM and National Park Service in response to the Draft EIS Management Plan. Development of a fire plan for the monument lands must be part of the comprehensive planning process. Protection of existing native habitat, especially sagebrush, should be identified as a top priority in fire situations. Whether a wild fire or a prescribed burn, all areas should be reseeded with native plants and adequately rested from livestock grazing and recreation use to allow native plant establishment and lessen the spread of weeds. No new crested wheat grass seedlings or other exotic species should be used to restore native habitat.

3-17 The BLM and NPS should work to establish their own, local seed sources from within the monument. Areas should be identified (possibly Laidlaw Park) where select removal of a desired species seed will not impact the current location, but will provide native seed to another location if none is available from the usual DOI sources.

3-17 The monument plan should identify as one of its primary goals, restoration and maintenance of native vegetation on all lands altered by fire or other disturbance.

3-18 Restoration should be conducted using only native species. Specific timelines for restoration, revegetation and rest should be included in the management plan. The management plan should also include a timeline for revegetation and/or restoration to natural conditions of all "user-created" motorized routes in the monument.

#### Livestock Grazing

3-19 The FMDA analysis of effects on livestock grazing and management is flawed. It specifically estimates the loss of revenue to the BLM in the form of grazing fees associated with the impacted AUMs. The analysis even goes on to estimate the cost of leasing private land and purchasing hay to replace lost AUMs. However, there is no estimate or attempt to quantify in any monetary way the funds saved by BLM in administering these AUMs and associated resource impacts.

#### Alternative C versus Alternative D

As noted in the DEIS, of the several issues that were identified during the scoping process, two in particular were deemed appropriate for additional analysis. These are: 1) questions concerning fulfillment of Cohesive Strategy objectives and 2) impacts to Sage Grouse habitat and population.

We are concerned that the analysis conducted and conclusions drawn from these specific issues unnecessarily set the two alternatives (Alt. C and Alt. D) as contrary to one

3-20 another. That is, the analysis leads to the conclusion that the FMDA can *either* fulfill the objectives outlined in the Cohesive Strategy *or* it can address Sage Grouse habitat restoration but not both. This dichotomy fragments rather than promotes the plan amendment's purpose and need of promoting comprehensive fire management.

3-21 We are specifically concerned that the agency's preferred alternative- D- would unnecessarily restrict the discretion of local land managers to use the process of fire- either through prescribed fire or as Wildland Fire Use- to achieve land management goals in the short and long term.

3-21 If a specific landscape area is deemed in Alternative D as not suitable for the use of fire as a management tool, what provisions within the Alternative would allow managers the discretion to use fire in future years when and where the landscape has been sufficiently restored to a degree where the use of fire does not pose undue risk to habitat components?

3-22 When examining the summary of alternatives table (Table S.3), we note with some frustration that projected treatment levels over a 10-year planning period allow for the possibility of up to 3 times the potential use of fire- prescribed and WFU- as a viable management tool under Alternative C than in Alternative D. This disparity results in the expectation that over 4.3 million acres will be treated using non-fire vegetation treatments over that same time period in Alternative D. Suffice to say, by overruling the possibility of the use of fire as a management tool on so broad a landscape unnecessarily commits BLM to using a non-fire vegetation management approach on an unrealistic scale.

Does BLM currently have the capacity to address non-fire fuel treatments over up to 4.3 million acres?

3-23 Following this same line of thought, it seems irresponsible of the BLM to carry forward and analyze an alternative described as alternative C, not "limited by existing operations capabilities and resources". The figures represented in alternative C do not seem to be realistic or even achievable as target figures.

In conclusion, The Wilderness Society holds as a core value that the "freedom from human control," and the humility it represents, is an essential quality of wilderness that cannot be tossed aside in the interest of maintaining naturalness. At the same time, we are not willing to stand idly by and watch the natural quality of wilderness quality lands degrade through neglect. However, the importance of maintaining "the freedom of the wilderness" demands a high burden of proof from those who seek to intervene on behalf of naturalness.

Sincerely,

Lahsha Johnston, Regional Conservation Associate

Management Direction Plan Amendment (FMDA). The Department of Energy (DOE) has informally provided input to BLM during the development of the EIS as it pertains to the Idaho National Laboratory site. If, however, you believe a more formal comment document is required, please don't hesitate to contact me at (208) 526-5053 and I will make the appropriate arrangements.

Jack Depperschmidt  
NEPA Compliance Officer  
DOE, Idaho Operations Office

<<Comments on the November 2004 Fire.doc>>

(See attached file: Comments on the November 2004 Fire.doc)

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cyberzono@netscap  
e.net

02/10/2005 06:51  
AM

ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov,  
kfite@juno.com,  
jrandall@lightcom.net

To

cc

Subject  
Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation  
EIS

4

\*\*\*Please acknowledge receipt\*\*\*\*

Eric Limbach  
FMDA Project Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204

10-Feb-05

Dear Eric,

I am writing concerning the Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement November 2004.  
4-1

Amazingly, no alternative addresses livestock grazing in other than cursory manner. Vegetation communities are shaped by climate, soils and disturbance regimes (Pianka 1983); and live stock grazing is a disturbance (Noss and Cooperrider 1994, Fleischner 1994) that is responsible for changes that: predispose landscapes to fire (West 1999), create impoverished soils (Belknap et. al. 2001) and the presence of cheat grass (Leopold 1949), without returning a meaningful economic benefit to the American public (Frewing-Runyon 1995).  
4-1

The Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement November 2004 is extremely flawed because it does not address the ubiquitous disturbance of livestock (Wuerthner and Matteson 2002). Meaningful, cost effective Fire, Fuels, and

Related Vegetation Management will not occur without examining the entire disturbance regime and being willing to make changes.

I have kept these comments extremely simplistic for reasons of clarity. If you require further explanation of how the major commercial permitted use of BLM lands in the USRD impacts the vegetative, soil, and water resources the industry exploits, need a more extensive bibliography so you can read up on grazing processes and impacts, or require a guided tour of BLM lands so you can see this landscape for yourself; please don't hesitate to get in touch. I would greatly enjoy the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way in the process of saving the public lands I love.

Thank you,

Kent Fothergill  
Conservation Committee, Prairie Falcon Audubon  
780 Falls Avenue #159  
Twin Falls, ID 83316

PS. Bibliography for this letter below.

CC: WWP, PFA

Belknap J, Hilty-Kaltenecker J, Rosentreter R, Williams J, Leonard S, Eldridge D. 2001. Biological Soil Crusts: Ecology and Management. Technical Reference 1730-2. Denver, CO: USDI. 110 p.

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5



"Depperschmidt, Jack D"  
<depperjd@id.doe.gov>

02/07/2005 10:15 AM

To <ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Comments on the Draft FMDA EIS

Attn: Eric Limbach:

I have attached comments on the Draft Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment (FMDA). The Department of Energy (DOE) has informally provided input to BLM during the development of the EIS as it pertains to the Idaho National Laboratory site. If, however, you believe a more formal comment document is required, please don't hesitate to contact me at (208) 526-5053 and I will make the appropriate arrangements.

Jack Depperschmidt  
NEPA Compliance Officer  
DOE, Idaho Operations Office

<<Comments on the November 2004 Fire.doc>>



Comments on the November 2004 Fire.doc

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BOZEMAN, MONTANA  
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2/7/05

**Comments on the November 2004 Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

- 5-1 1. Global document change: replace "Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL)" with "Idaho National Laboratory (INL)" and, naturally, "INEEL" with "INL."
- 5-2 2. The primary goal of Alternative D must be no net loss of sagebrush habitat. Areas where sagebrush has already been removed should be restored to a self-sustaining sagebrush community before areas containing even marginal sagebrush communities are "treated." To do otherwise, results in losing more sagebrush habitat without ensuring habitat is being restored in the short term (i.e. less than 20 years).
- 5-3 3. It is not appropriate to consider all sagebrush types as equally responsive to treatment and restorations activities. A condition should be included in the EIS for all alternatives that stipulates, "No treatments should occur in sagebrush communities dominated by wyoming big sagebrush unless a there is a funded plan to aggressively re-establish with seedlings." Those communities do not appear to re-establish very well by simply reseeded or natural processes. Do not manage Wyoming big sagebrush communities like mountain sagebrush communities that appear to re-establish more readily after treatments. Generally, those two communities types show completely different responses after a fire. This comment relates to comment 2.
- 5-4 4. Replace the entire section 1.8.3 Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory with the following:

**1.8.3 Idaho National Laboratory (INL)**

*The INL is located entirely within the administrative boundary of the District. The U.S. Department of Energy, Idaho Operations Office (NE-ID) and the BLM both have management responsibilities within the INL boundaries, as identified in a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). While most INL activities are overseen by NE-ID, certain responsibilities, such as grazing management, remain with the BLM. The INL has primary responsibility for suppressing wildland fires within it's administrative boundaries, and BLM provides mutual aid for wildland response.*

*In April 2003, NE-ID completed a wildland fire management environmental assessment that detailed the environmental impacts of various wildland fire management strategies. In August 2004, BLM, in cooperation with NE-ID, completed the Final Management Plan and Environmental Assessment for the INEEL Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem Reserve located within the INL boundary. NE-ID is supportive of the BLM's fire management planning effort and agrees that describing the INL lands in the District planning document would be beneficial to the two agencies and interested publics.*

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IDAHO FIELD OFFICE  
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*As identified in the 2003 MOU, the District will consult with NE-ID prior to making any final decisions regarding wildland fire suppression and control that might affect the INL.*

- 5-5 5. Section 2.2, first paragraph, last sentence; change "TNEEL" to "NE-ID."
- 5-6 6. Page 2.11, Section 2.4.3.3.2, under subheading "Livestock Grazing". The first sentence is not appropriate for Alternative D, the preferred alternative. To adequately address Issue 2, the first sentence needs to read; "All RxFire treatment areas would be rested from livestock grazing until vegetation establishment and resource objectives are achieved." This does not disallow grazing, it simply requires a healthy system exists before resuming grazing.

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January 28, 2005

**DIRK KEMPTHORNE**  
governor

Eric Limbach, FDMA Project Manager  
Pocatello Field Office  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204

**Robert L. Meinen**  
director

RE: Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan  
Amendment and DEIS

**Dean Sangrey, Administrator**  
operations division

Dear Mr. Limbach:

**Jane Wright, Acting Administrator**  
management services division

The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation reviewed the Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and DEIS. The plan amendments serve as the management strategy for fire, fuels and related vegetation in the field offices for the next 15 years.

IDAHO PARK AND RECREATION  
BOARD

**Steve Klatt**  
region one

The DEIS identifies Alternative D as the preferred alternative. This alternative emphasizes retaining and enhancing sagebrush habitat.

**Randal F. Rice**  
region two

6-1

Plan amendments generally are strategic in nature. It is hard to quantify the impacts that Alternative D or the other alternatives would have on recreation. As you know, recreation activities can be temporarily displaced by wildfire recovery efforts or vegetative treatments.

**Ernest J. Lombard**  
region three

**Latham Williams**  
region four

6-2

6-3

The DEIS mentions off-highway vehicles in Section 3.10.1.5 on page 3-72. The DEIS uses an outdated reference for the increase in Motorbike/ATV Registrations. The FEIS should also compare use in the planning area, not statewide.

**Jean S. McDevitt**  
region five

6-2

**Douglas A. Hancey**  
region six

Our registration records show (see attachment) that Motorbike/ATV registrations increased 155.9% in South Central Idaho, 129.1% in Southeast Idaho, and 162.8% in East Idaho from 1999 to 2003. South Central and East Idaho had a higher percentage increase than the statewide increase of 131.9%.

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF PARKS  
AND RECREATION

p.o. box 83720  
boise, idaho 83720-0065

6-3

Section 4.10 analyzes the effects this amendment would have on recreation resources. 4.10.1 assumes that wildland fire or prescribed fire would expose previously hidden recreational resources that could become subject to unmanaged use.

(208) 334-4199

fax (208) 334-3741

6-3

This assumption would only hold true if the BLM failed to manage recreation use. Most recently burned areas have a temporary recreation use closure. If the Field Offices properly sign, educate and enforce the closure, the previously hidden recreation resources could remain unused.

tdd 1-800-377-3529

The rest of Section 4.10 is accurate in its recreation resource analysis.

street address

5657 Warm Springs Avenue

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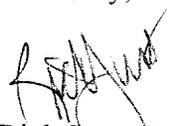
6-4

In our review of the other parts of the DEIS, we found old references that need to be updated. For instance, on Page 4-129, the DEIS states "The Sawtooth National Forest is currently revising its Forest Plan," The Sawtooth National Forest has already revised its Forest Plan.

It seems the plan and DEIS writers used other BLM plans and EISs to write various sections. Plan writers need to closely look at these references to make sure they are not outdated.

In the long run, we believe that Alternative D will help improve recreation opportunities by restoring sagebrush communities. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this DEIS. If you have any questions about these comments, contact Jeff Cook, Outdoor Recreation Analyst at (208) 334-4180 ext. 230.

Sincerely,



Rick Just, Coordinator  
Comprehensive Planning, Research and Review

Enclosure

# IDAHO ATV REGISTRATION STATISTICS 1999 - 2003

County	1999 Registrations	2000 Registrations	2001 Registrations	2002 Registrations	2003 Registrations	1999-2003 % Change
Benewah	403	461	517	901	955	137.0%
Bonner	436	625	762	1,051	1,307	199.8%
Boundary	47	52	108	174	243	417.0%
Kootenai	1,601	2,054	2,454	3,457	4,037	152.2%
Shoshone	472	576	599	834	972	105.9%
<b>North Idaho Total</b>	<b>2,959</b>	<b>3,768</b>	<b>4,440</b>	<b>6,417</b>	<b>7,514</b>	<b>153.9%</b>
Clearwater	350	480	526	675	743	112.3%
Idaho	471	615	708	941	1,095	132.5%
Latah	649	945	976	1,172	1,281	97.4%
Lewis	199	260	271	351	432	117.1%
Nez Perce	1,392	1,461	1,588	1,917	2,153	54.7%
<b>North Central Total</b>	<b>3,061</b>	<b>3,761</b>	<b>4,069</b>	<b>5,056</b>	<b>5,704</b>	<b>86.3%</b>
Ada	3,848	4,696	5,638	7,245	8,188	112.8%
Adams	129	191	233	281	294	127.9%
Boise	164	225	325	452	482	193.9%
Canyon	2,137	2,498	3,174	4,672	5,396	152.5%
Elmore	310	382	470	665	782	152.3%
Gem	557	657	712	957	1,047	88.0%
Owyhee	194	240	273	427	496	155.7%
Payette	416	585	654	897	1,003	141.1%
Valley	358	407	436	561	661	84.6%
Washington	171	241	238	366	414	142.1%
<b>Southwest Total</b>	<b>8,284</b>	<b>10,122</b>	<b>12,153</b>	<b>16,523</b>	<b>18,763</b>	<b>126.5%</b>
Blaine	171	245	292	423	483	182.5%
Camas	10	25	35	45	49	390.0%
Cassia	298	431	480	668	803	169.5%
Gooding	231	307	321	533	607	162.8%
Jerome	316	419	502	667	761	140.8%
Lincoln	51	87	148	192	207	305.9%
Minidoka	319	467	516	744	872	173.4%
Twin Falls	994	1,191	1,409	1,948	2,335	134.9%
<b>South Central Total</b>	<b>2,390</b>	<b>3,172</b>	<b>3,703</b>	<b>5,220</b>	<b>6,117</b>	<b>155.9%</b>
Bannock	1,297	1,633	1,895	2,622	2,903	123.8%
Bear Lake	379	507	571	782	878	131.7%
Bingham	777	1,025	1,268	1,744	2,128	173.9%
Caribou	399	470	489	647	691	73.2%
Franklin	468	529	712	904	983	110.0%
Oneida	90	137	160	209	215	138.9%
Power	102	143	152	204	248	143.1%
<b>Southeast Total</b>	<b>3,512</b>	<b>4,444</b>	<b>5,247</b>	<b>7,112</b>	<b>8,046</b>	<b>129.1%</b>
Bonneville	1,450	1,592	2,145	2,973	3,441	137.3%
Butte	74	90	131	191	228	208.1%
Clark	9	9	15	12	23	155.6%
Custer	134	148	161	244	283	111.2%
Fremont	246	307	371	567	727	195.5%
Jefferson	532	669	688	1,018	1,237	132.5%
Lemhi	81	74	213	353	452	458.0%
Madison	299	363	529	733	998	233.8%
Teton	50	75	95	124	166	232.0%
<b>East Total</b>	<b>2,875</b>	<b>3,327</b>	<b>4,348</b>	<b>6,215</b>	<b>7,555</b>	<b>162.8%</b>
Out of State	1,126	1,654	1,947	2,364	2,444	117.1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>24,207</b>	<b>30,248</b>	<b>35,907</b>	<b>48,907</b>	<b>56,143</b>	<b>131.9%</b>

Note: These registration numbers are not absolutely definitive. This table includes only registered all-terrain vehicles. The previous IDPR Registration System counted any change of registration as a new registration, creating some duplication. There is also varying yearly compliance rates.

Source: IDPR Recreation  
Registration Information  
System

Prepared by Jeff Cook,  
Outdoor Recreation Analyst 7/15/04

**SOUTH CENTRAL  
SUPERVISORY AREA**  
329 Washington Street  
Gooding ID 83330  
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Dick Kempthorne, Governor  
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Keith Johnson, State Controller  
Marilyn Howard, Sup't of Public Instruction

February 8, 2005

Bureau of Land Management  
Attn: Eric Limbach  
FMDA Project Manager  
4350 Cliffs Dr.  
Pocatello, ID 83204

Dear Eric:

We have reviewed the Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement and have the following comments.

- E
- 7-1 In general we would support Alternative D. This alternative would apparently treat the greatest acreage overall. We are in full agreement with the proposal to use non-native
  - 7-2 "place holder" species where the risk of invasion by undesirable species is high. We encourage the Bureau of use grazing when possible to manipulate fuels and reduce undesirable species. This may be a way of reducing the number of AUMs that are
  - 7-3 actually temporarily reduced while still achieving a desirable end.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment we now look forward to implementation.

Sincerely,

TIMOTHY C. DUFFNER  
Area Supervisor

C: Tracy Berhens  
Bob Brammer

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2005 JAN -7 AM 11:07

BUREAU OF LAND MGMT.  
POCATELLO FIELD OFFICE  
POCATELLO ID

January 5, 2005

 **University of Idaho**  
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences  
**Cooperative Extension System**  
Twin Falls R&E Center  
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Bureau of Land Management  
FMDA Project Manager  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
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Attn: Eric Limbach:

I wish to offer the following comments on the Draft Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement for the former Upper Snake River District.

8-1 While I found many statements in the details of the plan that I question from a scientific standpoint and personal experience, I certainly support the need for amending the 12 existing land use plans to incorporate a fire, fuels and vegetation management plan. I think the BLM has chosen the correct approach in writing a general guidance plan for the 8-2 District, but leaving the details to be determined on a site specific basis.

8-3 I support the proposed alternative over the other three. I believe it is more realistic, in terms of what can be accomplished, given the time-frame, manpower, and budget available. I question alternative D being identified as the preferred alternative. I feel it is based on false assumptions of what it will do for sage grouse and to identify it as the 8-4 USRD's preferred alternative only sets you up for protests/litigation. Alternative A has not worked in stopping the spread of invasive species or reducing the frequency of 8-8 wildfires, thus it is unacceptable.

A 8-5 One of my concerns with the plan is the emphasis on reseeding native species. I do not believe the low success that has been achieved in seeding natives justifies the expense. I have seen examples of what the USRD considers successful native grass seedings, but I have yet to see one that I would consider a success. The primary objectives in reseeding following a fire should be: 1) preventing soil erosion and 2) establishment of perennial vegetation that has a chance of out competing annual grasses (cheatgrass and medusahead wildrye). If that means seeding an introduced grass (i.e. crested wheatgrass), and it does on the more arid rangelands (in my experience, <12 inches), then that is what should be seeded. For all practical purposes, crested wheatgrass should be considered a naturalized species, rather than an exotic, in the low elevation shrub/annual grass areas.

B 8-6 I question that BLM guidance "dictates" no grazing for two growing seasons following a fire. While guidance may "recommend" such, I have it on pretty good authority that it does not "dictate" a minimum of two growing seasons rest. In some cases, it may be advantageous to timely graze the first spring after the fire to prevent cheatgrass from

going to seed. In a review of scientific literature, it appears questionable that grazing after seed ripe the first year after seeding is necessarily detrimental to the perennial grasses and in some cases it may be beneficial. I refer you to a paper I wrote in 2000 on "How Long Should Rangelands Be Rested from Livestock Grazing Following a Fire?" that can be found at the website: <http://www.cnr.uidaho.edu/range/> under publications.

8-7

I was initially concerned that the document did not recognize that there are thousands of acres in the USRD where sagebrush density is greater than it should be for any use, including sage grouse habitat and that it poses a high fire risk, once it gets started burning. However, I was pleased to see that both the Shoshone and Burley resource areas did indicate that they had such areas that needed to be treated.

Again, I support your proposed alternative and appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Kenneth D. Sanders, Professor

Since cheatgrass generally initiates growth earlier in the spring than crested wheatgrass (or other perennial bunchgrasses), competition from the cheatgrass might be reduced with livestock grazing in the spring, before the perennial seedlings have made sufficient growth to be grazed.

The final criteria for successful seed germination and establishment is adequate seed coverage. All perennial grasses require some seed coverage by mineral soil before the seed can germinate. However, cheatgrass can germinate and become established lying on top of the soil, again giving it a competitive advantage. It is widely accepted by those with experience in seeding rangelands that aerial broadcasting of seed on burned areas at lower elevations is seldom successful and it is only slightly more successful at the higher elevations. The greater success at higher elevations is probably related to a deeper ash layer to cover the seed and more available moisture. Why is aerial broadcasting seldom successful at lower elevations? The most likely cause is inadequate seed coverage, especially when the area is placed off limits to livestock grazing for two or more growing seasons. The principles of rest-rotation grazing, developed by Gus Hormay (1961) and widely applied throughout the Intermountain Region and the Pacific Northwest, especially the treatment of grazing after seed ripe to get seed coverage applies to burned areas as well as low condition rangelands.

The argument can be made that in some cases it might be better to graze the first year following fire. When there is an adequate stand of perennial bunchgrasses surviving a fire, grazing after seed ripe may enhance the establishment of new plants through seed coverage. However, if the perennial plants were in low vigor prior to the fire, then the area should probably be rested for the entire first year. Those species more

susceptible to fire (i.e. Idaho fescue, needle-and-thread) should also be rested the first year. Following the principles of rest-rotation grazing, if there are abundant seedlings the second spring and average or above spring precipitation, the area should probably be rested that entire grazing season to give the seedlings a chance to become established. Second, on lower elevation rangelands faced with heavy competition from annual grasses, consideration should be given to grazing the burned area early the first spring or two to reduce competition from the annuals with perennial grass seedlings.

A blanket policy of withholding livestock grazing on a burned area for two or more growing seasons is open to question. The decision to graze or not to graze the first year following the fire may vary from one pasture to another within an allotment, depending on the many variables affecting plant survival, growth and reproduction. Because of the many variables involved, such decisions should be made on a case by case basis.

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ID. Idaho State Office, USDI-BLM, Boise, ID.

# HOW LONG SHOULD RANGELANDS BE RESTED FROM LIVESTOCK GRAZING FOLLOWING A FIRE?

## A Viewpoint

Kenneth D. Sanders, Professor  
Rangeland Ecology & Management  
University of Idaho

September 13, 2000 (Revised 10/12/00)

Some land management agencies have a general policy that rangelands are to be rested from grazing for at least two growing seasons following fire. Many range scientists and range managers, including myself, question this policy. There are three reasons commonly cited for a post-burn rest from grazing: recovery of residual plants, regeneration of desirable plant species and accumulation of litter for soil stability. The effect of fire on plant survival and regeneration depends on several variables, including plant species, season of the fire, intensity of the fire, vigor of the plants prior to the fire, associated species and climatic conditions during and following the fire. Soil stability varies by soil type, topography and climatic conditions. Therefore, a more reasonable approach would be to decide on a pasture by pasture basis whether to graze the year following the fire or to rest the pasture for two or more growing seasons. This paper is not intended as an exhaustive literature review, but rather, as a starting point for on-the-ground discussions between land managers and livestock permittees in the coming year.

I will limit my discussion to the effect on major perennial grass species of the sagebrush-grasslands in the Intermountain Region. The late Henry Wright, widely regarded as the preeminent rangeland fire ecologist of the western U.S., discussed fire effects on this vegetation type (Wright 1985). He reported that fire effect on grasses is largely dependent on growth form and season of burning. Bunchgrasses with densely

clustered culms and lots of leaf tissue (Idaho fescue and needle-and-thread) are more susceptible to damage by fire and are slower to recover because they will burn longer and hotter than those without dense culms and less leaf tissue (wheatgrasses). The latter burn quickly with little heat transfer below the soil surface. Rhizomatous grasses (thickspike and western wheatgrasses) tolerate fire well, as does Indian ricegrass. June and July is the most detrimental season to burn bunchgrasses, with spring burns less detrimental than fall burns.

In reviewing research on how long it takes for bunchgrass production to return to preburn levels, Wright (1985) reported that bluebunch wheatgrass will recover in 1 to 3 years; Idaho fescue 2 or more years; and needlegrasses 3 or more years, all depending on soil moisture, season and intensity of the fire. But what is the effect of grazing on perennial grasses the first season after they burn? Jirik and Bunting (1994) examined the response of bluebunch wheatgrass and bottlebrush squirreltail grass to post-fire defoliation at two locations in southern Idaho. They found that late season defoliation (after seedset) the first year after burning did not significantly reduce the vigor of either grass species. Production, basal area and tiller numbers of bluebunch wheatgrass were not affected by late season defoliation, despite two years of below normal precipitation following the fire. Squirreltail grass was slightly more sensitive to late

season defoliation than bluebunch wheatgrass. Early season defoliation (during the boot phenological stage) the first year after burning did reduce vigor of the two grasses. Bunting et al. (1998) found that early-season defoliation the first year after fire resulted in plant mortality as high as 50% for Idaho fescue and 70% for bluebunch wheatgrass in a study in northern Idaho. However, the effects were lessened when defoliation was delayed one growing season after the fire.

Uresk et al. (1980) reported an increase in vegetative growth and superior reproductive performance in bluebunch wheatgrass during the first post-burn season. Patton et al. (1988) also found greater seed production of bluebunch wheatgrass on 2 out of 4 one-year old burns, compared to unburned control plots. Idaho fescue had less seed production on the burned areas than the unburned controls on one-year old burns, but recovered by the third year. Bunting (1985) pointed out that most studies indicate two to several years may be required for this to occur. He attributes the increase in production primarily to an increase in production per plant and not an increase in density of plants (new plants established from seed). Thus it appears that the increased seed production does not necessarily result in new plants becoming established. What causes a low establishment rate has not been addressed by research, except when there is competition from invading annual grasses, such as cheatgrass.

In order for perennial grasses to establish from seed, certain requirements have to be met. These are a source of viable seed, adequate seed coverage, suitable germination temperatures, minimal competition from other plants and last, but probably most important, adequate soil moisture for the seedling to develop sufficiently that it can survive the dry summers. Patton et al. (1988) reported the number of filled florets (i.e.

viable seed) was greater on burned plots than on unburned control plots on bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue and Columbia needlegrass. Thus it is likely there is an adequate source of viable seed the first year following a burn. Suitable temperatures for seed germination will occur every spring, although the date may vary from year to year

Soil moisture is not only required for a plant to germinate, but there must be sufficient moisture in the seedling root zone over a long enough period for the plant to develop sufficiently to survive an extended dormant period. For most bunchgrasses, this requires the seedling to reach the 3-leaf or greater stage of growth. At higher elevations (6000 ft plus), there is generally adequate soil moisture for seedling establishment. At lower elevations in the Intermountain Region, adequate soil moisture is dependent on the frequency of spring precipitation. Some years it is adequate, some it is not. It is common at the lower elevations to see seedlings of plants every year of both grasses and sagebrush. However, in years with below average spring precipitation, most of those seedlings do not survive.

Competition from other plants, especially annual grasses, is generally not a problem on higher elevation rangelands. However, where cheatgrass or medusahead was present prior to the fire or a seed source is at hand, competition for moisture on the lower elevation rangelands can be a problem for perennial grass seedling establishment. Considerable research has been conducted on reducing or controlling the competition from these annual grasses, but such control is not assured with mechanical or chemical means. The most successful biological control method has been to seed crested wheatgrass. Crested wheatgrass and squireltail grass are the only perennial grass species that have been shown to successfully compete with the annual grasses in the Intermountain Region.



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IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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DIRK KEMPTHORNE  
 GOVERNOR

February 3, 2005

PATRICK A. TAKASUGI  
 DIRECTOR • SECRETARY

Bureau of Land Management  
 Attn: Eric Limbach  
 FMDA Project Manager  
 4350 Cliffs Drive  
 Pocatello, Idaho 83204

Dear Mr. Limbach:

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) appreciates the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) efforts to address fire and fuels management in the Eastern Idaho Cooperative Fire Management District, and the opportunity to comment on the Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The plan's stated intent, to develop a comprehensive directive for the management of Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management by providing guidance through clearly stated objectives, policies, and resource goals, is commendable. ISDA would like to support your efforts by providing direction to enable incremental steps toward long-term goals of more natural fire conditions and related vegetative communities throughout the landscape.

9-1  
 (ALT B)

9-2  
 (ALT D)

ISDA's remarks are organized to comment on the merits of each alternative as they relate to the purpose and need of this plan. The DEIS states, "Current land use plans do not address fire management issue in a comprehensive way...Amending the land use plans is necessary in order to integrate comprehensive fire management direction into the land use plans." (pg. S-2) ISDA contends that neither the Proposed Action, nor the Preferred Alternative provides for a "comprehensive fire management direction." The comments that follow explain our reasoning for this assertion. We also incorporate ideas from the analyzed alternatives and suggest an additional alternative to better meet the stated objectives, and to aid the deciding officer's final decision.

General

9-3

ISDA is concerned that the DEIS may be too ambitious in the targeted acres to be treated. Funding is always inadequate and inconsistent so the BLM should be cautious in projecting goals and objectives that may not be realistically achievable. This situation is common and creates several complications. One, litigation by unsatisfied user groups is more likely because the BLM is unable to fulfill objectives of the DEIS and Land Use Plans (LUPs). Second, cooperators become dissatisfied with the inability of the BLM to fulfill their commitments and are less likely to participate in collaborative

programs and projects primarily because they don't want to engage in a process that is foreseen as a waste of their limited time and resources.

#### Alternative B

9-1 The proposed alternative, Alternative B, though it does satisfy certain aspects of the purpose and need of the action, does not address it in a comprehensive manner. The DEIS admits that this alternative does not "...treat all cover types to a level that returns the fire regime to the range of historical variability." (pg. 2-22) The DEIS also implies that Alternative B would be "...limited by existing operations capabilities and resources." (pg. 2-22)

9-1 Alternative B also does not effectively address Issue 1, which stemmed from the scoping process that drove the development of alternatives (Section 1.4.1). The DEIS even recognizes this fact: "The Proposed Action does not incorporate the recommended level of treatment in the national-scale program option..." nor does it "...directly address the goals and priorities..." of the Cohesive Strategy/10-year Comprehensive Strategy prepared by the USDA for restoring fire's natural role in the ecosystem. (pg. 1-10)

#### Alternative D

9-2 Alternative D, the preferred alternative, changes the direction of the plan entirely and inadequately addresses the purpose and need of the plan. Though Alternative D was formulated to address Issue 2, which deals with sagebrush obligate species, it should be remembered that this is a Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan and not a habitat conservation directive for sage steppe obligates. If the BLM selects this alternative, the BLM will miss out on a great opportunity to return fire regimes to the range of historical variability, and provide for a complete and healthy range ecosystem.

9-4 If Alternative D is chosen, the BLM will also limit itself to treating only certain types of vegetative cover, in this case, low-elevation shrub, perennial grass, annual grass, mid-elevation, shrub, mountain shrub, and juniper. These are not all types of habitats which are under BLM's jurisdiction where fire historically played a critical role in vegetation health. Cover types not included in Alternative D are aspen/conifer and dry conifer vegetation types. Aspen is a critical part of western landscapes as it provides forage for livestock, habitat for wildlife, watershed protection, and water yield for downstream users, esthetics, recreational opportunities, and landscape diversity (Bartos and Cambell 1998). Bartos and Cambell also state that not only is plant diversity reduced, but for every 1,000 acres converted to mixed conifer stands 250-500 acre-feet of water is transpired into the atmosphere and is not available for streamflow or undergrowth production. Additionally, 500-1,000 tons of undergrowth biomass is not produced. Of this biomass 40-60 percent is usable forage for livestock and wildlife, the remaining is valuable hiding and thermal cover for wildlife. Records indicate Idaho has already lost approximately 60 percent of its aspen ecotypes emphasizing the impact of this community change to the state of Idaho.

None of BLM's field offices covered by this DEIS have a Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) of 1, meaning that aspen stands in the Upper Snake River District are predominately made up of late successional forest. As a result, most of BLM's seral aspen stands have been taken over by conifer and stable aspen stands are decadent. Late successional aspen stands greatly alter available water, undergrowth biomass production, and biodiversity (Bartos 2005). The BLM must include this

important vegetation type to properly manage watersheds, and assist the state of Idaho in meeting its objectives for a sustainable forage base for livestock grazing, wildlife habitat and disease control, and water production.

9-5 Alternative D also does not return juniper woodlands to their historical fire regime. As stated in the DEIS, juniper and pinyon woodlands have expanded ten-fold in the last 130 years in the Intermountain West (pg. 3-13), due in large part to fire suppression. Though important to several wildlife species, juniper woodlands and associated encroachment leads to a depleted understory, and increased hillslope runoff and erosion. Many juniper-dominated watersheds produce less water and many springs and meadows within them have dried up. Juniper dominated stands can also shorten the growing season of surrounding plants by as much as six weeks because of juniper's extensive root system (Pierson 2005).

9-2 ISDA appreciates the BLM's efforts in sage grouse recovery and we support any attempt at improving sage grouse habitat. Alternative D is more than adequate at accomplishing that mission for the Upper Snake River District. However, the purpose and need of the plan isn't to develop a landscape strategy to benefit sage grouse and the Sagebrush Guild. Doing so would come at a cost of not having good rangeland health on all landscape levels.

#### Alternative C

9-6 As outlined above, Alternatives B and D do not accomplish the purpose and need of the plan. Alternative C or some variation thereof, if chosen, would more effectively fulfill the purpose and need of the plan and move the landscape toward Desired Future Conditions as outlined in Table 2-1, page 2-5. Alternative C would create a wildland fire regime within the historic range of variability for all cover types. The DEIS states, "...most fire regimes have been altered, resulting in shifts toward Annual Grass cover types, loss of desirable sagebrush steppe, encroachment of junipers, and decadence in Mountain Shrub, Aspen/Conifer, and Dry Conifer cover types." (pg. 3-30) Alternative C is equal to Alternative D in providing the greatest long-term benefits for Annual Grass habitat (pg. 4-99), and Perennial Grass habitat (pg. 4-99), and have a more desirable impact on the Juniper and Mountain Shrub Guild (pg. 4-104), and Wet/Cold Conifer cover types (pg. 4-106) than all other alternatives.

#### Alternate Alternative

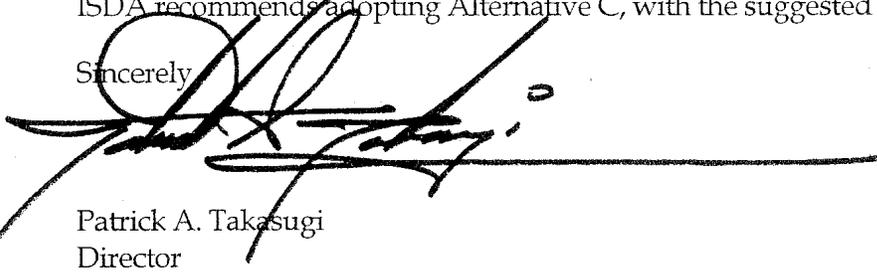
9-7 As mentioned earlier, the sagebrush steppe habitat is an extremely critical component to the long-term integrity of sage grouse populations, and ISDA supports efforts to improve sage grouse habitat. One shortcoming of Alternative C is that it doesn't sufficiently address Issue 2 and could have potential negative impacts on sagebrush steppe obligate species. The DEIS states, "Even though Alternative C more closely mimics the historical fire regime, it is not sensitive to the needs of the Sagebrush Guild." (pg. 4-85) This situation could easily be remedied if the treatments outlined for the sagebrush steppe ecosystem in Alternative D were incorporated into Alternative C. Two specific elements that could be incorporated into Alternative C are Alternative D's treatments in Low-elevation Shrub and Perennial Grass ecosystems. As acknowledged by the DEIS in Section 4.4, this would speed up the process in converting Perennial Grass to sagebrush steppe habitat in the short term, and improve the proportion of 15- to 30-year sagebrush age class and significantly reducing cheatgrass in the long term.

9-2

Again, ISDA would like to emphasize that the BLM should not select the Preferred Alternative. If the BLM proceeds with Alternative D, they will limit their range of management options by focusing on a single species of sagebrush obligate (sage grouse). This will not give the BLM the needed flexibility to manage all types of ecosystems, especially if and when public policy and political forces switch their focus from sagebrush obligate species to other potential species of interest in the next 10 years.

ISDA recommends adopting Alternative C, with the suggested changes, as the Proposed Action.

Sincerely,

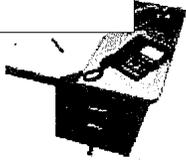


Patrick A. Takasugi  
Director  
Idaho State Department of Agriculture

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Terry  
Smith/AKSO/AK/BLM/DOI  
02/10/2005 02:46 PM

To Terry Lee Smith/USRD/ID/BLM/DOI@BLM  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Fw: Fuels Comments 1

----- Forwarded by Terry Smith/AKSO/AK/BLM/DOI on 02/10/2005 12:46 PM -----



"kfite@juno.com"  
<kfite@juno.com>  
02/10/2005 12:40 PM

To ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov, kfite@juno.com,  
terry\_smith@blm.gov  
cc  
Subject Fuels Comments 1

Pasted below is the first of 3 documents - 2 sets of comemnts, and lit. cited submitted by WWP on the Fire, Fuels and Related Veg. Mgmt. EIS

Please let me know that you have received them.

Katie Fite  
kfite@juno.com

February 9, 2005

Terry Smith  
FMDA Project Manager  
BLM  
1111 N. 8th Avenue  
Pocatello, ID 83201

Here are comments of Western Watersheds Project on the Upper Snake River District Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Plan Amendment. We incorporate by reference past comments (scoping) of American Lands Alliance and Committee for the High Desert on this process. We are also submitting additional comments.

#### LIVESTOCK GRAZING AS A CAUSAL AGENT IN FIRE, FUELS, VEGETATION "PROBLEMS"

The Draft EIS fails to adequately address the role of livestock, and BLM and other agency management of livestock, on the ecological health and fire regime of lands across the Project area.

10a-1 It fails to present scientific information and analysis necessary to understand the role of livestock

in causing fuels problems - including the role of ongoing livestock grazing across the lands of the EIS area.

10a-2 The EIS and alternatives are based on BLM's false premise that it can impose fire and other treatments to bring about "historical" ranges of fire occurrence and achieve an artificially derived "desired" future conditions is not based on the facts that cattle and sheep grazing in the USRD lands have created an UNNATURAL environmental setting - often with massive topsoil loss, lowered site potential, desertification, and great vulnerability to weed invasion following disturbance. BLM's complicated modeling fails to address this. BLM has not used current ecological science in deriving its models, desired conditions, and predicted outcomes of treatments.

10a-3 BLM must fully update the livestock grazing and vegetation allocation components of all 12 affected Land Use Plans in conjunction with this process. The livestock grazing and vegetation portions of all these Land Use Plans are woefully outdated. They allow extremely high utilization rates on both upland and riparian sites. They lack quantified trampling standards. Most of the old plans view threatened native sagebrush vegetation communities as "brush", primarily suitable for burning, spraying and discing up. These plans fail to consider current science, such as stubble height standards necessary for riparian protection, utilization levels necessary for successful sage grouse nesting, or grazing systems that protect microbiotic crusts necessary for soil health and keeping cheatgrass and other weeds that cause a fuels problem from invading. As a result, we believe it is not possible for BLM to tier to, or rely on, these documents in this planning effort. This is especially the case as the EIS proposes large-scale alteration of landscapes across hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands.

10a-3 In addition, these old Land Use Plans do not provide for protections necessary to slow down or halt weed invasions and alterations of the fire cycle. The current scientific literature overwhelmingly shows that livestock grazing is a primary cause of problems affecting native vegetation, including altered fire frequencies and altered fuel situations. See Attachment 1 to our scoping comments, an extensive annotated bibliography provided with these comments, which we ask you to carefully review in relation to the whole range of our comments. An EIS grappling with fire, fuels and vegetation management on southern Idaho lands must address livestock grazing as a causal agent, and analyze the impacts of livestock grazing in causing "unnatural" fire cycles, and the impact of livestock grazing on the ultimate outcome/effectiveness/success of any treatments. Without including significant changes in livestock grazing practices including reduced stocking rates and/or removal of livestock from lands at risk to cheatgrass invasion, or where restoration actions may be undertaken, and more protective levels and standards of use, BLM will be wasting taxpayer dollars on this Fire EIS effort.

10a-2 BLM must fully address livestock as a causal agent in ecosystem disruption, and alteration of composition, structure and function of native ecosystems in the arid lands (see Fleischner 1994) covered by the EIS. Thus, the role of livestock in causing any fuels problem must be fully assessed, including all direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of past and ongoing livestock use on rangeland health problems associated with fire, hazardous fuels and weeds. A wide range of up-to-date livestock management alternative components must accompany all alternatives in this EIS process. These should include analysis of a range of reductions in stocking rates, and their effects on ecosystem processes, fire, fuels, weeds, restoration, rehabilitation efforts.

10a-4 BLM must fully analyze cessation of livestock use/grazing permit retirement as part of any treatment analysis that is conducted. Federal fire funds should be used to buyout the grazing permits on lands that are treated, or determined to be at risk to weed invasion, or determined to be at risk of crossing thresholds from which recovery may not be possible, and the inextricable link between fire/fuels problems and livestock grazing effects must be addressed.

Information that needs to be acquired and assessed includes:

- Current stocking rates (average actual use as well as active permitted use) in all allotments, and in all vegetation types
- 10a-5 · Utilization levels allowed in all allotments and in all vegetation types
- Season of grazing use
- Condition of soils, vegetation, habitats related to stocking rates, levels of use allowed, etc.

10a-5 BLM must Conduct Population Viability, Persistence, Extinction/Extirpation Models for species of Native Wildlife Under all Alternatives. The Proposed Action would treat 646,000 acres over a 10-year period. The Preferred Alt. would treat 1,522,300 acres over a 10-year period. This will have a widespread, and drastic, impact on special status species habitats and populations

#### ADEQUATE BASELINE INFORMATION ON VEGETATION COMMUNITIES MUST BE COLLECTED

Unfortunately, the Draft EIS does not provide adequate information on vegetation communities in the affected lands and their surroundings.

10a-6 BLM must collect and analyze extensive baseline information on past fire and vegetation conversion or manipulation projects in the affected lands, and other factors that result in weed corridors, habitat fragmentation, increase likelihood of human-caused fires or disturbance, etc. Data and maps must be compiled and assessed that indicate where all past treatments have been conducted by state and federal land managers (and private - where known) within the EIS area. Without understanding the past dispersion and impacts of treatments and disturbance across the landscape, BLM can not adequately assess the impacts of various alternatives related to treatment and land health.

Information that needs to be acquired and assessed includes data and maps of:

- Past disturbance events on these lands (fire- prescribed or wild, chemical treatment, mechanical treatment, other);
- 10a-6 · Seedings or any other post-disturbance treatments that have occurred
- Condition of seedings, including cheatgrass and other fine fuels and weeds in interspaces
- Comparison of current seeding condition to stocking rate based on good or better condition seeding
- Location of all livestock facilities

Location of all roads.

10a-6 Assessment should include a study of the current ecological condition and health of soils, vegetation, important wildlife habitats and other important values of the affected lands, a comparison between these conditions and conditions at the time of the disturbance.

10a-6 For all 5.3 million acres, BLM must collect current information on: Vegetation species composition, its current ecological condition; livestock grazing regimen and standards of use; wildlife habitats and populations occurring here. Information on periods of rest, trespass, and other livestock factors must be included.

10a-6 Current information on ecological condition, presence of weeds and other exotic species, etc. on all lands within the 5.3 million acre project area must be collected as part of this effort. It must be the basis for decisionmaking on "acres to be treated" for various purposes in the EIS.

10a-6 For example, how many acres of salt desert shrub communities, Wyoming big sagebrush, or other communities have a significant component of cheatgrass in the understory? How many of these lands have already crossed thresholds, where succession is truncated? How many are at risk of crossing thresholds? How many acres, and what is the location, of each vegetation type is in good or better ecological condition?

10a-6 After solid, on-the-ground collection of new information, BLM must develop a rigorous protocol for determining all lands in need of "treatment", and explain in comprehensive detail, with supporting science, why these lands need treatment.

10a-7 We are alarmed that BLM in the EIS proposes to NOT treat the extensive crested wheatgrass seedings that have so altered and largely destroyed wildlife habitats, and which often form the basis of continuing to graze excessive numbers of livestock that also affect native vegetation in or near these seedings. Many crested wheatgrass seedings have become infested with cheatgrass, halogeton or other weeds and now contain continuous fine fuels. They are now not acting to stop fires, but instead are susceptible to burning. Plus, the harm and fragmentation of native species habitats caused by these seedings must be assessed - as it is important to understand their role in habitat fragmentation on top of the extensive alterations of habitat proposed by BLM under the Draft EIS. The Burley BLM lands provide a perfect example of a woefully fragmented landscape where crested wheatgrass seedings have greatly fragmented sage grouse habitats across middle to lower elevations, and many are in very poor condition and have rampant cheatgrass, halogeton and other problems - as well as loss of forage. Yet, BLM persists in promoting the killing of native vegetation (junipers, mountain big sagebrush, pinyon, and other species) in the Jim Sage and other areas, while ignoring the habitat loss, and weed and fire risks, posed by the crested wheatgrass and other purposefully altered lands, including those BLM itself "treated" with fire and which have become weedlands.

10a-8 We attended the EIS Scoping meeting held in Boise, and were shocked that BLM had no sound basis for estimates of acres proposed to be treated in the information that was provided to the public. We were told that BLM asked land managers in each field office to come up with estimates. However, there was no protocol followed as a basis for these estimates, and it appears no scientific

10a-8 methodology was followed. Our review of the Draft EIS confirms that a systematic method to assess treatment "need" has not been used.

10a-8 Cohesive Strategy and Fire's Natural Role. The EIS must base its analysis on science, and not the mis-begotten hope that fire still retains a "natural" role in many of the highly disturbed systems here. This is key to understanding that many of the DFCs are not attainable - especially if large-scale chronic disturbance factors like grazing continue unabated, and spread cheatgrass and weeds in their wake.

10a-9 The EIS's discussion of Age, Seral Status and other elements ignores alterations in composition, function and structure that exist in the real world as a result of livestock grazing and other disturbances, past vegetation treatments followed by livestock grazing, etc.

### RISK ASSESSMENTS MUST BE CONDUCTED

10a-10 Following careful and systematic data collection on current ecological condition, current vegetation type, range trend, and current weediness of the 5.3 million acres of lands, BLM must prepare honest and accurate assessments of "risks" of and "need for" various treatment disturbances or treatments to the affected lands, as well "risks" of invasions with continued livestock grazing under the old Land Use Plan paradigms, and under updated paradigms under the alternative actions that BLM needs to develop for this process.

10a-11 ICBEMP assessed lands and categorized them "at risk" to weed invasion. This EIS effort can build on that, and take a much more detailed look at the Upper Snake BLM lands affected by this proposal. Shockingly, ICBEMP also found that only a very small portion of the entire USRD had even "moderate" ecological integrity (PNW-GTR-385 at 118, Map 18). Nearly all the USRD lands except for the Upper Little Lost and Birch Creek are in "Low" ecological condition. The EIS fails to provide information to tie proposed treatments to such land areas, and fails to assess the role (and ecological condition) of past treatments past and current livestock management (especially under out-dated paradigms and levels of use), and develop new goals, objectives and allocations that better address the pressing habitat needs of many important species and that address root causes of hazardous fuels problems, and thus provide better and more cost-effective protection from hazardous fuel problems.

### SUITABILITY OF LANDS FOR TREATMENT - WILDERNESS, ACECs, ROADLESS LANDS

10a-12 We are very concerned about the lack of necessary analysis of the impacts of the various alternatives on the integrity of, ecosystem processes within, and important and special features of WSAs; relevant and important values of ACECs; integrity and values to society and watersheds of roadless lands. BLM's proposal will cause irreparable harm to values ranging from recreational spiritual and aesthetic values, to unroaded watersheds that do not release road sediment to streams.

### SUITABILITY OF LANDS FOR LIVESTOCK GRAZING

In many areas, sheep AUMs have been converted to cattle AUMs, with no intensive "look" taken at the impacts of sheep vs. cattle use, and the often decreased suitability of steep, rocky or other terrain for cattle use (vs. sheep).

10a-13 This suitability of lands for livestock grazing must be assessed as part of this process. Please see USFS methods used in development of the Boise, Payette and other recent southern Idaho Forest Plans.

BLM has failed to employ the analytical procedures described by Professors Holechek, Galt and others, and which the Forest Service uses in its grazing management, in setting stocking levels by first determining the amount of land area that is both "capable" and "suitable" for grazing.

10a-13 Under the "capability", an evaluation is made to determine the number of acres of lands that are "capable" of livestock grazing, based on specific slope, distance from water, rockiness, and other factors. Then, out of the "capable" lands, a further determination is made about which acres are "suitable" for grazing, based on considerations such as special management areas, fragile ecological resources, or other considerations. After this analysis is done, then the remaining lands that are both "capable" and "suitable" are assessed to determining grazing levels by setting proper stocking rates. This analytical process is central to ensure a proper grazing management system that does not degrade range resources, and must be considered as part of the determination under various alternatives of the impacts or effects of the outcomes of any of the many large-scale disturbance treatments of fuels or weeds across vast acres that BLM is proposing in the EIS. Plus, BLM must understand if setting stocking rates, and the action to sustain them, in grazing unsuitable lands is a major contributing factor to fuels and weeds problems.

10a-13 All alternatives must include 25% or less allowable utilization of upland vegetation, no grazing during critical growing periods for native species, no grazing during nesting periods for migratory birds and sage grouse, measurement of livestock trampling damage to native vegetation and microbiotic crusts and means to minimize trampling damage, no movement of livestock from lands infested with exotics to more intact communities.

#### BLM MUST EXAMINE USE LEVELS, AND THEIR ROLE IN FUELS PROBLEMS

10a-14 BLM does not take into account the scientific literature - much of it published in the Journal of Range Management - demonstrating that utilization limits historically followed by BLM (typically, 40%, 50% or 60% utilization limits) may contribute to degradation of native forage, and plant community changes that result in fuel and weed problems.

#### A FULL RANGE OF PASSIVE TREATMENTS MUST BE EVALUATED

10a-15 Passive treatments primarily minimize site disturbance, and generally remove or minimize an environmental irritant that is affecting the health of the plant community. Thus, they have less risk of soil erosion, weed invasion or proliferation and other negative impacts associated with them. They also have a high probability of being beneficial to watersheds, native wildlife habitats and populations and the economic well-being of western communities that are increasingly dependent on tourism and recreational uses of public lands.

An array of passive treatments exist that will enable BLM to treat many of the affected lands. Such treatments include:

10a-15 Livestock grazing treatment: Livestock grazing treatments can reduce spread of flammable invasive species, heal damaged understories so that more natural, cool-burning fires can occur, and reduce the proliferation of doghair thickets of dense young trees which serve as ladder fuels. Treatments include significant reductions in livestock numbers accompanied by prudent utilization and trampling standards in plant communities found to have damaged understories vulnerable to invasion by flammable exotic species.

Closure of pastures with known exotic infestations. Closure of lands to grazing that have known exotic species infestations is a prudent first step toward control of spread of flammable, watershed-altering exotics.

Closure of pastures "at risk" to weed invasion - such as any Wyoming big sagebrush, Basin big sagebrush, or juniper communities that still contain relatively intact understories. This EIS process should map and identify such areas, as well as all areas where cheatgrass already dominates the understory.

Livestock removal treatment: Grazing permit buyout and permit retirement using federal fire funds is a very reasonable treatment that will heal damaged lands, help restore natural fire cycles, minimize the spread of exotics and other hazardous fuels.

10a-15 Livestock facility removal treatment: Livestock facilities (fences, artificial watering sites - especially troughs associated with pipelines and water haul sites, corrals, etc.) serve as zones of livestock concentration, and result in areas of severe disturbance readily colonized by highly flammable exotic species. Removal of these facilities and restoration of disturbed zones will limit spread of invasive flammable species, and help develop healthy understories necessary to carry cool, light fires in surrounding lands.

We are alarmed that BLM's Draft EIS casually casts aside Alternatives development based on a series of passive livestock treatments, and fails to explain the actions such treatments entail.

Road/ORV trail closure and rehab/restoration treatment: Closures and restoration treatments quell the spread of flammable invasive species from disturbed road and trail edges. Roads are known to serve as conduits for weed invasion (Gelbard and Belnap 2003).

10a-16 Road closure coupled with grazing reductions can have large-scale positive effects, as roads as weed conduits can be closed, and livestock reductions minimize spread of weeds already present within the area.

Allowing natural successional processes and healing processes to occur in plant communities that are still relatively intact is the most cost-effective method of attaining natural fire cycles, reducing buildup of hazardous fuels over time, etc. Natural mortality occurs in sagebrush, sagebrush-bitterbrush and other vegetation types. Allowing natural processes to play out, while

10a-16 removing or minimizing those agents that are disturbing natural ecological processes takes patience, but minimizes risks of exotic invasion that accompany aggressive intervention such as fire or mowing.

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## HAZARDOUS FUEL

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10a-17 If BLM plans on using this term in its analysis, we ask for a careful and scientific description of the basis for its use. For example, Idaho Falls BLM engaged consultants to prepare an EA for "hazardous fuels reduction" in Sands Checkerboard. We are uncertain just what the hazard is here. Who or what is threatened by the woody vegetation termed hazardous fuels? Is cheatgrass a "hazardous fuel"? We certainly think this term is far more apt for cheatgrass than it is for most other vegetation situation where BLM applies it. BLM must develop a methodology to prioritize any "treatments" of hazardous fuels. This is necessary to most effectively spend scarce taxpayer dollars, best protect habitations and areas that are truly "at risk". Instead of spending hundreds of thousands of dollars planning 6-10 million dollars or more of "treatments" in the Jim Sage Area, or drastic "treatment" of the entire Samaria Mountain Range, These projects are primarily aimed at killing woody vegetaiton top promote livestock grazing. BLM must use a sound methodology to determine needs for treatment - and focus should always be on the areas withn approx. 1/8 mile of actual interfaces with human habitation.

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## RESTORATION

Restoration of native vegetation communities and ecological processes must be the goal of all treatments. Restoration means restoring and maintaining ecological integrity. Ecological integrity is the ability of an ecosystem to support and maintain a balanced, adaptive community of organisms having a species composition, diversity and functional organization comparable to that of natural habitats within the region.

10a-18 Lands of primary focus for most active restoration should be: Lands that have been invaded by exotics such as cheatgrass, medusahead, knapweed or leafy spurge; Lands purposefully seeded to exotics such as crested wheatgrass following past agency vegetation manipulation or fire. These should be prioritized for treatment on the basis of: Geographic location and continuity/connectivity of native habitats that restoration would provide for native species. For example, crested wheatgrass seedings in the Little Lost River Valley are located in an area of great importance to sage grouse. Restoring the native sage-steppe vegetation on these sites as habitat for sage grouse and pygmy rabbit should be top priority, as well as prevention of any further degradation to still-native communities.

BLM must focus significant treatment and restoration efforts and spending of federal fire funds on restoration of native species composition and function to crested wheatgrass that has been rampantly seeded as following ill-conceived sagebrush removal or as post-fire "rehab", and lands overrun by cheatgrass. The current abundance of federal fire funds should be used to follow-through on BLM post-fire rehab actions that have failed in the past (please evaluate all seedings and identify failures and causes of failure), or where crested wheatgrass and other exotics were planted as a first step in arid lands rehabilitation. BLM now has the opportunity to complete post-fire rehabilitation that has been undertaken, but has failed or had poor results on

10a-18 likely millions of acres of USRD lands. As part of this process, BLM should identify all lands where post-fire rehab/"emergency" stabilization with crested wheatgrass, intermediate wheatgrass and other exotics was conducted, and prioritize treatment of these lands to return them to native vegetation and restore natural fire cycles.

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Experimentation with new techniques, especially new chemicals, should be limited to lands overrun by cheatgrass and crested wheatgrass seedings.

10a-19 For lands still in reasonable health with reasonable ecological integrity, passive treatments should primarily be applied. Techniques which minimize soil and native vegetation disturbance should be the first steps taken. Try these first. See if they work.

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10a-20 As the result of past proliferation of purposeful seedings of exotic species by BLM in ESR situations, huge sterile monocultures of exotic species dominate hundreds of thousands of acres of Idaho BLM lands. These seedings, a result of activities to produce forage, sometimes under post-fire ESR, have had disastrous consequences for native ecosystems. Plus, instead of restoring lands seeded immediately after fire to exotics, BLM instead has let these lands in a highly altered and unnatural condition. BLM now manages these seeded lands as permanent BLM sacrifice zones to the livestock industry - issuing TNR, converting TNR to permanent AUMs, etc. It is these post-fire seedings, a direct result of BLM's short-sighted livestock forage or ESR efforts of the past, that are facing massive AUM increases to wealthy permittees, such as JR Simplot, in the Jarbidge Field Office.

You must fully assess the impacts of these past actions in order to understand the context of your current decisionmaking process, as well as to assess environmental impacts and reasonably foreseeable outcomes.

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10a-21 As part of this EIS, you must commit to restoration of native vegetation on all lands seeded to exotics as a part of past or future ESR activities. This NEPA document should include a timetable for accomplishing this.

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10a-22 BLM also appears to be segmenting the NEPA processes associated with this EIS, by preparing two separate small "EAs" for ESR activities that occur on its lands throughout Idaho. No explanation is provided for why this is occurring.

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## PREVENTION

10a-23 Arid lands may become so degraded that they can never recover. These communities have been described (Archer and Smeins 1991) as crossing a "transition threshold" -with loss of topsoil, dominant species that have become locally extinct, and introduced species that have become so dense that weedy annuals become the climax species. All efforts must be made to keep plant communities from crossing this threshold, and thus requiring massive amounts of funds and elaborate treatments to attempt restoration.

Moderately degraded communities can become severely degraded if preventive action is not taken.

10a-23

Pristine and near-pristine efforts should be protected using all possible techniques, especially passive restoration techniques such as immediate removal of all livestock disturbance as they typically serve as important habitats for native species and protection of biodiversity. Economically, it is a lot more cost-effective to keep lands from becoming degraded than it is to conduct wide-scale treatments after they have become degraded.

Prevention is especially critical in upland communities, as they are less resilient to recovery following site disturbance than are riparian areas. Plus, the greater the aridity, the greater the difficulty of recover. This may even vary within the same geographic area, as south and west faces are more likely to face cheatgrass invasion following treatments.

10a-23

Almost universally throughout the Upper Snake District, wetlands (springs, seeps, streams, playas, etc.) have been heavily damaged by livestock grazing and trampling activity. This has altered their morphology, areal extent of water tables/wetted soil areas, plant and animal species composition, plant and animal ecology. However, the current path of livestock shifting use onto upland sites to take pressure off riparian areas is an ecologically destructive path, and prevention must be conducted in an integrated way. Both the riparian and upland areas are undergoing desertification processes, which ultimately make them less resilient, and less likely to be able to be restored to native systems.

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#### ROLE OF DESERTIFICATION IN FUELS AND FIRE PROBLEMS AND ECOSYSTEMIC CHANGE

No  
Letter

Please see our "Additional Comments" explaining the role of desertification caused by livestock grazing and other activities in causing fuel and weed problems.

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#### WEEDS AND INVASIVE SPECIES

Exotic species are invading lands in the Interior Columbia Basin at an alarming rate. Exotic species alter western ecosystems by increasing fire frequency, disrupting nutrient cycling and hydrology, increasing erosion, altering soil microclimates, reducing biodiversity, and reducing wildlife habitat.

10a-24

Disturbance related to livestock grazing, livestock grazing facilities, ORVs and extensive road networks are causes of weed invasion. Removing these sources of disturbance from "at risk" lands, and any lands that have been treated is a vital and integral part of any treatment, as well as prevention and restoration.

Livestock and ORVs are weed seed vectors. Livestock carry weed seeds in fur, feces, mud on hooves, etc. They also disturb soils and created ideal sites for weed seed establishment (Belsky and Gelbard 1999).

Recent observations show that exotics like cheatgrass and medusahead may be only the first in a wave of exotics and that new infestations of aggressive species such as white top or knapweed occur in areas overtaken by cheatgrass and medusahead. Thus, BLM's current practice of using these weeded areas as "sacrifice zones" for excessive levels of livestock use; issuance of TNR, etc. only increases chances of invasion by new and even more aggressive exotic species.

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## REMOVAL OF LIVESTOCK

Livestock grazing and trampling is the major cause of damage to upland plant communities and western ecosystems. They are also the major factor preventing recovery of these systems.

- 10a-25 Removal of livestock, including through use of federal fire funds to permanently buy out grazing permits, must be a treatment that is evaluated under all alternatives. USRD lands should be prioritized for buyouts, based on the need for passive and active treatment measures to be applied.

It makes no sense to spend hundreds of dollars an acre on "restoration", or \$40 an acre on a "prescribed" fire treatment if livestock grazing disturbance is then to again occur. Livestock are the primary cause of vegetation/fuels problems. Allowing the primary causal agent of ill-health to then again be allowed to graze and trample these same lands, and cause a "need" for future treatments, makes no sense at all. BLM typically receives around 13 cents an acre annually for livestock grazing on these lands, so the economic folly of returning livestock to treated lands is extreme - just like the ecological folly.

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## REST FROM LIVESTOCK

- 10a-26 BLM's EIS and the "updated" EFR plans are woefully deficient in providing adequate periods of rest from livestock grazing following treatments. In order to determine necessary rest periods, BLM must understand the condition of the community pre-treatment (see, for example, Eddleman et al 1994). Specific time periods must be applied, along with measurable recovery standards for soils, microbotic crusts, herbaceous and woody vegetation recovery before livestock grazing can resume.

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## FIRE

- 10a-27 BLM can not use "natural fire regimes", historical ranges of variability and other models as a basis for any fire planning. The potential for anything resembling a "natural" fire regime has been drastically altered by 150 years of livestock grazing and other disturbance so that natural fire regimes no longer exist in many areas. As part of its assessment, BLM must first determine the current condition of all the vegetation communities in the affected lands in the planning area. This information must be newly collected as part of this process, since most BLM inventories, especially in these lands with ancient LUPs, are nearly 25 or more years old. This necessary is critical to understanding the risks of any treatment disturbance to these lands.

We believe that until effective answers are found for the vexing problems of noxious weeds and exotic annual grasses, a cautious and prudent fire suppression plan must be in place. This is also necessary because of the dramatically altered and unnatural condition of many sites caused by 150 years of livestock grazing.

## FUELS REDUCTION

Shrub-Steppe Communities: Livestock grazing has fundamentally altered (and continues to alter and degrade) native understories, by killing and weakening native grasses and forbs and harming

10a-27 microbiotic crusts. As native bunchgrasses have been replaced by cheatgrass and other exotics in the wake of livestock grazing, USRD plant communities are now subject to hot, early season fire instead of cooler, late-season fires. Cheatgrass provides dense, continuous fuel that causes fires to flash across the landscape. Cheatgrass results in frequent re-occurrence of fire, preventing regrowth of native vegetation. Plus, cheatgrass litter chokes soil surfaces, preventing germination of native shrubs (sagebrush, rabbitbrush). Fuels reduction in sage-steppe communities should focus on restoration of these cheatgrass-invaded sites and damaged understories. This is the primary active restoration measure/treatment that needs to be taken to fundamentally alter the nature of fire in these arid lands.

Low Elevation Forests: Here too, livestock grazing has fundamentally altered (and continues to alter and degrade) native plant understories. By creating abundant areas of bare soils, it creates ideal conditions for increased densities of young trees. These become the fire-prone doghair thickets of young trees that create ladder fuels and other incendiary conditions in arid forests.

Before Euro-American settlement, periodic fire cleared Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir understories, and the build-up of fuels was too slow to create hot canopy fires. With Euro-American settlement, and continuing to the present: 1) Selective logging of large trees occurred, and small, highly flammable trees were left; 2) Fire control was instituted; 3) Domestic livestock consumed grasses that carried low-intensity fires, and such fires became less frequent, and woody fuels built up.

Hot fires occurred in the past, and were a part of natural forested ecosystems. In many areas away from human habitation, fuel reduction may not be necessary.

To prevent buildup of woody, highly flammable fuels in arid forests at times need to be let burn under carefully controlled conditions. This should only occur in lands that are not at risk to exotic species invasion in the post-fire environment. Selective logging of old, fire-tolerant trees must be halted. Domestic cattle and sheep grazing must be decreased or ended.

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## JUNIPER

10a-28 Juniper and other woody vegetation throughout Idaho have been vilified by the ranching industry. Juniper in the USRD-BLM managed lands have been greatly fragmented by purposeful fire, escaped prescribed fire and wild fire. NO additional acreage of juniper should be removed until BLM-prescribed fire-ravaged lands, such as those at Rice Canyon in the Burley District, are fully restored with native species.

Any juniper removal should be highly selective, individual tree cutting of smaller-sized trees. Fire or extensive soil disturbance paves the way for weedy species invasion in juniper communities. Grazing causes juniper expansion by destroying and weakening native understories, and altering natural cool burning fires and fire cycles.

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A CRITICAL AND METHODOICAL EXAMINATION OF SUCCESS/FAILURE OF PAST BLM TREATMENT PROJECTS IS NECESSARY

10a-29

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A careful scientific evaluation and assessment of past BLM "treatments" on USRD lands must be prepared. How many acres have been burned in prescribed fires? What post-fire management was done by BLM? What were the results? What are their current vegetative communities? What past herbiciding has been done by BLM? Where? How many acres? What were the results? How many acres, and where, was post-fire rehab. done? What is the current condition and vegetation of these lands? Please provide maps that adequately depict the above information.

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#### FIRE SUPPRESSION

10a-30

Fire suppression is critical in areas of high ecological value habitats that are "at risk" to exotic species invasion following fire, areas where irreplaceable ecological values, human life, or cultural resources are at stake. Effective fire suppression plans must be in place for these lands.

Minimum impact suppression tactics should be followed.

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#### PRESCRIBED FIRE

Prior to conducting any prescribed burn, BLM must thoroughly consider and analyze in an open NEPA process with full public comment and review periods:

10a-31

Long-term damage to microbiotic crusts, soil erosion through wind and runoff events, long-term loss of nutrients from already nutrient-deficient landscapes, loss of native species, radionuclide levels in surrounding vegetation, interrelation between prescribed burns and other "treatments" on neighboring federal/state/private lands, increased risks of exotic species invasions, impacts on habitat for native wildlife, indigenous uses of plants that may impacts, air quality impacts. BLM must also conduct a

We are very concerned that BLM may initiate a program of widespread "prescribed" burns on lands that have been, and continue to be, seriously damaged by livestock grazing and other abuses, and which will are very vulnerable to exotic invasions in post-fire environments.

All fuels reduction projects must be based on comprehensive restoration assessments before any reduction takes place.

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#### USE OF LIVESTOCK AS A "TOOL"

10a-32

Livestock should not be used as a "tool". They are only a temporary, stop-gap measure and simply mowing weeds to ground level does not address the fundamental problem of eliminating weeds, and getting native species to grow. Native species will not recover if sites are grazed by livestock. In fact, the extreme disturbance caused by livestock will make sites MORE fire prone. In most instances, it would be just as effective to mow weeds as to use livestock, and would have far less impacts to soils. Plus, the possibility of introduction of new weedy species as a result of livestock disturbance would be minimized. BLM should examine the appalling fire history of the Jarbidge FO and assess how seeding of crested wheatgrass, heavy grazing, high stocking rates, etc. -have resulted in extensive and large acreage fires.

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## USE OF HERBICIDES

10a-33 Herbicide use should be kept to an absolute minimum under all alternatives. Herbicides are known carcinogens. Many herbicides migrate in soils and infiltrate water supplies. USRD's own disastrous experience with the herbicide Oust demonstrates the dangers of herbicide use in wild land settings, and how despite reassurances in EAs, things can go very wrong. Here, Oust blew on soil particles into neighboring fields, and inhibited crop germination. We have seen wild settings where application of Oust has likewise had disastrous results - including in the "dad zone" it created in Rice Canyon and in the Jarbidge WSA. For several years prior to the Oust drift disaster, the corporation that manufactured Oust aggressively marketed its use at seminars attended by federal agencies. We are quite suspicious of the role of chemical corporations in pushing the use of herbicides.

At the best, herbicide use is only a temporary measure or intermediate step to be used, and it does not address the basic causes of weed problems. Sulfonylurea and acetolactate synthase-inhibiting herbicides should not be used due to their demonstrated ability to damage off-site plant species.

We often encounter areas on public lands - such as leafy sprurge spraying in the Lost River Area - where all native veg. has been killed by herbicides, and leafy spurge continues to thrive. The role of continued livestock grazing post-treatment in continuing weed invasion must be addressed - and the EIS does not do this.

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## MECHANICAL TREATMENTS

10a-34 BLM should use mechanical methods of weed control that have been identified as effective in current scientific literature (mowing, spot fire (flamer), weed eaters, mulching).

Any mechanical removal of woody vegetation must be carefully conducted. Any removal of trees must be based on individual tree marking.

All off-road travel should be minimized.

All fuels reduction projects must be based on comprehensive restoration assessments before any reduction takes place.

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## MIGRATORY BIRDS/CRITICAL PERIODS/SAGE GROUSE

10a-35 No treatments of any kind should be allowed during nesting periods for migratory birds, or in important or critical wildlife habitats during sensitive times of year. The role of all past and proposed treatments on habitat fragmentation must be assessed. See Knick et al. 2003, Connelly et al. 2004 to understand the tremendous fragmentation that exists.

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## BIOMASS

10a-36 Use of material for biomass fuels should not be allowed. Biomass projects export nutrients from often nutrient-deficient sites, and is an extractive, commercial use of public lands with widespread harmful ecological impacts.

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## USE OF CONSULTANTS

- 10a-37 We are very concerned that BLM is in such a rush to spend federal fire funds that it is turning far too much environmental analysis over to consulting firms, and removing local agency specialists who are most familiar with land conditions from the data acquisition and analysis loops. What protocols will BLM use to ensure sound decisionmaking, adequate knowledge of local conditions and necessary site specific analysis?

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## PREVENTION

- 10a-38 BLM's vegetation efforts can not be limited to disturbance-style treatments alone. Plant communities which are still healthy should be managed in a way to effectively: 1) prevent their conversion to weed-dominated communities; 2) prevent loss of biodiversity; 3) prevent changes in their fire frequencies and intensities; 4) prevent the conversion of shrub lands to woody thickets.

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## ASSESSMENT

- 10a-39 An independent assessment by qualified ecologists not tied to Western Land Grant universities of the "need" for the proposed actions, and the risks of undertaking new disturbance must be conducted as part of this process. We would like to be involved with this effort, and would be happy to provide you with a list of names of scientists that could be involved in this. Since BLM's scoping notice discusses "collaboration", this is an important part of the collaborative process to us - i.e. BLM working with us to ensure its EIS is based on current ecological science and the science of arid lands restoration.

A component of this should be an assessment of risks of new, additive or cumulative disturbances associated with the projects on top of existing disturbances. For example, if an area unrelentingly subjected to livestock grazing has previously been "thinned" by old herbiciding, or fire, what will the impact of a new treatment disturbance be on soils, vegetation, watersheds, water quality, native wildlife, etc.?

We urge you to focus on actual Interfaces with habitation, and not the large-scale wild land disturbance you propose.

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## ADDITIONAL SPECIAL STATUS, T&E SPECIES

- 10a-40 The actions of the EIS will have large-scale effects - ranging from increased sedimentation of bull trout and redband trout streams to major fragmentation of sage grouse, Brewer's sparrow and other declining species habitats. The EIS fails to address this fragmentation, on top of the fragmentation that already exists - see, for example, the analysis of fragmentation on the Sage Grouse Conservation Assessment (Connelly et al. 2004). The EIS is lacking in basic information on soil stability, erosion hazard, wind and water erosion risks, etc. related to lands in the EIS area. This is critical for understanding likely sedimentation into streams, site soil stability post-treatment, likelihood of increased gullyng, and other factors. Special status species habitats are faced with a broad array of escalating synergistic and cumulative impacts to habitats and

populations - ranging from development of new livestock infrastructure and expanded water-hauling to energy developments such as wind or geothermal and associated roading and disturbance across public and private lands of southern Idaho.

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#### MONITORING AND MITIGATION

10a-41 We are extremely concerned that monitoring and mitigation in the DEIS are not adequate and do not even begin to address the large-scale disturbance of plant and animal community composition, function and structure that undertaking the large-sale treatments will affect.

Monitoring. The EIS fails to provide necessary monitoring, and decisive actions that will occur post-treatment if treatment protocols, livestock rest, etc. is violated. BLM should establish weekly post-treatment monitoring for livestock trespass, sound studies of soil health and stability, vegetation community recovery and health, etc. post-treatment.

Mitigation. Large blocks of land (> 10,000 acres) should be established within watersheds where no fuels treatments are conducted, as reference areas for the outcomes/effectiveness/damage of the treatments that are proposed. These lands should be identified in the EIS. Other mitigation includes termination of grazing post-treatment, termination of grazing on reference areas, etc.

#### POST-TREATMENT ACTIONS

BLM current enforcement of grazing closure restrictions is incredibly lax - we have documented burn trespass after burn trespass where BLM has failed to administer more than a handslap - or simply ignored - permittee trespass of burns. For example - Rice Canyon - Burley BLM; Diamond A - Simplot livestock - Jarbidge BLM. Thus, we have no assurances that any livestock-related post-treatment measures will be followed, and these can not be used as "mitigation" for treatments.

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#### MITIGATION AND MONITORING

10a-41 BLM must develop adequate mitigation for activities carried out under this EIS. For example, if BLM wants to burn 10,000 acres of sage grouse habitat, it should be removing livestock use from a nearby 10,000 acres of land to provide better quality nesting and wintering habitat.

BLM must develop a comprehensive monitoring plan, with all monitoring to be funded as part of the original "treatment" cost. Otherwise, timely and necessary monitoring will never occur.

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#### USE OF NATIVE PLANTS AND LOCAL ECOTYPES

10a-42 BLM must commit to using all native species in all post-treatment plantings. BLM cannot rely on the old excuse of seed being unavailable or too expensive for use. Use of all native seed with commitments to reseed repeatedly must be part of the planning and funding for all projects. Planned development of reliable supplies of native seed sources is essential.

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#### WILDLANDS-URBAN INTERFACE

10a-43

Any habitation interface projects must focus on projects at the actual interface with inhabited lands. This is an area of 1/8 mile or less. Any interface projects must be tied to private landowners taking strict efforts to control any fire danger on their own private lands. Intensive wildland-urban interface treatments include thinning, pruning, mowing, roof cleaning, replacement of flammable landscape and building materials). These actions should be limited to the interface, and the private property, and be use to create 1/8 mile of defensible space.

In reality, the interface is to be the area where most federal fire funds are being spent. Instead, USRD BLM and BLM across-the-board is roaming far from any real interfaces in projects being conducted.

As part of this EIS, BLM should provide detailed maps of all interfaces, and a list and report of all criteria used to determine the existence of an interface.

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#### COST:BENEFIT ANALYSIS

BLM must provide an adequate cost:benefit analysis of all actions. For example, what are the costs vs. the benefits of spending \$100 an acre to treat/restore lands where livestock grazing will again soon resume?

10a-44

What are the costs to recreational uses of public lands of large-scale treatments? We have been repeatedly contacted by hunters, hikers and birdwatchers who have had recreational outings - or favorite recreational sites - ruined by BLM "treatments". What impact do such losses have on the local and regional economy?

For example, in BLM's recent flawed and soon-to-be-withdrawn Jim Sage EA, BLM planned to spend 6 million dollars to kill junipers across an entire mountain range, despite widespread weed problems throughout the lower and middle elevations - BLM grazing proposals would have increased grazing on the "treated" lands. Thus, taxpayers would have been funding increased livestock forage under the guise of fuels projects, while receiving only tiny amounts of grazing fee dollars in return.

BLM must adequately analyze a full range of alternatives based on sound economics. All alternatives should include use of federal fire funds to purchase grazing permits and permanently remove livestock from degraded lands, as this is a very foreseeable action during the life of this plan. We support an alternative that uses preventive measures and passive restoration techniques, addresses causal agents of fire/fuels/vegetation problems such as livestock and ORV use, and which minimizes risks of invasive species spread stemming from any treatment that is applied.

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#### WIND AND WATER EROSION

10a-45

Actions under the Alternatives will bring about widespread soil erosion and relocation in wind and water. In order to understand the impacts of the actions, the current condition of all lands (soils, veg, microbiotic crusts, etc.) must be thoroughly assessed. The EIS fails to assess how multiple or overlapping treatments, for example, how will herbicide runoff be accelerated in burned landscapes? This also relates to air quality problems, and possible increased air or water pollution. Recently discovered mercury contamination of Idaho waters and lands from gold roasting in Nevada must be

considered in this analysis, also.

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#### RELATED ACTIONS

- 10a-46 The USRD BLM is embarking on many other fire-related projects in USRD lands. The interrelationships of all ongoing or planned activities in this region, including across ownership boundaries, must be fully explored.

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#### COMMITMENT TO OPEN NEPA PROCESS

- 10a-47 The USRD BLM must ensure that all future projects that are tiered or related to this EIS undergo, further environmental review at the level of an EA or EIS with and full and open public comment and participation process.

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#### POST-TREATMENT, EFR

- 10a-48 BLM's recent ESR updates were big disappointments. BLM should use this EIS process to redo the flawed USRD EFR document.

- 10a-21 Use of Native Species: BLM must commit to use native species in all restoration seedings in all instances. In the past, BLM has used exotic, soil depleting crested and Siberian wheatgrasses, and aggressive, invasive, weedy forage kochia and intermediate wheatgrass. Instead of focusing on larger exotic plants (primarily because they produce livestock forage, no matter how limited its palatability), BLM must use natives, especially species like *Poa sandbergii*, bottlebrush squirreltail and bluebunch in lower elevation sites. In the past, BLM has failed to rest lands for sufficient periods of time to allow successful establishment of seeded native species.

- 10a-41 As part of this EIS, please provide a science-based (not livestock-forage-based, but ecological science-based) assessment of predicted establishment times for seedings of native vegetation under the various environmental settings in the USRD, and include in this predictions of "success" with and without livestock grazing. Please also thoroughly describe and assess the ecological impacts of the exiting seedings - impacts on soils, waters, vegetation, weeds, native biota, recreational and cultural concerns.
- 10a-49

- 10a-50 BLM must closely study the lessons provided by the bluebunch wheatgrass seeding in an ungrazed area near Kuna Butte in the LSRD - and any examples the agency may have in the Upper Snake or throughout the West, where, due to no grazing for a decade, seeded bluebunch wheatgrass was surviving and thriving at low elevations. In addition, please use existing exclosures as reference areas for comparison of effects of no grazing for several years following a fire, vs. BLM's typical woefully inadequate 2 growing season's rest. There are also exclosures in the Jarbidge FO that can serve as reference sites and comparative examples. One is located north of Winter Camp Butte, others are near Roseworth. Please visit these sites, and quantify the differences between vegetation inside and outside these exclosures, and use this information in developing a realistic time frame for livestock exclusion from seeded lands.

Sagebrush and other appropriate native shrubs (winterfat, shadscale, rabbitbrush) must be included

in all seedings, and repeated efforts must be made to establish native shrub cover, due to its importance to many native wildlife species.

10a-57

BLM must use some of its burgeoning fire funding to set up a reliable network and system for supply and storage of native seed, including locally adapted ecotypes, so that this native seed is readily available in the wake of fire. BLM will then no longer have the time-worn excuse that "we couldn't get native seeds, so had to plant cwg". It is time to act responsibly, and apply federal fire funds to setting up a reliable system of seed supply.

BLM must also commit to re-seeding in subsequent years, if initial seeding attempts are not successful due to drought or other factors. This must be factored into any

10a-26

No Need to Seed Herbaceous Species in Many Higher Elevation Sites: Many higher elevation sites require NO seeding of herbaceous species at all. Only sagebrush or other native shrubs should be seeded in these lands. It is essential, however, that these sites receive adequate rest from livestock grazing so that understory components, including microbotic crusts, can recover - this is essential to prevent new weed invasion. The two graing seasons' rest - maybe - is not sufficient.

10a-52

Livestock Trespass, Other Post-Fire Non-Compliance: As part of this NEPA process, BLM must review all records of livestock trespass (including warning letters, not only decision-level action - and assess its frequency and detail the lands where it has occurred. What are the impacts of trespass on outcome of rehab efforts? BLM must also provide strict penalties for post-fire trespass by livestock on burned areas. As taxpayers often have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on post-fire rehab and other ESR activities, accountability and effectiveness of rehab is essential. Please describe how trespass may harm any site recovery. Trespass has been a tremendous problem in Burley BLM lands, and documented by Miriam Austin of WWP and others over the years. The destroyed public lands at Rice Canyon and in the Goose Creek watershed provide a perfect example of BLM Post-fire failures to control livestock.

Livestock Facilities: The EFR must sharply limit the use of federal fire funds in construction of post-fire livestock facilities. BLM's typical response to fire is to place a fence, often permanent, as around the perimeter of a fire, and often to develop additional water facilities. These actions (permanent fence, new water facilities) are NOT part of post-fire rehab, they are part of livestock management on surrounding lands. Such projects inflict, in an unplanned and unnecessary manner, a new array of disturbances to wildlife habitats already impacted by fire disturbance.

There are many harmful impacts of barbed wire fences and other livestock facilities - posts serve as perches for predators, observation points for brown-headed cowbirds. Plus, fences cause avian mortality from collisions. New water sources lead to rapid disturbance and depletion of lands in the areas surrounding them, placing additional stress on native ecosystems and dependent species.

WWP strongly supports using existing unburned pasture or allotment boundary fences as the structures that restrict livestock from burned or treated lands. By closing these somewhat larger land areas to livestock grazing, BLM will also provide some better grass cover and habitat for species like sage grouse, who face habitat loss and fragmentation as lands burn. A 4-5 year closure of the pasture or allotment will result in ungrazed areas that help to provide grasses of sufficient

height, or other necessary habitat components, for sage grouse and other native wildlife. Only temporary facilities should be allowed, if any are used at all - primarily electric fences. All post-fire rehab plans must specify removal dates for any livestock facilities that result from fire rehab activities. However, temporary electric fences have a long track record of failure - please review information in Burley and Challis BLM files concerning woeful trespass of burned areas or sensitive riparian areas that resulted from the use of temporary fences, rather than removing livestock to existing pasture or allotment boundary fences .

10a-52 AUMs Should Not Be Shifted Elsewhere: BLM should not shift AUMs from treated lands to other areas. All AUMs from burned lands should be placed in temporary suspension until rehab, or restoration, success occurs.

Regrettably, in recent JFO post-fire documents, BLM has merely been shifting livestock use elsewhere, and thus impacts of livestock on watersheds, wildlife, habitat, etc. are magnified and amplified to the detriment of native species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. BLM has never assessed the impacts of these shifted AUMs.

10a-53 Area of Rested Lands Must Provide Habitat for Native Wildlife: BLM must protect land areas sufficient to provide habitat for sustaining viable and healthy populations of native wildlife as part of all treatment or ESR activities and decisions. This is particularly important for declining shrub-steppe species that are facing accelerated habitat loss and fragmentation (Knick et al. 2003, Connelly et al. 2004). BLM must assess the status of populations and habitats within the larger landscape area, and determine the likely effect of a fire on special status species and other important biota. BLM must also act to take protective measures - not only on the fire-affected allotments, but also on surrounding lands, and to buffer habitat loss until the habitat that has been lost can be restored.

Watersheds/Water Quality: Resting sufficient areas - burned and unburned, treated and untreated - is essential for watershed protection.

10a-31 Risk Assessments: BLM must conduct assessments of the risks of seeding failure/loss, increased depletion, weed invasions, under various post-treatment grazing strategies and across a broad range of alternatives. What are the risks of seeding weakening and depletion if grazing is allowed to resume too soon?  
10a-34

10a-54 Minimal Use of Chemicals: BLM must strive to minimize use of chemicals in wild land settings. An increasing segment of the public has health problems related to chemical sensitivities. Chemicals may leach into water, blow on eroding soils into other sites. Wind erosion is far more significant in post-fire environments, as dark bare soil surfaces heat up, with the result of funnel-cloud erosion/dustdevils blowing soils away. Cancer, respiratory problems and many other human health effects of herbicides and other treatment chemicals are well-known.

If BLM chooses to use chemicals, the treated lands, and surrounding areas, must be posted with signs that warns the recreational public of chemical use and possible exposure. BLM's disastrous use of Oust demonstrates the uncertainty associated with use of chemical in wild land settings, where wind erosion or water runoff may transport chemicals to unintended areas with unintended

consequences.

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10a-26 Periods of Rest: BLM must require adequate periods of rest from all livestock grazing to ensure that full recovery, or establishment of seeded vegetation, occurs. This time period is much longer than BLM ever requires, and is often dependent on the condition and health of vegetation communities pre-fire. Eddleman et al. (1994) described 4-5 year periods of rest as necessary for degraded western juniper communities.

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10a-55 Low elevation sagebrush-steppe communities may require a decade or more, and repeated seeding efforts during periods of favorable weather, to allow re-establishment of native vegetation. The EIS plan must address these necessary periods of rest, and not base its actions on the convenience of the livestock industry.

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10a-56 Commitment to Rehab: BLM's scoping letter states that "rehab" occurs up to three years after a fire. This must be expanded, to the time period sufficient to achieve adequate and healthy native vegetation communities, and no upper time limit put in place. A reasonable time period would be 10 years, given the vagaries of weather and drought cycles in depleted arid low elevation lands.

What About Restoration? "Rehabbing" in the BLM sense, is vastly different from restoration to a full component of native vegetation and ecological processes. Under what circumstances will BLM undertake Restoration? Is this NEPA document intended to cover that? How will BLM's ESR activities relate to restoration?

Analysis of Past EFR/Rehab/Restoration Actions. As part of this NEPA process, BLM must assess all its post-fire rehab efforts in the past 30-40 years, or however long records have been kept. For example, which cwg seedings in the Jarbidge were planted, when? With what species?

Following this, BLM must collect site-specific data on the current condition, health, wildlife, recreational and other values of these areas seeded post-fire. How many new fences, pipelines, troughs, etc. have been built using ESR funds? What impacts have they had? A complete analysis must be presented in this NEPA document.

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10a-44 Economics: A complete analysis of the costs and benefits of ESR seedings/rehab efforts must be provide. What is the per-acre dollar cost of all actions under all alternatives? What are the ecological costs/benefits of these actions?

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10a-56 BLM must also assess impacts of poor pre-fire land conditions and management on the outcomes of any post-fire recovery, and of the likelihood of success of any post-fire rehab.

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10a-57 We believe you must provide extensive analysis of the impacts of post-fire "salvage" logging or thinning. What are its impacts to soils, vegetation, weed invasion risks, wildlife habitats, fisheries, recreational and other uses of the affected lands? What have been the impacts to, and what is the condition of, lands where this has occurred in the past?

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Please keep us closely informed of all steps in this process.

Sincerely,

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Additional Comments Submitted  
Relevant Lit. Submitted as Separate Document  
CD of Juniper-Bird Study Submitted



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**Western Watersheds Project**

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Working to protect and restore Western watersheds

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February 9, 2005

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Here are additional comments of Western Watersheds Project on the Upper Snake River District Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Plan Amendment. Discussions below of desertification and watersheds, livestock grazing impacts, loss and fragmentation of habitats and populations of wildlife species are critical to BLM understanding, studying within the project area, and ultimately including in all analyses of impacts of the various EIS alternatives.

**Desertification and Watersheds**

10b-1

There is an extensive body of scientific literature on desertification of watersheds, including in the western United States. Desertification is defined as: "a change in the character of the land to a more desertic condition", involving "**The impoverishment of ecosystems as evidenced in reduced biological productivity and accelerated deterioration of soils** and in an associated impoverishment of dependent human livelihood systems". See Sheridan 1981, CEQ Report 1981 at iii. Major symptoms of desertification in the U. S. include: declining groundwater tables; salinization of topsoil or water; reduction of surface waters; unnaturally high soil erosion; desolation of native vegetation (Sheridan CEQ at 1). The existence of any one can be evidence of desertification. As lands become desertified, they become **less productive**, and activities such as livestock grazing become **less sustainable**. Continuing activities like livestock grazing may result in grazing becoming permanently unsustainable across the landscape. In many areas of these allotments, ecological conditions because of desertification and degradation processes that has already occurred and which is still underway, have already crossed the threshold between sustainability and, essentially, "mining" of increasingly **non-renewable** natural resources. Desertification can be both a patchy destruction, often exacerbated by drought, as well as as **the impoverishment of ecosystems within deserts**.

The EIS must assess the levels and degree of desertification that have occurred across the EIS area. This is necessary to understand the suitability of these lands for livestock grazing, the productivity and carrying capacity of these lands for grazing, the current or likely future extent of cheatgrass and other hazardous fuels, the likely success of any treatments undertaken under the EIS, the effects of alternatives developed here, the ability to meet any objectives, and the ability of actions under the EIS to maintain, enhance or restore habitats and populations of special status and other important species

? political pressures from ranchers results in strong political opposition to reduced grazing. Political pressures have hamstrung implementation of the Taylor grazing Act.

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10b-2 This EIS process provides BLM an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the actual capability and productivity of the vegetation and soils that meets the desires and needs of the public on these lands.

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10b-3 Sagebrush, pinyon-juniper and salt desert shrub vegetation communities are now showing signs of “extensive changes” and significant stresses, with livestock grazing and aggressive non-native weeds recognized as among important causal factors. Grazing disturbance, degradation and weed invasion will cause native plant communities to cross thresholds from which recovery is very difficult, if not impossible. The decline in sage grouse populations and other species dependent on arid land shrub habitats is a landscape-scale biological indicator that the loss of functions and values of sagebrush ecosystems are serious and widespread. These are also signs of desertification processes across the landscape.

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### **Imperilment of the Sagebrush Biome**

10b-4 A recent analysis, Dobkin and Sauder 2004, “Shrubsteppe Landscapes in Jeopardy: Distribution, abundances, and the uncertain future of birds and small mammals in the Intermountain West”, examined bird and small mammal species in the sagebrush biome. The authors found that “very little of the sagebrush biome remains undisturbed”, the **inherent resilience of the ecosystem has been lost and the ability to resist invasion and respond to disturbance has been compromised** (Dobkin and Sauder at 5). At least 60% of sagebrush steppe now has exotic annual grasses in the understory or has been converted completely to non-native annual grasslands (citing West 2000). More than 90% of riparian habitats have been compromised by livestock or agriculture.

The authors distilled a list of 61 species of birds and small mammals that are completely or extensively dependent on shrubsteppe ecosystems, and conducted an analysis of their distributions, abundances, and sensitivity to habitat disturbance to assess current state of knowledge and conservation needs of these species, with focus on Great Basin, Interior Columbia Basin and Wyoming Basin, based on BBS data and other studies.

The Columbia Plateau, Great Basin and Wyoming Basin are among the **least sampled** of all physiographic provinces covered by the Breeding Bird Survey. **Remarkably little** is known about the actual distributions or population trends of small mammals. “Range maps created by connecting the dots among sites where a species has been captured do not paint a realistic picture, especially in the highly altered and fragmented shrubsteppe landscapes of today. For small terrestrial mammals ... our results support the view that many of these species now exist only as **small, disconnected populations isolated from each other ... it is completely untenable to assume species’ presence based on simply on presence of appropriate habitat in shrubsteppe landscapes of the Intermountain West**”. Also, the authors “**find no reason for optimism about the prospects in the Intermountain West of any of the 61 species**” (at 3). “The results of our analyses

**present an overall picture of an ecosystem teetering on the edge of collapse** (citing Knick et al. 2003)”.

10b-4

This highlights the need for BLM to conduct a systematic and comprehensive on-the-ground survey and assessment of species presence and habitat presence and quality on these allotments and surrounding lands. BLM has a unique opportunity in this EIS process to act to identify important components of native biodiversity on these lands – and, armed with this knowledge, take management action to enhance and restore these species habitats and populations before it is too late.

#### **Sagebrush Mammal Summaries (based on Dobkin and Sauder 2004)**

11 of 24 mammals in the report by Dobkin and Sauder (2004) are endemic to the IM West, representing a high degree of endemism. Many of the small mammal species whose status is reviewed in the report are important prey for raptors and some other special status species. In addition, the high degree of endemism is likely even greater than species-level ranges would indicate, and genetic analyses of upland and riparian small mammals may provide more examples of “cryptic” species like has now been found in endemic ground squirrels in Idaho.

10b-4

Only one of the 19 species of small mammals for which adequate trapping data was available was found in more than 62% of potentially suitable localities. This analysis of field studies is the first comprehensive attempt to quantify presence or absence across a region. The report found that **21 of the 24 small mammal species respond negatively to the effects of livestock grazing. Eleven of 18 small mammal species responded negatively to the presence of exotic plants**, with riparian mammal species exhibiting neutral responses if vegetation was thick enough.

Geographic patterns of species richness and community stability raise concern. Despite range maps showing occurrence over broad areas, many species of small mammals now exist only as small, disconnected populations isolated from each other by unsuitable habitats.” Thus, **it is completely untenable to assume species’ presence based simply on presence of appropriate habitat in shrubsteppe landscapes of the IM West.**” This demonstrates why BLM must systematically conduct non-lethal site-specific surveys for small mammals in representative habitat types, and assess habitat conditions, across the allotments.

The report authors conclude: We find **no reason for optimism** about the prospects in the Intermountain West for any of the 61 species identified. Sagebrush distribution is highly fragmented, and much less extensive than large-scale maps suggest. Extraordinary fragmentation and degradation of sagebrush-steppe landscapes has been caused by livestock grazing practices, purposeful removal of sagebrush and/or seedings through prescribed fire, mechanical treatment, biological agents and herbicides, invariably done to provide forage for livestock, especially as native vegetation communities have become increasingly depleted, as well as ag-conversion, roads, mining and mining exploration fragmentation, powerline and pipeline corridors.

An untold number of livestock facilities (fences, spring projects, pipelines, trough systems, salting sites, corrals, wells, windmills, water haul sites, etc.) have been constructed or placed on public lands – including across these allotments and surrounding lands. Roads almost inevitably grow up either as a direct result of facility construction/placement, or of continued facility use and maintenance. Then, roads become travel corridors for predators (Braun 1998, Federal Register 2003, Federal Register 2004, Connelly et al. 2004, Freilich et al. 2003, Connelly et al. 2004, Dobkin and Sauder 2004), and conduits for weed invasion (Gelbard and Belnap 2003). Many of these facilities have unforeseen effects, and exert influence over much larger areas than anticipated. For example, water developments may attract sage grouse predators and be “sinks” (Connelly et al. 2004).

Ecological changes have pushed many sagebrush landscapes beyond ecological thresholds for recovery. Cumulative effects of land use and habitat degradation are moving sagebrush habitats toward ecological collapse and dysfunction (Knick et al. 2003, Dobkin and Sauder 2004).

Although sage grouse have been the flagship species for this ecosystem, and publicity over concerns have focused mainly on grouse, it is not just sage grouse that are in trouble. Sage grouse have become a surrogate for numerous species of animals and plants that depend on sagebrush communities, and many of these species may also use salt desert shrub communities.

Shrubland and grassland birds, representing an important component of the biodiversity of the western United States, are declining faster than any other group of species in North America (Saab and Rich 1997, Paige and Ritter 1999, USGS Great Basin Mojave-Desert Region, Dobkin and Sauder 2004). Species dependent on sagebrush ecosystems (Brewer’s sparrow, Sage Sparrow, Sage Thrasher), may be important predictors of ecological collapse.

A review of field studies of small mammal response to livestock grazing (compared moderately to heavily grazed upland or riparian areas with exclosures), found **overwhelmingly negative responses** (decreased abundance or productivity) to the effects of livestock grazing for 12 species (Table 8): Upland: Paiute ground squirrel, Washington ground squirrel, little pocket mouse, Great Basin pocket mouse, Chisel-toothed kangaroo rat, desert woodrat, sagebrush vole, Riparian: Water shrew, Western harvest mouse, long-tailed vole, montane vole, western jumping mouse. 9 species have an extremely high likelihood for negative responses to livestock grazing (Table 8) are: Upland: Merriam’s shrew, Preble’s shrew, pygmy rabbit Idaho ground squirrel, Merriam’s ground squirrel, Townsend’s ground squirrel, Townsend’s pocket gopher. Riparian: Townsend’s pocket gopher. Plus, negative responses to presence of exotic species have been demonstrated for eight upland species, and can be inferred with high likelihood for three others.

Virtually no areas in the IM West exhibited much riparian species diversity. For riparian birds, areas of highest species diversity were areas of highest community stability.

Patterns of high mammal species richness were concentrated within the three primary shrubsteppe ecoregions. Species richness was high in much of the Great Basin. Remarkably little is known about the actual distribution or conservation status of small-mammal species – there is no standardized survey. Alarmingly, there was **a high frequency in which species were missing from studies focused on suitable habitat**. This should raise concern about the current actual extent of populations. It must be understood in the context of the high degree of fragmentation and altered disturbance regimes (Knick et al. 2003), the “overwhelmingly negative response to livestock grazing”, and the limited dispersal capabilities of small mammals (Dobkin and Sauder 2004). **“Our results support the view that many of these species now exist as small, disconnected populations isolated from each other by unsuitable habitats across which they cannot disperse”**. Catastrophic decline of the largest population of northern Idaho ground squirrels illustrates this. The **combined effects of altered fire cycles**, (loss of fire here - as this species occurred in meadows in forest), **livestock grazing and exotic species introduction is the reality faced by many small mammal populations**.

10b-4

Many species of small mammals exist as scattered, disconnected populations. One cannot assume species presence based simply on presence of appropriate habitat in shrubsteppe landscapes of the IM West.

Vole populations isolated from each other and tied to the riparian habitats among isolated mountain ranges are likely candidates for endemism to be found if genetic analyses are conducted. Several isolated subspecies of montane vole occur along the southernmost portion of the species range - likely isolated from conspecifics for millenia. Endemism among small mammals of the IM West, already high, is likely even greater. Many of the species have two or more described subspecies, and much of the described subspecific variation is based on morphological variations. Where thorough genetic analysis is conducted, there may be sufficient evidence to warrant elevation to full species.

A pattern of high species richness is much more concentrated for small mammals, and the number of endemics may represent more habitat specificity. The authors note that very little attention is paid to conservation needs of small mammals. Conservation efforts should integrate areas of high species richness for birds and mammals.

Across the IM West, **altered fire frequencies combined with ubiquitous grazing drives the loss of native plant community structure and composition on which birds and small mammals depend**. Grazing reduces competition from native grasses, and cheatgrass and other weeds flourish, with each successive fire promoting invader expansion, resulting in self-perpetuating monocultures of exotic plant species with very short fire return intervals (Whisenant 1991, Anthony and Vitousek 1992, Billings 1994, Knick et al. 2003). Exotic plant dominated landscapes are uninhabitable for nearly all native bird and small mammal species (Dobkin and Sauder 2004). Shrub-steppe habitat has diminished greatly - at least 44% of potential habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse has

disappeared (Schroeder et al 2004) - and this study did not evaluate fragmentation of the rest!

10b-4

Biome-wide, accelerated Oil and Gas development is occurring in Wyoming. This places landscape-scale fragmentation and soil disturbance on an even faster trajectory. Also, an astonishing number of fences and other livestock projects that serve to fragment habitats are found across the sagebrush biome (see Connelly et al. 2004).

### **Sagebrush Bird Species Summaries (Dobkin and Sauder 2004)**

There are significant declining trends for 16 of 25 upland bird species (64%) in the regions of the Intermountain West (Dobkin and Sauder 2004). Only 3 species showed a significant increasing population trend. 5 of 12 riparian species declined significantly over both the short and long term. “Birds that depend on native vegetation for their nests clearly are jeopardized by the loss or degradation of vegetation. Nearly all 25 upland species are obligate ground/shrub nesters, with 18 of the 25 species dependent on native shrubs for nesting and foraging.

Species richness for upland birds was concentrated in the three primary shrubsteppe ecoregions, with areas of highest species richness extending across the Columbia Plateau from southeastern Oregon to easternmost Idaho, the eastern two-thirds of the Great Basin, and southwestern Wyoming Basin. There was constancy in bird species composition in upland bird communities between 1968-1983 and 1984-2001. However, the community composition of riparian bird communities varied substantially between periods, with a decrease in species composition of riparian communities. Plus, ecologically unsuitable habitats are now embedded in matrices of suitable habitats.

All of the upland bird species, and all the riparian species listed in Dobkin and Sauder (2004), Table 1 at 9 are likely to occur in the EIS Project area, likewise, nearly all of the small mammal species found in Table 2 at 10 are likely to occur in the Project area. For some species, such as loggerhead shrike, declines were especially severe in the three primary shrubsteppe ecoregions – with population losses across large geographic areas.

Geographic patterns of species richness for birds found that areas of highest upland avian species richness correspond with areas of lowest shrubsteppe fragmentation. Bird species “Entirely” dependent on sagebrush: Greater Sage-Grouse, Sage Thrasher, Brewer’s Sparrow, and Sage Sparrow. Birds “Nearly” dependent: Gray Flycatcher, Gray Vireo, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-throated Sparrow.

Riparian birds have distributions that extend beyond the IM West, as do riparian mammals. Given the relative rarity and ecological importance of riparian habitats within shrub-steppe landscapes, the high degree of instability in riparian bird community structure found in the report, reflects **the poor condition of riparian habitats** across the Great Basin, Columbia Plateau and Wyoming Basin ecoregions (Dobkin and Sauder 2004, citing Saab et al. 1995, Dobkin et al. 1998, Tewksbury et al. 2002, Krueper et al.

2003, Earnst et al. 2004) **and the dewatering of riparian zones** (Dobkin and Sauder 2004, citing Rood et al. 2003), causing damage to avifauna and habitats.

Upland Species (summarized from Dobkin and Sauder (2004):

10b-4 \* Greater Sage-Grouse. Owyhee allotment lies in part of one of the two zones of greater abundance in the ICB, and this abuts the states of Idaho and Oregon (see Dobkin and Sauder at 31). The Sheep Allotment Complex lies at the periphery of a large eastern gap in SG distribution (at 32). Causes of Declines: Habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation, altered fire frequency (both lower and higher), livestock grazing converting shrubsteppe to annual monocultures are Threats, range “improvements”, and West Nile virus are threats. (Note: Also, muddy cow tracks, such as at the margins of stock ponds or other livestock trampled areas may provide necessary breeding sites for mosquitoes in arid landscapes. Plus, large numbers of livestock may provide an unnaturally large blood food supply for mosquito populations.

\* Ferruginous Hawk. Open areas, isolated trees, and edges of pinyon-juniper woodlands are used for hunting perches and nesting. “Prey abundance, particularly jackrabbits and ground squirrels, is correlated significantly with the number of breeding pairs in an area and with reproductive success. (Dobkin and Sauder 2004, citing Jasikoff 1982 and Deschant 2001 b) (at 36). Habitat destruction and degradation are greatest threats, and directly influence prey abundance, important to reproductive success. Ferruginous hawks can be particularly sensitive to human disturbance (at 37).

\* Prairie Falcon. Open habitats with moderate grass cover and low-growing sparse shrubs. Nest-site availability and ground squirrel populations are important factors in habitat

selection. Activities affecting ground squirrel abundance, include livestock grazing, frequent fires, ag conversion, poisoning. Disturbance near nest sites (cliffs) can reduce breeding success.

\* Long-Billed Curlew. Livestock grazing can be negative if cows trample nests, or disturb birds and cause nest abandonment.

\* Burrowing Owl. Requires low vegetation and a suitable nest burrow. BOs may expand other species burrows, but do not dig their own. Excavation by ground squirrels, marmots and badgers is important in nest burrow availability. Threats are habitat degradation and destruction, and shrub-steppe degradation by livestock or ag conversion. Pesticides can reduce populations of insect prey and fossorial mammals. Badgers, coyotes, birds of prey and vehicle collisions may also be problems.

\* Gray Flycatcher. Shrub-steppe, mountain mahogany and pj. In shrubsteppe, gray flycatchers are associated with tall, dense sagebrush. Chaining or burning of sagebrush and pinyon/juniper areas is known to eliminate gray flycatchers (at 46). It is parasitized by the brown-headed cowbird. Habitat fragmentation likely increases nest parasitism and predation rates.

\* Loggerhead Shrike. Shrubsteppe, open woodland, field edges, and occasionally riparian areas. Presence and abundance in shrubsteppe is positively correlated with the diversity, density and height of shrubs. Population declines in Columbia Plateau and Great Basin.

\* Horned Lark. May be susceptible to trampling, and affected by invasion of annual grasses.

\* Sage Thrasher. Habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation are threats, including activities that destroy shrub cover (fire, chaining, herbicide) eliminate local populations. Although authors note that livestock grazing may increase shrubs, livestock grazing also alters shrub structure, especially that of taller sagebrush or other shrubs which are areas where sage thrashers nest.

\* Virginia's Warbler. P-j, mountain mahogany, mixed deciduous shrublands. Habitat destruction, livestock grazing.

\* Green-tailed Towhee. Shrublands and disturbed coniferous zones. In shrubsteppe, its presence and abundance are positively correlated with increased shrub species diversity, shrub cover, and taller shrubs. Threats are habitat destruction and degradation – livestock grazing and frequent fire have impacted shrubs. Simplification of shrub cover results in population reduction or elimination.

\* Brewer's Sparrow. Its presence is positively correlated with total shrub cover, bare ground, taller shrubs, patch size, and habitat heterogeneity – and negatively correlated with grass and salt shrub cover. Large population declines have occurred in the Columbia Plateau and Great Basin. Cowbird host. Threats are habitat destruction and degradation. Activities that destroy shrub cover (fire chaining herbicide, etc). A cowbird host. Positive (increased shrubs – see previous comments about shrub structure) and negative responses to grazing.

\* Vesper Sparrow. Inhabits short, patchy herbaceous vegetation, low shrub cover bare ground, forbs. Habitat destruction and degradation – frequent fires, in conjunction with invasive grasses, heavy livestock grazing (which increases shrub cover), and poor range conditions created by livestock grazing during drought increase rates of nest abandonment and failure. Cowbird host.

\* Lark Sparrow. Threats are fire and livestock grazing converting lands to annual grass monocultures are threats.

\* Black-throated Sparrow. Desert shrub, shrub-steppe, open pinyon-juniper. Correlated with moderate shrub cover, tall vegetation, shrub species richness, and dead woody vegetation. Drought reduces the number breeding attempts and clutch size.

\* Sage Sparrow. Particularly associated with big sagebrush, or may be found in mixed shrub communities with greater shrub cover, abundant bare ground, sparse grass cover. Shows high site fidelity. Habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation are chief threats, and are caused by frequent fire, livestock grazing, range "improvements" (shrub treatments, exotic grass plantings) – and these promote other impacts – predation and nest parasitism.

\* Savannah Sparrow. It has been assumed that Savannah Sparrow populations benefit from conversion to annual monocultures. However, converted habitats may not be equivalent to native grassland habitats and may serve as population sinks.

\* Grasshopper Sparrow. Livestock grazing degrades habitats. While benefits from natural fire, annual grass conversion resulting from fire is negative.

\* Western Meadowlark. May be affected by fire.

Other summaries of species trends support Dobkin and Sauder (2004). Many species with downward trends in population size are associated primarily or exclusively with shrub-

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steppe or riparian habitats. In shrub-steppe, this includes northern harrier, mourning dove, horned lark, loggerhead shrike, green-tailed towhee, vesper sparrow, sage sparrow (USGS Mojave-Great Basin at 33-51). Populations up in one area, down in another: rock wren, sage thrasher, Brewer's sparrow, black-throated sparrow, western meadowlark. Population sizes of mourning dove and loggerhead shrike, whose abundances are declining widely in western North America are also declining in the Great Basin. The preponderance of downward trends in shrub-steppe indicates continuing problems with the health of this community. In pinyon-juniper with a sagebrush and bunchgrass understory, species include common nighthawk, northern flicker, gray flycatcher, mockingbird, chipping sparrow, and Scott's oriole (USGS Mojave-Great Basin at 33). Riparian species with downward trends: killdeer, violet-green swallow, warbling vireo, yellow warbler, lazuli bunting, savannah sparrow, song sparrow, yellow-headed blackbird, Brewer's blackbird. Downward trends in riparian species – are indicative of continuing deterioration of riparian habitats of the Great Basin (USGS Mojave-Great Basin at 34).

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### **Conservation Strategies, and Exotic Species/Degradation of Native Communities**

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Landscape-scale conservation is also a critical component of ICBEMP assessments (see Wisdom et al. 2000 – much discussion in accompanying ACEC Nominations). In the project area, large browsers disappeared about 12,000 years ago. The largest ungulate was the pronghorn. Jackrabbits, cottontails, and rodents may have been the largest herbivores (Mack and Thompson 1982, Connelly et al. 2004). Microbiotic crust occurs in areas that are not, or lightly, grazed. As a result, livestock grazing and trampling impacts cause extensive, chronic and often irreversible harm to soils, vegetation and habitats of native species. This results in an alteration of composition, function and structure of plant and native animal communities (Fleischner 2004)

Salt desert communities: Invasive species have impacted shadscale and greasewood communities, and have altered their composition and function. Livestock grazing the most common disturbance that leads to weed invasions and altered fuels and fire regimes at these lower elevations. Cheatgrass and halogeton invades dry sites, exacerbated by livestock grazing. These communities are increasingly threatened by the proliferation of non-native annual grasses. Historically, they did not burn.

BLM's Standards and Guides and other recent Assessments and documents across the Project area are replete with descriptions of cheatgrass being a growing problem. However, BLM nearly always grossly under-estimates the extent of cheatgrass or other weed infestations in the understory, and fails to undertake more than token cuts, if even that, in livestock use. In fact, BLM often allows extra grazing on degraded lands (under the Temporary Non-Renewable Use) that may lead to further degradation, fuels problems, and introduction of even more aggressive exotic species.

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Sagebrush semidesert is highlighted for conservation because of decline of sagebrush-obligate species. Species dependent include: sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, sage

thrasher, sage grouse, pygmy rabbit, sagebrush vole, sagebrush lizard, pronghorn (Paige and Ritter 2000).

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Fire regulates the density of fire-intolerant shrubs. Invasion of exotic annual grasses has increased fire frequency in stands causing a decline in abundance of sagebrush and other non-sprouting shrubs. In some areas, knapweed or other noxious weed species may be invading annual grass-dominated sites. Grazing decreases the importance of tall bunchgrasses and increases rabbitbrush, forbs and non-native grasses. Grazed sagebrush usually lacks altogether, or has no good condition microbiotic crusts. Large tracts of sagebrush semidesert and sagebrush-steppe are needed to adequately protect these systems.

Pinyon-juniper: Lower montane ecological systems – middle elevations, including pinyon-juniper, low montane shrubland, mountain mahogany. Half of the species inhabiting these sites are endemic to the region. Pinyon jay and juniper titmouse are “restricted specialists”. More than half global population of gray flycatcher breeds in lower montane systems in the Great Basin. The very small areas of Utah juniper and Utah juniper and pinyon pine in SE Idaho are the only places in Idaho where several species of birds occur. Yet, under current management, and the aggressive proposed action, these habitats are greatly threatened. Please see accompanying report (on CD: Pinyon-juniper and Juniper Birds”, prepared by Red Willow Research for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game).

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PJ and juniperhabitats are threatened by grazing and fire, and many are in degraded condition, and are even being chained to create rangeland for livestock. Larger tracts of lower montane systems with connectivity to lower elevation sagebrush semidesert or basin and desert scrub systems are more likely to harbor larger populations of bighorn sheep. PJ woodlands – adjacent veg. is sagebrush steppe at lower and upper elevation margins.

Montane forest and woodlands. Montane islands in the Great Basin (and areas in eastern Idaho) may be important for resilience of natural communities and species responses to climate change. GBCB at 113, citing Wharton et al. 1990.

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The Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan (Rich et al. 2004) identifies a critical need for strategic approaches to landbird conservation, and describes overarching threats faced by landbirds, including: significant direct loss of major bird habitats (including loss of western riparian, pinyon-juniper and sagebrush habitats); fragmentation and degradation of remaining habitats due to intensified agricultural practices, inappropriate grazing, spread of exotic vegetation and other factors; failure to identify and properly protect or manage habitat used during spring migration, fall migration, and winter. Birds stressed during migration require quality habitats for food and cover; a steady, widespread increase in dispersed mortality factors. These factors collectively contribute to a **high proportion of population declines and anticipated future threats.**

The Plan describes the growing recreational importance of birds, and the economic importance of bird-associated recreational activities. Birds also contribute to the maintenance of ecosystems – from dispersing native plant seeds to consuming insect pests. Conserving habitat for birds will contribute to meeting needs of other wildlife.

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The Plan stressed it does not advocate conservation based on single species only, and encourages planners to identify common issues or habitats among suites of high priority species. It assesses conservation vulnerability based on biological criteria. PIF Assessment Factors include: Population size, breeding distribution, non-breeding distribution, threats to breeding, threats to non-breeding, and population trend.

Species of Continental Importance: Includes Watch List and Stewardship Species. Watch List: Greater Sage-Grouse, Swainson's Hawk, Short-eared Owl, White-throated Swift, Pinyon Jay, Brewer's Sparrow, Mountain Quail, Calliope Hummingbird, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Virginia's Warbler. Stewardship Species: Gray Flycatcher, Western Scrub Jay ???, Sage Thrasher, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-throated Sparrow, Sage Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow (?), Yellow-headed Blackbird, Rough-legged Hawk (winter?). Rosy Finch species (winter?).

Conservation of Stewardship Species will be a step towards maintaining broader suites of species within all biomes. LCP at 31 states: **“habitat loss remains the paramount factor for most species”, and “habitats in danger of significant loss in the near future include western pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, and wetlands.** It describes the impacts of habitat fragmentation, and the growth in dispersed recreation such as OHV use.

Sadly, the series of Alternatives (Proposed and Preferred Actions) cast aside reasonable analysis of the impacts of the massive intervention and disturbance put forth in the EIS on these species, and the viability of habitats that will be drastically fragmented under the EIS actions.

Sage grouse are threatened by “extensive degradation of its sagebrush habitat by overgrazing and invasive plants” (LCP at 31). Livestock grazing “has had enormous effects on native vegetation – a century of selective removal of palatable plant species, soil compaction, water developments and livestock management activities” (LCP 2004, citing Saab et al. 2004. Habitat loss and fragmentation are also occurring on migration routes and in wintering areas.

It promotes landscape-level natural resource planning. One example of “measurable criteria” is number of agency plans into which landbird objectives have been incorporated. This EIS provides just such an opportunity!

Issues are identified that transcend biomes, including:

- Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation
- Forestry management
- Fire management strategies

- Wetland Issues
- Exotic or invasive species
- Resource extraction/energy
- Livestock grazing management
- Climate change
- Contaminants and pesticides
- Lack of information.

The allotments lie within the Intermountain West Avifaunal Biome, which is composed of 3 Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs). “Extensive mountain ranges and broad basins produce large elevational gradients that create a complex and variable environment - including coniferous forest, pinyon-juniper woodland, and cold semidesert shrubsteppe, and important wetland complexes. The IM West is center of distribution for many birds, and over half the Biome’s SCSIs have 75 percent or more of their population here.

**“Threats and/or declining trends face Species of Continental Importance that use coniferous forest, pinyon-juniper woodland, shrubsteppe, and riparian habitats”.**

For example:

\* Coniferous forest: flammulated owl, Cassin’s finch, others.

\* Deciduous forest: Aspen forest is a declining habitat type SIC: Red-naped Sapsuckers, Mountain Bluebird.

\* Woodland: Pinyon-juniper woodlands are especially characteristic of the southern portion of the IM West. This habitat type supports the largest nesting-bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West (Beidleman 2000), cited in LCP at 53. SCI are Pinyon Jay, Gray Vireo and Gray Flycatcher. “Degradation of pj has been widespread and continuous since European settlement”.

Shrub-steppe species comprise the largest number of Species of Continental Importance in this biome. Conversion for ag. invasion of non-native grasses and forbs, development, sagebrush eradication and changes in fire frequency. This has caused extensive loss and degradation of habitat, with subsequent population declines. Cheatgrass has invaded over half of the existing sagebrush habitat. It is the highest conservation priority in the Interior Columbia Basin (Saab and Rich 1997, Paige and Ritter 1999), and species include: Greater Sage-Grouse, Sage Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, Brewer’s Sparrow, Green-tailed Towhee. “Montane shrublands embedded in the forests provide many species with valuable food and cover – and may be critical to hummingbirds during migration. Montane Shrubland SCI include: Ducky Flycatcher, Virginia’s Warbler, Calliope Hummingbird, Green-tailed Towhee, Rufous Hummingbird, and Mountain Bluebird.

Riparian Habitats. Characteristics of riparian habitats vary widely depending on matrix and elevation, from cottonwood gallery forests to willow thickets. Nearly all riparian areas have been substantially degraded by development or alteration of many types – including de-watering, and alteration of flows, road construction, invasion of non-native species, logging, severe overgrazing, recreation.

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Conservation issues include: Inappropriate livestock grazing, invasion of exotic plants change in fire intensity and frequency, logging practices affecting forest structure, and composition – especially mature, continued degradation of riparian habitat, conversion of sagebrush and pinyon-juniper habitats, including through land management practices, water diversion, alteration of flows, and spring development, recreational OHV use.

Recommended actions: Retain large tracts of pinyon-juniper; ensure seed supply of seed-producing pinyon pine; Maintain/promote growth of native grasses and forbs in shrub-steppe, prevent large scale wildfire, restore with native plants following disturbance. Maintain water quality and quantity and vegetation in embedded springs, seeps and riparian areas. Restore degraded habitats and habitats that have been converted to non-native grasslands. Protect high quality riparian habitat. Restore natural flows and flooding regimes.

Interfacing Communities/Natural Diversity and Inherent Complexity of Plant Communities. The ferruginous hawk illustrates the importance of understanding interfacing habitats. Ferruginous hawks typically nest in junipers at the edge of, or interfacing with sagebrush habitats. It is critical that BLM examine the already complex interspersed of plant communities across the landscape. Sagebrush communities often exist as complex mosaics with inherent natural diversity (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks 1995, Welch and Criddle 2003).

Native Vegetation: The ecological integrity of native plant communities is the foundation of healthy habitats for special status species, raptor prey species, and healthy watersheds and watershed processes that replenish aquifers for scarce desert springs.

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### Species to Be Covered

BLM must conduct on-the-ground inventories of species, and habitat conditions and populations across the EIS area. BLM must use its current special status species list, Partner in Flight species lists, information from the Conservation Data Center, and other important recent summaries, such as Connelly et al. 2004 and Dobkin and Sauder 2004, and Wisdom et al. 2000, to examine species of concern and their habitat needs. It must conduct on-the-ground surveys for species of concern, and collect thorough and up-to-date information on the quality and quantity of habitats across these allotments and surrounding lands.

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BLM must carefully review these lists, and updated information, and assess habitat conditions for these species. BLM must conduct systematic baseline surveys for breeding birds, migrants, wintering species. BLM should work with experts to assess populations, genetic uniqueness, etc.). BLM must also fully consider the changing dynamics in wildlife populations – such as elk, and the high priority segments of the public place on this species, as well as antelope and mule deer.

Juniper and/or pinyon-juniper birds are of high conservation concern (USFWS 2002, Rich et al. 2004). Yet, pinyon-juniper habitats are among the **most consistently under-**

**represented** habitat types in biological and ecological survey efforts (Red Willow Research 2004).

In the Great Basin Bird Conservation Region, high-priority Pinyon-Juniper species include: Pinyon Jay, Ferruginous Hawk, Plumbeous Vireo, Virginia's Warbler, and Black-throated Gray warbler. Pinyon-juniper and juniper woodlands/pygmy forest provide important breeding habitat for many wildlife species. Pinyon-juniper provides important food for birds and other wildlife. Avian species known to consume pinyon seeds include: Pinyon Jay, Steller's Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Flicker, Gray-eyed Junco, Black-billed Magpie, Clark's Nutcracker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, Juniper Titmouse, and Lewis Woodpecker (Martin and others 1951, cited in Red Willow 2004). Both pinyon nuts and juniper berries provide a vital food resource for birds. Juniper berries remain on trees in winter, and are important for Cedar Waxwing, Townsend's Solitaire, Pinyon Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Western Scrub Jay, Grosbeak sp., American Robin (Martin and others 1951; Johnson 1998; PIF 2000). Townsend's Solitaires establish winter territories based on juniper berry presence and abundance.

Extensive alteration has occurred to pinyon-juniper and juniper in many areas – chaining, spraying, and prescribed fire have been used to remove pinyon-juniper and juniper to plant livestock forage, especially at lower elevations on upper portions of alluvial fans and toeslopes of ranges. Often, exotic crested wheatgrass was planted. Wildfires have consumed large acreages, including across southern Idaho, northern Nevada and northern Utah. Plus, large-scale die-offs of sagebrush have occurred. BLM must assess the integrity and continuity of communities, identify higher quality communities, and protect them from new disturbance, and act to ameliorate ongoing, chronic disturbance of livestock grazing or other land use practices. These areas will also provide reference areas for unfragmented habitats.

Wisdom et al. (2000) provide additional information on understanding animal species habitat needs. See Summaries for Groups 30-35., for example – two specific examples provided below. Please apply information in this document to species and habitat needs analyses in the EIS area. Examples:

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*Group 30.* Ash-throated flycatcher and bushtit depend on a mix of source habitats. Retain contiguous blocks of mature juniper/sagebrush, especially old juniper with nest cavities. Consider site-specific ecological potential and response to management before removing juniper trees. Retain old growth, cavities, restrict pesticides, restore native understories, minimize likelihood of exotic invasion.

*Group 31.* Ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, vesper sparrow, lark sparrow, western meadowlark, shirt-eared owl and pronghorn. Ferruginous hawk populations fluctuate in response to prey populations. Breeding populations of short-eared owls are nomadic, and may occur when rodent densities are high. Burrowing owls rely on burrows provided by burrowing mammals (ground squirrels, marmots, coyotes, badgers) and may be closely tied to these mammals. Broad-sale changes in source habitats – have dramatic

10b-4

“decreasing” and “strongly decreasing trends”. Source habitat remains in northern Great Basin and Owyhee Uplands. Source habitat loss – tied to loss of big sagebrush. Ag. conversion, conversion to exotics. BO populations have declined as the result of pest control programs. Meadowlark and lark sparrow success, correlated with grass. Removal of grass cover may have detrimental effects, presence of livestock may attract brown-headed cowbirds and increase brood parasitism.

Juniper expansion may have benefited ferruginous hawks. Microbiotic crusts have been widely destroyed by livestock. Roads, human activities and domestic dogs. Recreational shooting of marmots or ground squirrels impacts burrowing owls, and pesticide use may lead to direct mortality.

Management implications. Most of habitat clusters 5 (Owyhee Uplands ERU) and 6 (northern Great Basin, Owyhee Uplands, Upper Snake ERU), with the potential risks to ecological integrity are: continued declines in herbland and shrubland habitats.

Primary issues: Permanent and continued loss of shrubsteppe due to ag conversion, brush control, cheatgrass invasion; Soil compaction and loss of microbiotic crust; Adverse human disturbance.

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**Strategy: Identify and conserve large remaining areas (contiguous habitat) of shrubsteppe vegetation where ecological integrity is still relatively high, and to provide long-term habitat stability for populations and provide anchor points for restoration, corridors, and other landscape-level management. Restore grass and forb components. Restore microbiotic crusts, maintain burrows. Minimize adverse effects of human intrusion.**

In support of conserving shrub-steppe, identify large areas of high ecological integrity to be managed for sustainability, on large areas of federal land. Criteria for protect and enhance include: maintaining or increasing the size of smaller patches, preventing further habitat disassociation, protecting or increasing the size and integrity of corridors, all in connection with the location of core areas. Use fire suppression and prevention to retard the spread of cheatgrass. Restore cheatgrass monocultures. Restore native vegetation. Design livestock grazing to promote abundance of forbs and grasses in understory, encourage development of microbiotic crusts. Allow burrows to persist or expand (Wisdom et al. 2000).

### **BLM “Range”/Vegetation Data**

At present, BLM has very little current information on ecological conditions and the health of native plant communities across the landscape. When BLM (especially in the USRD) conducts its limited and narrow FRH assessments and allotment evaluations, it relies on old data, data in databases, and never re-visits the sites where ESI data had been collected. Key Area sites are located in only the most accessible areas, and are clustered in particular areas of the allotments, leaving vast land areas with no monitoring information at all collected. BLM also fails to collect necessary data on degradation caused by livestock facilities and management activities. Such information is critical to

understanding sources of flammable cheatgrass or other weed invasion, causes of roading, the inter-relationship and cumulative impacts of grazing facilities and roading. Current, comprehensive data on condition of soils vegetation, and habitats must be systematically collected.

Plus, BLM can not ignore evidence that its limited old data does show - i. e, only a small fraction of larger size grasses present are present in most sites that should be dominated by these species. Thus, "production" is greatly less than that of good or better condition sites, and this is typical of nearly all sites. BLM must also tie water developments, water hauling or other livestock management practices to site depletion and alteration of species structure, composition and fuels and fire problems. As part of this process, BLM must revisit its limited monitoring sites, and must also establish a series of new ESI and monitoring sites across the allotments, in all vegetation types, and that represent levels of livestock use that occurs across these lands.

BLM must also conduct comprehensive new FRH assessments, in representative sites grazed by livestock across all areas of the allotments. BLM seldom, if ever, addresses the role of livestock in causing hazardous fuels or exotic species problems in its FRH analyses.

### **BLM Treatments Pose Grave Dangers to Native Species**

BLM's EIS for these lands involves large-scale vegetation manipulation proposals – ranging from massive burning and "treatment" of conifers and aspen communities to extensive fragmentation (aka burning "mosaics") across some of the most intact remaining big sagebrush habitats in Interior Columbia Basin. All of these proposals have serious risks for the perpetuation of native species – and pose great threats of escalated weed invasion and permanent loss of plants, animals and biodiversity.

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BLM must conduct a comprehensive analysis of pre-existing projects and disturbance across the landscape, and include analyses of treatments and disturbance factors across land ownership boundaries. BLM must also assess significant ecological problems that may have arisen in the wake of treatments.

Plus, in our past experience with BLM, the agency has much exaggerated the needed scale of any fire prevention treatment projects that may be necessary to protect plant communities from large-scale fires. For example, in the Ely-Mount Wilson Urban interface near Ely, NV – only around 13% of the land area proposed by the Ely FO was actually found necessary to be treated when BLM's own national-level fire experts, having assessed the situation, developed a sane and reasonable approach.

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### **Grazing Suitability and Capability Analysis**

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BLM must conduct a current livestock grazing suitability analysis. BLM is aware that it has based livestock use areas and stocking rates on old adjudication processes – where AUMs claimed and then assigned in the adjudication process were often greatly inflated

by ranchers. These “adjudicated” AUMs were not based on the ability of the land to sustain such high numbers of livestock and levels of use.

In the EIS suitability analysis, BLM must examine:

10b-6 Slope, distance to natural water, dispersion of “forage” across the landscape – i.e. many lands have been so depleted that it takes dozens of acres to support an AUM – so the costs (including in weight gain/loss of livestock) are often so great that grazing is a resoundingly losing proposition, areas inaccessible due to winter snow, summer desiccation, etc. Directly relevant to the Fuels EIS is an assessment of the Risk that continued livestock grazing may push habitats over ecological thresholds from which they can not recover. Examples: Continued heavy stocking and degradation of mountain big sagebrush opening the door to cheatgrass invasion of understory; continued heavy stocking and degradation of juniper leading to cheatgrass invasion of understory; continued heavy stocking and degradation of sagebrush leading to both juniper and cheatgrass invasion of sagebrush.

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### Sagebrush and Other Habitat Assessments

Assessments of the quality of sagebrush, salt desert shrub, juniper, montane conifer, aspen and other important habitats are necessary because: habitats and populations of species continue to decline across vast areas; there are many sagebrush species of concern; threats to sagebrush are regional in scale; regional knowledge facilitates development of consistent, efficient and credible management strategies for a comprehensive set of species. Federal land managers have legal responsibilities for effective management of habitats for sagebrush-associated species of conservation concern.

10b-4 Analysis procedures include: Ecoregion and spatial extent, identify species of conservation concern, delineate ranges, estimate habitat requirements, identify regional Threats and Effects, estimate and map the Risks posed by each threat, Calculate Species-Habitat effects from all risks and other steps. Other Analyses include: Fragmentation, connectivity and patch size analyses, Consideration of non-vegetative factors affecting species of concern, change detection studies. Regional knowledge provides essential context for land use planning.

We have reviewed the local sage grouse plans, and they fail to provide information/conduct several necessary analyses at the appropriate scale, and fails to present necessary information to the public, and do not integrate necessary information to understand scale and extent of Threats (such as livestock grazing, cheatgrass presence in understory or domination, livestock facility fragmentation, etc.) and other habitat degradation or fragmentation effects – especially for mammals, reptiles and many migratory birds. They also completely fails to describe or map attributes necessary to understand the **quality of habitats** that do exist. For example, there is no mapping or other information that shows sagebrush habitats dominated by cheatgrass; no mapping or other information to show where large understory grasses have been largely eliminated ad weakened, and replaced by small *Poas*, or squirreltail, etc.

**Threats to Sagebrush and Other Shrub-Dependent Species and Habitats that must be Assessed in the EIS**

BLM must assess the following threats to native vegetation and special status species and other important wildlife:

Wells and windmills  
Pipelines  
Troughs  
Pipelines  
Roads (often linked to facilities)  
Salting Sites  
Weed Infestations  
Powerlines  
Fences  
Aquifer depletion

10b-4

Cheatgrass-dominated understories  
Cheatgrass, few shrubs

Altered understory species composition  
Altered understory species structure  
Altered overstory species composition  
Altered overstory species structure (see, for example, Katzner and Parker 1997, and Federal Register 68 (43): 10389-10409) describing impacts of livestock-altered or thinned sagebrush to pygmy rabbit)

Vegetation Treatments (chainings, seedings, railings, herbicidings, mechanical such as mowing) lacking key habitat components and associated roading

Grazing season/disturbance conflicts with nesting, birthing, wintering or other critical period in species life cycle  
Grazing use levels fail to provide necessary habitat components (cover or food) based on nest available science  
Livestock structural alteration of shrubs

Energy project siting (wind, geothermal, other) and associated roading  
Mines and mining exploration and associated roading

OHV races  
Areas of high OHV use  
Unregulated motorized use  
Road densities  
Communication towers. Powerlines, other facilities or vertical structures

Often overlooked threats from livestock facilities and structures include:

- Physical harm to species - obstacles such as fences that can cause injury or mortality;
- Structures cause species avoidance of areas, i.e. sage grouse avoid vertical structures.
- Providing elevated predator perches and nest predator perches (in the case of songbirds – brood parasite perches).
- Attract predators and act as sinks
- Attract brood parasites

10b-4 All of these impacts may act directly, indirectly, cumulatively or synergistically with the effects livestock degradation associated with lands over broad areas surrounding these facilities may have to vegetation, soils and other habitat components. The end result is degradation and fragmentation of habitats for important and special status species. This must be determined before BLM can evaluate impacts of the large-scale disturbance that it seeks to impose under the Fuels EIS to many areas of still relatively intact native vegetation and species habitats.

The impacts of grazing during sensitive periods of the year for native wildlife must be assessed. For example, inundating sage grouse nesting or brood rearing habitats with large numbers of cattle or sheep during nesting season may cause: Removal of cover necessary to protect nesting birds and to hide and provide essential insect food for chicks; cause flushing of birds from nests – thus revealing nests to predators; cause separation of broods and increased vulnerability to predation; strip essential cover to hide hens and nests and conceal chicks from aerial vision-oriented predators and screen scent from ground-based predators..

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### Altered Fire Cycles

10b-5 BLM must study the extent of cheatgrass in understories, and areas already dominated by cheatgrass. BLM must assess the risk of cheatgrass invasion of understories with continued or extended livestock use or disturbance. BLM cannot gloss over the role of ongoing livestock grazing in continuing disturbance that spreads cheatgrass, retarding recovery and weakening of native vegetation in plant communities that still have a significant component of native species present, etc.

BLM must assess how the presence of cheatgrass may affect special status species. For example, how do cheatgrass-dominated understories and interspaces affect reptile species occurrence and abundance - (lizards may be prey species for small mammals)? How does cheatgrass affect the pygmy rabbit?

Plus, in any discussion of plant communities where BLM claims the fuels/fuel loading is too heavy, BLM must examine causes heavy fuels related to livestock degradation, topsoil loss and change in site potential, climate change, etc.

## **Altered Composition and Structure/Lost Productivity**

Over large areas of the EIS lands, larger sized native bunchgrasses and forbs have been eliminated, or significantly weakened. Only smaller stature native grasses and weeds remain. How do these smaller stature grasses affect fire behavior, outcomes of various treatments, etc.? Appropriate stocking levels for any areas grazed must be based on the amount of forage present on a sustainable level, and Risk of exotic species invasions must be minimized. In addition, with extensive depletion over large areas, BLM must assess the diminishing returns – and increased ecological damage done by livestock having to roam over dozens if not hundreds of acres to sustain themselves/harvest an AUM. This leads to more trampling impacts, more weeds, etc. BLM must identify areas where grazing is unsustainable, or where it will cause harm to still-intact communities, as part of the Suitability analysis conducted under the EIS.

10b-5 Grazing systems, grazing intensity and season of use: Financial returns from livestock production, trend in ecological condition, forage production, watershed status and soil stability are all closely associated with grazing intensity (Holechek et al. 1998). Short-term rest or deferment can not overcome periodic heavy use. The conflicts with wildlife habitat needs, including food, cover, nutritional composition, space, lack of disturbance and other factors, must be studied.

### **Health of Vegetation Communities and Soils across the Landscape Drives Health of Habitats and Populations**

Plant Communities - Dispersion across the Landscape –the DEIS does not adequately map or assess this dispersion. BLM must inventory and assess (including using accurate mapping) the full range and diversity of native plant communities that exist across the landscape. BLM must assess the condition of these communities, including soil stability, erosion, presence of microbiotic crusts, possible loss of soil horizons, susceptibility to wind and water erosion, and their ecological integrity.

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## **Range of Alternatives**

10b-7 Instead of structuring this process to develop a range of alternatives centered around the need to intensively alter and treat still relatively intact native vegetation, BLM must consider a range of alternatives that focus on restoring cheatgrass-infested lands, and protecting native vegetation as much as possible. Expansion of cheatgrass pushes communities across thresholds from which natural recovery is difficult - if even possible. livestock grazing as only one of many competing uses on these fragile and much-abused arid lands which are already undergoing accelerated habitat fragmentation.

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## **Drought**

10b-5 All impacts of livestock grazing on all elements of the SSSS EIS must be assessed during drought. How does drought affect productivity of vegetation? What are the additive,

synergistic and cumulative impacts of grazing depletion and drought on loss of plant vigor, weakening, or death?

- 10b-5 How much are plants of good vs. poor vigor affected by drought? What utilization levels are appropriate on drought-stressed vegetation? What stocking rates are necessary to prevent depletion during drought? How does drought affect fuels and fire danger in plant communities weakened by the combined effects of grazing and drought. Do they become vulnerable to cheatgrass and other weeds that increase fire dangers and cause fuels problems?

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### **The Snake River Birds of Prey Area: Case Study in How NOT to Manage Lands**

- 10b-8 BLM must closely examine the woeful management failures of BLM in the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area to understand the consequences of continuing near status quo forage allocations, livestock project construction/water hauling, roading, etc. The 1995 USDI BLM/IDANG report details the ongoing destruction of habitat caused by fire, grazing and other human activity (including military training). The loss of sagebrush in the SRBOPA is clear to even the most casual observer driving through the area. A proliferation of exotic species – cheatgrass, medusahead, bur buttercup, and now white top, rush skeletonweed, and other noxious weeds - have occurred in the wake of the excessive livestock seasons of use and numbers that have been authorized here in the past. The grazing levels in the SRBOPA (high allowable utilization of 50%, and many harmful grazing practices similar to those across the EIS area, including construction of new livestock projects or providing water in arid uplands through facilities and water hauling.

Over the years since the BOP has designated, we have watched as BLM has continued to allow grazing during periods of the year that are known to be harmful to native bunchgrasses and forbs, to allow use at high levels, including during drought years, and generally continue management in a manner biased towards the livestock industry.

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### **Need for Measures to Provide Increased Herbaceous Cover to Benefit Sage Grouse And Other Special Status Species**

- 10b-4 Sage grouse depend on a variety of shrub-steppe habitats, and populations may move over large areas of land in the course of a year. Overhead cover of sagebrush and tall residual native grass cover are critical to successful sage grouse nesting (DeLong et al. 1995; Connelly et al. 2000; Hockett 2003; 69 Federal Register (77) 21489; Connelly et al. 2004). The sage grouse is reliant on sage-steppe communities, and its populations have plummeted westwide. Excessive livestock grazing strips required nesting cover that screens nests of ground- and shrub-nesting birds from ground and aerial predators, and alters long-term diversity of native forbs that produce insects essential to the diet of sage grouse chicks. Sage grouse eat only sagebrush in winter, and require intact stands for winter survival. Physical breakage of sagebrush and nipping by livestock also alter and decrease sagebrush cover essential for sage grouse and other sagebrush species.

The “Guidelines to Manage Sage Grouse Populations and their Habitats” (Connelly et al. 2000), have been adopted by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) guidelines, and present well-established information on essential habitat components and management based on sage grouse needs. The WAFWA guidelines are now buttressed by the recent WAFWA Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats (Connelly et al. 2004). A link to this voluminous CA document is found at the NDOW Website: [www.ndow.org/wild/sg/resources/assessment.shtm](http://www.ndow.org/wild/sg/resources/assessment.shtm) .

The WAFWA Guidelines and the recent WAFWA Conservation Assessment (Connelly et al. 2004) underscore the following points with respect to sage grouse biological and habitat needs:

- The great importance of herbaceous cover in nesting habitats (WAFWA at 968; CA at 4-4 to 4-8). Grass height and cover are important to nest success. Herbaceous cover provides scent, visual and physical barriers to predators. (WAFWA at 971; CA at 4-4 to 4-8);
- Successful sage grouse nesting occurs under larger bushes. Nesting habitat has greater canopy cover, taller live and residual grasses, more live and residual grass cover, and less bare ground (WAFWA at 970-971; CA at 4-4 to 4-8);
- Successful nests occur in stands with greater canopy cover (WAFWA at 971; CA at 4-4 to 4-8);
- Early brood rearing habitats should have greater than 15% canopy cover of grasses and forbs. After chicks hatch, these grasses and forbs produce insects for chicks to eat and canopy cover to screen them from predators. Later, forbs are eaten by maturing chicks. Forbs are also important in providing adequate pre-laying nutrients to hens (WAFWA at 971; CA at 4-8 to 4-9);
- As upland vegetation desiccates, hens with broods seek out late brood rearing habitats comprised of areas with succulent green forb vegetation, such as wet meadows and riparian areas (WAFWA at 971; CA at 4-9 to 4-11);
- Winter habitats have relatively dense sagebrush canopy cover, with sagebrush exposed above the snow (WAFWA at 972; CA at 4-14).

105. Habitat protection management actions for sage grouse are summarized in the WAFWA Guidelines, and include:

- Manage breeding habitats to support 15-25% canopy cover of sagebrush, 18 cm. or greater perennial herbaceous cover height (grasses and forbs) (WAFWA at 977);
- In late summer brood rearing habitats, “avoid land use practices that reduce soil moisture effectiveness, increase erosion, cause invasion of exotic plants, and reduce abundance and diversity of forbs” (WAFWA at 980);
- “Avoid developing springs for livestock water.” If this must occur, “design project to maintain free water and wet meadows at the spring,” as “capturing water from springs using pipelines and troughs may adversely affect wet meadows used by grouse for foraging” (WAFWA at 980).

In addition, US Fish and Wildlife Service (69 Federal Register (77) at 21491) describes studies showing that losses of hens and nests are related to herbaceous cover surrounding

10b-4

nests. “Enhancing Sage Grouse Habitat, a Nevada Landowner’s Guide” (Northwest Nevada Sage Grouse Working Group) also cites studies showing that sage grouse nests were least preyed upon when a residual cover of 7 inches or more of herbaceous vegetation was present.

10b-6

Thus, there is strong scientific support for application of grazing use standards that provide for 7-9 inches of residual stubble height left uneaten on native grasses. Unfortunately, the livestock utilization levels now being applied across the USRD and adjacent Forest and other lands do not adhere to these requirements, and **will not provide for necessary residual stubble heights and cover for sage grouse nesting**, even under normal circumstances – let alone under drought, or weakened or low vigor conditions.

A recent EA from the BLM’s Jarbidge Field Office (BLM Jarbidge EA, Ch. IV, pg. 88-89). The public lands of the BLM’s Jarbidge Field Office are contiguous with the USRD area, and are sagebrush-steppe and other communities, with species of native bunchgrasses that are the same as the allotments here.

10b-6

BLM has found that with 50% utilization levels, as allowed across the EIS lands, bluebunch wheatgrass is grazed to 4.5 inches, Idaho fescue is grazed to 2.0 inches, Thurber’s needlegrass is grazed to 2.8 inches, bottlebrush squirreltail is grazed to 1.5 inches, and the exotic crested wheatgrass is grazed to 3.5 inches. All of these residual stubble heights are thus far less than the 7-9 inch stubble heights called for under the best scientific information available, such as the WAFWA guidelines discussed above; and demonstrate that grazing under BLM’s current management will result in far more utilization and seriously inadequate cover for sage grouse on the allotments in question. Plus, BLM’s woefully inadequate upland utilization levels and hand full of riparian stubble heights are not required Terms and Conditions on grazing permits, so there is no assurance that compliance will occur.

In many areas across the EIS area, livestock grazing has caused depletion of larger-sized native bunchgrasses capable of providing grass heights sufficient to mask sage grouse nests and to protect nests and chicks from predation. These larger “decreaser” grass species have been replaced with smaller “increaser” grasses like small *Poas* (bluegrasses) or unpalatable weeds. The direct, indirect, synergistic and cumulative impacts of the any treatments under the various EIS alternatives must be assessed in relation to such livestock impacts to sage grouse and other species habitat components.

### **Harmful Impacts of Livestock Facilities: Habitat Degradation and Fragmentation**

A growing body of scientific evidence demonstrates the negative impacts of fences and other vertical objects, as well as the increased fragmentation of sagebrush-steppe and other wild land habitats that result from placing vertical objects in sage grouse habitats. (Connelly et al. 2004).

BLM must conduct a full inventory and assessment of all existing livestock facilities and developments on the allotments, all water haul and salting sites, and all vegetation

treatments that have been conducted on these lands. The full array of direct, indirect, cumulative and synergistic impacts of these projects and activities must be assessed.

10b-6 A substantial body of scientific information demonstrates the harmful impacts of fences and other range developments on sage grouse. Sage grouse evolved in an open landscape without vertical structures, and they naturally avoid using areas near these structures - which include fences and fence posts. Sage grouse habitats are fragmented by fences and other facilities associated with grazing (USFWS 69 Federal Register (77) at 21490). Fences and other facilities (as associated with wells, pipelines, troughs and water developments in the three allotments) provide perching locations for raptors, and associated roading that grows up along fences or in association with other livestock facilities provides both travel corridors for predators and conduits for weeds (69 Federal Register (77): 21490). Mechanical treatments and seeding with exotics degrades sage grouse habitat by altering structure and composition of vegetative community (69 Federal Register (77): 21488). Development of springs and other water sources to support livestock in upland shrub-steppe habitats can artificially concentrate domestic and wild ungulates in sage grouse habitats, and worsen grazing impacts (69 Federal Register (77) at 21489). Direct mortality of sage grouse from collisions with fences is described in the WAFWA guidelines at 977, and USFWS in 69 Federal Register (77) at 21492.

10b-4 Sage grouse are a landscape-scale species, inhabiting large, interconnected expanses of sagebrush. A mosaic of fragmentation now exists across many parts of the landscape, including portions of these allotments, and BLM's Proposed Action would extend and worsen fragmentation effects across the landscape. Causes of habitat fragmentation include vegetation treatments and removal of sagebrush, wild and prescribed fire, livestock facilities and zones of livestock concentration. There is mounting evidence of long-term negative effects of fire on sage grouse populations (WAFWA Conservation Assessment at 4-16, 7-28), 80% of the land area in the Great Basin is susceptible to displacement by cheatgrass (WAFWA CA. at 7-17 and Fig. 7.10). Wyoming and basin big sagebrush shrub cover types occupy large areas in the EIS lands and are the cover types most susceptible to displacement by cheatgrass (these areas comprise large portions of the three allotments). The ecological effects of livestock grazing may alter vegetation communities, water and nutrient availability and soils so that **lands cross thresholds from which the system can not recover** (WAFWA CA. at 7-29 to 32). Habitat treatments have consequences for the habitat dynamics and wildlife use of habitats – and “each potentially decreases the suitability of sagebrush for wildlife” that depend on large, unfragmented sagebrush habitats” (WAFWA CA at 7-32). Evaluation of sagebrush communities primarily based on their ability to produce livestock forage (as in the case of these lands), may result in extensive alterations that are unsuitable for sage grouse and other species dependent on sagebrush habitats (WAFWA CA at 1-3).

10b-6 Fences influence livestock and predator movement, facilitate spread of exotic plants, provide travel and additional access for human disturbances, increase mortality due to direct collisions, and increase predation rates by providing perches for raptors (WAFWA CA at 7-34 to 35).

Fences used to control grazing (or in the aftermath of the treatments that may result under

10b-6

various EIS alternatives) modify the landscape by creating an artificial mosaic (WAFWA CA at 7-35), and allow more intensive grazing and loss of necessary habitat components such as residual grass cover for nesting. Intensified or more uniform use inside fenced areas results in patterns of unusable habitat across the landscape. Water developments influence the composition and relative abundance of plants (WAFWA CA at 7-35). Thus, infrastructure to support grazing programs including fences and water developments have both direct and indirect effects on the landscape (WAFWA CA at 13-9). Grouse may not commonly use water developments, and “water developments tend to attract other animals, and may serve as a predator “sink” for sage grouse, i.e. grouse fall victim to the many predators attracted to water developments (WAFWA CA at 4-12).

10b-4

The Conservation Assessment describes impacts of disturbance of sagebrush habitats by vegetation treatments (at 13-6); depletion of native vegetation facilitating cheatgrass invasion (at 13-7); problems associated with blocks of crested wheatgrass and exotic seedings (at 13-7 to 8); landscape-level concerns – including that areas with larger patches of sagebrush remaining receive lower precipitation and are the least resilient to disturbance (such lower precipitation areas characterize much of the Owyhee, Big Springs and Sheep Complex allotments, and this highlights why careful management of these lands is crucial) (at 13-8 to 9).

10b-6

An unknown array of livestock facilities has already been constructed throughout the three allotments (on both BLM and private lands) to facilitate, extend and concentrate livestock grazing. These facilities include wells, windmills, spring developments and water diversions, pipelines, troughs, stock ponds – at times dug into and destroying springs, fences and corrals. Some have fallen into abject disrepair – windmills lie crumpled on the ground, junk tanks and troughs are strewn across the landscape. Fences have improper spacing. Not only do these facilities concentrate large numbers of livestock with deleterious impacts to soils, vegetation and wildlife habitats in their vicinity and radiating outward over broad areas, unplanned roading is often directly related to construction or maintenance of these facilities. Plus, there are innumerable livestock salting or mineral supplement sites, too, which also result in zones of intensive livestock disturbance and incidental roading. All of these areas of livestock concentration, where heavy and severe livestock use has compacted soils and destroyed cover and food for wildlife, exhibit harmful impacts to vegetation and native wildlife habitats. These developments and zones of intensive disturbance fragment habitats, and cover and food, for native species including sage grouse (Braun 1998; Freilich 2003; Connelly et al. 2004). Such projects have been constructed throughout habitats critical for sage grouse and other shrub-steppe species. New pipeline spurs incrementally constructed would extend and shift livestock use to new and less grazed areas, as the vegetation has been depleted by livestock around existing artificial or natural water sources (Sada et al. 2001).

BLM’s EIS lands that are not close to livestock water sources often comprise the best remaining healthy native vegetation communities and are thus very important habitats for native sagebrush-steppe species – precisely because they have been far less altered by livestock impacts. On top of the existing network of facilities BLM treatments may result

in plans to construct dozens of new projects, thus greatly expanding the zones of disturbance and intense livestock concentration.

Networks of roads associated with livestock facilities (and which will likely grow dramatically as vegetation is burned or otherwise treated and thus cleared under the EIS serve as conduits for exotic plant invasions (Gelbard and Belnap 2003), and travel corridors for predators (Braun 1998, Connelly et al. 2004). The development of a maze of roads fragmenting the landscape has resulted from the proliferation of livestock facilities across the landscape. Roads grow up as projects are constructed and maintained.

10b-6

Instead of attempting to rest to enhance habitats or jump start recovery, or place strict use limits on degraded riparian areas, BLM relies overwhelmingly on the construction of a series of band-aid fenced exclosures, with accompanying development and de-watering of wetland areas through piping water to troughs. Large areas outside exclosures then become a wasteland. An increasing body of science demonstrates that fences are harmful to sage grouse and many other species of native wildlife, and that sage grouse may avoid use of areas near fences. BLM's post-treatment actions may in fact further fragment habitats beyond removal of vegetation, and rendering patches of remaining untreated or native vegetation unusable by grouse, while creating extended wasteland areas in their surroundings, causing expanded environmental harm.

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Instead of taking strong and decisive action to restore and enhance habitats and populations, BLM pursues a path of new and extended habitat alteration and fragmentation across the allotments under the guise of hazardous fuels, and restoring a "natural" fire interval that can no longer be considered natural under the chronic disturbance caused by livestock and in the face of exotic species invasions. .

10b-4

Degradation, fragmentation and loss of sagebrush across landscapes has imperiled the sagebrush-steppe avifauna. Besides the many effects described for sage grouse, these habitat changes and fragmentation have been shown to affect abundance of shrub-steppe birds Paige and Ritter 1999, Knick et al. 2003, Connelly et al. 2004 at 1-3.

The habitat for many native wildlife species across the EIS lands is already fragmented. Fragmentation would continue and escalate with new livestock developments, livestock management practices that result in zones of livestock concentration, and other disturbances under the EIS actions as laid out in the DEIS. Disturbance and depletion associated with livestock grazing and associated rangeland developments serve to break up and fragment the continuous cover of native sagebrush-steppe vegetation necessary for many sagebrush-dependent wildlife species survival (Knick and Rotenberry 1995; Knick et al. 2003; Freilich et al. 2003; 69 Federal Register (77), Connelly et al. 2004).

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This all demonstrates why BLM must abandon its alternatives that would radically alter large areas of the USRD that still contain largely native vegetation, and instead develop a range of new alternatives to enhance and restore public lands, native vegetation and important and special status species habitats.

Sincerely,

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Sincerely,

*Goos with WWP Comments*

Relevant Literature

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FEB 11 2005

## Memorandum

To: Upper Snake River District Bureau of Land Management, FMDA Project Manager (Attn: Eric Limbach), Pocatello, Idaho

From: Supervisor, Eastern Idaho Field Office, Fish and Wildlife Service, Chubbuck, Idaho

Subject: Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact Statement, November 2004 – 90 day public review and comment period; 9211 (ID-300)  
File # 1004.1000 FWS # 1-4-05-I-0041

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has reviewed the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment (FMDA) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Upper Snake River District (USRD), Idaho. The USRD includes the Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Burley, and Shoshone Field Offices (FOs) and administers almost 5.4 million acres of lands encompassing all or part of 23 counties in south-central and eastern Idaho.

The Service is pleased to participate in the development of the FMDA and commends the BLM USRD for committing to the development of a comprehensive fire and rehabilitation/restoration management plan on a landscape scale. Our comments are provided in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (Act) and to assist the BLM in meeting its responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act.

### Purpose, Need, Goals, and Objectives

At present, many of the 12 cover types identified within the USRD have been subjected to wildland fire that is outside the historical range of variability. Since approximately 1996, wildland fires have occurred on the USRD at an overall accelerated rate, mostly due to vegetation changes and altered conditions including cheatgrass invasion into sagebrush steppe cover types.

As we understand, FMDA goals and objectives include reducing risks to public and firefighter safety, dealing with impacts of invasive species on fire intervals and wildlife species, reducing hazardous fuel loads at the wildland-urban interface, and decreasing the potential for repeated fires in the same areas. These goals and objectives provide direction for making progress toward Desired Future Conditions for areas within the USRD, in which wildland fire should remain within the historical range of variability. The FMDA is also needed for the BLM to comply with the Federal Wildland Management Policy (1995; reviewed and updated in 2001), because existing Land Use Plans in the USRD do not address fire management issues in a comprehensive manner.

During the scoping period, two issues were identified that suggested a need for alternatives to the Proposed Action:

*Issue 1.* Under the Proposed Action fewer acres were identified for treatment than are recommended in Protecting People and Sustaining Resources in Fire-Adapted Ecosystems: A Cohesive Strategy (USDA 2000).

*Issue 2.* Under the Proposed Action, sage grouse could be negatively affected.

The DEIS describes management objectives and treatments for four FMDA alternatives:

Alternative A – The No Action Alternative (current plan direction);

Alternative B – The Proposed Action;

Alternative C – (designed to address Issue 1);

Alternative D – The Preferred Alternative (designed to address Issue 2).

All comments provided by the Service in this memo pertain to Alternative D – the Preferred Alternative. Under this alternative, up to approximately 1,552,300 footprint-acres would be treated in the USRD over a 10-year period (approximately six times the acreage in Alternative A).

#### Threatened and Endangered Species

11-1 The Service recommends that the FMDA direct the USRD BLM, in cooperation with the Service, to create and regularly update maps identifying important populations and sensitive habitat areas (occupied, nesting, denning, etc.) for each listed, proposed, and candidate species that necessitate high fire suppression priority. Fire Management Officers should then use these maps to help prioritize fire suppression activities on the ground, when fire suppression resources are limited. Further, such maps would be useful in analyzing potential impacts to listed species when designing other fuels, vegetation management, and restoration/rehabilitation projects.

Inclusion of the following conservation measures for federally-listed species in the FMDA would provide clarification needed to move forward with section 7 processes for the Preferred Alternative in a timely manner. The FMDA should direct site-specific project analyses to

reference the Species Effects Determination Criteria presented in the National Fire Plan Project Design and Consultation Process (USDA Forest Service et al. 2004) to help avoid or minimize adverse impacts to listed species. FOs should monitor cumulative effects of FMDA activities on federally-listed species together with effects of other activities conducted or permitted by the BLM. And, *in addition* to guidelines and conservation plans currently outlined in the FMDA (page 2-12, 13), the Service recommends that the following items be incorporated into the FMDA:

#### *Bald Eagle*

1. The Recovery Plan for the Pacific Bald Eagle (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1986) should guide FMDA direction for those activities with the potential to affect bald eagles in portions of the USRD located west of the Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle Management Plan (Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle Working Group 1996) units in Idaho.
2. Bald eagle nesting territories, known foraging areas, and communal roost sites (which may not be in riparian areas) should be given high fire suppression priority by FMOs.

#### *Bull Trout and Snake River Mollusks*

1. FMDA should also rely on INFISH (USDA Forest Service 1995), the Snake River Aquatic Species Recovery Plan (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1995), and Best Management Practices (Almas et al. 1996) for direction and guidance for those activities with the potential to impact bull trout, listed Snake River mollusks, or their habitats.
2. Riparian areas of waterways containing bull trout and listed Snake River mollusks should be given high fire suppression priority by FMOs.
3. Chemical treatments and sediment loading should be avoided near riparian areas in bull trout and Snake River mollusk habitat, and 300 foot buffer strips are recommended for these sensitive areas.

#### *Canada Lynx*

1. FMDA should provide programmatic direction to FOs to coordinate treatment activities, including rehabilitation/restoration activities, with the Forest Service to assist the BLM in complying with the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment Strategy (USDA Forest Service et al. 2000) cumulative effects standards and guidelines.

2. Known lynx denning habitat and high quality snowshoe hare habitat should be given high fire suppression priority by FMOs.

#### *Gray Wolf*

1. The Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1987) and Final Environmental Impact Statement: Reintroduction of Gray Wolves to Yellowstone National Park and Central Idaho (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1994) provides standards and guidelines for recovery of the gray wolf, including delineation of nonessential experimental populations.
2. Known gray wolf denning sites and rendezvous areas should be given high fire suppression priority by FMOs.

#### *Grizzly Bear*

1. Programmatic direction advocating communication and coordination between FOs and Forest Service counterparts regarding cumulative impacts of individual projects and management activities within Bear Management Units will be critical.
2. The development of fire suppression priorities should consider management objectives for identified grizzly bear habitat.

#### *Ute Ladies'-tresses*

1. The development of fire suppression priorities should consider management objectives for Ute ladies'-tress habitat.

#### *Yellow-billed Cuckoo*

1. If yellow-billed cuckoos, a candidate species, are discovered during surveys, and management activities may affect this species or their habitat, we recommend that the BLM discuss with the Service opportunities to avoid or minimize impacts to the species. (Candidate species are those for which the Service has enough information to warrant proposing them for listing as endangered or threatened).
2. Yellow-billed cuckoo nesting territories and known foraging areas should be given high fire suppression priority by FMOs.

### Sensitive Species and Other Resources

11-2 The Service agrees with the BLM's proposal in the FMDA to use sage grouse as "the premier representative wildlife species for sage steppe ecosystems." However, we emphasize that conserving sage grouse habitat as a surrogate for other sagebrush obligates, including the pygmy rabbit, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, and sage thrasher, may not be sufficient to capture and conserve necessary habitat characteristics. The Service expects that careful evaluation of important habitat characteristics for other sagebrush obligates and the potential impacts to those habitats from fire, hazardous fuel, and restoration/rehabilitation management will be made on a project-specific basis.

11-3 We believe that any treatments reducing, even temporarily, the amount of low elevation sagebrush, particularly var. *wyomingensis*, should be critically evaluated. Currently, there is low availability of high-quality sagebrush habitat on the landscape and a certainty that some sagebrush habitat will be lost each year to wildland fire, exotic plant species, and human development. Due to these factors, coupled with the limited success of reestablishing these shrubs, especially via aerial seeding (Lysne and Pellant 2004), the Service suggests the FMDA emphasize maximizing net gains of available sagebrush habitat over the short and long term.

11-4 We recommend that the FMDA programmatic direction allocate more restoration and rehabilitation treatments in additional vegetation types, particularly aspen/conifer habitats. Such treatments are currently needed for improving wildlife habitat and fire regimes.

11-5 In all treatment areas, we recommend the BLM sincerely evaluate regeneration methods on a project-specific basis, allowing the probability for successful regeneration to guide treatment implementations, not the reverse. Native seeds and plantings should be utilized during restoration and rehabilitation treatments, whenever possible. Additionally, during such activities, the recruitment goals for all important habitat components should be carefully considered (e.g., grasses, forbs, shrubs, trees).

11-6 The Service commends the BLM for providing adaptive management direction for treatment areas within the USRD. However, we advocate the FMDA programmatic direction to include identification of interdisciplinary and interagency planning and evaluation teams, implementation and monitoring timelines, and criteria for measuring success of objectives and management actions, whenever plausible.

11-7 We recommend the FMDA, in accordance with habitat management objectives, direct FMOs to allocate fire suppression activities for sensitive fish, wildlife, and plant habitats and populations.

### Other Specific Recommendations (listed by page)

11-8 Page 2-9 (under "*Riparian Areas*"). Add statement to "Avoid the location of incident bases, camps, helibases, staging areas, fueling areas, helispots, and other centers for incident

activities within riparian habitats unless the only suitable location for such activities is determined and documented by the line officer or designee to be within riparian areas.”

- 11-9 Page 2-11 (under “Livestock Grazing”): Replace “...two growing seasons or until vegetation establishment...” with “...two growing seasons and until vegetation establishment...”  
Essentially, the status and trajectory of the vegetation should drive rangeland management actions, not time since treatment.
- 11-8 Page 2-12 (under “*Riparian Areas*”). Add statement to “Avoid the location of helibases, staging areas, fueling areas, helispots, and other centers for vegetation treatment activities within riparian habitats unless the only suitable location for such activities is determined and documented by the line officer or designee to be within riparian areas.”
- 11-10 Pages 2-12, 13 (under “Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive [TES] Species,” 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> bullet): Replace “in areas supporting” with “activities that may affect.”
- 11-11 Page 2-12 (under “Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive [TES] Species,” 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet): How would presence/absence be “determined,” perhaps, surveys and Level 1 interagency meetings, etc?
- 11-12 Page 2-31 (under “Monitoring and Evaluation”). The Service recommends that monitoring associated with the proposed action would also examine both the implementation and effectiveness of conservation measures developed to avoid or minimize impacts to special status species.
- 11-13 Page 4-50 (Table 4-23). The numbers displayed in Table 4-23 should be rectified within the Annual Grass row as the total footprint acres of Annual Grass proposed for treatment under Alternative D (281,600 acres) is greater than the Total Acres of Annual Grass within the Shoshone Field Office area (281,362).
- 11-14 Page 4-93 (Table 4-37). The numbers displayed in Table 4-37 should be rectified within the Annual Grass row as the total footprint acres of Annual Grass proposed for treatment under Alternative D (281,600 acres) is greater than the Total Acres of Annual Grass within the Shoshone Field Office area (281,362).
- 11-15 Page 4-102 (under “Riparian Habitat”). Replace “The western yellow-billed cuckoo is presently the only species in the District proposed by the USFWS to be listed under the ESA as threatened” with “The western yellow-billed cuckoo is presently the only candidate species in the District. Candidate species are those for which the USFWS has enough information to warrant proposing them for listing as endangered or threatened, but the listing proposal is precluded by other species or listing actions that have higher priority.”

11-16 Page 4-107 (Riparian Areas Row in Table 4-38). Add “bull trout and listed Snake River snails” to “Type 1: Bald eagle, Western yellow-billed cuckoo” in column 2, “Sensitive Species List”. (Appendix pages K-1 and K-2 indicate that bull trout and listed Snake River snails are documented as occurring in the Upper Snake River District area.)

11-17 Page 4-108 (under “Unavoidable Adverse Impacts”). Add “Short-term adverse impacts to ESA candidate, proposed, or listed species or to proposed or designated critical habitat will be avoided or minimized to the greatest extent possible.”

11-18 Page K-1 (Table 1): Bliss Rapids snail should not be listed in Pocatello and Idaho Falls FOs.

11-19 Page K-2 (Table 1): Utah valvata snail should also be listed in the Idaho Falls FO.

11-20 Page K-2 (Table 2): Gray wolf should also be listed in the Pocatello and Burley FOs.

11-21 Page K-5 (Table 3): “Riparian” should also be checked for the grizzly bear and Canada lynx.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact Barb Heslin at the Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office in Boise (208) 378-5259 or Troy Smith at the Eastern Idaho Field Office in Chubbuck at (208) 237-6975x36. Thank you for your continued interest in fish, wildlife, and plant conservation, and particularly endangered species conservation.

cc: USFWS, Boise  
Idaho Fish and Game, Pocatello  
Idaho Fish and Game, Jerome

## Literature Cited

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Eric Limbach  
 FMDA Project Manager  
 4350 Cliffs Drive  
 Pocatello, Idaho 83204

RECEIVED  
 US DEPT OF INTERIOR

2005 FEB 15 AM 11:06

BLM TWIN FALLS DISTRICT  
 POCATELLO FIELD OFFICE  
 POCATELLO ID

February 10, 2005

Dear Mr. Limbach,

12-7 The Idaho Bureau of Land Management Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Council has recently reviewed the Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment. The Council does not herein collectively support any one Alternative, though we do offer the following recommendations.

D 12-1 Monitoring is frequently cut from the budget, resulting in one of the primary downfalls of some projects. Monitoring after a project has been completed is important, helping to better manage when, how often and how much livestock can use the treated area. The BLM Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Council (RAC) recommends that monitoring be supported through the future.

A 12-2 The use of native grasses has greatly increased in recent years. This is a good practice but can be extremely expensive. Some native or hybrid native plants grow and do well, but frequently take much longer to get established. Grazing usage on some of this native seeding should be managed differently than some of the introduced grass species, while stabilization should be valued as more important in critical condition areas.

As an example, in some parts of the Bennett Hills area, King Hill Creek and other tributaries, there are heavy clay loam soils that make it extremely difficult to get seeding established. These areas also have an established and spreading medusa rye grass problem, as well as being a heavily used mule deer wintering area in need of rehab work with grasses and shrubs that can establish quickly.

E 12-3 The BLM Twin Falls District RAC recommends that individual case areas are going to differ and non-native grasses or place holder species referred to in Chapter 2, page 11 need to be used in areas of importance and great concern. Also of concern is the lack of low precipitation grasses, other than crested wheat, for rehab purposes. Until such a time as more low precipitation natives are developed, we recommend a need to use exotics to promote watershed stability and limit soil erosion.

12-4 Alternative D focuses on sage brush communities and sage grouse. We suggest this Alternative needs also to integrate some of Alternative B and C, which better address diverse plant communities, from juniper control to Douglas Fir tree stands in the Wood River Valley that have heavy mistletoe infestations. Douglas Fir encroachment on sage brush plant communities, as well as Aspen regeneration, are issues that will need addressed, with some general guidelines to follow.

C

12-5 Regarding livestock grazing, the Twin Falls District RAC recommends that the term  
12-8 "minimum of two years," found in Chapter 2, page 11, should be changed to reflect no specified  
12-6 time, but instead a site specific evaluation. The following sentence should also be added:  
"Treatments in grazing allotments should be designed to minimize impacts to grazing users in  
any specified allotment." The socio-economic effect on small rural communities can be dramatic  
if protection for local ranchers is not a priority. Along this line, the RAC recommends  
involvement and consideration of all multiple users on proposed treatments.

12-6 Of concern are cuts in grazing preference while fuels management is occurring. Unless  
all the feed in an allotment is currently being used to the prescribed level of utilization, it would  
be un-necessary to cut grazing preference in that allotment.

The Idaho BLM Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Council appreciates the  
opportunity to review and comment on this planning effort.

Sincerely,



Kelly Adams,  
Chair  
on behalf of  
Twin Falls District Resource Advisory Council



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 10

1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, Washington 98101

13

February 3, 2005

Reply To

Attn Of: ETPA-088

RECEIVED  
2005 FEB -7 11:56

POCATELLO OFFICE  
POCATELLO ID  
Ref: 02-014-BLM

Joe Kraayenbrink  
Bureau of Land Management  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204

Dear Mr. Kraayenbrink:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed **Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment** (CEQ No. 040512) in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. The draft EIS proposes activities that would amend 12 existing land use plans in the Upper Snake River District in Idaho to incorporate fire, fuels and vegetation management consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The EIS identifies Alternative B as the proposed action and Alternative D as the preferred alternative.

The three action alternatives would incorporate new policy, guidance and changes in the National Fire Plan that would emphasize the use of prescribed fires, wildland fire management, and mechanical and chemical treatments to more closely approximate historic disturbance and succession patterns. The proposed alternative (Alternative B) would emphasize increased vegetation treatments and restoration to increase the use of fire in all plant communities except Wet/Cold Conifer, Riparian, Salt Desert Shrub and Vegetated Rock/Lava. Alternative C would implement fire treatment levels to meet the goals of BLM's strategies to restore and maintain ecosystem health within fire-prone areas, based on restoring ecosystems to their historic fire regime. Alternative D, BLM's preferred alternative, would also meet the goals of BLM's ecosystem and fire regime strategies and in addition, would maintain, protect and expand sage grouse habitats in the Upper Snake River Plain.

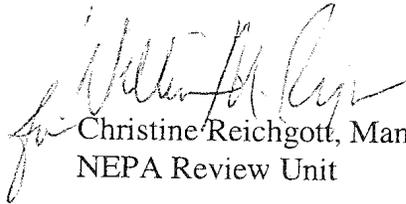
We have assigned a rating of EC-2 (Environmental Objections - Insufficient Information) to the draft EIS based on the proposed action alternatives. This rating and a summary of our comments will be published in the *Federal Register*. A copy of the rating system used in conducting our review is enclosed for your reference. Our concerns and recommendations are highlighted below and in detail in the enclosure to this letter.

Our concerns with the action alternatives focus on air quality impacts associated with fire treatments, impacts from grazing activities, and chemical treatment impacts on wildlife in the project area. We support the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) efforts to develop

management plans that restore plant communities to their historical range of variability and fire regimes that better reflect historic frequency and intensity. We believe that these goals can be met and impacts reduced with grazing restrictions and a more developed monitoring and adaptive management plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this draft EIS. If you would like to discuss these issues or need additional information regarding these comments, please contact Mike Letourneau at (206) 553-6382.

Sincerely,



Christine Reichgott, Manager  
NEPA Review Unit

Enclosures

**EPA's Detailed Comments**  
**Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment**  
**Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

**Air Quality Impacts from Wildfire and Prescribed Fire Treatments**

13-1

Wildfire and prescribed fire treatments would result in increased particulate concentrations that would negatively affect air quality. The EIS states that management practices to control air quality impacts would include limiting prescribed fire treatments to times when existing air conditions are favorable. Part of this program would include checking existing monitoring stations prior to the commencement of burns and postponing burn activities if data from these stations indicates that National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) would be exceeded. Currently, there are only two particulate ambient air monitoring stations in the project area, both of which are located in the Pocatello, Idaho area.

While the EIS provides estimates of the total tons of particulate matter from prescribed fire treatments for each alternative, it does not identify where those prescribed fires will be located. The EIS should provide information on the location of potential prescribed fires and provide assurances that the existing ambient air monitoring stations will provide representative data for all proposed prescribed burns. If the two existing monitoring stations will not be representative of the ambient air quality under each prescribed burn scenario (including predominant wind directions) then additional measures should be taken to assure that a representative monitoring program is in place prior to initiating prescribed burn treatments. The EIS should include information that demonstrates monitors are approved for measuring NAAQS compliance, can measure particulate matter in real time and that sufficient background monitoring is performed to accurately predict if a prescribed burn would exceed the NAAQS.

**Grazing Impacts**

13-2

The EIS states that an alternative that would alter or eliminate grazing practices was considered but eliminated from further environmental analysis because it did not meet the purpose and need of the proposed project. However, the EIS states that part of the purpose of the proposed action includes updating Forest Management Plans (FMP) to integrate them with guidelines for livestock grazing. In addition, the Need section of the EIS states that sage grouse habitat is being replaced by invasive species and there is a need to protect and improve degraded sagebrush steppe communities, which is important sage grouse habitat. Grazing activities are known to provide a means by which invasive species may be introduced and propagate in various habitats.

The EIS discusses the potential impacts that pre- and post-treatments such as prescribed fire will have on grazing activities. However, the EIS does not address the impacts grazing activities in the proposed project area may have on the introduction and propagation of invasive species. As the purpose and need of the proposed project includes meeting livestock grazing guidelines

and reducing invasive species, the EIS should analyze the potential grazing activities may have on the introduction and propagation of invasive species in the proposed project area and the proposed plan's ability to meet grazing guidelines. In particular, the EIS should discuss the impacts grazing activities would have on sagebrush steppe communities and sage grouse habitat. If analyses demonstrate that gazing activities would continue to contribute to invasive species introduction and propagation after treatment and not meet grazing guidelines, the EIS should include an alternative that restricts or eliminates grazing activities in sensitive areas. Restrictions could include the construction of fencing around sensitive areas, reducing the number of livestock authorized to graze or the total removal of livestock from an area. In addition, EPA recommends that the EIS include monitoring and adaptive management measures to assure that grazing restrictions are effective at preventing reintroduction and propagation of invasive species and support protection, restoration and rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat.

13-3  
D

**Species Status**

The Affected Environment section of the EIS describes the current status of some of the species that will be impacted by the proposed action. However, there are a number of representative guild species for which the status is not described. The EIS should include information on the status (stable, increasing, declining) of the following guild representative species so that the reader can better assess the significance of the described impacts on these species.

13-4

Habitat	Species
<b>Perennial Grass</b>	Western meadowlark Montane vole Short-eared owl Bighorn sheep
<b>Annual Grass</b>	Long-billed curlew Western burrowing owl
<b>Dry Conifer, Aspen/Conifer, and Wet/Cold Conifer Habitats</b>	Three-toed woodpecker Ruffed grouse Red-naped sapsucker Snowshoe hare Elk Moose
<b>Riparian Habitat</b>	White-tailed deer Northern leopard frog

**Chemical Treatment Impacts on Wildlife**

Chemical treatments will be performed according to manufacturer's instructions and guidance will be followed to limit the area of impact to prescribed treatment areas. Despite these precautions, there will be negative impacts on wildlife. In particular, the EIS states that chemical

13-5

treatments have the potential to increase short-eared owl mortality. While the EIS discusses some of the short-term (acute) impacts chemical treatments may have on some wildlife, it does not discuss the potential short term impacts on all species nor does it discuss the long-term (chronic) impacts chemical treatments may have. The EIS should discuss which chemicals are being considered for use as treatments and discuss in detail the potential acute and chronic impacts these chemicals may have on all wildlife species in the treatment areas. In particular, the EIS should discuss impacts on survival, reproduction, and over impacts on species populations. Also, the EIS should include requirements for the development of monitoring plans to assess the acute and chronic chemical treatment impacts for individual project plans.

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for  
Draft Environmental Impact Statements  
Definitions and Follow-Up Action\***

**Environmental Impact of the Action**

**LO – Lack of Objections**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

**EC – Environmental Concerns**

EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

**EO – Environmental Objections**

EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

**EU – Environmentally Unsatisfactory**

EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

**Adequacy of the Impact Statement**

**Category 1 – Adequate**

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

**Category 2 – Insufficient Information**

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

**Category 3 – Inadequate**

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

\* From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment. February, 1987.



**IDAHO FISH & GAME**

600 South Walnut  
P.O. Box 25  
Boise, Idaho 83707-0025

**Dirk Kempthorne** / Governor  
**Steven M. Huffaker** / Director

February 11, 2005

RECEIVED  
FOR DEPT OF INTERIOR  
2005 FEB 16 PM 1:31  
FEDERAL LANDS  
MANAGEMENT  
Pocatello ID

Eric Limbach  
FMDA Project Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204

RE: Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan  
Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Limbach:

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) personnel have reviewed the Upper Snake River District's Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). It is our understanding the DEIS will amend 12 existing land use plans within the Upper Snake River District (District) to incorporate fire, fuels, and related vegetation management direction consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The DEIS includes four alternatives; Alternative A No Action, Alternative B which incorporates new policy, guidance, and changes brought about by the National Fire Program, Alternative C which addresses treatment levels outlined in the Cohesive Strategy and 10-year Comprehensive Strategy, and Alternative D, the Preferred Alternative, which was developed to determine the appropriate level and kind of treatments needed within the sagebrush steppe ecosystem to benefit sagebrush habitat, sage grouse, and other sagebrush obligate species.

14-1

IDFG supports Alternative D, the Preferred Alternative. The landscape scale loss, fragmentation, and degradation of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem throughout the District have impacted a wide variety of native wildlife species. Linking protection and treatment priorities to source, key, and restoration sage grouse habitats should, over the course of the 30-year planning period, produce improvements in the abundance and distribution of productive sagebrush habitats throughout the District. Potential wildlife benefits extend beyond sagebrush obligate species. The vast majority of critical mule deer and elk winter habitats in the District occur within the low- and mid-elevation shrub and mountain shrub vegetation cover types. Protecting and restoring these cover types has important long-term implications for mule deer and elk populations throughout the District.

We offer the following recommendations for inclusion in the final EIS that will serve to improve its utility as an overall wildlife and habitat enhancement alternative.

14-2 Aspen is an important deciduous component within forested and sagebrush steppe habitats. Over 30 bird species breed in aspen forests in Idaho including a number of high priority species like Ruffed Grouse and Northern Goshawk. Aspen habitats also provide valuable forage resources and cover for mule deer and elk. Aspen habitats are particularly important calving and fawning areas. To strengthen the overall effectiveness of for wildlife on a landscape scale we recommend Alternative D include treatments in Aspen/Conifer cover types. Specifically, we recommend addition of the following Aspen/Conifer objectives within Alternative D:

- Forestall/stop conifer encroachment into stands historically comprised of aspen using treatments like mechanical manipulations, soil and aspen root scarification, and/or controlled fire. Seek consultation with IDFG to prioritize areas for treatment.
- Promote the cataloguing of aspen communities in GIS layers, both the current status and estimates of aspen range at a point between 20 and 50 years ago.
- Focus aspen regeneration efforts throughout the District by using a multi-agency/NGO guiding task force including BLM, USFS, IDL, IDFG, IDPR, RMEF, ISDA and others. A group under leadership of ISDA and IDFG has already formed for this purpose and could provide assistance. Please contact our Upper Snake Regional office (Gary Vecellio or Steve Schmidt) for additional information about these ongoing efforts.
- Focus aspen regeneration efforts for the benefit of a variety of wildlife, particularly mule deer, in the Idaho Falls Field Office (Birch Creek, Medicine Lodge, Beaver Creek, Camas Creek drainages), Shoshone Field Office (Big Wood River drainage and Bennett Hills), and Burley Field Office (Sublett area). These areas are of primary interest to IDFG as part the Mule Deer Initiative, a statewide mule deer population and habitat enhancement effort.
- Aspen rejuvenation treatments could be targeted to enhance elk habitat as part of IDFG and ISDA efforts to address brucellosis issues in eastern Idaho. Improving these habitat components could aid in seasonally segregating elk from cattle, particularly in late winter and early spring during elk migration. These prescriptions would be particularly valuable along the Idaho-Wyoming border from Teton Valley southward to Utah. Please consult with the IDFG and IDA on current brucellosis surveillance efforts and related habitat enhancement opportunities within the aspen cover type.

14-3 None of the alternatives include treatments in existing crested wheatgrass seedings over the life of the plan. We recognize, under certain conditions, the need to maintain seedings in areas that are ecologically compromised. While seedings are effective in stabilizing soils and alleviating the spread of undesirable plants, they offer little benefit for most native wildlife species. This issue is of particular concern in the Burley and Shoshone Field Offices where seedings now dominate vast acreages of former mule deer winter range and sage grouse breeding and brood rearing habitat. We recommend the Preferred Alternative include opportunities to improve wildlife habitat values in

crested wheatgrass seedings following wildfire. Treatments should focus on improving plant diversity and structure and should be prioritized similar to the criteria outlined in 2.4.7.3 (DEIS page 2-28) with an added emphasis on designated mule deer winter range. We offer our assistance in prioritizing potential crested wheatgrass rehabilitation areas for wildlife benefit throughout the District. IDFG also has some funding available to cost share on habitat improvements in crested wheatgrass seedings.

14-4 The maps depicting pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and moose habitats in the District do not include important seasonal habitats in the Burley and Shoshone Field Offices. Please coordinate these revisions with IDFG staff in our Magic Valley Regional Office in Jerome.

14-5 We question the analysis of effects on pronghorn in low- and mid-elevation shrub habitats (DEIS, 4.5.3, pages 4-100 and 4-101). Paragraph 2 of section 4.5.3 states: "A reduction of cover in the low- and mid-elevation shrub types have also been shown to allow pronghorn better visibility, decreasing predation and allowing them to expand their area of use." This statement fails to address other important attributes of pronghorn habitat and uses literature citations that are not appropriate for pronghorn occupying sagebrush steppe habitats. Sagebrush is a critical dietary and seasonal cover component of pronghorn habitat throughout the District. The lack of productive sagebrush habitat, particularly in the low-elevation shrub cover type, has directly impacted the abundance and distribution of pronghorn in the District. We suggest the analysis focus on how the Preferred Alternative will help protect and restore healthy sagebrush communities and subsequent pronghorn habitat over the life of the plan.

D 14-6 Effective monitoring will be a crucial component of the proposed effort. Given the Preferred Alternative was designed to address specific wildlife and vegetation issues in the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, it will be imperative that BLM tie the monitoring of fire, fuels, and vegetation management actions to wildlife habitat and population responses. We suggest the BLM and IDFG work cooperatively to design an effective monitoring program to address this essential component of the proposed amendment.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the planning process and to provide comment on the DEIS.

Sincerely,



Tracey Trent, Chief  
Natural Resources Policy Bureau

c: IDFG - Region 4 (McDonald)  
IDFG - Region 5 (Mende)  
IDFG - Region 6 (Vecellio)

## Lava Lake Land & Livestock, L.L.C.

P.O. Box 2249  
Hailey, Idaho 83333  
Tel : 208-788-1710  
Fax : 208-788-1264

3485 Sacramento Street  
San Francisco, California 94118  
Tel : 415-292-1764  
Fax : 415-292-1766

February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005

Eric Limbach  
Bureau of Land Management  
FMDA Project Manager  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204

RECEIVED  
BLM  
POCATELLO FIELD OFFICE  
POCATELLO ID  
2005 FEB 15 11:11:06

Dear Eric:

I am writing to respond to the Draft Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment and E.I.S. We support many of the components of Alternative D – the preferred alternative.

We support your recognition that:

- 15-1 • sage grouse need protection from wildfire and the fire suppression is an appropriate policy in low elevation sagebrush steppe habitat
- 15-2 • fire is needed in other areas to promote aspen regeneration and prevent further conifer encroachment
- 15-3 • noxious weeds are a serious issue that need to be addressed when planning for prescribed fire and restoration, or following naturally ignited fires
- 15-4 • restoration of vegetation to more native conditions will prevent and/or reduce the destructive nature of wildfire in low elevation sagebrush habitat and will improve habitat for wildlife
- 15-5 • management within Wilderness Study Areas should ensure that these areas remain roadless
- 15-6 • restoration seed mixes should be as close to native as possible and should include forbs

15-7 We hope to work cooperatively with the BLM in implementing these fire management and restoration efforts in southern Idaho. The success of these efforts rides, in part, on good coordination amongst agencies, landowners, and grazing permittees in setting schedules for burns and restoration. We urge the BLM to proactively coordinate potential changes to our permitted allotment uses so that we can plan our grazing accordingly.

Sincerely,



Tess O'Sullivan  
Program Manager for Science and Conservation

Linda Jones

From:  Eric\_Limbach@blm.gov  
Sent: Tuesday, March 15, 2005 12:58 PM  
To: ljones@swca.com  
Subject: Fw: FMDA Public Comment No. 16

More coming ...

----- Forwarded by Eric Limbach/USRD/ID/BLM/DOI on 03/15/2005 12:56 PM  
-----

jean public  
<jeanpublic@yahoo.com>

11/20/2004 10:39  
AM

ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov

Eric\_Limbach@blm.gov

To

cc

Subject

public comment on fed reg of  
11/5/04 vol 69 no 214 page 64583

usdoi blm id 070 2824 ds pj 04  
fire mgt deis for upper snake river

the management "direction" is always to cut it down,  
burn it up--the lumber barons need to get richer.

16-1 I object and oppose to that same old management  
approach. This is a national area and the national  
taxpayers are entitled to more than that.

16-2 comment on page 2 - just how "broad" was the alleged  
public participation. I bet all the local lumber  
barons, mining kings were invited and sent notices to  
comment. The true public who enjoys and appreciates  
open space and knows the healthful benefits such  
spaces brings to their families health were probably  
left out. i would appreciate more information being  
sent from you on how you "reached Out to the true  
american public. Especially for a nationally supported  
area like this one.

16-3 BLM Is the agency best known for throwing wild  
mustangs off our public lands so that the lands can be  
leased for \$5. an acre to rich mining entrepreneurs.  
A very dirty, disgustin gbusiness since the wild  
horses end up in slaughterhouses being sold for  
horsemeat. It is slimy, and makes one want to vomit  
at the record of this agency.

I also oppose prescribed burning, since it kills human

beings. the dirty air particulates settle in lungs and  
cause lung cancer, asthma, heart attacks and strokes.  
Again a policy that is foisted upon an unwitting  
public not knowing how they are being killed by our  
allegedly esteemed blm employees.

16-1 All in all we need a sea change at this agency, one  
focused on saving our land not letting our national  
land simply be used for enriching cattle barons,  
mining entrepreneurs and environmental cads.

blms record is deplorable.

b. sachau  
15 elm st  
florham park nj 07932

---

Do you Yahoo!?  
Meet the all-new My Yahoo! - Try it today!  
<http://my.yahoo.com>

Linda Jones

From:  
Sent:  
To:  
Subject:

17

Terry\_Lee\_Smith@blm.gov  
Tuesday, March 15, 2005 4:00 PM  
ljones@swca.com  
FMDA DEIS Fw Comment - sagehen plan

Here's one more e-mail comment. This should be Number 17.

Terry Lee Smith  
RMP/FMDA Project Manager  
Pocatello Field Office  
4350 Cliffs Drive  
Pocatello, ID 83204  
(208) 478-6347  
Terry\_Lee\_Smith@BLM.GOV

----- Forwarded by Terry Lee Smith/USRD/ID/BLM/DOI on 03/15/2005 03:59 PM  
-----

"Bob and Vikie"  
<vibo@filertel.co  
m>

12/10/2004 08:07  
AM

<ID\_USRD\_FMDA@blm.gov>

To

cc

Subject

sagehen plan

Dear BLM Managers,

I'm writing regarding the sagehen management plan. It is time our public lands are managed for ecosystems and habitat and not cows. Do NOT fall for the argument that grazing reduces fire danger. All you have to do is drive out west of balanced rock to the road south to clover crossing. There are thousands of acres of wheatgrass that cows have not eaten. This is due to very poor management. Those lands are covered with old, grey, dry wheatgrass that has not been eaten because the cowboys have not managed grazing to have cows eat all that is there. Instead the animals leave the old stuff which is a fire hazard. Then it burns and you replant nothing but wheatgrass for the stupid cows. It is a vicious cycle that is of no benefit.

17-1

17-2

17-3

17-4

I am in favor of all you can do to restore native grasses, reduce grazing, and manage our public lands for habitat, ecosystems, recreation, and yes, even some grazing. But the era of ranchers telling BLM what to do with our public lands has got to stop. This plan may be a small but important first step.

Bob Stoltz  
1150E 3400N

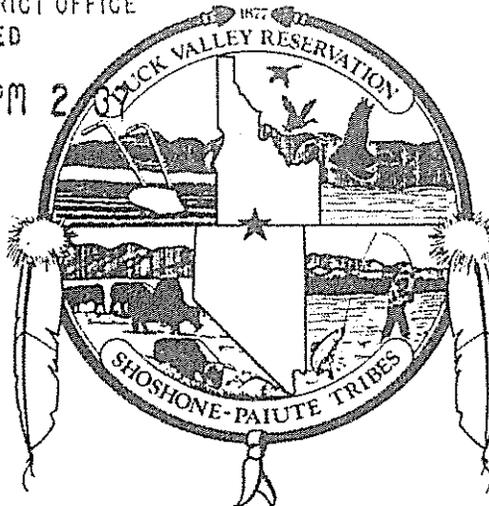


November 7, 2007

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
TWIN FALLS DISTRICT OFFICE  
RECEIVED

Tribal Comments to:

2007 NOV 7 PM 2:03

BLM's Fire Management Direction  
Amendment, October 3, 2007Cultural Resource Issues in Fire Suppression  
Priorities.**1.2.2 Need (P. 1-4)**

18-1

Action is needed to for the BLM to comply with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and to work toward resource conditions on BLM administered lands that allow productive use of these lands and enhance the social, cultural, and economic stability of the communities that depend on them.

- The tribal communities depend on the sites and resources on their homelands as well. Cultural stability must be included.

**1.3 The Proposed Action (P. 1-5)**

18-2

Fourth bullet; Restrictions on fire management practices, if any, are needed to protect natural or cultural values.

- What's the difference? The tribes do not separate natural and cultural resources, I don't understand what natural resource values are, please explain.
- This document continually refers to natural and cultural resources values.

**1.3.2.3 Non-fire Vegetation Treatments (P.1-7)**

18-3

**Chemical:**

- The timing of chemical treatment is very important. The tribes do not recommend the use chemical treatment in the spring when the birds have their young. The chemicals will more than likely have a negative impact on their survival rate.

Mechanical: Mechanical treatments include mowing, chaining, chopping, drill seeding, and cutting vegetation.

- The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and other tribes oppose chaining as treatment. Chaining is a very destructive method, chaining destroys cultural sites both on the surface and subsurface, it is also destructive to the habitat of various wildlife.. We recommend chaining not be used.

**1.4 IDENTIFICATION OF RELEVANT ISSUES (P. 1-9)**

- 18-4 Comments regarding issues surrounding this project were solicited from tribal governments, the public, and federal, state, and local agencies.
- Were the comments from the tribes through formal consultation? The process in which agencies are mandated to interact with federally recognized tribes is through govt-to-govt consultation, not through solicitation.
- 18-5 **1.4.2 Issues driving the Analysis** (P. 1-10)  
 This section summarizes the general issues that helped determine the pertinent resources and scope to be analyzed during the planning process.
1. Water Quality, Watershed, Soils and Riparian Resources
  2. Vegetation
  3. Wildlife
  4. TES Species “Terrestrial and aquatic TES species
  5. Cultural Resources
    - What is a cultural resource? Everything that is mentioned above is a cultural resource from the tribal perspective.
- 18-6 **1.5 PLANNING CRITERIA AND LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS** (P. 1-11)  
 The criteria were based on standards prescribed by applicable law and regulations; agency guidance; analysis of information pertinent to the planning area; results of coordination consultation with tribal governments, the public, and government agencies; and professional judgement.  
 (Second bullet) Consult and coordinate with applicable, federal, state, local agencies, and tribal governments.
- Affiliated federally recognized tribes should be one of the first to be consulted; additional studies and consultation may be required.
- (Third bullet) Recognize the Fort Bridger Treaty (1868) and preserve values significant to tribal governments.
- The Fort Bridger Treaty is only relevant to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The unextinguished rights of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes under the Boise and Bruneau Valley treaties must also be addressed.
- (Last bullet) Manage resources/uses for multiple use and sustained yield.
- The BLM must protect sacred sites and sensitive areas for traditional use.
- 18-7 **1.8.5 Tribal Trust Responsibilities** (P.1-13)  
 (P. 1-14 top of page) The relationship between the federal government and the tribal governments focuses on ensuring that the legal rights and interests of the tribal governments are considered upheld and protected.
- 18-8 **3.113 Cultural Resources** (P 3-80)
- 3.13.1** (P. 3-80) **Current conditions and trends**  
 The BLM is responsible for identifying, protecting, preserving, managing, and enhancing archaeological, historical, architectural, and traditional lifeway values.

- Traditional lifeway values, what does that mean? It's a foreign term to me, one that I don't recall ever being used in previous documents. Where did it come from? Who suggested that the phrase should be used?

18-9 **3.13.1.1 (P. 3-81) Cultural Resource Inventories**

Cultural resources are generally identified through field inventories conducted by qualified professionals to comply with Section 106 of the NHPA of 1966. Informant information and historical records are also used to identify known or potential archaeological, historical, and traditional lifeway values.

- Consultation with tribes and Ethnographic studies must be included on the list.
- Ethnographic studies by an ethnographer that the tribes are comfortable with, tribal elders will not share sensitive information with someone they're not familiar with.
- What does "Informant information"? Is that old information? Or is the BLM out currently seeking "Informants?"

18-10 **3.13.1.3 (P. 3-81) Cultural Resources Conditions and Trends**

Cultural resources conditions and trends within the planning area vary considerably due to the variability of terrain and geomorphology, access and visibility, and past and current land use. Exposed artifacts and features on the ground surface can be disturbed by elements such as wind, and water erosion, animal and human intrusion, and development and maintenance activities. Based on limited site visitation and site form documentation, the trend of site condition is considered stable in most areas. Vandalism and unauthorized collection at sites constitutes the main source of cultural resource degradation.

- Has the BLM conducted surveys of the entire area? What kind of documentation do you have of the area covered in this document?
- Wind and water erosion, is a natural process.
- The BLM must increase patrols on BLM administered lands, or provide funding for the tribes to monitor the sites.
- It is the BLM's trust obligation to protect the sites and provide for contemporary and ongoing use of the sites by tribal members.

18-11 **3.13.3 (P. 3-82) Opportunities**

(Last sentence) Other types of treatments could reveal previously unknown cultural sites, providing important historical information to the public and/or the tribal governments.

- This only says "historical information," but when it refers to "previously unknown cultural sites," please explain.
- Site specific information on any Native American sites must be kept confidential. That information is not for the public.

**3.14 (P. 3-82) NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBAL CONCERNS (*LEGAL RIGHTS*)**

18-12 **3.14.1 Current Conditions and Trends**

The planning area now occupies traditional lands of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Governments, as well as some lands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Government.

- Explain what this paragraph means, what is meant by “some lands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Government? Where are those lands?
- The tribes are basically one people. Drawing lines is a European concept, tribes never drew lines, boundaries of our traditional lands exceeds the ICC lines considerably.

Federally recognized tribal governments have rights to and/or legal interests in public lands administered by the BLM. Both tribal governments depend upon the lands for a myriad of uses. The lands retain social, and economic and traditional value for the tribal people, as well as contemporary and ongoing spiritual and cultural uses.

Through past discussions consultation with the tribal governments, the BLM is aware of their treaty/trust obligations and the tribes’ their desire to capitalize on opportunities that maintain or enhance resources critical to the exercise of treaty rights, traditional customs, subsistence, and cultural uses purposes of the land.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes tribal governments have treaty under the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 that extend to unoccupied federal lands off-reservation.

- There are several places in this paragraph that refers to “tribal governments.” This paragraph is specifically in reference to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes.
- I recommend removing the phrase, “tribal governments” from this paragraph. This is very misleading to someone who doesn’t know the difference between the tribes.

18-13 (P.3-83)

The Duck Valley Indian Reservation is the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes’ tribal government’s current reservation includes 294,242 acres in Idaho and Nevada. The reservation is headquartered in Owyhee, Nevada, and the Tribal Government is housed there. The principle revenue sources of the Tribal Governments are farming and ranching. Business and lands leases in the planning and grazing permits also provide income to the Tribal Governments.

- Most all business’ are owned and managed by tribal members.
- Land leases are very limited.
- The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes is one tribal government.

18-14

Like most reservation communities, the area is geographically isolated and economically depressed. The people are tied traditionally, culturally, and spiritually to the land, and they are very interested and involved in helping to shape how the lands and the resources is are administered by the BLM. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Governments are particularly concerned about cultural resources on public land, as well as subsistence, spiritual, and traditional use areas.

18-15

- **The Boise Valley Treaty;** On October 10, 1864
- **The Bruneau Valley Treaty;** on April 10, 1866
- After more than a century, the United States Senate has not gotten around to ratifying these treaties.
- The United States of America still has not obtained title to the Boise and Bruneau lands of southwestern Idaho, although Caleb Lyons of Lyonsdale, governor and superintendent of Indian affairs for Idaho, solemnly promised us

that this matter would be attended to. The Aboriginal Title remains with the tribes.

- The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes have not relinquished any rights to southwestern Idaho, we still maintain aboriginal land title and all hunting, fishing, gathering and other traditional uses on our homelands.

18-16 The BLM is ~~responsible~~ **obligated** for maintaining a formal government-to-government relationship with federally recognized Tribal Governments. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Governments and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Governments both have rights to and cultural/historical affiliation with the lands in the planning area. The relationship between the federal government and these Tribal Governments focuses on ensuring the **legal** rights and/or interests of the Tribal Governments are ~~considered and~~ protected, **preserved** in accordance with relevant treaties, executive orders, legislation, **the U.S. Constitution** and federal policies. This includes consulting with tribal representatives; identifying and protecting important archaeological, religious, and/or sacred sites; and providing tribal members with appropriate access to these sites. The Tribal Governments are also interested in the BLM acquiring lands that contain traditional cultural resources and are part of their aboriginal territory, as well as ensuring that lands that go out of federal ownership do not diminish their rights of traditional uses.

- 18-17
- Any lands leaving federal ownership must undergo an intensive cultural resource survey to assure that they will remain protected and access to the sites will continue for tribal members.

18-18 **Figure 3-14. (P. 3-84) Areas of interest to the local tribal governments**  
The BLM is required under **the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, (NAGPRA)** federal cultural resource law to ensure the protection and proper treatment of human remains of Native American **origin** patrimony known to be present or discovered on lands under their jurisdiction.  
**NAGPRA mandates that land managers assign cultural patrimony of affiliation to human remains found as part of a federal undertaking and consult with the affiliated Tribes group to determine the appropriate repatriation of the human remains.**

- The agency must consult with the affiliated tribes and attempt to establish cultural affiliation.
- Once cultural affiliation is determined, they must continue consultation with the affiliated tribe(s) to arrange for repatriation of the remains, associated funerary objects and other objects.

NAGPRA also applies to ~~grave goods~~ **Associated Funerary Objects** or objects of cultural patrimony associated with burial sites.

### 18-19 3.14.2 Risks

Consultation has been undertaken between the BLM the tribal **governments** groups regarding concerns over implementing the proposed plan amendments that would result as a process of this EIS.

## 4.13. ANALYSIS OF EFFECTS ON CULTURAL RESOURCES

18-20 **4.13.1 Analysis Assumptions and Methods**

**4.13.2.1 Direct and indirect impacts of prescribed burn** P. 4-65 (Top of the page)

Most looting is undertaken by people who are unaware that their activities are illegal and can often be controlled by educating the public about the various laws.

- Most looting on the small scale could be people who are unaware.
- Professional looters know what their going after, and sometimes return to a site if it paid off before.
- We do agree that education is an important tool, in turn they too could help discourage looting and report violators.
- Tribes must be a participant in the education process.

18-21 Same page (second paragraph from the bottom)

Archaeological sites consist of a collection of culturally modified material.

- What does that mean? That's what a cultural site is, a site of culturally modified material, and materials from different quarries and other sources.

18-22 **4.13.2.4 Direct and indirect impacts of Mechanical Treatment**

Mechanical activities can include, mowing, chaining, chopping, and cutting of surface vegetation, and applying seeds via rangeland drill.

- The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and other tribes are opposed to chaining because of the destruction to cultural sites, habitat and the environment.
- Chaining destroys subsurface material and displaces them from it's original location.

18-23 **4.13.8 Mitigation as Monitoring** (P.4-168)

The BLM has formulated management restrictions to protect cultural resources during fire management activities. In addition to these guidelines, the BLM as a federal agency is required under Section 106 of the NHPA to identify archaeological and historical properties eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) and to determine if these properties would be affected by a specific action.

- The BLM is mandated to comply with all relevant laws not just Section 106 of NHPA.
- BLM cannot be selective when it comes to compliance.
- Whether a site is eligible for the NRHP is irrelevant to tribes. A site could have very little left on the surface and still be a very significant site to the tribes.

**Conclusion:**

Fire is a part of the natural process when it occurs naturally, but with the increase in human activities, a large number of the fires are human caused. Tribes have historically used fire to enhance areas when needed. Fire can be used as a tool when used properly.

This document can be confusing to someone who does not understand the legal standing of sovereign tribal governments. The language flip flops from “tribal governments” to “tribal groups.” The language needs to be consistent and less confusing for all readers.

Treaty Rights and trust obligations is not something that should only be considered, it must be upheld by the government and it’s agencies. It’s what the US Government agreed to when they negotiated with tribal leaders and the Indians agreed to move onto reservations. Those rights was not given to the tribes by the government, those were rights the tribes reserved for themselves.

Treatments can be more destructive than the fire itself.

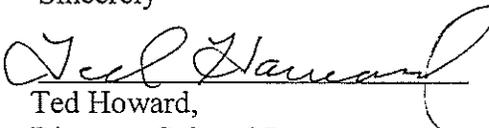
Chemical treatment can cause a rippling affect when used carelessly. If used in the spring it could be kill sage grouse chicks and other birds. When sprayed onto plants that are inhabited by insects that the chicks feed on, or grass that they use for shelter, it can kill the natural inhabitants. It can also make big game sick that feed on the grasses that were treated, and when it gets into their milk, it can affect their off spring too.

The timing of chemical treatment should be coordinated with the tribes. Some areas are gathering areas, and may impact the health of tribal members if they consume treated plants.

Mechanical treatments: The tribes are opposed to chaining. The burned trees are better of left standing rather than using the chaining technique. Chaining is very destructive, to the environment, cultural resources, and habitat.

Thank you, for allowing the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes an opportunity to comment on this important document. Our comments are not conclusive, there could be additional comments in the future.

Sincerely

  
Ted Howard,  
Director, Cultural Resources

#### **P.4 IDENTIFIED COMMENTS AND RESPONSES**

Comments identified in the letters, facsimiles, and emails to the BLM during the comment period are grouped by subject, primarily into resource or discipline categories. Similar comments were combined. The comment letter Source Code numbers are displayed following each comment. References to more than one comment letter are the result of combining similar comments. Responses addressing each individual comment follow the Source Code numbers. Not all of the following comments are considered substantive; instead of asking for clarification or expressing concerns regarding the EIS analysis, they express an opinion. However, they are included as part of this comment summary to indicate public opinion regarding the project.

<b>TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE FMDA DRAFT EIS</b>				
<b>Category</b>	<b>Specifics</b>	<b>Comment Letter and Number</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Response</b>
Alternative Development	AT1	3-2, 6-1	Lack of specificity regarding alternatives. It is hard to quantify the impacts that Alt. D or other alternatives would have on recreation.	As stated in Section 2.1, the nature of this EIS as a programmatic document is to provide the BLM direction to amend planning area wide LUPs to include Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy in their management strategy. LUP-level planning is at a landscape level; once the LUPs are amended, alternative actions provided within this document would enable managers to use a broad range of management tools at their disposal to best address local situations within a given field office. More specific actions regarding fire management decisions would be at the field office level, through the use of site specific Fire Management Plans, using appropriate tools/treatments, to best meet the goals and objectives of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.
	AT2	3-20	We are concerned that the analysis conducted and conclusions drawn from these specific issues unnecessarily set the two alternatives (Alt. C and Alt. D) as contrary to one another. That is, the analysis leads to the conclusion that the FMDA can <i>either</i> fulfill the objectives outlined in the Cohesive Strategy <i>or</i> it can address Sage Grouse habitat restoration but not both. This dichotomy fragments rather than promotes the plan amendment's purpose and need of promoting comprehensive fire management.	The range of alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS do not preclude the combination of elements of different alternatives to formulate an alternative that best meets the BLM's policy objectives. These alternatives presented in the Draft EIS were formulated precisely to provide a view of how different elements of fire management can be achieved with different treatment levels. The Final EIS was revised to include a new Proposed Plan Amendment that includes elements from the alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS to best meet the comprehensive fire management goals in the project area.

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	AT3	3-21	<p>Alt. D would unnecessarily restrict the discretion of local land managers to use the process of fire- either through prescribed fire or as Wildland Fire Use- to achieve land management goals in the short and long term.</p> <p>What provisions within the Alternative would allow managers the discretion to use fire in future years when and where the landscape has been sufficiently restored to a degree where the use of fire does not pose undue risk to habitat components?</p>	<p>Although there will always be areas that are considered inappropriate for WFU for resource benefit or Rx Fire due to social, economic, political, or resource constraints, Alternative D does allow for WFU and RxFire treatments as appropriate to achieve DFC after site-specific project level planning. Monitoring would help evaluate success regardless of treatment type and adaptive management provides a mechanism for managers to use their discretion in how and when they use WFU and Rx Fire treatments. Please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements of Alternatives C and D, is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to as the Proposed Plan Amendment).</p>
	AT4	3-22	<p>In Alt D., by overruling the possibility of the use of fire as a management tool on so broad a landscape unnecessarily commits BLM to using a non-fire vegetation management approach on an unrealistic scale.</p>	<p>In some areas within the planning area, there are social, economic, political, or resource constraints that prevent the use of WFU or RxFire as a treatment option. In these areas, other treatment options are available to implement in order to achieve DFCs. See Section 2.4.7.4 for further discussion of WFU areas under Alt. D.</p>
	AT5	3-23	<p>Alt C describes unrealistic / unachievable treatment targets.</p>	<p>As stated in Section 2.4.6, it is assumed that Alternative C would not be limited by existing operational capabilities and resources. This alternative is included to present a scenario of the amount of resources needed to meet goals of the Cohesive Strategy and 10-year</p>

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				Comprehensive Strategy within the 30-year planning window.
	AT6	6-5, 7-1, 14-1	We support Alt. D, will improve recreational opportunities by restoring sagebrush.	Comment noted. See Section 2.4.7 for a more detailed description of Alt. D.
	AT7	8-2	Support writing general guidance, leaving details to site-specific plans.	Comment noted. See also response to comment AT1.
	AT8	8-3	I support Alt B because it seems more realistic in terms of what can be accomplished, given the time frame, manpower, and budget available.	Comment noted. See Section 2.4.5 for a more detailed description of Alt. B.
	AT9	8-4	Alt D is based on false assumptions on what it will do for sage grouse, and to identify it as the preferred alternative only sets you up for protests/litigation.	Alternative D was developed with input from wildlife resource experts at the federal, state, and local level. This alternative seeks to maintain existing, high-quality sagebrush steppe habitat and to increase the quantity of resilient sagebrush steppe via post-wildland fire rehabilitation and proactive restoration. See Section 2.4.7 for a more detailed description of Alt. D, included alternative objectives. Also, please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements from Alternatives D and C is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to as the Proposed Plan Amendment). This choice was based on comments on the Draft EIS that expressed concern that Alternative D did not provide adequate fire and vegetation management for non-sagebrush vegetation types or Wildland Urban Interface.

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		8-8	Alt A is unacceptable b/c it hasn't worked in stopping the spread of invasive weeds or reducing the frequency of wildfires.	Alternative A is considered the No Action Alternative. It serves as the basis of comparison for the other alternatives. Alternative A represents no change from current levels of treatment, but still allows the LUPs to be amended. Additionally, an analysis of the impacts of the No Action Alternative is required as stated in CEQ regulations (40 CFR § 1502.14(d)). See Section 2.4.4 for a more detailed description of Alt. A.
	AT10	9-1	Alt B doesn't provide for 'comprehensive fire management direction'. Does not address purpose and need in a comprehensive manner by not treating all cover types to a level that returns the fire regime to the range of historic variability, and it would be limited by existing economic and personnel resources. It also does not incorporate the recommended level of treatment in the national scale program option, or directly address the goals and priorities of the Cohesive Strategy and 10-year Comprehensive Strategy.	As stated in Section 2.4.5.1, it is assumed that Alternative B would be limited by existing operations capabilities and resources. This alternative is included to present a scenario of what could be accomplished towards meeting the goals of the Cohesive Strategy and 10-year Comprehensive Strategy within the 30-year planning period given existing operational capabilities and resources. Under this assumption, not all cover types are treated adequately since there are limited operational resources.
	AT11	9-2	Alt D doesn't address purpose and need adequately; this is not a habitat conservation directive. The BLM would miss the opportunity to return fire regimes to the range of historical variability, and provide a complete and healthy range ecosystem. Limits range of management options, removes flexibility for future management	As stated in Section 1.2.2, the proposed fire management direction plan amendments respond to several identified needs, one of which is the increased demand for the protection of sagebrush steppe communities. All treatment options are available for implementation, though there are some restrictions placed on WFU and RxFire due to social, economic,

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			objectives.	political, or resource constraints. The nature of this document as programmatic EIS and the use of monitoring and adaptive management help provide mechanisms for land managers to be flexible in meeting goals and objectives for future management decisions.
	AT12	9-6	Alt C does the best job meeting objectives of P/N, Issue 1.	Comment noted. See Section 2.4.6 for a more detailed description of Alt. C.
	AT13	9-7	Combining Alt C with sagebrush restoration components of Alt D would meet both issues.	Comment noted. See also the response to AT2.
	AT14	10a-8, 10b-7	The BLM had no sound basis for estimates of acres proposed to be treated in the information that was provided to the public. No protocol was followed as a basis for these estimates, and no scientific methodology was followed. BLM did not use systematic approach for assessing treatments need. Analysis must be based on science. DFCs are not obtainable, especially considering disturbance	The BLM acknowledges the desire to have better vegetation data across the planning area. This is one reason that monitoring and adaptive management components are critical to the success of implementing the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (see Sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3). Treatment needs were developed based on the best vegetation data available, as well the professional expertise of field office resource personnel who are familiar

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			factors. Need range of alternatives that focus on restoring cheatgrass infestations, and restore native vegetation.	with current resource conditions and needs. DFCs are based on landscape-level fire management goals and objectives for the 30-year planning period of this EIS. Depending on the alternative, the DFC may not be attainable within the planning period. The BLM recognizes the importance of decreasing cheatgrass infestations since this is one of the reasons that fire frequency and intensity are more severe than in the past. By restoring native vegetation, fire resiliency is increased, and ecosystem integrity is restored. All action alternatives attempt to accomplish this, though at different levels.
	AT15	12-7	We do not collectively support any one Alternative.	Comment noted.
Process	PR1	3-1	'Analysis incomplete and lacking'.	Comment noted. Please see Chapter 4 for impacts analysis.
	PR2	3-3	Treatment-acres vs. footprint-acres difficult to understand.	The BLM wanted the reader to understand that a given piece of land (the footprint-acre) could receive one or multiple treatments (the treatment-acre). Thus, a single acre of land could be treated several times (e.g., One acre of land could be mechanically disced, then chemical treated, then seeded. Under this scenario, there is one footprint-acre, and three treatment-acres). This aspect of treatment-areas is important to consider when planning budgets, personnel needs, and other management issues. Please see Section 2.4.1 for further explanation.

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Resource Issue: Livestock Grazing Management	LG1	1-4, 2-2, 5-6, 10a-26, 10a-50	Rest AUMs until recovered, not just 2 seasons. Page 2.11, Section 2.4.3.3.2, under subheading "Livestock Grazing". The first sentence is not appropriate for Alternative D, the preferred alternative. To adequately address Issue 2, the first sentence needs to read; "All RxFire treatment areas would be rested from livestock grazing until vegetation establishment and resource objectives are achieved." This does not disallow grazing, it simply requires a healthy system exists before resuming grazing. Use comparison of exclusion areas to quantify differences between vegetation in and out, and use this info to develop a realistic time frame for livestock exclusion from seeded lands.	All treatment areas would be rested from livestock grazing until project-specific monitoring identified in site-specific project plans and/or NEPA documents show that resource objectives have been met. Resumption of grazing would be determined on a case-by-case basis.
	LG2	1-5, 10a-55	Use environmental/landscape health to determine suitable grazing conditions.	The Draft EIS analysis is based on landscape level disclosure of vegetation condition and health. See Section 3.2 for a description of how existing vegetation condition was determined.
	LG3	1-7	No cows on cheatgrass monocultures.	Decisions affecting grazing management are beyond the scope of this EIS.
	LG4	2-3, 10a-4, 10a-25	Grazing increases cheatgrass, cheatgrass increases fire, decrease grazing, eliminate grazing, buyout grazing permits, cows are bad for the ecosystem, and economics.	As stated in Section 2.6, an alternative of altering or eliminating grazing practices was suggested in the scoping process. While this is closely tied to vegetation conditions and treatments, it does not, in itself, meet the purpose and need of the

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				<p>proposed project.</p> <p>An additional alternative was suggested to passively treat areas by utilizing livestock grazing to reduce invasive species, reducing livestock usage in areas with known exotic infestations, removal of livestock facilities, and the closing of roads and off-road vehicle trails. This alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis because it involves decisions beyond the scope of the EIS. Such decisions would be addressed in the RMP/LUP process.</p> <p>The purpose of this EIS is to address fire management issues within the planning area. While it is acknowledged that grazing would be impacted by implementing any of the alternatives presented in this EIS (see Section 4.9), it is not the purpose of this EIS to address the impacts that livestock grazing has on the ecosystem and landscape, the appropriateness of grazing on public lands, or livestock economics within the planning area. LUPs analyze the benefits and consequences of grazing on BLM-administered lands. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 states that the BLM is required to manage for multiple uses of administered land, one of which is livestock grazing. The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 and Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 further guide BLM's management of livestock grazing on public lands. In 1997,</p>

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				the BLM adopted the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, which provides guidance for grazing in Idaho. The cumulative impacts section of this EIS has also been revised to include additional information regarding livestock grazing as it relates to the FMDA.
	LG5	3-19	The Draft EIS specifically estimates the loss of revenue to the BLM in the form of grazing fees associated with the impacted AUMs, and estimates the cost of leasing private land and purchasing hay to replace lost AUMs. There is no estimate or attempt to quantify in any monetary way the funds saved by BLM in administering these AUMs and associated resource impacts.	The Final EIS will be revised to include information regarding the resources expended to manage the grazing program. However, the resource impacts of this management will not be disclosed as part of this EIS process. As stated previously, analysis to support decisions regarding grazing are outside the scope of this EIS and are best addressed through the LUP/RMP planning process.
	LG6	4-1, 10a-1, 10a-14, 10a-15, 10b-6	No alternative addresses livestock grazing in other than cursory manner. Vegetation communities are shaped by climate, soils and disturbance regimes; and live stock grazing is a disturbance that is responsible for changes that: predispose landscapes to fire, create impoverished soils and the presence of cheat grass without returning a meaningful economic benefit to the American public. The FMDA is extremely flawed because it does not address the ubiquitous disturbance of livestock. Meaningful, cost effective management will not occur without examining the entire disturbance	More specific analysis of grazing and grazing impacts is addressed in the LUPs, some of which are currently undergoing revision. Because this EIS aims to update existing LUPs with the National Fire Plan and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, grazing management has not been directly incorporated in alternative development, but is instead addressed in Section 4.9. See response comments to LG4. Additional analysis of grazing issues as they relate to fire are presented in Section 4.16 Non-Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Cumulative Effects of the Final EIS.

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			<p>regime and being willing to make changes.</p> <p>The EIS fails to address the role of livestock, utilization, and BLM management of livestock on ecological health, livestock facilities, and fire regime within project area. It does not present scientific information and analysis necessary to understand the role of livestock in causing fuels problems. No alternative addresses livestock grazing, passive livestock treatments, disturbance from livestock and the subsequent effects on vegetation communities.</p>	
	LG7	7-3	Grazing encouraged to manipulate fuels and reduce undesirable species. May help prevent having to reduce AUMs temporarily following fire / treatment.	In some instances grazing can be used to manipulate fuels and reduce undesirable species. However, the main herbaceous invasive species with regard to fuel loading include cheatgrass and medusahead. Neither of these species provide good forage value for livestock. Additionally, in order to take advantage of the early-season short-term nutritional value of cheatgrass, livestock operators would have to move their livestock over long distances at frequent intervals. It is highly unlikely that permittees would have the resources or financial ability to do this.
	LG8	8-6	I question that BLM guidance "dictates" no grazing for two growing seasons following a fire. It may be advantageous to timely graze the first spring after the	The BLM has recently changed this policy to prescribe rest in accordance with objectives set prior to treatment. Treated sites will be monitored to determine when

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			fire to prevent cheatgrass from going to seed. It appears questionable that grazing after seed ripe the first year is necessarily detrimental to the perennial grasses, and in some cases, may be beneficial. See paper "How long should rangelands be rested from livestock grazing following a fire," found at <a href="http://www.cnr.uidaho.edu/range">www.cnr.uidaho.edu/range</a> .	objectives are met, at which point, grazing will resume. The Final EIS has been updated to reflect this change in policy.
	LG9	10a-2, 10a-13, 10a-27, 10b-6	BLM's false premise that it can bring about changes is not based on the fact that grazing occurs, creating unnatural conditions. All direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of past and ongoing livestock use on rangelands health problems associated with fire must be assessed. Thus BLM is not using current ecological science in models and setting goals. Must determine current conditions. Stocking rates and/or removing cows from lands at risk from cheatgrass invasion, or where restoration actions may be undertaken, should be considered, otherwise it's a waste of taxpayers money. Conversion of sheep AUMs to cattle AUMs not looked at. Suitability and capability of grazing not analyzed. Need to do this. All alternatives must include 25% or less allowable utilization of upland vegetation, no grazing during critical periods of growth for native species, no grazing during nesting seasons, management of trampling on native veg	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.

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			and cryptic crust, no movement of livestock from infested lands to more intact communities.	
	LG10	10a-4, 10a-24, 10a-32, 10b-8, 13-2	Grazing can introduce/propagate invasive species. This impacts fuels/fire cycles. How livestock influences outcome/effectiveness /success of treatments needs to be analyzed. BLM is using weeded areas as sacrifice zones (increased levels of livestock). Native species do not recover. The BLM has a poor track record with Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area as it relates to habitat destruction caused by drought, livestock management, and invasive species.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.
	LG11	10a-5, 10b-4, 10b-6, 10b-8	Collect/analyze impacts from current stocking rates, utilization levels, grazing seasons, grazing facility, physical environmental conditions as they relate to grazing. Conduct additional modeling to determine impact of grazing on wildlife habitats and populations.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.
	LG12	10a-10	Use better and more current data, and develop assessments on needs and risks of various treatments, as it related to continued livestock grazing under the old LUP paradigms, and under updated paradigms under the alternative actions that the BLM needs to develop for this process.	See response to comments AT14, LG4 and LG6.
	LG13	10a-31	Concerned that the BLM may initiate a	As stated in Section 1.7.1, field offices will

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			program of widespread prescribed burns on land previously disturbed by grazing and are vulnerable to invasives.	prepare site-specific fire management plans, and consider those areas for WFU or RxFire where such treatments would be appropriate.
	LG14	10a-32, 17-1, 17-2	Grazing doesn't reduce fire danger. Livestock shouldn't be used a fire reduction tool, b/c they actually increase fire potential. Cows don't eat the old wheatgrass, which creates a fire hazard.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.
	LG15		Livestock mitigation can't be monitored sufficiently, do not use these types of mitigation.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.
	LG16	10a-52	Assess trespass impacts, don't use fire fund to construct post fire livestock facilities (fences are bad, water attracts livestock and causes degradation), restrict livestock access on treated parcels, don't shift AUMS after treatment, allow to rest.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.
	LG17	12-5	Regarding livestock grazing, the term minimum of two yeas should be changed to reflect no specified time, but instead a site-specific evaluation.	As stated in Section 4.9.1, this two-growing season time limit may be extended if the BLM determines that the vegetation has not adequately recovered from the treatment.
	LG18	12-8	'Treatments in grazing allotments should be designed to minimize impacts to grazing users in any specified allotment' should be added to Chapter 2.	As discussed in Chapter 2.4.5, public safety and the protection of property will be a top priority in fire suppression. This would help decrease impacts to grazing permittees from wildland fire. Additionally, post-treatment monitoring would be completed at the site-specific level to determine the effectiveness of treatments

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				and to allow grazing to recommence as soon as possible. Note that Section 4.9.1 discloses the long-term beneficial impacts of vegetation management to livestock grazing including, reduction in the number of long-term allotment closures and animal unit months (AUMs) temporarily unavailable and improving overall forage production.
	LG19	13-2	The EIS doesn't address the impacts grazing activities in the proposed project area may have on the introduction and propagation of invasive species, nor the proposed plan's ability to meet grazing guidelines.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.
	LG20	10b-4, 13-3	How will grazing affect sagebrush steppe communities and sage grouse habitat, including introduction/propagation of invasive species as it relates to grazing. If analysis demonstrates that grazing activities would continue to contribute to invasive species introduction and propagation after treatment and not meet grazing guidelines, the EIS should include an alternative that restricts or eliminates grazing activities in sensitive areas. Include monitoring / adaptive management to assure grazing restrictions are effective to curb invasive species and support protection, restoration, and rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat.	See response to comments LG4 and LG6.

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Vegetation	VR1	1-1, 10a-41	Monitor sites as long as necessary based on site-specific conditions. Establish criteria.	Section 2.5 discusses the critical role of monitoring and adaptive management as it relates to implementing new management actions or maintaining present activities. The constant feedback nature of adaptive management facilitates management flexibility and reduces the chances of missed opportunities.
	VR2	1-2, 1-8, 10a-41, 11-6	Fund monitoring adequately, outsource monitoring if needed. Plan criteria of implementation, timing, and success.	Any one of the alternatives that would be selected for implementation would have a monitoring component. This is critical to the success of implementing the FMDA. This monitoring would likely be conducted by BLM resource specialists. Using field office personnel enables the resource specialists to gain comprehensive knowledge of the resources, and provide their expertise to decision making. This aspect helps ensure that BLM establishes representative criteria for success.
	VR3	1-3, 2-1, 10a-21, 10a-42, 10a-51, 11-5, 15-6, 17-3	Use native seeds for restoration, include forbs. Use local seeds. Establish seed bank. Establish timeline for restoration of all seeded exotic areas to be restored with natives. Commit to reseed when necessary. Don't reseed high elevation sites.	The BLM understands that numerous vegetation species and cover types in the planning area have developed various responses that have enabled them to resist, tolerate, or take advantage of fire. Ideally, it makes sense to reseed native species in areas that are suited for a given areas, and the BLM would prefer to do this wherever possible. However, there are situations where soil stability is important since wind and water erosion can have cumulative effects on additional resources such as air quality or water quality. Under these conditions, a place holder species is

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				needed until such time when land managers can reseed an area with native species and work towards meeting DFC for a given cover type.
	VR5	1-6, 10a-24, 10a-33, 15-3	Better weed control on treated or burned sites.  Grazing, grazing facilities, and/or road access can introduce/propagate invasive species. Must analyze.	Noxious weeds and invasive species are undesirable to have for many reasons, and site-specific treatment plans will factor in consideration for minimizing propagation of these types of plants. Part of the adaptive management process is to evaluate sites that have been treated, and make management decisions to improve conditions. See response to comments LG4 and LG6 for relationship to grazing.
	VR6	3-4, 10a-9, 10a-27, 10b-2, 10b-5	Despite repeated attempts to incorporate the goals behind Issue 2 (sagebrush), the analysis lacks sufficient integration and examination of sagebrush steppe restoration and rehabilitation. The complexities of sagebrush steppe restoration seem almost non-exist in the analysis. There is no discussion of past rehabilitation or restoration efforts in the area and their success or problems.  Ignores livestock grazing impacts (water developments, fences, etc.), composition, function, and structure, past disturbances, past treatments, relationship to invasive species, and human impacts (e.g., logging) to the various vegetation communities and relationship to proposed treatments as	The analysis that was conducted for Alternative D, which focuses on the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, used the best data available at the landscape level. Appendix C presents the assumptions and methodology for developing FRCCs. Site-specific fire management plans will be developed that will incorporate livestock grazing, invasive weeds, and other resource issues into treatment scenarios for a given area. Under Alternative D, wildland fire suppression efforts would emphasize protection of sagebrush steppe habitats.  Also, please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements from Alternatives D and C is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to

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			<p>well as past treatments.</p> <p>Use suppression until grazing consequences and problems (altered understories, weakened native grasses/forbs, soil surface changes) understood more clearly.</p> <p>This EIS provides the BLM an opportunity to gain better understanding of the actual capability and productivity of the vegetation and soils that meets the desires and needs of the public on these lands.</p>	<p>as the Proposed Plan Amendment). This choice was based on comments on the Draft EIS that expressed concern that Alternative D did not provide adequate fire and vegetation management for non-sagebrush vegetation types or Wildland Urban Interface.</p> <p>The cumulative impacts analysis in the Final EIS has been revised to provide additional information regarding the cumulative impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable livestock grazing on vegetation resources in the project area.</p> <p>See also response to comments VR18, LG4, and LG6 for relationship to grazing.</p>
	VR7	3-5	<p>There is no real analysis of mechanical and chemical treatments. Appendix H is a very short description of some other broad (regional and national) agency guidance documents on these treatments. There is no specificity as to how these treatments will be used or prioritized in the Upper Snake River District.</p>	<p>This programmatic document provides general direction for fire management within the planning area. A range of treatments available to the land managers is presented and analyzed to allow them to use those that are best suited for a given site. Site-specific fire management plans will be created at the field office level to enable land managers to prioritize those areas that need addressing sooner. See Section 1.7.1. More information on the treatment themselves can be obtained by reviewing the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) and ROD to address vegetation treatments using herbicides on BLM lands in 17 western states (BLM 2007) This</p>

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				Programmatic EIS will provide a comprehensive NEPA document that can be used by BLM field-level staffs for local land-use planning with regards to vegetation treatment methodologies and strategies.
	VR8	3-6, 10a-41, 10a-50	<p>The criteria for establishing vegetation treatments (p 2-28) all have to do with location, not vegetation type, class, condition, likelihood of restoration and other key factors. There is no discussion of how to prioritize what treatment(s) will be used and in what circumstances. What constitutes successful restoration? How will prioritization be given to an area depending on the likelihood of it responding to a type of treatment?</p> <p>Provide science-based assessment of predicted establishment times for seedings of native vegetation under various environmental settings, include with and without livestock influences. Establish control areas for comparison.</p>	See response to comments VR1, VR3, and VR7.
	VR9	3-7, 10a-19, 10a-33, 10a-34, 10a-54	Chemical and mechanical treatments should only be considered if it can be assured that they would minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, air, or other resources of the public lands, and to prevent impairment of wilderness suitability; minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitats, and	Treatments will be selected based on the current conditions and objectives for a given site in site-specific plans prepared at the field office level. Some areas will not be suitable for fire treatments, and will only be able to receive mechanical and/or chemical treatments. Precautions will be followed to reduce the likelihood of impacting T&E species (e.g., timing of

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			<p>especially for protection of endangered or threatened species and their habitats; minimize impacts to recreational and other multiple uses of the same or neighboring public lands; and outside officially designated wilderness, primitive or wilderness study areas, and in natural areas only if the agency determines that will not adversely affect their natural, aesthetic, scenic, or other values for which such areas are valued.</p> <p>Experimentation with (new) chemical treatments should be limited to cheatgrass and wheatgrass areas.</p> <p>Keep chemical use to bare minimum. Use signage as appropriate. Use passive treatments instead where appropriate.</p>	<p>treatment, pre treatment surveys). Future chemical treatments will be carefully evaluated prior to broad application. Manufacturer's instructions will be followed. See also response to comments LG4 and VR7.</p>
	VR10	3-12	<p>Analysis of the condition class approach shows that the data needed to assess the condition of vegetated landscapes are not available and that they cannot be applied to existing data. Lack of data for FRCC assessment (don't know enough about historical and current conditions, results not accurate and meaningful). We believe that until the data "required by the methodology" are compiled, any results from applying that methodology should be viewed with skepticism. Discuss more clearly data used, data gaps, and assumptions</p>	<p>Appendix C discusses the methodology, assumptions, and data that were used to calculate FRCC. The BLM believes the data is sufficient for the programmatic level analysis presented in the EIS.</p>

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			(back up with literature/analysis).	
	VR11	5-2, 8-7, 10b-5, 15-4	<p>No loss of sagebrush habitat should be goal. Areas where sagebrush has already been removed should be restored to a self-sustaining sagebrush community before areas containing even marginal sagebrush communities are "treated." To do otherwise, results in losing more sagebrush habitat without ensuring habitat is being restored in the short term (i.e. less than 20 years).</p> <p>Restoration of vegetation will help reduce destructive fires in low elevation shrub and will improve habitat for wildlife.</p> <p>Varying age-classes important to establish and maintain.</p>	<p>Alternative D recognizes that the sagebrush steppe ecosystem and its associated wildlife species, including sage grouse, are at risk from increased wildland fire and other disturbances. As stated in Section 2.4.7, the emphasis of this alternative is to maintain existing, high-quality sagebrush steppe habitat and to increase the quantity of resilient sagebrush steppe via post-wildland fire rehabilitation and proactive restoration. Treatments would aim to create mosaics for the improvement or enhancement of sagebrush steppe habitats. Restoration priorities would be identified to enlarge and reconnect sagebrush steppe habitat.</p> <p>Also, please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements from Alternatives D and C is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to as the Proposed Plan Amendment). This choice was based on comments on the Draft EIS that expressed concern that Alternative D did not provide adequate fire and vegetation management for non-sagebrush vegetation types or Wildland Urban Interface.</p>
	VR12	5-3	A condition should be included in the EIS for all alternatives that stipulates, "No treatments should occur in sagebrush communities dominated by	Treatments, including restoration and rehabilitation, of Wyoming big sage, which is associated with the Low-elevation Shrub cover type, will be prioritized and

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			Wyoming big sagebrush unless a there is a funded plan to aggressively re-establish with seedlings." Those communities do not appear to re-establish very well by simply reseeding or natural processes. Do not manage Wyoming big sagebrush communities like mountain sagebrush communities that appear to re-establish more readily after treatments.	implemented in site-specific fire management plans prepared at the field office level. See also response to comment VR11.
	VR13	7-2, 14-3,	Placeholder species are suitable where needed.  While place holders are needed under certain conditions, work towards improving plant diversity and structure on these sites, which would benefit wildlife. Prioritize similar to that in Section 2.4.7.3.	See Response to Comment VR3. It is not predicted that species composition will change dramatically on these sites until additional management action is taken.
	VR14	8-5	I do not believe the low success that has been achieved in seeding natives justifies the expense. The primary objectives in reseeding following a fire should be 1) preventing soils erosion 2) establishment of perennial vegetation.	The ideal restoration scenario involves restoration and rehabilitation with native species. Returning cover types to historic conditions will also improve wildlife habitat and water quality, decrease fire intensity in most cases, and create resilient vegetation communities. However, in cases where restoration with native species is unlikely to be successful, placeholder species will be used.

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	VR15	8-7	I was initially concerned that the document did not recognize the thousands of acres in the planning area where sagebrush density is greater than it should be. I was pleased to see that BFO and SFO indicated that they have such areas that need to be treated.	Comment noted. See Sections 3.1.3, 3.1.4, and 3.2 for additional discussion.
	VR16	9-4, 14-2, 15-2	Alt D doesn't sufficiently address Aspen Conifer or Dry Conifer vegetation types. Must include aspen to properly manage watersheds, and habitat, and sustain forage (see comment letter 14 for specific recommendations).  Fire is needed to promote aspen regeneration and prevent conifer encroachment.	The Final EIS has been modified to address these issues. See Response to Comment AT2.
	VR17	9-5	Juniper woodlands are not returned to historical fire regime (under Alt D). Encroachment can increase runoff, deplete water resource Incorporate management into alternative. Juniper management should be sensitive to disturbance and restoration.	The Final EIS has been modified to address these issues. See Response to Comment AT2.
	VR18	10a-6, 10a-11, 10a-29, 10a-39, 10a-56, 10b-3, 10b-4, 10b-5, 10b-8	More baseline vegetation data needed to adequately assess alternatives / treatments needed for successful restoration / rehabilitation (see text for list of data). Include consideration of roads, soils, species composition/diversity, weed distribution, wildlife, past treatments, drought, livestock management, money spent,	The BLM acknowledges the desire to have better vegetation data across the planning area. This is one reason that monitoring and adaptive management components are critical to the success of implementing the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (see Sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3). Treatment needs were developed based on the best vegetation data available, as

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			<p>and other disturbances on vegetation communities. Use this information to determine current ecological condition of resources, what needs to be restored and treated, and why. Tie information to ICBEMP's ecological integrity rating for the area, and assess the role of past treatments and currently livestock management; develop new goals, objectives, allocation that better address pressing habitat needs of many species, and address root causes of hazardous fuels problem, and thus provide better and more cost effective protection from fuel problems.</p> <p>Commit longer than 3 years to rehabilitation. Under what circumstances will the BLM undertake restoration.</p>	<p>well the professional expertise of field office resource personnel who are familiar with current resource conditions and needs. More specific actions regarding fire management decisions would be implemented at the field office level, through the use of site-specific fire management plans, using appropriate tools/treatments, to best meet the goals and objectives of the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. This way, additional management considerations specific to a given site will be able to guide treatment scenarios.</p> <p>While ICBEMP provides valuable regional information, better direction for managing vegetation cover types within a given areas can be found at the field office level. See also response to comment LG7.</p>
	VR19	10a-7, 10a-20	<p>Crested wheatgrass seedings have altered landscape, fragmented landscape, destroyed wildlife habitat, and promoted fine fuels. Analyze impacts of past seedings on current proposals to predict future outcomes.</p>	<p>See response to comment VR3.</p>
	VR20	10a-17	<p>The word 'hazardous fuel' is unclear in its use. We think it is applicable to cheatgrass than it is for most other vegetation situations. BLM needs to develop methodology to prioritize treatment of 'hazardous fuels'. This is necessary to most effectively spend taxpayer money, best protect</p>	<p>As defined in the National Fire Plan (August 2000), hazardous fuels can be considered "dry brush and trees that have accumulated and increase the likelihood of unusually large fires..." as a "...result of decades of fire suppression activities, sustained drought, and increasing insect, disease, and invasive plant infestations."</p>

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			habitations that are truly at risk.	Prioritization of sites will be conducted at the field office level since field office resource personnel are most knowledgeable of local conditions. The glossary in the Final EIS will be revised to incorporate this definition.
	VR18	10a-18	Restoration must be goal of all treatments, targeting invasive species that have wildlife habitat needs consideration. Revisit crested wheatgrass areas, and return to native communities.	Restoration of historical cover types is the goal of all treatments, except in the WUI, where public safety is paramount. See also responses to comment VR3 and VR14.
	VR19	10a-23, 10b-1, 10b-3, 10b-5	Arid lands that have crossed the transition threshold cannot recover. Must try to prevent vegetation communities from doing this. Use passive techniques. Desertification in uplands and destruction of wetlands must be assessed and prevented, and/or restored to native systems. This is necessary to understand the suitability of these lands for livestock grazing, invasive species issues, and whether proposed treatments will work and restore habitats.	The conditions of various vegetation communities have changed for various reasons, one of which has been the continual long-term suppression of fire. This EIS attempts to restore healthy ecosystems within the planning area to benefit the many resources contained within. See Section 1.2.2 for additional information needs addressed in the document. See response to comment LG4 also.
	VR21	10a-28, 10a-34	Juniper and other woody vegetation have been fragmented by fire. No additional acreage should be removed until prescribed fire lands are fully restored with native species. Any removal should be highly selective. Fire or other disturbance allows invasives to come in, grazing expands juniper by	As discussed in Section 3.2.1.2 and Table 3.2, approximately 83 percent of the juniper communities are considered encroachment into sagebrush steppe habitat. The lack of fire has allowed juniper to expand. Where feasible, juniper encroachment areas will be treated to encourage sagebrush recolonization.

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			weakening native understories.	
	VR22	10a-31, 10a-34	Proposed treatments (prescribed burning, seeding) must be fully analyzed under NEPA, with comprehensive restoration assessment conducted prior to treatment. Include road access to treatments	See response to comments VR6, VR7, and VR18.
	VR23	10a-36	Biomass fuel exportation shouldn't be allowed.	Biomass fuel exportation would be considered based on site-specific NEPA analysis on a case-by-case basis.
	VR24	10a-38	Areas that are healthy need to be managed so they stay healthy.	This is an objective of all the action alternatives. Sites that need treatment will be considered and prioritized at the field office level.
	VR25	10a-49	Describe impacts of exiting seedings on all resources.	Impacts of past seedings and/or perennial grass treatments are a characteristic of the existing environment as described in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Impacts of treatment in perennial grass on other resources are described in Chapter 4 of the Draft EIS.
	VR26	10a-53	Rest areas for wildlife, watershed protection. Analyze.	Impacts to wildlife and watershed resources are disclosed in Sections 3.5 and 3.8 of the Draft EIS.
	VR27	10a-57	Post fire salvage operations on resources must be analyzed. Include past areas where this has occurred.	Post-fire salvage operations would be considered on a case-by-case basis and analyzed with site-specific NEPA.
	VR28	11-5	The BLM should evaluate regeneration methods on project-specific basis, allowing the probability for successful regeneration guide treatment implementations, not the reverse.	See response to comments VR6, VR7, and VR18.

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			Recommend that monitoring be supported through the future.	
	VR29	12-1	Monitoring helps to better manage when, how often, and how much livestock can use treated areas.	See response to comment LG1.
	VR30	12-2	The use of native species good, but can be expensive. Some native or hybrids do well, but take longer to be established. Grazing on some of this native seeding should be managed differently than some introduced species, while stabilization should be valued as more important in critical condition areas.	See response to comments LG1 and VR1.
	VR31	12-3	Individual case areas are going to differ and placeholder species should be used in areas of importance and great concern. Also of concern, is the lack of low precipitation grasses other than crested wheat for rehab purposes. We recommend a need to use exotics to promote watershed stability and limit soil erosion until more low precipitation natives are developed.	See response to comments VR3 and VR13.
	VR32	12-4	We suggest that Alt D integrate some of Alt B and C, which better address diverse plant communities, from juniper control to Douglas fir tree stands in the Wood River Valley that have heavy mistletoe infestations. Douglas fir encroachment on sagebrush plant communities, as well as Aspen regeneration need to be addressed.	The Final EIS had been modified to address this comment. Please see the description of Alternative E in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS.

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	VR33	17-3	BLM replants with wheatgrass, which starts the fire cycle again.	See response to comments VR3 and VR13.
Wildland Urban Interface	WUI1	3-8	In reviewing the Analysis of Effects on WUI, we do not understand why the Alternatives would prescribe varying levels of treatment to reduce risk to at-risk communities. For example, as detailed in Table 4-31, Alternative B proposed treatment acres are less than half that of Alternative D and less than a fifth of the proposed treatments of Alternative C. As noted in section 4.3, Alternatives C and D propose the highest amount of treatment acres and "therefore would make the most progress towards creating fire safe communities." Yet, Alternative D, given its bias to maintaining or improving sage grouse habitat, would focus only on Low and Mid-elevation Shrub, Mountain Shrub, and Perennial and Annual Grass cover types. Please discuss how the final preferred alternative will maximize proposed treatments to reduce risk to communities-at-risk.	<p>The major federal documents addressing fire management all indicate that protection of lives and property is the number one priority for fire management. See the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, National Fire Plan, 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy, and 10-Year Implementation Plan for additional details. Also, the National Wildfire Coordination Group has been created with the purpose of establishing an operation group designed to coordinate programs of participating wildfire management agencies.</p> <p>The difference in treatment levels in the WUI between alternatives is meant to disclose the changes in conditions that would be expected for a given alternative. Please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements from Alternatives D and C is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to as the Proposed Plan Amendment). This choice was based on comments on the Draft EIS that expressed concern that Alternative D did not provide adequate fire and vegetation management for non-sagebrush vegetation types or Wildland Urban Interface.</p>
	WUI2	3-9	Should narrow the 145-community list.	A specific process for refining the Wildland

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			Consider those communities with mitigation plans already vs. without.	Urban Interface communities list has been developed by the USFS, the Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters (e.g., Field Guidance: Identifying and Prioritizing Communities at Risk. Prepared by: National Association of State Foresters June 27, 2003). Recently the National Wildfire Coordination Group was also formed. These teams will work collectively to serve the long-term goals of identifying, prioritizing, and implementing wildland risk and hazard assessment and fuels treatment projects, to ensure that the long-term needs of communities vulnerable to wildland fire are addressed.
	WUI3	3-10	The term 'Community Fire Planning Zone' (CFPZ) better describes WUI. It is worth noting that where communities at the highest risk in the Burley and Shoshone Field Offices have largely completed or are completing mitigation plans, none of the highest risk communities in the Idaho Falls or Pocatello Field Offices have completed mitigation plans. Develop appropriate treatments within CFPZ.	At this time, the BLM is using the definition in the Federal Register (66:751, 2001). The collaborative effort to identify the WUI is completed or currently underway for most communities within the planning area. See response to comment WUI1.
	WUI4	3-11, 10a-43	Work to create defensible space, homes, CFPZ, communities, educate citizens, and pull stakeholders together to develop wildfire protection plans. Activities should be limited to the interface and private property, and be used to create 1/8 mile of defensible	The 10-year Comprehensive Strategy establishes a strategy for federal, state, and private land managers/owners to plan and prioritize fuels reduction projects in and around WUI areas, improve fire prevention and suppression, restore fire-adapted ecosystems, and promote

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			space.	community assistance. The BLM is participating in interagency awareness campaigns, to encourage private landowners to proactively reduce the risk of wildland fire to their property and improve their safety in relation to wildland fire, as well as prevention programs. However, it should be noted that actual landowner implementation of the measures you describe is outside of the BLM's jurisdiction because it would occur on private land.
	WUI5	10a-43	Focus on actual interface, provide detailed maps of interfaces, and list all criteria to determine interface area.	More specific information will be provided via site-specific fire management plans. Criteria for determining the WUI are related to a combination of factors, including the composition and density of vegetative fuels, extreme weather conditions, topography, density of structures, and response capability.
WSA / WSR / Special Management Areas	WI1	3-13, 3-14, 10a-12	<p>Although we recognize that there may be circumstances, which would require treating WSAs, we do place a high burden of proof on those proposals and actions. We suggest that two threshold questions must be answered before intervention/treatment/restoration should be undertaken in WSAs, WC, or WSR.</p> <p>1. Is intervention/treatment/restoration appropriate in this case?</p> <p>If this is answered affirmatively, then the "minimum requirement question</p>	See response to comment AT1 and Section 2.4.3.3.2. In the case of proactive restoration, the Field Office Manager would have to approve any use of mechanized equipment in WSAs contingent upon the findings of implementation-level NEPA analyses. In the case of emergency stabilization during or after a wildfire, the BLM resource advisor would ensure communication between the Incident Commander and the Field Office Manager.

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			<p>2. What intervention is appropriate in this case?</p> <p>Would treatments affect suitability, integrity, features of special areas?</p> <p>We recommend that before acting in WSAs, WCs, or WSR, treatments should be done in adjacent areas of appropriate size and with similar vegetation type using minimal tool techniques and methods. The area then needs to be closely monitored over a period of time that would allow for verification of success and effectiveness of treatment.</p> <p>Although use of earth-moving equipment may be used in WSAs, per approval of field office manager, what is the line of communication established to assure that those uses would not be done before approval from FO manager?</p>	
	WI2	3-15	<p>What additional data (besides FRCC model) were used to determine that plant communities outside vegetation lava would receive more treatment?</p> <p>What data shows that treatments would restore enhance wilderness value / are successful? Should do an adjacent test plot.</p>	The best available resource data, along with professional expertise, were used to determine proposed treatments. See response to comments VR18.

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	WI3	3-16, 3-17, 3-18	CMNMP needs a fire plan, management plan. Protect and restore native vegetation. Use local native seeds. Rest from livestock. No crested wheatgrass. Timeline needed for unauthorized OHV trail restoration.	Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve has a Fire Management Plan already prepared (2000). In addition, the National Park Service and the BLM have prepared a joint general management plan and resource management plan that have incorporated fire management. OHV trail restoration is outside the scope of this EIS.
	WI4	15-5	Management within WSA should ensure areas remain roadless.	WSA wilderness values are protected in accordance with the Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (BLM Handbook 8550.1). Fires will be allowed to burn in WSAs, though risks of wildfire escaping from WSAs would be managed. Under this scenario, certain types of treatments (e.g., earth-moving equipment) may be required contingent upon approval by the Field Office Manager.
INL	IN1	5-1, 5-4, 5-5	Replace text (see letter).	The Final EIS had been modified to address these comments.
Recreation	RR1	6-1	It is hard to quantify the impacts that Alt. D or other alternatives would have on recreation. Recreation activities can be temporarily displaced following wildfire or treatments.	Site-specific fire management plans will be used to incorporate all existing information regarding resources in a given area to avoid or minimize impacts to resources, including recreation. See Section 2.4.3.3.2 for more information.
	RR2	6-2	Use more recent data, and be more specific to planning area (see data	The Final EIS had been modified to

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			submitted with letter).	address this comment.
	RR3	6-3	Must manage (post, educate, enforce) recreational use so that previously hidden recreation resources remain hidden following treatment.	See response to comment RR1.
Wildlife	WL1	10a-30, 11-7	Direct FMOs to allocate fire suppression in sensitive animal and plant habitats/populations.	Implementation level fire management will be determined by Field Office Managers contingent upon site-specific NEPA analysis. This analysis will consider all pertinent resource issues, including sensitive animal and plant populations.
	WL2	10a-35, 10a-40	No treatments during nesting seasons or within critical seasonal habitats. Role of past fragmentation and disturbances to habitats must be assessed, including to TES species.	The BLM will work with IDFG and USFWS to develop site-specific project plans with careful consideration given to T&E and BLM-sensitive species in the planning area. Fire management restrictions (Section 2.4.3.3 of the Draft EIS) provide protection to seasonal habitat and nesting seasons. The Draft EIS analyzes both positive and negative impacts to wildlife resources as a result of fire management. Fragmentation and disturbances are considered in the Draft EIS impacts analysis.
	WL3	10a-53, 10b-4	BLM need to conduct systematic and comprehensive survey and assessment of all vegetation communities, and relate to habitat and wildlife, species diversity and richness, and restore where appropriate. Consider that many species (see text for list) respond negatively to increased fire frequencies, grazing, and associated	See response to comment WL2 and VR18.

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			issues/problems (grazing facilities, drought, invasive species, fragmentation, resource extraction, loss of riparian, etc.). Conservation efforts should seek opportunities to integrate important habitats. Look at Partners in Flight NA Landbird Conservation Plan.	
	WL4	11-1	Create and update maps of populations and habitats regularly for listed, proposed, and candidate species in areas of fire suppression priority. Include conservation measures given for bald eagle, bull trout, snake river mollusks, Canada lynx, gray wolf, grizzly bear, Ute ladies'-tresses, and yellow-billed cuckoo (see letter).	Data on specific habitats and populations for listed, proposed, and candidate species will be developed and disclosed through implementation level NEPA analyses as specific projects are proposed. The identification of potential planning area-wide impacts to these species are disclosed in Section 4.5 of the Draft EIS and are based on the general vegetation cover types typically used by these species throughout the planning area. Conservation measures for the aforementioned species are provided in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS, as well as the Final Biological Assessment and Biological Opinion found in Appendix O of the Final EIS.
	WL5	11-2	Evaluation of other sagebrush steppe obligates and potential impacts to those habitats as a result of fire management and restoration/rehabilitation expected on project-specific basis.	Site-specific fire management plans will be prepared at the field office for all treatments.
	WL6	11-3	Any treatments reducing amount of low-elevations sagebrush, especially Wyoming sagebrush, should be critically evaluated. Maximize net gain	The BLM recognized the importance that low-elevation shrub sagebrush has for wildlife, and that it is also at risk from habitat degradation as a result of a variety

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			of available sagebrush habitat over short and long term.	of factors. Alternative E – Proposed Plan Amendment and Alternative D specifically emphasizes protection of key sagebrush steppe habitats via wildland fire suppression. The goal is also to increase the quantity of resilient sagebrush steppe via post-wildland fire rehabilitation and proactive restoration. For Alternatives A, B, and C,, WFU would not be used where there are critical wildlife habitats.
	WL7	11-4	Allocate more restoration treatments in additional vegetation types, particularly aspen/conifer to benefit wildlife and fire regimes.	The Final EIS has been modified to address this comment. See description of Alternative E in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS.
	WL8	11-8 through 11-10, 11-13 though 11-21	Add/replace/delete text (see letter).	The Final EIS had been modified to address this comment. Appendix Q and the Biological Opinion have incorporated the suggested management restrictions.
	WL9	11-11	Discuss how would presence absence of TES species be determined?	The presence or absence of T&E species would be determined at the project-implementation level through site-specific NEPA.
	WL10	11-12	Monitoring should also examine implementation and effectiveness of conservation measures for special status species.	See Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 of the Draft EIS and Final EIS for descriptions of monitoring commitments and adaptive management.
	WL11	13-4	Better discursion on guild species representatives and effect of proposed action needed for: western meadowlark, montane vole, short-eared owl, bighorn sheep (perennial grass); long-billed curlew, western burrowing owl (annual grass); three-toed woodpecker, ruffed	The Draft EIS provides adequate analysis to assess the relative level of impacts to the habitat types used by these species. It is impossible to predict actual impacts until specific projects are proposed. At this time, the specific impacts on pertinent species, including those you have listed,

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			grouse, red-naped sapsucker, snowshoe hare, wild, moose (dry conifer, aspen./conifer, wet/cold conifer); white tailed deer, and northern leopard frog (riparian).	will be disclosed through corresponding site-specific NEPA processes.
	WL12	13-5	Discuss short-term, long-term impacts of chemical application on the above-mentioned species, species discussed in EIS, and include chronic and acute impacts. What chemicals are being considered for use and impacts on survival, reproduction, and population viability of chemicals used? Include requirements of developing monitoring plans for individual projects to assess chemical treatment impacts on wildlife.	The Draft EIS includes a programmatic discussion of potential chemical impacts on wildlife species habitats. Detailed analysis of these impacts will be conducted at the implementation level through site-specific NEPA. See also response to WL11.
	WL13	14-3	Alternative D should include opportunities to improve winter mule deer range in wheatgrass areas.	Proposed vegetation treatments in Alternative D provide for potential long-term impacts to mule-deer habitat. See Section 4.5 of the Draft EIS. Also please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements from Alternatives D and C is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to as the Proposed Plan Amendment). This choice was based on comments on the Draft EIS that expressed concern that Alternative D did not provide adequate fire and vegetation management for non-sagebrush vegetation types or Wildland Urban Interface.
	WL14	14-4	Revise mule deer, elk, pronghorn,	The Final EIS had been modified to

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			moose maps. Coordinate this with IDFG	address this comment (See Chapter 3).
	WL15	14-5, 15-4	<p>Section 4.5.3 doesn't address other important attributes of pronghorn habitat and uses literature citations that are not appropriate for pronghorn occupying sagebrush habitats. We suggest the analysis focus on how Alt. D will help protect and restore healthy sagebrush communities and subsequent pronghorn habitat in the future.</p> <p>Vegetation restoration (sagebrush steppe) will reduce wildfire destruction of habitat and will benefit habitat and wildlife, including mule deer, pronghorn, and elk populations. Include how habitat improvements will benefit pronghorn.</p>	Section 4.5 of the Draft EIS discloses potential impacts to pronghorn. More detailed impacts analysis will be conducted at the implementation level through site-specific NEPA.
	WL16	14-6	Effective monitoring of management actions must be tied to wildlife habitat and population responses. Work with IDFG to address issue.	Section 2.5 discusses the importance of monitoring and adaptive management to the success of ecosystem restoration. The BLM will work IDFG and USFWS to address concerns regarding management actions upon wildlife habitat and populations.

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	WL17	15-1	Sage grouse / habitat need protection from wildfire, and using fire suppression is an appropriate policy in low elevation sagebrush steppe habitat.	Alternative D specifically emphasizes protection of sagebrush steppe habitats via wildland fire suppression. The goal is also to increase the quantity of resilient sagebrush steppe via post-wildland fire rehabilitation and proactive restoration. For the remaining alternatives, WFU would not be used where there are critical wildlife habitats. Also please note that Alternative D is no longer the Preferred Alternative. Alternative E, which is a combination of elements from Alternatives D and C is the new Preferred Alternative (also referred to as the Proposed Plan Amendment). This choice was based on comments on the Draft EIS that expressed concern that Alternative D did not provide adequate fire and vegetation management for non-sagebrush vegetation types or Wildland Urban Interface. Alternative E also emphasizes protection of sagebrush steppe habitat.
	WL18	16-3	The BLM throws wild horses that end up in the slaughterhouse so the mining industry can lease cheap public land.	Wild horse management is beyond the scope of this document.
Air Quality	AQ1	13-1	The EIS should provide information on the location of potential prescribed burns and provide assurances that existing monitoring stations will provide representative data for all prescribed burns. If they don't, a representative monitoring programs needs to be in place to meet NAAQS compliance issues (e.g., monitors are approved for	All proposed treatments will be analyzed on a site-specific basis, prepared at the field office level. Careful consideration will be given to ensure NAAQS standards will not be exceeded under proposed fire management plans. See response to comment AT1.

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			measuring NAAQS compliance, can measure particulate matter in real time, sufficient background monitoring is performed to accurately predict if a prescribed burn would exceed the NAAQS).	
	AQ2	16-4	Prescribed burning kills people via particulates.	The air quality analysis is presented in Section 4.6. It presents particulate estimations for each of the alternatives. It is important to consider that RxFire and WFU are smaller, planned burns that reduce fuel load so that larger catastrophic fires that release much more particulates are avoided.
Socioeconomic	SE1	10a-44	A cost benefit analysis of all actions on resources needed. BLM treatments can ruin the recreational experience of users. What impact does this have on economy? Consider economics of removing grazing, invasives, and passive restoration techniques. Include ESR seedings and rehabilitation efforts.	The costs of the various treatments and suppression are presented in Section 4.15 of the Draft EIS.
	SE2	12-6	Effect of reducing grazing allotments can be severe for rural communities. Be sure to include in decision-making. If all of allotment not being used, is it necessary to cut grazing preferences in that allotment?	The BLM recognizes the economic importance that grazing has for rural communities. The BLM has been directed to incorporate fire management into LUPs, which will ultimately benefit all resource users, including grazing permittees. While the BLM will make every effort to coordinate with stakeholder to minimize impacts associated with implementing the FMDA, it is anticipated that some gazing allotments will be impacted. See Section

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				4.9 for a detailed discussion of these impacts.
Soils Resources	SR1	10a-45	Current conditions of all lands must be assessed to understand impacts to resources, (e.g., wind/water erosion, herbicide runoff, soil crusts).	Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS provides a detailed description of the current conditions of the affected environment.
General/Miscellaneous	GM1	6-4	Check to see that references are updates and current, e.g., the Sawtooth National Forest has already amended their Forest Plan.	The Final EIS had been modified to address this comment.
	GM2	8-1	While I found many statements in the details of the plan that I question from a scientific standpoint and personal experience, I support amending the LUPs.	Comment noted.
	GM3	9-3	Funding to fulfill goals / objectives is inadequate and inconsistent. This creates situations that may allow for litigation by unsatisfied user groups b/c the BLM is unable to fulfill objectives of this EIS and LUPs, as well as dissatisfied cooperators who are less likely to participate in collaborative programs that appear ineffective and wasteful.	BLM funding is outside the scope of this analysis. This Draft EIS discloses the costs and benefits of several alternatives so the public, stakeholders, and cooperators can evaluate both the cost and effectiveness of each alternative.
	GM4	10a-3	Need to update vegetation and livestock grazing components of LUPs in conjunction with this process. Can't rely upon older versions for this planning effort since info is outdated and doesn't take into account current science. Thus, cannot tier to these	Several LUPs are in the process of being updated, and will incorporate this information. For those not scheduled to be updated in the foreseeable future, additional updates to these resource components are outside the scope of this document since they do not meet the

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			documents in this planning effort.	purpose and need identified in Section 1.2.
	GM5	10a-16	Road closures coupled with grazing reductions need to be considered in terms of weed invasion, attaining natural fire cycles. Allowing natural successional processes and healing processes to occur in plant communities that are still relatively intact is the most cost effective method.	Historical fire cycles have been disrupted through years of fire suppression activities, sustained drought, and increasing insect, disease, and invasive plant infestations. While invasive plants can be carried via vehicular modes, it is out of scope of this document to consider closing roads, reducing grazing (other than resting allotments following treatments) as ways to reduce noxious weeds and invasive species from colonizing sites. Refer to the Vegetation EIS and LUPs to obtain additional information regarding these issues.
	GM6	10a-22	Why is the BLM going to prepare 2 EAs for ESR activities?	The BLM generally does not prepare EAs for ESR activities for each fire. Instead, the BLM relies on the Normal Fire Rehab EA, which is programmatic in nature and analyzes the effects of the most common treatments applied post-wildfire.
	GM7	10a-37	What protocols did the BLM use to ensure decision making, adequate site specific analysis? Were local agency specialists involved in data acquisition and analysis loops?	Site-specific analyses were not conducted for this document since it is a programmatic EIS that will amend 12 existing LUPs. When site-specific decisions are made, the BLM will use the best available data along with professional expertise of local BLM resource specialists to ensure site-appropriate management decisions are made.
	GM8	10a-39	An independent vegetation assessment should be done. WWP would like to participate. A component of this should	Existing vegetation data was considered sufficient for this programmatic-level EIS. Should a new vegetation assessment be

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			be assessment of risks of new, additive, or cumulative disturbances associated with the projects on top of existing disturbances.	undertaken, BLM would welcome partners. Risks and cumulative effects to planning area resources are analyzed in Chapter 4 of the Draft EIS.
	GM9	10a-41	Adequate mitigation should be developed for activities carried out, e.g., burn 10 acres of sagebrush, remove cows from 10 acres of sagebrush to provide habitat in the interim.	Fire management restrictions and mitigation are presented in Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3.3 of the Draft EIS.
	GM10	10a-46	All other fire related projected in USRD planning area must be explored.	Section 1.8 discusses the relationship of other planning efforts in the planning area. Chapter 4 includes a cumulative impacts analysis disclosing the cumulative impacts of implementation of these projects.
	GM11	10a-47	BLM must ensure that all tiered /related projects undergo NEPA process.	All site-specific Fire Management Plans and Project Plan would be required to undergo additional NEPA analysis.
	GM12	10a-48	The BLM's ESR updates should be redone.	The update of BLM's ESR is outside the scope of this EIS process.
	GM13	11-6, 15-7	The BLM should proactively coordinate amongst stakeholders, include grazing permittees, landowners, agencies to allow for appropriate planning. Identify interdisciplinary/ interagency teams, and evaluation teams.	The BLM is required to involve the public during the development of LUPs, and other NEPA documents. The BLM will make every attempt (e.g., internet, newspaper, radio, TV announcements, etc.) to notify stakeholders and the public of opportunities to participate in decision making. More site-specific information will be determined on the field office level as FMPs are updated.
	GM14	16-1, 17-4	Public taxpayers are entitled to better management. Land shouldn't be just for lumber barons, mining	The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 states that the BLM is required to manage for multiple uses of

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			kings/entrepreneurs, cattle barons, and environmental CADS! The era of ranchers telling the BLM what to do with our public lands has got to stop.	administered land. In many cases, resource uses can exist side-by-side, allowing for the public to reap the benefits of resource extraction, grazing, and recreational enjoyment, among others.
	GM15	16-2	Want to know how BLM actually reached out to the true American public. Especially for a nationally supported area like this one.	The 'Response To Comments' portion of the Final EIS provides a discussion/summary of public involvement as it relates to this EIS.
Native American Interests	NAI	18-1	1.2.2 Need (P. 1-4) Action is needed to for the BLM to comply with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and to work toward resource conditions on BLM administered lands that allow productive use of these lands and enhance the social, <b>cultural</b> and economic stability of the communities that depend on them.  The tribal communities depend on the sites and resources on their homelands as well. Cultural stability must be included.	The word <i>cultural</i> will be inserted into the text in the FEIS as indicated in the comment to insure that cultural stability is reflected in the text of the FEIS in recognition of Tribal dependence on the sites and resources of these lands.
	NAI	18-2	1.3 The Proposed Action (P. 1-5), Fourth bullet; Restrictions on fire management practices, if any, are needed to protect natural or cultural values.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's the difference? The tribes do not separate natural and cultural resources, I don't understand what natural resource values are, please explain.</li> <li>• This document continually refers to</li> </ul>	The BLM recognizes that the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes do not separate natural and cultural resources. For the purpose of program management, however, the BLM defines natural resources as soil, water, air, wildlife, vegetation, etc. Cultural resources are defined by the BLM as archeological sites, historic sites and traditional cultural properties.

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			natural and cultural resources values.	
	NAI	18-3	<p>1.3.2.3 Non-fire Vegetation Treatments (P.1-7) Chemical:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The timing of chemical treatment is very important. The tribes do not recommend the use chemical treatment in the spring when the birds have their young. The chemicals will more than likely have a negative impact on their survival rate.</li> </ul> <p>Mechanical: Mechanical treatments include mowing, chaining, chopping, drill seeding, and cutting vegetation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and other tribes oppose chaining as treatment. Chaining is a very destructive method, chaining destroys cultural sites both on the surface and subsurface, it is also destructive to the habitat of various wildlife. We recommend chaining not be used.</li> </ul>	<p>The Proposed Plan Amendment proposes to mitigate potential negative effects of chemical treatment and mechanical treatment as described in Appendix Q, section Q.1.2 Fire and Non-Fire Vegetation Treatment Restrictions. Specifically see the restrictions under <u>Vegetation Management</u>, page Q-3, and <u>Cultural Resources and Historic Trails</u>, pages Q-4 and 5. These restrictions call for the use of archeologists and biologists during site specific project planning and NEPA analysis.</p> <p>This is a programmatic EIS and as such does not analyze individual site specific projects however; mitigation or restrictions are generally applied during site specific project planning and NEPA analysis as described below.</p> <p>The BLM recognizes that chaining can be destructive if used improperly. Chaining is but one of the tools the BLM can use during restoration efforts to prepare a seed bed. During site specific project planning and NEPA analysis, wildlife biologists and archeologists would consider project design features, mitigation measures and/or restrictions that could exclude the use of chemical treatments during spring when birds have their young. Similarly, project design features could be developed for chaining that would avoid</p>

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				<p>known and or potential surface/subsurface cultural sites or key wildlife habitat features to minimize adverse impacts. The specialists could conclude that chaining is not the appropriate tool to use in some cases.</p> <p>The impacts of chemical and mechanical treatments are presented in Chapter 4 of the FEIS.</p>
	NAI	18-4	<p>1.4 Identification of Relevant Issues (P. 1-9)</p> <p>Comments regarding issues surrounding this project were solicited from tribal governments, the public, and federal, state, and local agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Were the comments from the tribes through formal consultation? The process in which agencies are mandated to interact with federally recognized tribes is through government-to-government consultation, not through solicitation.</li> </ul>	<p>Throughout this planning process comments from the Tribes has been sought and received through formal government to government consultation.</p>
	NAI	18-5	<p>1.4.2 Issues driving the Analysis (P. 1-10)</p> <p>This section summarizes the general issues that helped determine the pertinent resources and scope to be analyzed during the planning process.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Quality, Watershed, Soils and Riparian Resources</li> <li>Vegetation</li> </ol>	<p>Cultural resources are defined by the BLM as archeological sites, historic sites and traditional cultural properties.</p> <p>The BLM defines natural resources as water, watershed, soils, riparian areas, vegetation wildlife and so on.</p>

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE FMDA DRAFT EIS				
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			<p>3. Wildlife</p> <p>4. TES Species "Terrestrial and aquatic TES species</p> <p>5. Cultural Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is a cultural resource? Everything that is mentioned above is a cultural resource from the tribal perspective.</li> </ul>	
	NAI	18-6	<p>1.5 Planning Criteria and Legislative Constraints (P. 1-11)</p> <p>The criteria were based on standards prescribed by applicable law and regulations; agency guidance; analysis of information pertinent to the planning area; results of <del>coordination</del> <b>consultation</b> with tribal governments, the public, and government agencies; and professional judgment.</p> <p>(Second bullet) Consult and coordinate with applicable, federal, state, local agencies, and tribal governments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affiliated federally recognized tribes should be one of the first to be consulted; additional studies and consultation may be required.</li> </ul> <p>(Third bullet) Recognize the Fort Bridger Treaty (1868) and preserve values significant to tribal governments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Fort Bridger Treaty is only relevant to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The unextinguished rights of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes under</li> </ul>	<p>The text in the FEIS will be changed to <i>consultation</i> as suggested in the comment.</p> <p>Reference to the Fort Bridger Treaty will be dropped from the third bullet on page 1-11.</p> <p>The revised third bullet will be revised to read, "Recognize traditional tribal uses associated with these lands and preserve values important to tribal members". The unextinguished rights of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and the Boise and Bruneau Valley treaties will be discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS in conjunction with discussion of the Fort Bridger Treaty. Also see the response to Comment 18-15.</p> <p>Under Executive Order 13007 American Indian Sacred Sites the BLM will ensure the protection of sacred sites and sensitive areas for traditional uses.</p>

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE FMDA DRAFT EIS				
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			<p>the Boise and Bruneau Valley treaties must also be addressed.</p> <p>(Last bullet) Manage resources/uses for multiple use and sustained yield.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The BLM must protect sacred sites and sensitive areas for traditional use.</li> </ul>	
	NAI	18-7	<p>1.8.5 Tribal Trust Responsibilities (P. 1-13)</p> <p>(P. 1-14 top of page) The relationship between the federal government and the tribal governments focuses on ensuring that the <b>legal</b> rights and interests of the tribal governments are considered <b>upheld</b> and protected.</p>	The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the edits suggested in the comment.
	NAI	18-8	<p>3.13 Cultural Resources (P 3-80)</p> <p>3.13.1 (P. 3-80) Current conditions and trends The BLM is responsible for identifying, protecting, <b>preserving</b>, managing, and enhancing archaeological, historical , architectural, and traditional lifeway values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional lifeway values, what does that mean? It's a foreign term to me, one that I don't recall ever being used in previous documents. Where did it come from? Who suggested that the phrase should be used?</li> </ul>	The text in the FEIS will be changed to insert the word <i>preserving</i> and delete the word <i>lifeway</i> as suggested in the comment.
	NAI	18-9	<p>3.13.1.1 (P. 3-81) Cultural Resource Inventories Cultural resources are generally identified through field inventories conducted by qualified</p>	The text in the FEIS will be changed by deleting the word <i>lifeway</i> as suggested in the previous comment.

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<b>Category</b>	<b>Specifics</b>	<b>Comment Letter and Number</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Response</b>
			<p>professionals to comply with Section 106 of the NHPA of 1966. Informant information and historical records are also used to identify known or potential archaeological, historical, and traditional lifeway values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with tribes and Ethnographic studies must be included on the list.</li> <li>• Ethnographic studies by an ethnographer that the tribes are comfortable with, tribal elders will not share sensitive information with someone they're not familiar with.</li> <li>• What does "Informant information"? Is that old information? Or is the BLM out currently seeking "Informants?"</li> </ul>	<p>The last sentence in the paragraph will be rewritten as follows in the FEIS: "Historical records, ethnographic studies and consultation with tribes are also used to identify known or potential archeological, historical, and traditional values." The phrase <i>informant information</i> will be removed from the document.</p>
	NAI	18-10	<p>3.13.1.3 (P. 3-81) Cultural Resources Conditions and Trends Cultural resources conditions and trends within the planning area vary considerably due to the variability of terrain and geomorphology, access and visibility, and past and current land use. Exposed artifacts and features on the ground surface can be disturbed by elements such as wind, and water erosion, animal and human intrusion, and development and maintenance activities. Based on limited site visitation and site form documentation, the trend of site condition is considered stable in most areas. Vandalism and</p>	<p>The BLM has not conducted a survey of the entire area. However the BLM has conducted numerous surveys in the area over the years in conjunction with ongoing project level work. Project level surveys have been documented and are on file in the respective BLM offices.</p> <p>BLM patrols to monitor sites, or funding for such patrols, is outside the scope of this EIS. See Chapter 1, Purpose and Need for Action.</p> <p>Agreed, the protection of sites and provision for tribal use is a BLM trust obligation. See the restrictions in Appendix Q regarding protection of sites to provide</p>

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			<p>unauthorized collection at sites constitutes the main source of cultural resource degradation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the BLM conducted surveys of the entire area? What kind of documentation do you have of the area covered in this document?</li> <li>• Wind and water erosion, is a natural process.</li> <li>• The BLM must increase patrols on BLM administered lands, or provide funding for the tribes to monitor the sites.</li> <li>• It is the BLM's trust obligation to protect the sites and provide for contemporary and ongoing use of the sites by tribal members.</li> </ul>	for on-going use by tribal members.
	NAI	18-11	<p>3.13.3 (P. 3-82) Opportunities (Last sentence) Other types of treatments could reveal previously unknown cultural sites, providing important historical information to the public and/or the tribal governments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This only says "historical information," but when it refers to "previously unknown cultural sites," please explain.</li> <li>• Site specific information on any Native American sites must be kept confidential. That information is not for the public.</li> </ul>	<p>The phrase <i>previously unknown cultural sites</i> refers to those recently discovered sites that had not yet been inventoried and documented. New sites that are encountered during site specific project planning will be documented and recorded upon discovery. The site will then be properly managed in accordance with cultural resource laws.</p> <p>It is BLM policy to keep site specific information on any Native American site confidential.</p>
	NAI	18-12	3.14 (P. 3-82) Native American Tribal Concerns ( <i>Legal Rights</i> )	The first sentence following the heading 3.14 (P 3-82) Current Conditions and Trends, will be rewritten as follows in the

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE FMDA DRAFT EIS				
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			<p>3.14.1 Current Conditions and Trends</p> <p>The planning area now occupies traditional lands of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Government, as well as some lands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Government.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what this paragraph means, what is meant by "some lands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Government? Where are those lands?</li> <li>• The tribes are basically one people. Drawing lines is a European concept, tribes never drew lines, boundaries of our traditional lands exceeds the ICC lines considerably.</li> </ul> <p>Federally recognized tribal governments have rights to and/or <b>legal</b> interests in public lands administered by the BLM. Both tribal governments depend upon the lands for a myriad of uses. The lands retain social, <del>and</del> economic <b>and traditional</b> value for the tribal people, as well as <b>contemporary and ongoing</b> spiritual and cultural uses. Through <del>past discussions</del> <b>consultation</b> with the tribal governments, the BLM is aware of <b>their treaty/trust obligations and the tribes'</b> their desire to capitalize on opportunities that maintain or enhance resources critical to the exercise of treaty rights, traditional customs, subsistence, and cultural uses</p>	<p>FEIS: "The planning area now includes portions of the traditional lands of the Shoshone-Bannock and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes.</p> <p>The phrase, "some lands of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Government" was an awkward attempt to refer to the lands traditionally used by the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. The phrase has been rewritten as presented above.</p> <p>The text in the FEIS will also be changed to reflect the edits suggested in the remaining portion of this comment. The phrase, "tribal government" will be removed from the paragraph.</p>

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE FMDA DRAFT EIS				
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			<p><del>purposes</del> <i>of the land.</i></p> <p>The <b><i>Shoshone-Bannock Tribes</i></b> <del>tribal governments</del> have treaty under the Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868 that extend to unoccupied federal lands off-reservation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are several places in this paragraph that refers to "tribal governments." This paragraph is specifically in reference to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes.</li> <li>• I recommend removing the phrase, "tribal governments" from this paragraph. This is very misleading to someone who doesn't know the difference between the tribes.</li> </ul>	
	NAI	18-13	<p>(P.3-83) The <b><i>Duck Valley Indian Reservation is the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes'</i></b> <del>tribal government's</del> current reservation includes 294,242 acres in Idaho and Nevada. The reservation is headquartered in Owyhee, Nevada, and the Tribal Government is housed there. The principle revenue sources of the Tribal Governments are farming and ranching. Business and lands leases in the planning and grazing permits also provide income to the Tribal Governments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most all business' are owned and managed by tribal members.</li> </ul> <p>Land leases are very limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes is one</li> </ul>	<p>The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the edits suggested in the comment. The last sentence in the paragraph will be rewritten in the FEIS to read as follows: "Businesses owned by and managed by Tribal members, and grazing permits also provide income to the Tribes."</p>

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			tribal government.	
	NAI	18-14	(Same page.) Like most reservation communities, the area is geographically isolated and economically depressed. The people are tied <b>traditionally</b> , culturally, and spiritually to the land, and they are very interested and involved in helping to shape how the lands <b>and the resources</b> <del>is</del> <b>are</b> administered by the BLM. The Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Governments <del>are</del> <b>is</b> particularly concerned about cultural resources on public land, as well as subsistence, spiritual, and traditional use areas.	The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the edits suggested in the comment.
	NAI	18-15	(Same page.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Boise Valley Treaty; On October 10, 1864</li> <li>• The Bruneau Valley Treaty; on April 10, 1866</li> <li>• After more than a century, the United States Senate has not gotten around to ratifying these treaties.</li> <li>• The United States of America still has not obtained title to the Boise and Bruneau lands of southwestern Idaho, although Caleb Lyons of Lyonsdale, governor and superintendent of Indian affairs for Idaho, solemnly promised us that this matter would be attended to. The Aboriginal Title remains with the tribes.</li> </ul>	The following text will be added to the Chapter 3 of the FEIS to acknowledge the Boise and Bruneau Valley Treaties on page 3-83 at the top of the first full paragraph. "Regarding Shoshone-Paiute Tribal interest in these lands, the Boise Valley Treaty and the Bruneau Valley Treaty were never ratified. The Tribes believe that the title was not relinquished and they continue to claim title, rights and interests associated with these lands. The BLM recognizes the traditional use associated with the lands as well as the requirements of cultural resource laws."

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			(Same page.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes have not relinquished any rights to southwestern Idaho, we still maintain aboriginal land title and all hunting, fishing , gathering and other traditional uses on our homelands</li> </ul>	
	NAI	18-16	(Same page.) The BLM is <del>responsible</del> <b>obligated</b> for maintaining a formal government-to-government relationship with federally recognized Tribal Governments. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Governments and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Governments both have rights to and cultural/historical affiliation with the lands in the planning area. The relationship between the federal government and these Tribal Governments focuses on ensuring the <b>legal</b> rights and/or interests of the Tribal Governments are <del>considered and</del> protected, <b>preserved</b> in accordance with relevant treaties, executive orders, legislation, <b>the U.S. Constitution</b> and federal policies. This includes consulting with tribal representatives; identifying and protecting important archaeological, religious, and/or sacred sites; and providing tribal members with appropriate access to these sties. The Tribal Governments are also interested in the BLM acquiring lands that contain	The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the edits suggested in the comment.  The discussion of acquisitions of or lands that go out of Federal ownership is outside of the scope of this EIS. This sentence (last sentence p. 3-81, Section 3.14.1, paragraph 4) will be deleted from the FEIS. See Chapter 1, Purpose and Need for Action.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE FMDA DRAFT EIS				
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			traditional cultural resources and are part of their aboriginal territory, as well as ensuring that lands that go out of federal ownership do not diminish their rights of traditional uses.	
	NAI	18-17	(Same page.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any lands leaving federal ownership must undergo an intensive cultural resource survey to assure that they will remain protected and access to the sites will continue for tribal members.</li> </ul>	The discussion of acquisitions of or lands that go out of Federal ownership is outside of the scope of this EIS. See Chapter 1, Purpose and Need for Action. The last sentence p. 3-81, Section 3.14.1, paragraph 4 of the FEIS will be deleted.
	NAI	18-18	Figure 3-14. (P. 3-84) Areas of interest to the local tribal governments The BLM is required under <b>the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, (NAGPRA)</b> <del>federal cultural resource</del> law to ensure the protection and proper treatment of human remains of Native American <b>origin patrimony</b> known to be present or discovered on lands under their jurisdiction. NAGPRA mandates that land managers assign cultural patrimony of affiliation to human remains found as part of a federal undertaking and consult with the affiliated <b>Tribes groups</b> to determine the appropriate repatriation of the human remains. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The agency must consult with the affiliated tribes and attempt to establish cultural affiliation.</li> <li>Once cultural affiliation is determined, they must continue</li> </ul>	The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the edits suggested in the comments. To incorporate the comments at the two bullets, the second sentence of the paragraph will be rewritten in the FEIS to read as follows. "NAGPRA mandates that land managers consult with affiliated tribes to assign cultural patrimony of affiliation to human remains found as part of a federal undertaking and consult with the affiliated Tribes to arrange for repatriation of the remains, associated funerary objects and other objects."

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			<p>consultation with the affiliated tribe(s) to arrange for repatriation of the remains, associated funerary objects and other objects.</p> <p>NAGPRA also applies to <del>grave goods</del> <b>Associated Funerary Objects</b> or objects of cultural patrimony associated with burial sites.</p>	
	NAI	18-19	<p>3.14.2 Risks</p> <p>Consultation has been undertaken between the BLM the tribal <del>groups</del> <b>governments</b> regarding concerns over implementing the proposed plan amendments that would result as a process of this EIS.</p>	The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the edits suggested in the comment.
	NAI	18-20	<p>4.13.1 Analysis Assumptions and Methods</p> <p>4.13.2.1 Direct and indirect impacts of prescribed burn P. 4-165 (Top of the page) Most looting is undertaken by people who are unaware that their activities are illegal and can often be controlled by educating the public about the various laws.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most looting on the small scale could be people who are unaware.</li> <li>• Professional looters know what their going after, and sometimes return to a site if it paid off before.</li> <li>• We do agree that education is an important tool, in turn they too could help discourage looting and report violators.</li> </ul>	The text in the FEIS will be changed to incorporate the ideas that most looting on the small scale could be people who are unaware and that professional looters know what their going after, and sometimes return to a site if it paid off before. Tribal participation in the education process would be welcomed by the BLM.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tribes must be a participant in the education process.</li> </ul>	
	NAI	18-21	<p>Same page (second paragraph from the bottom)</p> <p>Archaeological sites consist of a collection of culturally modified material.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does that mean? That's what a cultural site is, a site of culturally modified material, and materials from different quarries and other sources.</li> </ul>	The text in the FEIS will be edited to clarify. The words <i>culturally modified materials</i> will be replaced with the word <i>artifacts</i> . This change will be made in section 4.13 of the FEIS.
	NAI	18-22	<p>4.13.2.4 Direct and indirect impacts of Mechanical Treatment</p> <p>Mechanical activities can include, mowing, chaining, chopping, and cutting of surface vegetation, and applying seeds via rangeland drill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes and other tribes are opposed to chaining because of the destruction to cultural sites, habitat and the environment.</li> </ul> <p>Chaining destroys subsurface material and displaces them from its original location.</p>	See the response to Comment 18-3 above.
	NAI	18-23	<p>4.13.8 Mitigation as Monitoring (PA-168)</p> <p>The BLM has formulated management restrictions to protect cultural resources during fire management activities. In addition to these guidelines, the BLM as a federal agency is required under</p>	The text in the FEIS will be edited to incorporate the notion that the BLM is required to comply with all other relevant cultural resource laws in addition to Section 106 of NHPA. A last sentence will be added this paragraph in the FEIS as follows: "Similarly, whether a site is eligible for the NRHP is irrelevant to tribes. A site

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			<p>Section 106 of the NHPA to identify archaeological and historical properties eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and to determine if these properties would be affected by a specific action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BLM is mandated to comply with all relevant laws not just Section 106 of NHPA.</li> <li>• BLM cannot be selective when it comes to compliance.</li> <li>• Whether a site is eligible for the NRHP is irrelevant to tribes. A site could have very little left on the surface and still be a very significant site to the tribes.</li> </ul>	<p>could have very little left on the surface and still be a very significant site to the tribes and the BLM must also determine if these properties would be affected by a specific action.”</p>

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