

# Greater-Sage Grouse Questions and Answers

## **What is the BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy?**

The BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy provides a coordinated, cooperative stakeholder team approach to incorporate regionally appropriate, science-based conservation measures into BLM land-use planning efforts throughout the range of the greater sage-grouse.

Greater sage-grouse benefit from, and make use of, suitable habitat—regardless of land ownership and management responsibility, so the BLM planning strategy uses an open and collaborative approach to foster cooperative conservation efforts across the regions and states that make up the greater sage-grouse range.

The planning strategy illustrates the BLM’s continued commitment to long-term, range-wide sage-grouse conservation and habitat restoration and acknowledges the added value of engaging all stakeholders and governmental partners in cooperative conservation efforts.

## **Why is a new planning approach needed?**

In April 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined that the greater sage-grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but that listing the species was precluded by the need to address other, higher-priority species first. One reason for the FWS decision was an identified need for “improved regulatory mechanisms” to ensure species conservation. The principal regulatory mechanisms for BLM are Resource Management Plans (RMPs).

The FWS greater sage-grouse decision placed the species on the candidate list for future regulatory action, which provided stakeholders such as federal agencies, states, tribes and private landowners with additional opportunities to continue working cooperatively to conserve the species and restore its habitat. BLM is also using this opportunity to develop long-term conservation and habitat restoration measures and actions for the species on the National System of Public Lands.

## **What does the new planning strategy do to advance the BLM’s efforts to improve and protect greater sage grouse habitat and populations?**

The new planning strategy:

- Creates a range-wide approach that allows for improved collaboration and coordination, and addresses eco-regional differences by dividing the existing sage-grouse range into an Eastern Region and a Western Region. The Eastern Region will include Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, northeastern Utah, and Wyoming, where major sage-grouse threats include habitat loss and fragmentation due to energy development—both from oil and gas and renewable energy projects. The Western Region will include northeastern California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and most of Utah, with a small portion of southwestern Montana where major sage-grouse threats include wildfire, habitat loss due to invasive plant species, and habitat fragmentation.
- Creates several governance teams to ensure ongoing coordination and oversight, both regionally and nationally, using an interagency and multi-state approach that engages all stakeholders.



## **What does BLM hope to achieve by implementing the National Greater Sage Grouse planning strategy?**

Through the strategy's planning process, BLM hopes to strike the appropriate balance of resource uses and resource conservation to ensure the short and long-term sustainability of greater sage grouse habitat and populations. BLM will incorporate consistent conservation measures as land use planning decisions into all of its RMPs covering occupied greater sage grouse habitat. These decisions may take the form of prescriptions for resource uses to determinations of the types of resource uses that are appropriate within greater sage grouse habitat.

## **Who will be guiding development of this policy?**

- A National Policy Team will provide national policy guidance on sage-grouse conservation and consistent planning objectives.
- A National Technical Team (NTT) will use the best science available to derive recommended conservation measures.
- Two Regional Management Teams (RMTs) will coordinate planning and strategy implementation efforts across the states and provide direction at specific points to ensure consistency.
- Two Regional Interdisciplinary Teams (RIDTs) will coordinate development of EISs and RMP amendments using policy guidance provided by the National Policy Team.
- Sub-regional Interdisciplinary Teams (SIDTs) will conduct the required environmental analyses to transform goals and objectives into regulatory mechanisms for greater sage-grouse conservation.

Most of these teams include representatives from other federal and state agencies.

## **Who are you working with?**

We have been working with multiple Federal, State and Tribal agencies; organizations; educational and research institutions and committed individuals to develop our sage-grouse conservation efforts. They include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) and many local working groups.

## **What is your timeline?**

Given the tight time frames in which the Fish and Wildlife Service must make its listing decision, it's crucial that we get this done right and done quickly. The BLM already has established the multiple teams necessary to guide this complex process to completion. We plan to issue interim management guidance in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2012. We also plan to formally publish our notice of intent to amend our land use plans in the Federal Register in the same time period. Shortly thereafter, we will begin an active public involvement process to solicit input on potential science-based management actions we should be considering as we look at amending our RMPs. By the second quarter of Fiscal year 2013, we will publish the draft Environmental Impact Statement needed to amend our RMPs for public comment. All of the public involvement will culminate with revised or amended RMPs and publication of several Final Environmental Impact Statements within the two regions in 2014.

## **What are you doing to protect sage-grouse and their habitat in the interim?**

While this extensive planning process is underway, the BLM also is developing conservation measures and policy recommendations for the interim protection of sagebrush habitat. These measures will help BLM offices determine whether to authorize or continue certain activities

in greater sage-grouse habitat. They are designed to ensure that greater sage-grouse populations and habitats are maintained or improved and that habitat loss is minimized.

**What about the two sub-populations, the Washington State Distinct Population Segment (DPS) and “bi-state” DPS, of the Greater Sage-grouse? Will they be included in this new Strategy?**

No. Sage grouse in Washington have been managed under a specific Washington Greater Sage-Grouse Recovery Plan since 2004. BLM has limited involvement in the Washington State DPS and only manages about 5 percent of the remaining habitat for this population. The “bi-state” DPS exists in a small area in California and Nevada. It is being addressed by the FWS with different timeframes and processes.

**Is the Gunnison sage-grouse a part of this planning strategy?**

No. The Gunnison sage-grouse is not included in this National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy. It is a separate species. The Gunnison sage-grouse is being addressed by the Rangewide Conservation Plan (RCP) developed by an interagency steering committee and signed in April 2005. It includes a suite of conservation strategies designed to address localized and range-wide threats to the species, and has been used to help design projects and management strategies within its habitat.