

RAWLINS FIELD OFFICE

# Wyoming News

Bureau of Land Management

1300 North Third Street

PO Box 2407

Rawlins, WY 82301



**Contact: Mary L. Wilson, 307-328-4329**

**March 28, 2005**

**WY-05-13**

*Bureau of Land Management wildlife biologists, Frank Blomquist and Mary Read, have written the following opinion-editorial to help inform the public about BLM's wildlife program and how the Rawlins Resource Management Plan addresses wildlife habitat.*

BLM is a "multiple-use" land management agency, mandated to manage public land for a variety of uses. BLM's Rawlins Field Office manages 3.5 million acres of public land surface and 4.5 million acres of federal mineral estate in Carbon, Sweetwater, Albany and Laramie Counties. This multiple-use mandate brings with it a number of challenges as the agency works to balance many conflicting land uses.

In recent months, much has been written about the proposed oil & gas development in the Rawlins area. However, little mention has been made of what is done to manage the development of this land which provides some of the best habitat in the country for a variety of wildlife species, such as the greater sage-grouse, mountain plover, mule deer, antelope and elk.

Providing, maintaining, and improving wildlife habitat is a critical management issue addressed in the Rawlins Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision. BLM biologists implement Best Management Practices to reduce or eliminate impacts on wildlife.

This includes enforcing seasonal timing restrictions, identifying protection buffers around critical wildlife areas and designating special management areas. For example, strengthening greater sage-grouse lek protections is an important component of the preferred alternative. Going from a controlled surface use (where surface use is discouraged in the ¼ mile area around leks) to no surface occupancy (which keeps surface activity completely out of the ¼ mile area) is one of many wildlife protection measures in the RMP. Timing restrictions for greater sage-grouse and sharp-tail grouse around strutting and nesting periods is another protection measure in the preferred alternative.

Implementing Best Management Practices also means working with oil and gas operators to centralize facilities, pipe condensate to central locations, use remote sensing at well pads, install anti-perch devices and reduce noise levels. All of this is done to decrease habitat disturbance and fragmentation, reduce traffic, noise and human activity in sensitive areas during critical times.

Designating Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, Raptor Concentration Areas, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern also provides the opportunity to manage these unique habitats using more restrictive measures, even though these areas may remain open to oil and gas leasing.

A key component of managing wildlife habitat is monitoring the effects of development. To that end, BLM biologists in the Rawlins Field Office have taken innovative steps to create comprehensive wildlife habitat monitoring plans that reach across physical boundaries and involve a varied range of activities. An example of this “out-of-the-box” thinking is the development of a single wildlife habitat monitoring plan for several gas development projects within the Rawlins Field Office area. This allows wildlife biologists to create monitoring plans that look at the “big picture”—rather than in a piecemeal approach.

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, industry and BLM work in partnership to identify habitat monitoring needs and assessments which provides information related to ongoing activities. Analysis provides opportunities to identify potential impacts and specific protection measures that may be implemented. Working collaboratively, interested agencies and others develop ways to monitor effects of what occurs on the public lands. Working together in this team approach has proven very valuable to both agencies and wildlife.

The next in this series of information articles will focus on public land oil and gas leasing in the Rawlins Field Office.

-BLM-

[www.wy.blm.gov](http://www.wy.blm.gov)