

Development of Sage-Grouse Preliminary Habitat Maps for Oregon: Process and Terminology

Purpose

Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-044 directs BLM to collaborate with state wildlife agencies to identify and map two categories of sage-grouse habitat:

- **Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH):** Areas that have been identified as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable Greater Sage-Grouse populations. These areas would include breeding, late brood-rearing, and winter concentration areas, and
- **Preliminary General Habitat (PGH):** Areas of occupied seasonal or year-round habitat outside of priority habitat.

In Oregon, BLM developed the PPH/PGH map based on the ODFW *Sage Grouse Core Areas Map* (<http://nrimp.dfw.state.or.us/DataClearinghouse/default.aspx?p=202&XMLname=944.xml>). The Core Areas Map did not include all general sage-grouse habitat, so BLM collaborated with ODFW and the BLM NOC to add a layer with general habitat data to the Core Areas Map. However, the terminology used to define sage-grouse habitat differs between agencies, and this has the potential to cause confusion during the land use planning process. The purpose for this paper is to describe the inter-agency coordination that has occurred to map PPH/PGH and to cross-walk the terminology.

Process and Terminology

The ODFW Sage Grouse Core Areas Map identifies two categories of habitat: Core Area and Low Density. Definitions for Core Area and Low Density (see pages 82-83 in *Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon*) are consistent with PPH and PGH, respectively. However, Low Density habitat and PGH are not interchangeable. Whereas PGH includes all known occupied or suitable sage-grouse habitat, Low Density habitat does not. Relatively minor areas of apparently suitable sagebrush habitat fall outside of identified Core and Low Density areas.

Recognizing the need to capture all sage-grouse habitat in its PPH/PGH map, BLM modeled occupied habitat for baseline year 2006, modified by removal of habitat within fire perimeters for 2007 through 2010 (Durtsche 2010). Sage-grouse are assumed to be present within a mapping unit at least once in the last 10 years. This *Currently Occupied Habitat* (COH) was added to the Low Density habitat to create the PGH layer, as shown in the attached map.

BLM shared the PPH/PGH map with ODFW, and on May 16, 2012, David Budeau, Upland Game Bird Coordinator replied with email message: "The map appeared to accurately reflect the Core Area and Low Density designations. Again, for the Department the areas mapped as Core and Low Density are the most important to sage-grouse given our current state of knowledge. However it would be important to consider the occupied sagebrush habitat outside of these designations may contribute to connectivity of important sage-grouse areas and contribute to the overall goal of reducing habitat loss and fragmentation. In some cases these areas could be more important to the life-history needs of sage-

grouse than we currently understand, so having the ability to elevate the importance of these areas as our knowledge becomes more complete would be a desirable option.”

Summary

The Oregon sage-grouse PPH/PGH map was developed through a collaborative effort between BLM and ODFW using the best available data. PPH is equivalent to Core Area, and PGH is composed of Low Density plus COH. ODFW has accepted the PPH/PGH GIS layer. The map may change as new information becomes available. Such changes would be coordinated with ODFW so that the delineation of PPH and PGH provides for sustainable populations.

Figure 1. Map of Greater Sage-Grouse Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH) in eastern Oregon. Note that PPH is identical to Core Area, and PGH is composed of Low Density plus Current Occupied Habitat. Core Area and Low Density are defined in *Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon: A Plan to Maintain and Enhance Populations and Habitat* (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2011).

