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BLM releases draft Greater Sage-Grouse EIS for Oregon

PORTLAND, Ore. – As part of a joint effort with the U.S. Forest Service to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat across 10 western states, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today issued a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a 90-day public comment period.

The draft Oregon Sub-Regional Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment/EIS would amend the BLM land management plans covering the Andrews, Baker, Lakeview, Steens, Three Rivers, Brothers LaPine (east), Southeastern Oregon, and Upper Deschutes RMPs in Oregon. It considers six possible management alternatives for maintaining and increasing habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse on BLM-administered lands in Oregon. Approximately 10 million acres of Oregon's Greater Sage-Grouse habitat is on BLM-administered lands. The decisions in this RMP Amendment apply only to BLM-administered lands in Oregon. They do not apply to private land.

“We are considering a range of alternatives designed to conserve and protect Greater Sage-Grouse habitat,” said Joan Suther, Oregon Sub-Regional Greater Sage-Grouse Project Manager. “We have been working closely with our cooperating agencies to develop a plan. Public review and comment on the draft EIS is the next important step in the process.”

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined that the Greater Sage-Grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act, but that listing the species was precluded by the need to address other species first. One reason for the FWS determination was the need for “improved regulatory mechanisms” to ensure species conservation. The principal regulatory mechanisms for the BLM and the Forest Service are resource decisions in land management plans. The BLM and the Forest Service are stewards of more than half of all Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in the United States.

In 2011, the BLM and the Forest Service joined forces to develop, analyze and incorporate coordinated, long-term conservation measures and actions for the Greater Sage-Grouse in their land management plans. These land-use planning measures must be completed by the end of 2014 to give FWS time to evaluate them before the agency must make a court-ordered, final listing decision in 2015. For additional information about Greater Sage-Grouse conservation, visit <http://www.blm.gov/sagegrouse>.

The draft EIS released today is one of more than a dozen coordinated environmental documents developed to provide a consistent approach to sustaining the species and its habitat across the west. The drafts are being released for public comment as they are completed.

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The six alternatives include:

- Alternative A, a no-action alternative which would retain the management goals, objectives, and direction specified in the current Resource Management Plans for the state.
- Alternative B, that analyzes management actions outlined in the multi-agency National Technical Team (NTT) report, which includes such protections as right-of-way exclusion areas and a fluid mineral leasing closure.
- Alternative C, that analyzes management recommendations submitted by conservation groups, which includes the creation of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern covering approximately 4,547,043 acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and removal of grazing in the planning area.
- Alternative D, the Oregon sub-regional alternative that incorporates local adjustments to the NTT report which were developed with cooperating agencies. The BLM has identified Alternative D as its preferred alternative. Although the BLM has identified a preferred alternative, it will consider the entire range of alternatives when developing the proposed plan.
- Alternative E is based on recommendations included in the ODFW Sage-Grouse Conservation and Assessment Strategy (2011), which includes an emphasis of protecting Core Areas with no development permissible for major surface disturbing activities.
- Alternative F, that analyzes other management recommendations submitted by conservation groups, which includes creation of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern covering approximately 4,040,202 acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and reduced grazing in the planning area.

The draft Oregon Sub-Regional Greater Sage-Grouse RMP Amendment/EIS is available at <http://on.doi.gov/H9NDe1> or <http://on.doi.gov/I26YQt>.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2012, activities on public lands generated \$4.6 billion in revenue, much of which was shared with the States where the activities occurred. In addition, public lands contributed more than \$112 billion to the U.S. economy and helped support more than 500,000 jobs.

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