



BLM NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Mitch Snow
(202) 441-3188

BLM Issues Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Guidance

The Bureau of Land Management today issued two Instructional Memorandums (IMs) that will help guide both immediate and longer-term conservation actions aimed at conserving the greater sage-grouse and its sagebrush habitat in 10 western states – aimed at benefitting the species while maintaining a robust economy in the West:

- The *Interim Management IM* provides immediate direction for the management of greater sage-grouse habitat while the agency works on updating multiple land use plans. The measures in this IM represent a starting point that will help the agency determine whether to authorize or continue certain activities in greater sage-grouse habitat while it works on updating multiple land use plans, known as Resource Management Plans (RMPs).
- The *Planning Direction IM* establishes consistent protection measures for the species and its habitat to be incorporated into one or more alternatives for analysis in the Environmental Impact Statements that will be used to amend the BLM's RMPs. The decisions in these RMPs will provide for longer term conservation for the greater sage-grouse.

“The aim of these science-based measures is to maintain and restore flourishing populations of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat,” BLM Director Bob Abbey said. “We are working to do this in a way that protects the health of our land, while also facilitating safe and responsible energy development and recreational opportunities that power our economy. By proactively addressing sage grouse conservation concerns on BLM lands, we also hope to maintain the widest possible range of options for our neighboring landowners.”

The guidance in these documents applies to BLM activities in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming. Greater sage-grouse currently use up to 47 million acres of land managed by the BLM.

Today's announcement builds on a series of federal and state initiatives underway to protect the species while ensuring that energy production, recreational access and other uses of federal lands continue. These programs include Wyoming's Sage Grouse Initiative developed under the leadership of Governor Mead; the BLM's National Greater Sage-Grouse *Planning Strategy*; and

the ongoing implementation of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Comprehensive Strategy.

On Dec. 9, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Wyoming Governor Matt Mead **convened a meeting** with representatives from eight western states to discuss ongoing efforts to conserve the greater sage-grouse and identify next steps in implementing a landscape level strategy, including the development of the *Interim Management* IM. Participants discussed current strategies, challenges, and areas of collaboration for local, state, and federal governments to proactively address the needs of the species to ensure its long-term health and stability.

The states were told that the guidance would be issued in December as part of the BLM's efforts to implement a landscape level strategy that will benefit the species while maintaining a robust economy in the West. Both IMs are integral parts of the agency's strategy for working collaboratively with local, state, and federal governments to proactively address the needs of the species to ensure its long-term health and stability.

Both IMs cover a wide range of issues associated with carrying out the BLM's multiple-use mandate on public lands in the west. Among the topics covered by the IMs are:

- Vegetation Management
- Wildfire Emergency Stabilization and Burned Area Rehabilitation
- Wildfire Suppression and Fuels Management
- Rights of way for facilities such as roads, powerlines, pipelines and wind farms
- Leasable minerals, such as coal, oil and gas
- Locatable minerals, such as gold, silver and copper
- Saleable minerals, such as sand, stone and gravel
- Grazing
- Recreation
- Travel Management
- Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Control and Management
- Wild Horse and Burro Management
- Realty Actions, such as land exchanges, transfers and sales; and
- Vegetation and Resources Monitoring

The two IMs focus on actions proposed to take place in Preliminary Priority Habitat, which has the highest conservation value for maintaining the species and its habitat. Priority sage-grouse habitat includes breeding, late brood-rearing and winter concentration areas. The identification of these areas was a collaborative effort between the BLM and the respective state wildlife agencies. Under the alternative set out in the Planning Direction IM, human-caused disturbance in priority habitat would be limited to less than 2.5% of the species' total habitat, regardless of surface ownership. In priority habitat areas where more than 2.5% of the surface area has already been disturbed, the BLM would not authorize any further disturbance.

The guidance also covers actions in Preliminary General Habitat, which was also identified through a collaborative effort with state wildlife agencies.

The BLM will refine the maps of priority and general greater sage-grouse habitat through its planning process which is currently underway.

Both IMs are effective immediately. The interim management IM will remain in effect until land use plans are amended or revised to conserve greater sage-grouse and its habitat as outlined in BLM's July 2011 National Greater Sage Grouse Planning Strategy. BLM's RMP revisions are on different schedules in different areas, and some will be completed more rapidly than others.

BLM's Interim Management IM won't apply in Wyoming because their guidance has been approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service and adopted by the BLM; with the exception of grazing which is not addressed in the Wyoming guidance.

Each of the elements contained in the Planning Direction IM are derived from a report by BLM's National Technical Team. This team is composed of representatives from the BLM, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Geological Survey and State Fish and Wildlife agencies. The team is charged with ensuring that the relevant science on greater sage-grouse conservation is considered, reasonably interpreted and accurately presented, with risks and uncertainties clearly delineated; providing conservation objectives in measurable terms to guide planning; and identifying science-based conservation measures.

IM 2012-043, Greater Sage-Grouse Interim Management Policies and Procedures, is available at <http://blm.gov/f4jd>

IM 2012-044, BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy, is available at <http://blm.gov/g4jd>

The BLM manages more land - over 245 million acres - than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.