

**Record of Decision and
Approved Resource Management Plan
Amendments for the Great Basin Region,
Including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions
of**

**Idaho and Southwestern Montana
Nevada and Northeastern California
Oregon
Utah**

Prepared by:
US Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Washington, DC

September 2015





United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Washington, D.C. 20240

<http://www.blm.gov>

SEP 18 2015



Dear Reader:

Enclosed are the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments (RMPAs) for the Great Basin Region Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-regions (Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah).

The documents are the product of an unprecedented effort to respond to the deteriorating health of the sagebrush landscapes of the American West and the declining population of the Greater Sage-Grouse, a ground-dwelling bird that has been under consideration by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Based on the best available science and with extensive participation from the public, partners, and stakeholders, these documents, and those published today for the Rocky Mountain Region, serve as the cornerstone of the broader, landscape-level National Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy (Strategy).

This Strategy responds to the threats identified in the FWS's 2010 "warranted, but precluded" finding and was guided by over a decade of research, analyses, and recommendations for Greater Sage-Grouse conservation, including the FWS Conservation Objectives Team Report and the BLM National Technical Team Report. These underlying Reports were developed through a collaboration of state, Federal, and research scientists with extensive experience in sage-grouse management and research.

The BLM's actions are guided by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which requires that RMPs for managing public lands be developed and maintained, and the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires that an environmental impact statement (EIS) be prepared for major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. In fulfillment of these requirements, the BLM prepared 15 EISs for the associated Draft RMPs and RMPAs, which were published in 2012 and 2013.¹ Each document incorporated analyses and input from the public; Native American tribes; cooperating agencies and other local, state, and Federal agencies and organizations; and BLM resource specialists.

The public had 90 days to comment following publication of the Draft RMPAs and EISs. The BLM received 1,348 unique letters with more than 4,990 substantive comments on all the Great Basin Region Draft documents. The BLM and the U.S. Forest Service reviewed, summarized, and took into consideration these comments when preparing the Proposed RMPAs and Final EISs, which were published May 29, 2015, for a 60-day Governor's consistency review and a 30-day public protest period.

¹ The BLM published one of the 15 Draft EISs – that associated with the Lander RMP Revision – in 2011.

The BLM received consistency review letters from the Governors of California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Utah in the Great Basin Region and has worked closely with these States to address their concerns. Across all of the Proposed RMPAs and their associated EISs in the Great Basin Region, government entities, private citizens, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders submitted 133 protest letters. Of those, 124 letters contained valid protest issues, in accordance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-2. The BLM addressed these issues in the Director's Protest Resolution Reports. These Reports are available on the Internet at: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/planning_overview/protest_resolution/protestreports.html.

The Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management of the U.S. Department of the Interior and I have signed the attached ROD, approving the RMPAs. These plans will guide future land and resource management on BLM-administered land in this region to benefit the Greater Sage-Grouse and more than 350 other species of wildlife that depend on healthy sagebrush-steppe landscapes, while maintaining multiple uses, including grazing and recreation. This ROD applies to the BLM plans for the Great Basin Region and applies only to BLM-managed lands and subsurface mineral estate. However, the complete Strategy on BLM- and U.S. Forest Service-administered lands consists of this ROD, the BLM ROD for the Rocky Mountain Region, the BLM ROD for the Lander RMP,² and the two Forest Service RODs for each of these regions. Together these five RODs and the underlying plans implement the Strategy across the remaining range of the species.

Copies of the ROD and RMPAs can be obtained from the BLM's National Greater Sage-Grouse website at: <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse.html>.

The BLM extends its sincere appreciation to the public; Native American tribal representatives; local, state, and other Federal agencies; and the cooperating agencies, all of whom contributed significantly to the completion of these plans. Your participation informed and improved the land use plans presented here. Together with our partners, we have taken action that ensures a bright future for wildlife, the sagebrush sea, and a thriving economy in the American West. We look forward to working with you to implement the Strategy.

Sincerely,



Neil Kornze
Director

Enclosure:

1. Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments

² The BLM signed the ROD approving the Lander RMP in June 2014

SUMMARY

This Record of Decision (ROD) is the culmination of an unprecedented effort to conserve Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) habitat on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). It is consistent with the BLM's multiple-use and sustained yield mission and the joint objective established by Federal and State leadership through the GRSG Task Force to conserve GRSG habitat on Federal, State, and private land such that additional protections under the Endangered Species Act may be avoided.

In response to a [2010 determination](#) by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) that the listing of the GRSG under the Endangered Species Act was “warranted, but precluded” by other priorities, the BLM, in coordination with the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service, developed a landscape-level management strategy, based on the best available science, that was targeted, multi-tiered, coordinated, and collaborative. This strategy offers the highest level of protection for GRSG in the most important habitat areas. It addresses the specific threats identified in the 2010 FWS “warranted, but precluded” decision and the [FWS 2013 Conservation Objectives Team \(COT\) Report](#).

This ROD and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments (ARMPAs) are for the Great Basin Region GRSG Sub-Regions of Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah. The ARMPAs include GRSG habitat management direction that avoids and minimizes additional disturbance in GRSG habitat management areas. Moreover, they target restoration of and improvements to the most important areas of habitat. Management under the ARMPAs is directed through land use allocations that apply to GRSG habitat. These allocations accomplish the following:

- Eliminate most new surface disturbance in the most highly valued sagebrush ecosystem areas identified as Sagebrush Focal Areas
- Avoid or limit new surface disturbance in Priority Habitat Management Areas, of which Sagebrush Focal Areas are a subset
- Minimize surface disturbance in General Habitat Management Areas

In addition to protective land use allocations in habitat management areas, the ARMPAs include a suite of management actions, such as establishing disturbance limits, GRSG habitat objectives, mitigation

requirements, monitoring protocols, and adaptive management triggers and responses. They also include other conservation measures that apply throughout designated habitat management areas.

The cumulative effect of these measures is to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat across the species' remaining range in the Great Basin Region and to provide greater certainty that BLM resource management plan decisions in GRSG habitat in the Great Basin Region can lead to conservation of the GRSG and other sagebrush-steppe associated species in the region. The targeted resource management plan protections presented in this ROD and ARMPAs apply not only to the GRSG and its habitat but also to over 350 wildlife species associated with the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem; this is widely recognized as one of the most imperiled ecosystems in North America. In addition to protecting habitat, reversing the slow degradation of this valuable ecosystem will also benefit local economies and a variety of rangeland uses, including recreation and grazing. This also will safeguard the long-term sustainability, diversity, and productivity of these important and iconic landscapes.

This conservation strategy has been developed in conjunction with the 10 states in which the ARMPAs apply, including the ARMPAs and ARMPs for the sub-regions in the BLM's Rocky Mountain Region ROD. In combination with additional State and Federal actions underway and in development, the strategy represents an unprecedented coordinated collaboration among Federal land management agencies and the States to manage an entire ecosystem and associated flora and fauna. The goal is to achieve the COT Report objective of "conserv[ing] the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future." [[Dan Ashe, Director, FWS, Transmittal letter to COT Report. 2013](#)]

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1	Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment
2	Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment
3	Oregon Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment
4	Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Full Phrase

AML	appropriate management level
ARMPA	Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BSU	biologically significant unit
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
COT	Conservation Objectives Team
EIS	environmental impact statement
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FIAT	Fire and Invasives Assessment Team (also Fire and Invasives Assessment Tool)
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act
FR	<i>Federal Register</i>
FWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
GHMA _s	General Habitat Management Areas
GIS	Geographic Information System
GRSG	Greater Sage-Grouse
IHMA _s	Important Habitat Management Areas
IM	instruction memorandum
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MZ	management zone
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NSO	no surface occupancy
NTT	National Technical Team
OHMA _s	Other Habitat Management Areas
OHV	off-highway vehicle
PAC _s	Priority Areas for Conservations
PGH	preliminary general habitat
PHMA _s	Priority Habitat Management Areas
PPH	preliminary priority habitat
RDF	required design feature
RMP	resource management plan
RMPA	resource management plan amendment
ROD	Record of Decision
ROW	right-of-way
SFA _s	sagebrush focal areas
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
USGS	United States Geological Survey
WAFWA	Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
WHB _s	wild horses and burros

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision (ROD) approves the United States (US) Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) attached approved resource management plan amendments (ARMPAs) for the Great Basin Region GRSG Sub-Regions (Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah). This ROD and the attached ARMPAs provide a set of management decisions focused on specific GRSG conservation measures across the Great Basin Region on BLM-administered lands.

The BLM prepared the ARMPAs under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA; 43 United States Code [USC], Section 1701 et seq.), BLM planning regulations (43 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Part 1600), and other applicable laws. The BLM prepared environmental impact statements (EISs) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 USC, Sections 4321-4347), as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ's) and the US Department of the Interior's regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500.1 et seq. and 43 CFR 46.01 et seq., respectively).

Throughout the GRSG planning process, the Forest Service has been a cooperating agency on the Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, and the Utah planning efforts. All three of these Draft RMPAs/EISs and Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs included proposed GRSG management direction for National Forest System lands. The Forest Service has completed two separate RODs with associated resource management plan amendments under their planning authorities; these are available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/r4/>.

This ROD, in conjunction with the ARMPs and ARMPAs approved through the Rocky Mountain ROD, constitutes BLM land use planning decisions to conserve the GRSG and its habitats throughout its remaining range that is administered by the BLM under authority of FLPMA. The efforts of the BLM, in coordination with the Forest Service on National Forest System lands within the remaining range of the species, constitute a coordinated strategy for conserving the GRSG and the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem on most Federal lands on which the species depends. These decisions complement those implemented by Federal agencies through *An Integrated Rangeland Fire Strategy: Final Report to the Secretary of the Interior*

(US Department of the Interior 2015) and the Sage Grouse Initiative, as well as those implemented by State and local governments, private landowners, and other partners.

I.1 GREAT BASIN REGION PLANNING AREA

The Great Basin Region Planning Area is composed of four sub-regions: the Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah. (see **Figure I-1**, Great Basin Region Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions). The BLM prepared a separate EIS for each of these sub-regions, and each sub-region conducted its own planning effort, with input from local cooperators, stakeholders, and members of the public. The sub-regional boundaries were constructed to align with BLM administrative offices, state boundaries, and areas that share common threats to GRSG and its habitat. The boundaries for these sub-regions largely coincide with zones III, IV, and V identified by the [Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies \(WAFWA\) Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy](#) (Stiver et al. 2006) to delineate management zones (MZs) with similar ecological and biological issues.

The Great Basin Region Planning Area boundaries include all lands regardless of jurisdiction (see **Figure I-2**, Great Basin Region Planning Area). **Table I-1** outlines the amount of surface acres that are administered by specific Federal agencies, States, local governments, and privately owned lands in the four sub-regions that make up the Great Basin.

The Planning Area also includes other BLM-administered lands that are not identified as habitat management areas for GRSG. The ARMPAs generally do not establish any additional management for these lands outside of GRSG habitat management areas, and they will continue to be managed according to the existing land use plans for these Planning Areas.

Table I-1
Land Management in the Great Basin Planning Area

Surface Land Management	Nevada/NE California	Idaho/SW Montana	Utah	Oregon	Great Basin Total
BLM	45,359,000	12,449,000	20,387,200	12,615,900	90,811,100
Forest Service	9,719,900	13,252,400	7,396,300	6,454,800	36,823,400
Private	11,857,800	13,637,700	10,818,200	10,907,900	47,221,600
Bureau of Indian Affairs (tribal)	922,000	343,600	1,140,000	191,900	2,597,500
FWS	805,900	81,400	121,900	482,500	1,491,700
Other	326,100	414,400	30,400	100,700	871,600
State	195,600	2,646,100	5,137,200	723,100	8,702,000
National Park Service	160,100	511,700	1,365,600	0	2,037,400
Other Federal	3,200	562,200	0	61,300	626,700
Bureau of Reclamation	431,200	116,300	800	52,700	601,000
Local government	17,800	0	0	900	18,700
Department of Defense	402,000	127,400	1,812,300	64,500	2,406,200
Total acres	70,200,600	44,142,300	48,209,900	31,656,200	194,208,900

Source: BLM GIS 2015

Note: Acres have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

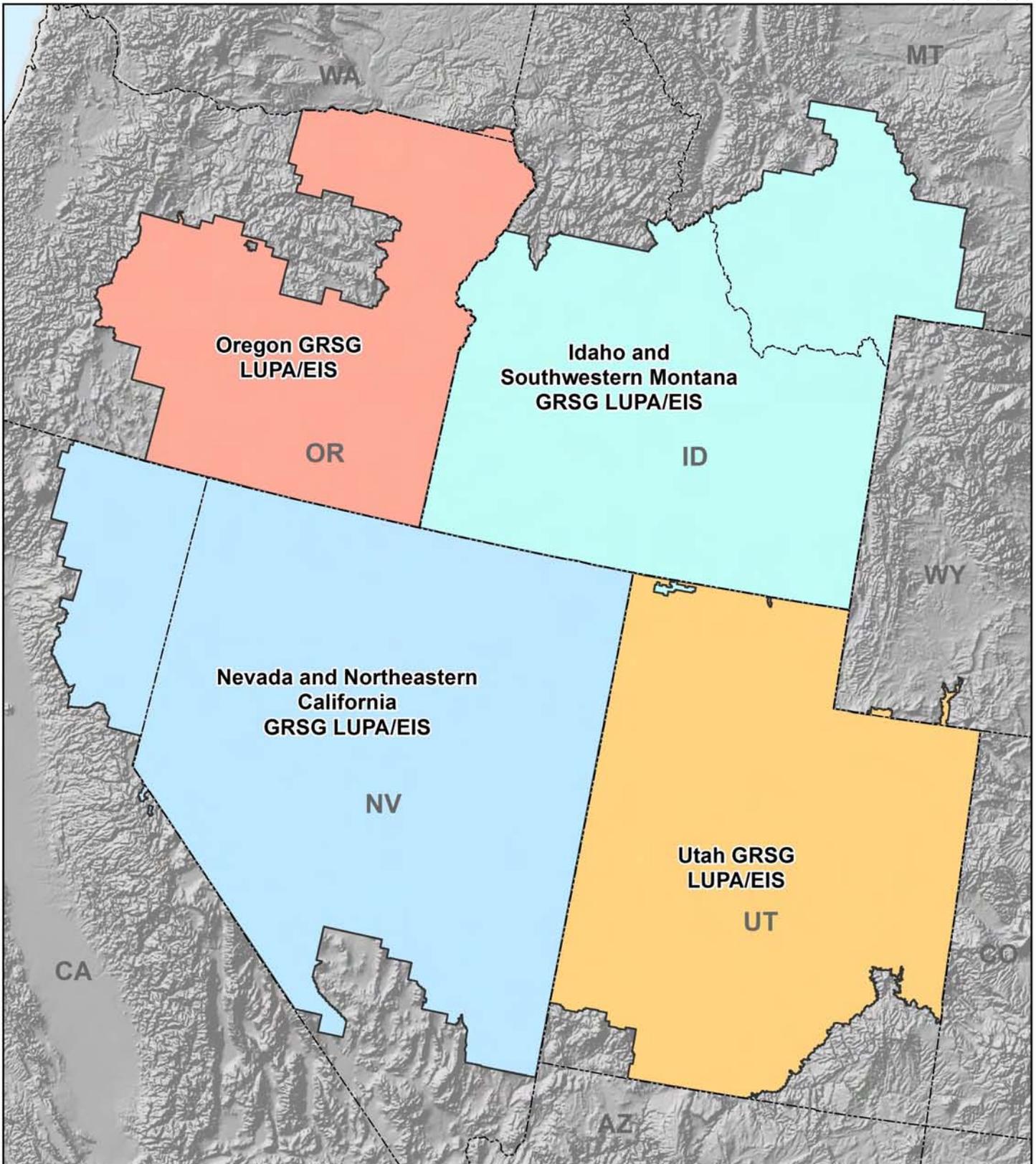
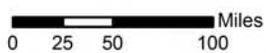


Figure 1-1: Great Basin Region Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions

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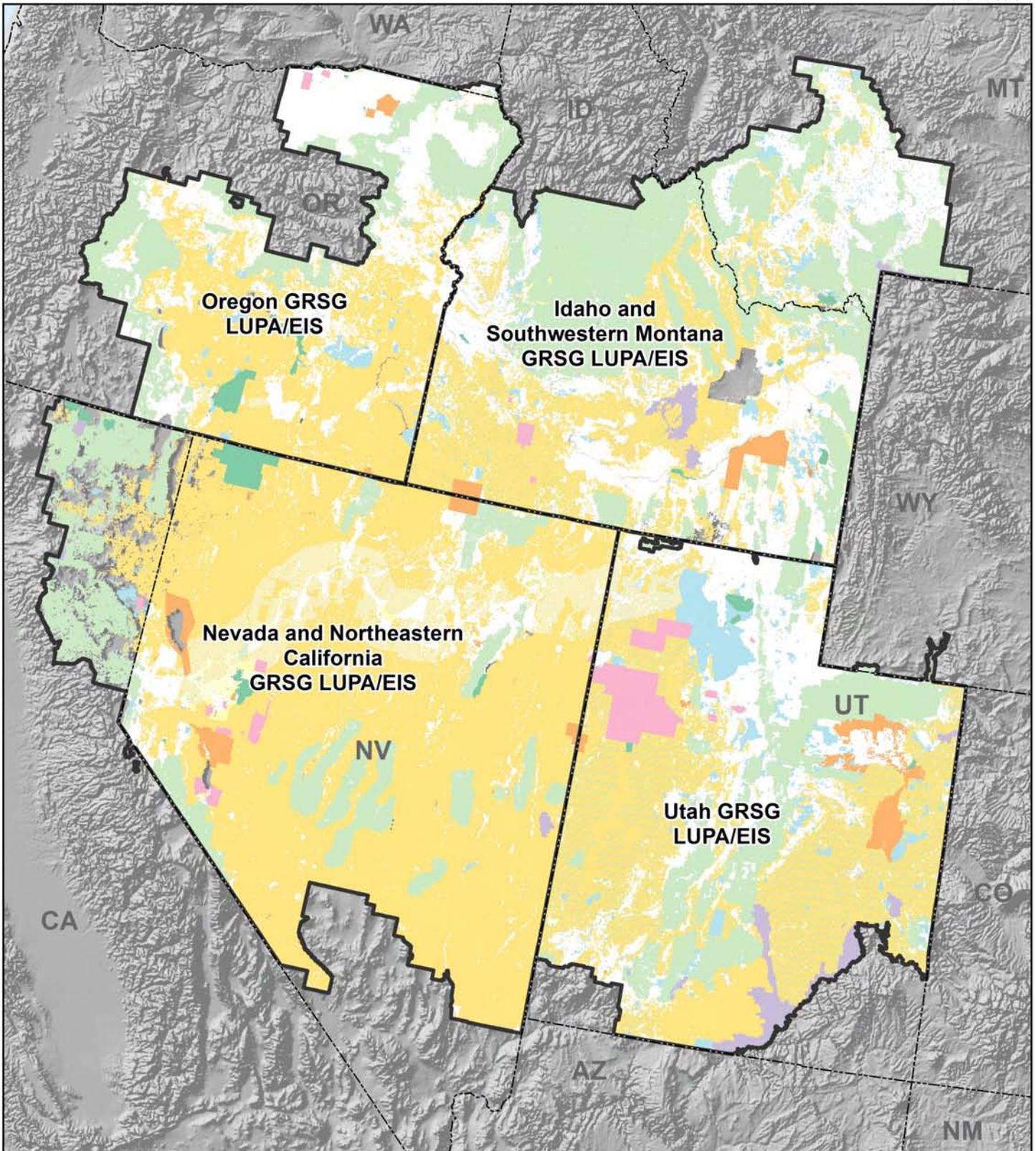


Figure 1-2: Great Basin Region Planning Area

Legend

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Bureau of Land Management (BLM) | Department of Defense (DOD) |
| U.S. Forest Service (USFS) | Other Federal |
| National Park Service (NPS) | State/Local |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) | Private/Other |
| Indian Reservation (BIA) | Planning Area Boundary |
| Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) | State Boundary |



0 25 50 100 Miles

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The decision area for the Great Basin Region ARMPAs is BLM-administered lands, including split-estate lands where the BLM has subsurface mineral rights in GRSG habitat management areas (see **Figure I-3**, Great Basin Region Decision Area, Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Areas [BLM-administered]). For a description of these habitat management areas, refer to **Section I.5**.

The decision areas for the ARMPAs are the surface acres identified in **Table I-1** that the BLM manages. The decision areas also include subsurface mineral estate that the BLM administers within the ARMPAs Planning Area boundaries.

I.2 EARLY GRSG CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Currently, GRSG occupy an estimated 56 percent of the historically occupied range. The BLM manages most of the GRSG habitat on Federal lands (i.e., the range of GRSG that does not include the Columbia Basin or Bi-State populations). The BLM and other wildlife conservation agencies and organizations have been trying to conserve GRSG habitat for many years; this has provided an important foundation for the GRSG conservation strategy that guides these plans.

The WAFWA 2004 [Range-wide Conservation Assessment for Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats](#) (Connelly et al. 2004) was the first range-wide assessment of GRSG using the vast amount of population data collected over the previous 60 years, habitat information spanning the previous 100 years, and literature dating back 200 years. The goal of the assessment, which includes contributions from the BLM, was to present an unbiased and scientific assessment of dominant issues and their effects on GRSG populations and sagebrush habitats.

In November 2004, the BLM released its [National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy](#), which encouraged GRSG habitat conservation through consultation, cooperation, and communication with WAFWA, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Forest Service, the US Geological Survey (USGS), State wildlife agencies, local GRSG working groups, and various other public and private partners.

In 2006, WAFWA completed a [Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy](#) (Stiver et al. 2006), with the assistance of the BLM, the Forest Service, and other contributors. The overall goal of the strategy was to maintain and enhance populations and distribution of GRSG by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain those populations. The strategy outlined the critical need to develop the associations among local, State, provincial, tribal, and Federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals to design and implement cooperative actions to support robust populations of GRSG and the landscapes and habitats they depend on. The catalyst for this was widespread concern for declining populations and reduced distribution of GRSG.

In 2008, the BLM created two national teams to investigate possible BLM management options for GRSG conservation and to summarize the BLM's ongoing conservation efforts. A product of this investigation was one of the first range-wide maps of GRSG priority habitat, referred to as "key habitat." At the time, the primary purpose for the key habitat map was to inform and help prioritize fire suppression in GRSG habitat on BLM-administered lands.

An additional outcome of this team's work was signing a [memorandum of understanding \(MOU\)](#) among the WAFWA, the BLM, FWS, and USGS (in the US Department of the Interior), and the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS; in the US Department of Agriculture). The MOU's

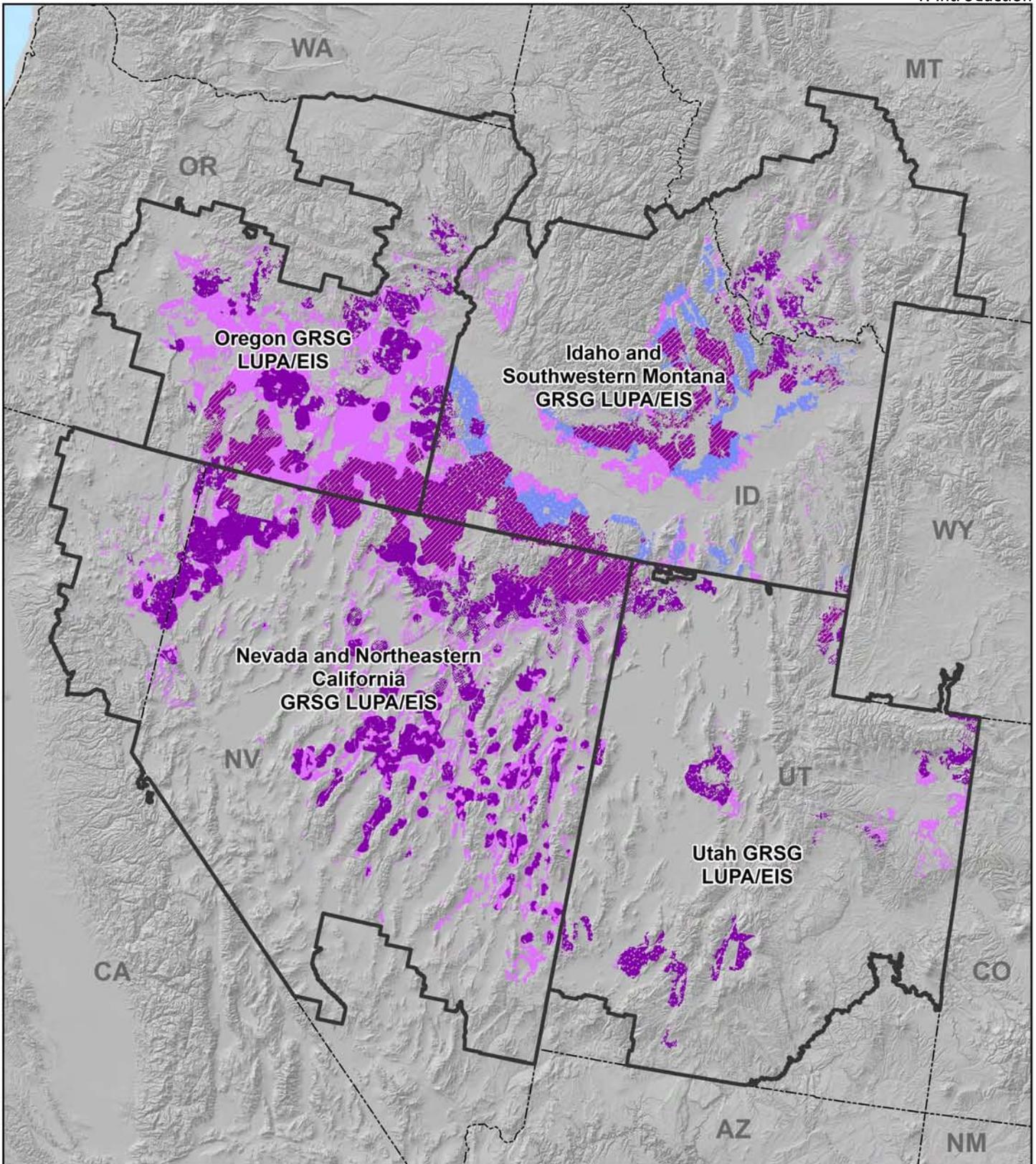


Figure 1-3: Great Basin Region Decision Area, Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Areas (BLM Administered Lands*)

Legend

-  Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs)
-  Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs)
-  General Habitat Management Areas (GHMAs)
-  Additional Habitat Management Categorizations
-  Planning Area Boundary
-  State Boundary





0 25 50 100 Miles

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*For Subsurface information see the ARMPA

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purpose was to provide for cooperation among the participating State and Federal land managers and wildlife management and science agencies to conserve and manage GRSG sagebrush habitats and other sagebrush-dependent wildlife throughout the western US.

In 2010, the BLM commissioned the [mapping and modeling of breeding GRSG densities](#) across the West. It convened a conference with State wildlife agencies to coordinate the lek survey data needed for this project. Through an agreement with the FWS, this modeling project mapped known active leks across the West, which served as a starting point for all States to identify priority habitat for the species.

In March 2010, the FWS published its [12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse \(*Centrocercus urophasianus*\) as Threatened or Endangered](#) (75 FR 13910, March 23, 2010). In that finding, the FWS concluded that GRSG was “warranted, but precluded” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This finding indicates that, although the species meets the criteria for listing, immediate publication of a proposed rule to list the species is precluded by higher-priority listing proposals; that is, the species should be listed based on the available science, but listing other species takes priority because they are more in need of protection.

As part of its 2010 finding, the FWS reviewed the status of and threats to the GRSG in relation to the five listing factors provided in Section 4(a)(1) of the ESA. The FWS determined that Factor A, “the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the habitat or range of the GRSG,” and Factor D, “the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms,” posed “a significant threat to the GRSG now and in the foreseeable future” (75 FR 13910, March 23, 2010).

In addition, the FWS found that existing local, State, and Federal regulatory mechanisms were not sufficient to address threats to their habitat. The FWS identified the BLM’s resource management plans (RMPs) as the primary regulatory mechanisms. The BLM manages approximately 67 million acres of the remaining habitat for the species (see **Figure I-3**).

I.3 THREATS TO GRSG IN THE GREAT BASIN REGION

In its 2010 finding, the FWS identified a number of specific threats to GRSG in the Great Basin Region. The primary threats are the widespread present and potential impacts of wildfire, the loss of native habitat to invasive species, and conifer encroachment. Other threats, some of which are more localized, are habitat fragmentation due to human disturbances associated with energy development, mining, infrastructure, recreation, urbanization, and sagebrush elimination, as well as impacts on habitat associated with free-roaming equids (horses and burros) and improper livestock grazing.

In 2011, the BLM established the GRSG National Technical Team (NTT), comprised of BLM, USGS, NRCS, and State specialists. The NTT’s charge was to identify science-based conservation measures for the GRSG to promote sustainable populations. These measures would be focused on the threats identified in the FWS listing determination (75 *Federal Register* [FR] 13910) in each of the regional WAFWA Sage-Grouse MZs (**Figure I-4**). The NTT produced [A Report on National Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Measures](#) (NTT Report; NTT 2011) in which it proposed conservation measures based on habitat and other life history requirements for GRSG. The NTT Report described the scientific basis for the conservation measures proposed for each program area. It also emphasized the importance of standardizing monitoring across the WAFWA GRSG MZs.

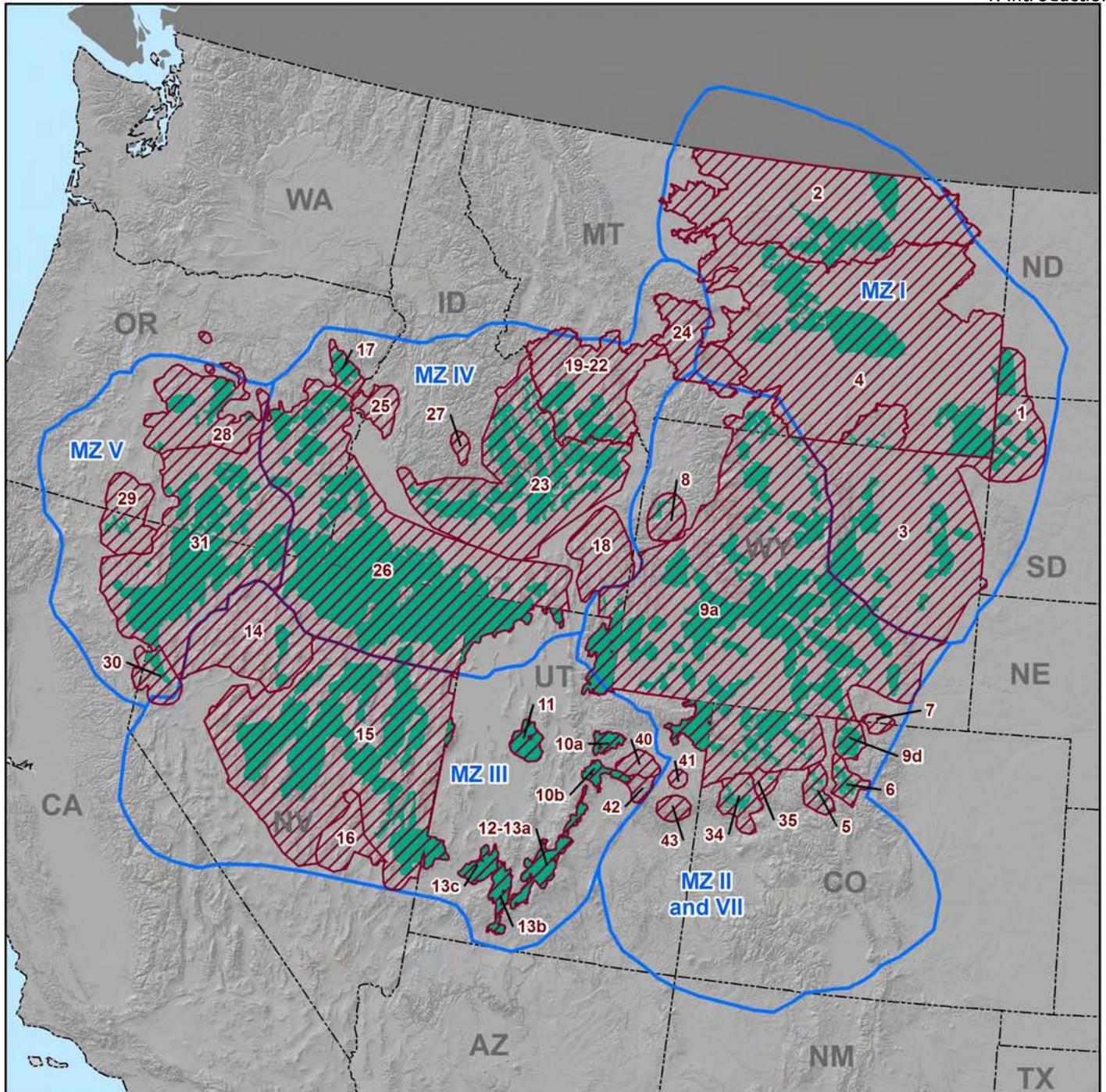


Figure 1-4: Greater Sage-Grouse Priority Areas for Conservation, Populations and WAFWA Management Zones

Legend

-  WAFWA Sage-grouse Management Zones
-  Greater Sage-grouse Priority Areas for Conservation (PAC)
-  WAFWA Revised Sage-Grouse Populations 2015



0 50 100 Miles

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1	Dakotas	10a	Strawberry Valley	18	E-Central ID	30	Warm Springs Valley NV
2	Northern Montana	10b	Carbon	19-22	SW Montana	31	Western Great Basin
3	Powder River Basin	11	Sheeprock Mountains	23	Snake, Salmon, & Beaverhead	34	Parachute Piceance Roan
4	Yellowstone Watershed	12-13a	Parker Mountain-Emerly	24	Belt Mountains MT	35	Meeker - White River
5	Eagle/S Routt CO	13b	Panguitch	25	Weiser ID	40	Anthro Mountain
6	Middle Park CO	13c	Bald Hills	26	Northern Great Basin	41	S White River
7	Laramie WY	14	NW-Interior NV	27	Sawtooth ID	42	W Tavaputs
8	Jackson Hole WY	15	Southern Great Basin	28	Central OR	43	E Tavaputs Plateau
9a	Wyoming Basin	16	Quinn Canyon Range NV	29	Klamath OR/CA		
9d	North Park	17	Baker OR				

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In 2012, the FWS, with the support of the Western Governors Association Sage-Grouse Task Force, convened the Conservation Objectives Team (COT), composed of State and Federal representatives. One of the team's tasks was to produce a peer-reviewed report identifying the principal threats to GRSG survival. Another task was to determine the degree to which these threats need to be reduced or ameliorated. The goal was to conserve GRSG so that they would no longer be in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future.

The [COT Report](#), released in March 2013, also identified Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs) and emphasized that “Maintenance of the integrity of PACs . . . is the essential foundation for sage-grouse conservation” (FWS 2013). Finally, the COT Report identified present and widespread, as well as localized threats by GRSG population across the West (**Table I-2**). The BLM also identified and explained additional threats in the Final EISs that were published with proposed plans on May 29, 2015. **Figure I-4** identifies the PACs, GRSG populations (and their names), and WAFWA MZs across the West.

A summary of the nature and extent of threats identified in the COT Report for each remaining identified population of GRSG in the Great Basin Region—as highlighted in the 2013 COT Report—is provided in **Table I-2**.

I.4 NATIONAL GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The BLM recognized the need to incorporate explicit objectives and concrete conservation measures into RMPs¹ to conserve GRSG habitat and provide robust regulatory mechanisms. This was based on the identified threats to the GRSG, especially inadequate regulatory mechanisms, and the FWS's timeline for making a decision on whether to propose this species for listing. In August 2011, the BLM came up with a plan to revise and amend existing RMPs throughout the range of the GRSG. These revised and amended RMPs would incorporate management actions intended to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat. Separate planning began that would address the conservation needs of the Bi-State GRSG populations in California and Nevada and the Washington State distinct population segment.

The BLM found that additional management direction and specific conservation measures on Federal public lands would be necessary to address the present and anticipated threats to GRSG habitat and to restore habitat where possible. This finding was in light of the 2010 “warranted” determination by the FWS, the recommendations of the NTT, and specific threats summarized in the COT Report. The BLM proposed to incorporate the management direction and conservation measures into its RMPs. The goal was to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG and its habitat and to provide sufficient regulatory certainty such that the need for listing the species under the ESA could be avoided.

In December 2011, the BLM published a [Notice of Intent](#) to prepare EISs and a Supplemental EIS to incorporate GRSG conservation measures into land use plans across the species' range.

¹ BLM land use plans prepared under the present regulations (see 43 CFR 1601.0-5(n)) are generally known as resource management plans. Some BLM land use plans, including ones predating the present regulations, are referred to by different names, including management framework plans. For purposes of this ROD, the BLM land use plan and resource management plan interchangeably refer to all BLM-administered land use plans.

**Table I-2
Threats to GRSG in the Great Basin Region as identified by the COT**

Population	Unit Number	Isolated Small Size	Sagebrush Elimination	Agriculture Conversion	Fire	Conifers	Weeds/Annual Grasses	Energy	Mining	Infrastructure	Improper Grazing	Free-Roaming Equids	Recreation	Urbanization	EIS/Plan
Rich-Morgan-Summit (Utah)	9b				Y	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y	Y	Utah
Uintah (Utah)	9c				Y	Y	Y	L	Y	Y			Y	Y	Utah
Strawberry Valley (Utah)	10a	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y		Utah
Carbon (Utah)	10b	Y			Y		Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		Utah
Sheeprock Mountains (Utah)	11	Y			Y	L	L	Y	Y	L		Y	L		Utah
Emery (Utah)	12	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		Utah
Greater Parker Mountain (Utah)	13a				Y	Y	Y			Y			Y		Utah
Panguitch (Utah)	13b			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	L	Y			Y	L	Utah
Bald Hills (Utah)	13c	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Utah
Ibapah (Utah)	15a	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		Utah
Hamlin Valley (Utah)	15b	Y			Y	Y	Y			Y		Y	Y		Utah
Box Elder (Utah)	26b			Y	Y	Y	Y	L	Y	Y			Y		Utah
N. Great Basin (Oregon, Idaho, Nevada)	26a		L	L	Y	Y	Y	L	L	Y	Y	L	Y	Y	Idaho/SW Montana, Oregon, Nevada/ California
Baker (Oregon)	17	Y	Y	Y	Y	L	Y	L	Y	L	U		L	L	Oregon
Central Oregon (Oregon)	28		L	L	Y	Y	Y	L	Y	L	Y	U	L	L	Oregon
W. Great Basin (Oregon, California, Nevada)	31		L	L	Y	Y	Y	L	L	L	Y	Y	U		Oregon, Nevada/ California
Klamath (California)	29	Y	U	U	Y	Y	Y	L		U	U	U	U	U	Nevada/ California
Northwest Interior (Nevada)	14	Y			Y		Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Nevada/ California
Southern Great Basin (Nevada)	15c	L	L	L	Y	Y	Y	L	L	Y	Y	Y	Y		Nevada/ California
Quinn Canyon Range (Nevada)	16	Y			Y	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y		Nevada/ California

Table I-2
Threats to GRSG in the Great Basin Region as identified by the COT

Population	Unit Number	Isolated Small Size	Sagebrush Elimination	Agriculture Conversion	Fire	Conifers	Weeds/Annual Grasses	Energy	Mining	Infrastructure	Improper Grazing	Free-Roaming Equids	Recreation	Urbanization	EIS/Plan
Warm Springs Valley (Nevada)	30	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Nevada/California
East Central (Idaho)	18	Y	L	Y	L	Y	L	Y		Y	Y		L		Idaho/SW Montana
Snake-Salmon-Beaverhead (Idaho)	23		L	L	Y	L	Y	Y		L	Y	Y	L		Idaho/SW Montana
Weiser (Idaho)	25	Y	L	L	L	L	Y	Y		L	Y		L	L	Idaho/SW Montana
Sawtooth (Idaho)	27	Y	L		L	U	L			Y	Y		L		Idaho/SW Montana
Southwest Montana (Montana)	19-22		L		L	L	Y	L	L	L	Y		L	L	Idaho/SW Montana

Source: FWS 2013

Threats are characterized as Y = threat is present and widespread, L = threat present but localized, and U = unknown.

The planning associated with the National GRSG Conservation Strategy has been coordinated under two administrative planning regions: the Rocky Mountain Region and the Great Basin Region. The regions were drawn roughly to correspond with the threats identified by the FWS in its 2010 listing decision, along with the WAFWA MZs framework (Stiver et al. 2006). Due to differences in the ecological characteristics of sagebrush across the range of the GRSG, WAFWA delineated MZs I through VII, based primarily on floristic provinces. Vegetation found in an MZ is similar, and GRSG and their habitats in these areas are likely to respond similarly to environmental factors and management actions.

The Great Basin Region is composed of plan amendments in California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, and portions of Utah and Montana. This region falls in WAFWA MZs III (Southern Great Basin), IV (Snake River Plain), and V (Northern Great Basin). The Rocky Mountain Region is composed of BLM planning in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and portions of Utah. (This includes plan revisions and plan amendments.) That region falls within WAFWA MZs I (Great Plains), II (Wyoming Basin), and a portion of VII (Colorado Plateau).

Both the Rocky Mountain and Great Basin regions are further divided into sub-regions. The BLM initiated 15 sub-regional planning efforts and associated EISs to analyze the alternatives developed for

each of the Draft and Final RMPAs and ARMPs across the range of the species.² These sub-regions are based on the identified threats to GRSG and the WAFWA MZs from the FWS 2010 listing decision, with additional detail on threats to individual populations and sub-regions from the COT Report. In the Rocky Mountain Region, some sub-regions correspond to BLM field and district office boundaries, specifically for planning that incorporates GRSG conservation measures through plan revisions that were that began before the start of the National GRSG Conservation Strategy in December 2011. **Figure I-5** illustrates the regional and sub-regional Planning Area boundaries across the western US.

The BLM used the best available science, including additional review and analysis from the USGS on specific issues that arose in developing the ARMPAs. Additionally, the BLM considered State GRSG conservation strategies where they existed, as well as State recommendations for measures to conserve GRSG on BLM-administered lands, where relevant, in its planning. These are reflected in the approved plans to the extent compatible with GRSG objectives to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat to address the threats identified in the FWS 2010 listing determination and the 2013 COT Report.

I.5 HOW THE ARMPAs ADDRESS THE IDENTIFIED THREATS TO THE CONSERVATION OF GRSG

The 2006 WAFWA [Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy](#) stated goal for GRSG management was to “maintain and enhance populations and distribution of GRSG by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations” (Stiver et al. 2006). The NTT Report also endorsed this goal “as a guiding philosophy against which management actions and policies of BLM should be weighed” (NTT 2011).

In establishing the COT, with the backing of the Sage Grouse Task Force, the FWS Director affirmed the commitment to the goal for GRSG conservation originally articulated in the 2006 WAFWA report—reversing negative population trends and achieving a neutral or positive population trend—and emphasized the following:

The Service interprets this recommendation to mean that actions and measures should be put in place now that will eventually arrest what has been a continuing declining trend. Conservation success will be achieved by removing or reducing threats to the species now, such that population trends will eventually be stable or increasing, even if numbers are not restored to historic levels. (Stiver et al. 2006)

The COT Report emphasized the need to avoid or minimize additional disturbance in GRSG habitat. Specifically, it stated, “[m]aintenance of the integrity of PACs ... is the essential foundation for sage-grouse conservation” (FWS 2013). To achieve this, the COT Report recommended “targeted habitat management and restoration” to be achieved by “eliminating activities known to negatively impact sage-grouse and their habitats, or re-designing these activities to achieve the same goal” (FWS 2013). The

² The National GRSG Conservation Strategy consisted of 15 separate EISs. For ease of implementation, the Bighorn Basin RMP has been split between the two field offices that make up the Bighorn Basin Planning Area, the Cody Field Office ARMP and the Worland Field Office ARMP. The Billings and Pompeys Pillar National Monument RMP has also been split between the Billings Field Office ARMP and Pompeys Pillar National Monument ARMP. This results in a total of 17 ARMPs and ARMPAs.

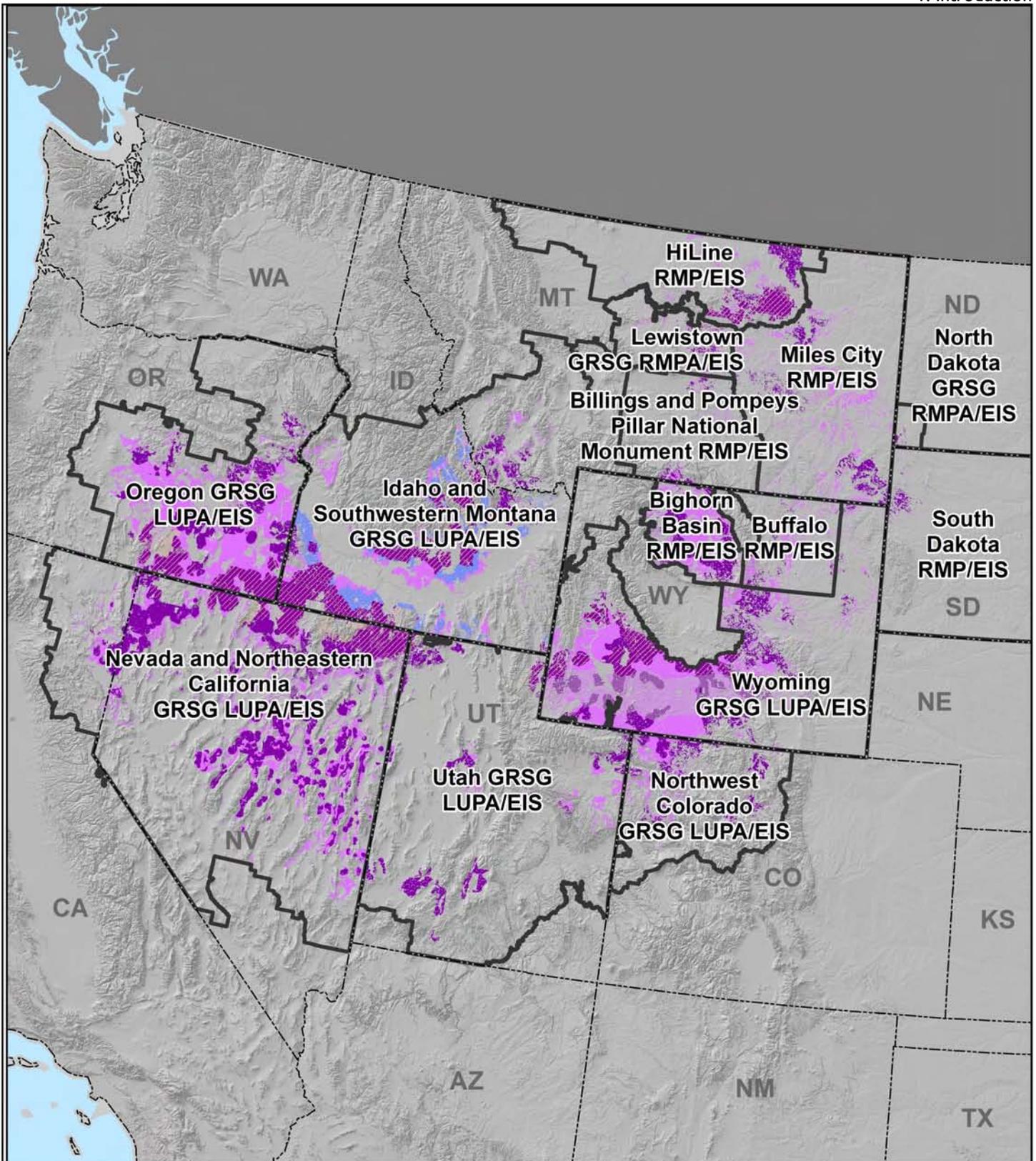


Figure 1-5: Regional and Sub-Regional Boundaries with Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Areas (BLM Administered Lands)

Legend

-  Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs)
-  Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs)
-  General Habitat Management Areas (GHMAs)
-  Additional Habitat Management Categorizations
-  Planning Area Boundary
-  State Boundary

*For Subsurface information see the ARMPA

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed.



Miles
0 25 50 100
September 2015

Map Area



COT Report emphasized an “avoidance first strategy” and stressed those threats in GRSG habitat “must be minimized to the extent that population trends meet the objectives of the 2006 WAFWA Conservation Strategy” (FWS 2013).

The plans were developed to address specific, identified threats to the species in order to conserve GRSG, such that the need to list it under ESA may be avoided. Across ten western states, the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain sub-regional ARMPs/ARMPAs contain land use plan direction on approximately 67 million acres of the GRSG’s remaining habitat (see **Figure I-5**). These plans are the product of extensive coordination between the BLM and the Forest Service and the active engagement of the FWS which informed the BLM and Forest Service land allocation and related management decisions. The plans also benefit from strong collaboration with the States and reflect the unique landscapes, habitats, priorities and approaches in each.

In order to protect the most important GRSG habitat areas, planning began with mapping areas of important habitat across the range of the GRSG. In collaboration with State fish and wildlife agencies, the BLM identified areas as preliminary priority habitat (PPH) and preliminary general habitat (PGH). In Utah, all occupied GRSG habitat was identified as PPH. The Draft RMPAs/EISs used PPH and PGH to analyze the impacts of the decisions the BLM was proposing in the plans. PPH and PGH were identified as Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs) and General Habitat Management Areas (GHMAs) in the Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs to identify the management decisions that apply to those areas (except for Nevada and Utah). The designated GRSG habitat management areas on BLM-administered lands in the decision area are as follows:

- PHMAs, which largely coincide with PACs identified in the COT Report³
- GHMAs
- Other Habitat Management Areas (OHMAs; applicable only to the Nevada and Northeastern California)
- Important Habitat Management Areas (IHMAs, applicable only to Idaho)

Table I-3 identifies surface acres of PHMAs, GHMAs, OHMAs, and IHMAs in the decision area for the Great Basin Region.

Habitat maps were based initially on State key habitat maps, which identified areas necessary for GRSG conservation. These areas were derived from breeding bird density maps and lek counts, nesting areas, sightings, and habitat distribution data. These data included occupied suitable seasonal habitats, nesting and brood-rearing areas, and connectivity areas or corridors. The BLM used this information to develop PPH and PGH maps and, subsequently, to identify PHMAs and GHMAs, respectively.

The COT Report also used State key habitat maps as a basis for identifying PACs. The COT Report notes that there is substantial overlap between PACs and BLM PPH areas, with the exception of areas in Nevada and Utah (FWS 2013, p. 13). **Figure I-5** illustrates the regional and sub-regional Planning Area boundaries, along with BLM-administered PHMAs and GHMAs across the western US.

³ Except for PACs in Nevada and Utah, as specified on page 13 of the COT Report; see **Figure I-4**.

Table I-3
Surface Acres of PHMAs, GHMAs, OHMAs, and IHMAs in the Decision Area for the
Great Basin Region

BLM-Administered Surface Acres	PHMAs	GHMAs	OHMAs	IHMAs
Idaho and Southwestern Montana	4,627,200	2,179,700	0	2,737,600
Utah*	2,023,400	502,500	0	0
Oregon	4,547,000	5,660,150	0	0
Nevada and Northeastern California	9,309,700	5,720,600	5,876,600	0
Total Acres	20,507,300	14,062,950	5,876,600	2,737,600

Source: BLM GIS 2015

*41,200 acres of National Forest System lands in the Anthro Mountain area of Utah would be managed as neither PHMAs nor GHMAs. These areas would be identified as “Anthro Mountain.” In the Utah ARMPA, these areas are considered split-estate, where the BLM administers the mineral estate.

The BLM-administered surface and Federal mineral estate of each designation (in acres) in the Decision Area for the Great Basin Region are shown in **Table I-3**; PHMAs, GHMAs, OHMAs, and IHMAs are defined below.

- **PHMA**—BLM-administered lands identified as having the highest habitat value for maintaining sustainable GRSG populations. The boundaries and management strategies for PHMAs are derived from and generally follow the PPH boundaries. PHMAs largely coincide with areas identified as PACs in the COT Report (except for PACs in Nevada and Utah, as specified on page 13 of the COT Report).
- **GHMA**—BLM-administered GRSG habitat that is occupied seasonally or year-round and is outside of PHMAs. It is where some special management would apply to sustain GRSG populations. The boundaries and management strategies for GHMAs are derived from and generally follow the PGH boundaries.
- **OHMA**—BLM-administered land in Nevada and Northeastern California, identified as unmapped habitat in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, that is within the Planning Area and contains seasonal or connectivity habitat areas. With the generation of updated modeling data (Spatially Explicit Modeling of Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat in Nevada and Northeastern California; Coates et al. 2014) the areas containing characteristics of unmapped habitat were identified and are now referred to as OHMAs.
- **IHMA**—BLM-administered land in Idaho that provides a management buffer for and that connect patches of PHMAs. IHMAs encompass areas of generally moderate to high habitat value habitat or populations but that are not as important as PHMAs. These lands serve a critical role in the adaptive management strategy developed by the State of Idaho and adopted in the ARMPA.

The ARMPAs also identify Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs) on a portion of the landscape. SFAs are a subset of PHMAs (see **Figure I-3**). Across the Great Basin Region, there are 8,385,280 acres of BLM-administered SFAs. They correspond to the [areas identified by the FWS as GRSG “strongholds”](#) and

represent “a subset of priority habitat most vital to the species persistence within which we recommend the strongest levels of protection” (FWS 2014a).

SFAs are areas of highest habitat value for GRSG and are managed to avoid new surface disturbance for the following reasons:

- They contain high-quality sagebrush habitat and the highest breeding bird densities
- They have been identified as essential to conservation and persistence of the species
- They represent a preponderance of current Federal ownership
- In some cases, they are next to protected areas that serve to anchor the conservation importance of the landscape

SFA management is consistent with the recommendations provided by the FWS that these are the areas “where it is most important that the BLM and Forest Service institutionalize the highest degree of protection to help promote persistence of the species” (FWS 2014a).

Remaining habitats in GHMAs and IHMAs (applicable only to BLM-administered lands in Idaho) would be managed consistent with the COT Report recommendation to recognize “that important habitats outside of PACs be conserved to the extent possible” (FWS 2013). Thus, land allocations in GHMAs and IHMAs provide for more flexibility for land use activities, while minimizing impacts on existing GRSG leks. This tiered habitat management area framework, associated with the land use plan allocation decisions in the ARMPs and ARMPAs (explained more fully in **Section 1.6** of this ROD) provides a high degree of certainty that the integrity of PHMAs can be maintained through management decisions. This would be done to avoid or minimize additional surface disturbance. At the same time, it would recognize the potential importance of areas outside of PHMAs for maintaining connectivity between highly important habitats and their potential for addressing seasonal habitat needs, such as winter habitat areas not fully incorporated in PHMAs.⁴

Major components of the attached ARMPAs that address the specific threats to GRSG and its habitat, as identified in the FWS 2010 listing decision and 2013 COT Report (many of which were also identified by the BLM’s 2011 NTT Report), are listed and summarized in **Table I-4**.

⁴ Recently completed analysis by Crist et al. (2015) highlights the importance of certain key “priority areas” across the species range as well as the importance of connectivity between priority areas as a component of successful GRSG conservation. Generally, these priority areas coincide with PHMAs across the landscape. It is important to note that BLM-administered SFAs also coincide with a number of the areas identified by Crist et al. (2015) as important for maintaining connectivity between the network of conservation areas that are of greatest importance to the integrity of the conservation strategy. To maintain connectivity between PHMAs across the remaining range, requirements were incorporated into the majority of the ARMPAs for lek buffers, consistent with guidance provided by the USGS; mitigation to a net conservation gain; and required design features for projects in GHMAs, as described later in this document. These measures are specifically intended to benefit GRSG in GHMAs by maintaining connectivity and added habitat protection consistent with the Crist et al. (2015) findings.

**Table I-4
Key Responses from the Great Basin Region GRSG ARMPAs that Address the COT Report Threats**

Threats to GRSG and its Habitat (from COT Report)	Key Management Responses from the Great Basin Region GRSG ARMPAs
All threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement an Adaptive Management Strategy, which allows for more restrictive management to be implemented if habitat or population hard triggers are met. • Monitor implementation and effectiveness of conservation measures in GRSG habitats in a consistent manner.
All development threats, including mining, infrastructure, and energy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Implement a human disturbance cap of 3 percent within the biologically significant unit (BSU) and proposed project analysis areas in PHMAs (slight variations to this management component in Nevada only). • PHMAs and IHMAs—Apply a disturbance density cap of 1 energy and mining facility per 640 acres (except in Nevada). • IHMAs—Implement the 3 percent disturbance cap. Apply Anthropogenic Disturbance Development Criteria (applicable to Idaho only). • Apply buffers based on project type and location to address impacts on leks when authorizing actions in GRSG habitat. • Apply required design features (RDFs) when authorizing actions in GRSG habitat. • Minimize the effects of infrastructure projects, including siting, using the best available science, updated as monitoring information on current infrastructure projects becomes available. • Consider the potential for the development of valid existing rights when authorizing new projects in PHMAs. • When authorizing third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation, require and ensure mitigation that provides a net conservation gain to the species.
Energy development—fluid minerals, including geothermal resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Open to fluid mineral leasing subject to a no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulation without waiver or modification and with limited exceptions. In SFAs, an NSO stipulation would be applied without waiver, modification, or exception. In Nevada only, in the portions of the PHMAs outside of SFAs, geothermal projects may be considered for authorization if certain criteria are met. • IHMAs—Open to fluid mineral leasing, subject to NSO stipulation without waiver or modification and with limited exception (applicable to Idaho only). • GHMAs—Open to fluid mineral leasing, subject to controlled surface use and timing limitation lease stipulations (except in Utah, where some portions of GHMAs are open with standard lease stipulations). • Prioritize the leasing and development of fluid mineral resources outside GRSG habitat.
Energy development—wind energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Exclusion area (not available for wind energy development under any conditions, except in the southeastern counties of Oregon, where portions of PHMAs are avoidance areas).

**Table I-4
Key Responses from the Great Basin Region GRSG ARMPAs that Address the COT Report Threats**

Threats to GRSG and its Habitat (from COT Report)	Key Management Responses from the Great Basin Region GRSG ARMPAs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for wind energy development with special stipulations; applicable to Idaho only). • GHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for wind energy development with special stipulations, except in Utah and Idaho, where these areas are open to wind energy development).
Energy development—solar energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Exclusion area (not available for solar energy development under any conditions, except in southeastern counties in Oregon, where portions of PHMAs are avoidance areas). • IHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for solar energy development with special stipulations; applicable to Idaho only). • GHMAs—Exclusion area (not available for solar energy development under any conditions, except in Oregon and Montana, where these areas are avoidance areas for solar energy development, and Idaho, where these areas are open to solar energy development).
Infrastructure—major rights-of-way (ROWs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for major ROWs with special stipulations). • IHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for major ROWs with special stipulations; applicable to Idaho only). • GHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for major ROWs with special stipulations, except in Utah, where GHMAs are open).
Infrastructure—minor ROWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for minor ROWs with special stipulations). • IHMAs—Avoidance area (may be available for minor ROWs with special stipulations; applicable to Idaho only).
Mining—locatable minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFAs—Recommend withdrawal from the Mining Law of 1872.
Mining—nonenergy leasable minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Closed area (not available for nonenergy leasable minerals; however, expansion of existing operations could be considered if the disturbance is within the cap and subject to compensatory mitigation).
Mining—salable minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Closed area (not available for salable minerals), with a limited exception (may remain open to free use permits and expansion of existing active pits if criteria are met).
Improper livestock grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize the review and processing of grazing permits and leases in SFAs, followed by PHMAs. • Ensure that the NEPA analysis for renewals and modifications of grazing permits and leases includes specific management thresholds, based on the GRSG habitat objectives table, land health standards, and ecological site potential, to allow adjustments to grazing that have already been subjected to NEPA analysis. • Prioritize field checks in SFAs, followed by PHMAs, to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of grazing permits.

**Table I-4
Key Responses from the Great Basin Region GRSG ARMPAs that Address the COT Report Threats**

Threats to GRSG and its Habitat (from COT Report)	Key Management Responses from the Great Basin Region GRSG ARMPAs
Free-roaming equid (horses and burros) management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize gathers in SFAs, followed by other PHMAs. • Manage herd management areas in GRSG habitat within established appropriate management level (AML) ranges to achieve and maintain GRSG habitat objectives. • Prioritize rangeland health assessment, gathers, and population growth suppression techniques, monitoring, and review and adjust AMLs and preparation of herd management area plans in GRSG habitat.
Range management structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow range improvements that do not impact GRSG or that provide a conservation benefit to GRSG, such as fences for protecting important seasonal habitats. • Remove livestock ponds built in perennial channels that are negatively impacting riparian habitats. Do not permit new ones to be built in these areas.
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs and IHMAs—Do not construct new recreation facilities unless required for health and safety purposes or if the construction will result in a net conservation gain to the species. • Allow special recreation permits only if their effects on GRSG and its habitat are neutral or result in a net conservation gain. • PHMAs and GHMAs—Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use limited to existing routes (routes to be designated through future travel management planning). The Utah ARMPA does retain two areas as open to OHV use in PHMAs.
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and prioritize areas that are vulnerable to wildfires and prescribe actions important for GRSG protection. • Restrict the use of prescribed fire for fuel treatments. • Prioritize post-fire treatments in SFAs, other PHMAs, IHMAs, and GHMAs.
Nonnative, invasive plant species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve GRSG habitat by treating annual grasses. • Treat sites in PHMAs, IHMAs, and GHMAs that contain invasive species infestations through an integrated pest management approach.
Sagebrush removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMAs—Maintain all lands capable of producing sagebrush (but no less than 70 percent), with a minimum of 15 percent sagebrush canopy cover, consistent with specific ecological site conditions. • Ensure that all BLM use authorizations contain terms and conditions regarding the actions needed to meet or progress toward meeting the habitat objectives for GRSG.
Pinyon and juniper expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove conifers encroaching into sagebrush habitats, prioritizing occupied GRSG habitat, in a manner that considers tribal cultural values.
Agricultural conversion and exurban development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain GRSG habitat in Federal management, unless disposal (including exchanges) of the lands would provide a net conservation gain to GRSG or disposal (including exchanges) of the lands would have no direct or indirect adverse impact on conservation of GRSG.

I.6 KEY COMPONENTS OF THE BLM GRSG CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The ARMPAs were developed to meet the purpose and need to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat by eliminating or minimizing threats to their habitat identified in the 2010 listing decision and highlighted in the Background and Purpose Section of the COT Report (FWS 2013). Consequently, consistent with guidance contained in the COT and NTT Reports, four essential components of the GRSG conservation strategy were identified, as follows:

- Avoiding or minimizing new and additional surface disturbances
- Improving habitat conditions
- Reducing threats of rangeland fire to GRSG and sagebrush habitat in the Great Basin
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of conservation measures and implementing adaptive management, as needed

The land allocations and management actions included in the ARMPAs incorporate these components and are summarized below.

I.6.1 Avoid and Minimize Surface Disturbance

Land Use Allocations and Management Actions in SFAs, PHMAs, and GHMAs

The four Great Basin ARMPAs build on the designated habitat management areas described in **Section I.5** by applying management actions to these areas to avoid and minimize disturbance associated with proposed projects, as described below and shown in **Table I-4**. Land use plan allocations specify locations within the Planning Area that are available or unavailable for certain uses and also prioritize conservation and restoration management actions applied to habitat management areas.

The COT Report states that “maintenance of the integrity of PACs ... is the essential foundation for sage-grouse conservation” (FWS 2013, p. 36). Areas of PHMAs largely coincide with areas identified as PACs in the COT Report. While surface disturbance associated with development in the Great Basin is not as significant a threat to GRSG and its habitat as rangeland fire and invasive species, the BLM ARMPAs include land allocations and management actions that avoid and minimize surface disturbance in PHMAs for identified threats (e.g., energy, mining, infrastructure, improper grazing, free-roaming horses and burros, recreation and urbanization). These land allocations and management actions are necessary because the location and extent of habitat loss to fire is difficult to predict, and much of the habitat, due to low precipitation in the Great Basin, is difficult to restore once lost. Further, even a small amount of development in the wrong place could have an outsized impact in these landscapes.

SFAs—The most restrictive allocations include requirements to avoid and minimize additional disturbance in SFAs, which are a subset of lands within PHMAs, with the highest habitat value for GRSG. Surface disturbance from fluid mineral development is avoided by imposing NSOs, without waiver, modification, or exception. In addition, these areas will be recommended for withdrawal from mineral entry under the Mining Law of 1872, subject to valid existing rights, to address the risk of disturbance due to mining.

PHMAs—In PHMAs outside of SFAs new fluid mineral leasing would be subject to NSOs, with no waivers or modifications. Exceptions would be granted only under two circumstances: if the proposed

action would not have direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on GRSG or its habitat or if the action is proposed to be undertaken as an alternative to a similar action occurring on a nearby parcel, and it would provide a clear conservation gain to GRSG. This is fully consistent with guidance in the NTT Report, which states, “Do not allow new surface occupancy on federal lands within priority habitats” (NTT 2011, p. 23).

Similarly, PHMAs are closed to nonenergy and salable mineral development (this does not apply to locatable minerals governed under the 1872 Mining Law). An exception may be granted for free-use permits and the expansion of active pits for salable minerals and expansion of nonenergy leasable development under certain conditions. This exception is included because of the importance of these materials to local communities and their limited disturbance, which would be offset by the mitigation requirements.

Because there is no potential for coal development in the Great Basin Region outside of Utah, only the Utah ARMPA addresses the potential disturbance threat from coal development. In Utah, at the time an application for a new coal lease or lease modification is submitted to the BLM, the BLM will determine whether the lease application area is deemed unsuitable for all or certain coal mining methods, pursuant to 43 CFR 3461.5. PHMAs are essential habitat for maintaining GRSG for the purposes of suitability criteria set forth at 43 CFR 3461.5(o)(1).

All PHMAs will be managed as exclusion areas for commercial renewable energy development (solar and wind), with the exception of areas outside of SFAs in three counties in southeastern Oregon. The three counties in Oregon will be managed as avoidance areas, with priority placed on locating commercial-scale wind and solar energy development in nonhabitat areas first, that is, outside of PHMAs and GHMAs, before development in PHMAs is approved. New ROWs and development for transmission lines, pipelines, and related infrastructure would be avoided by restricting land use authorizations. In avoidance areas, exceptions would be granted only if it can be demonstrated that adverse impacts would be avoided or that residual impacts would be mitigated.

High voltage transmission lines will generally be avoided in PHMAs. A limited number of priority transmission lines, such as Transwest Express and portions that are collocated with Transwest Express, including Gateway South, Gateway West, and Boardman to Hemingway, have been proposed to expand access to renewable sources of energy and to improve the reliability of the western grid. These projects have been underway for several years and are currently being analyzed under NEPA. As part of the decision-making process for those projects, conservation measures for GRSG are being analyzed in the project-specific NEPA processes, which should achieve a net conservation benefit for GRSG.

New recreation facilities would not be authorized in PHMAs, unless the development results in a net conservation gain to the GRSG or its habitat or unless required for health and safety purposes.

In PHMAs, travel is limited to existing routes until new routes are designated through the implementation travel management planning process. Travel management plans, including route inventories, NEPA analysis, and route designation will be completed in a subsequent public planning process.

A 3 percent human disturbance cap in PHMAs has been established in accordance with the recommendations contained in the NTT Report and peer-reviewed literature from the Great Basin

([Knick et al. 2013](#)). Disturbance will be calculated at two scales: first at the BSU scale determined in coordination with the state and second for the proposed project area. BSUs are geographic units of PHMAs that contain relevant and important GRSG habitat. In Oregon, for example, BSUs are synonymous with PACs. These BSUs are used solely for the calculation of human disturbance caps and in some ARMPAs, the adaptive management habitat triggers.

If the 3 percent human disturbance cap is exceeded on lands (regardless of landownership) in PHMAs in any given BSU, no further discrete human disturbances (subject to valid existing rights) will be permitted on BLM-managed lands in that BSU until restoration of disturbed lands brings the BSU below the cap. If the 3 percent human disturbance cap is exceeded on all lands (regardless of landownership) within a proposed project analysis area in a PHMAs, then the BLM would permit no further human disturbance until disturbance in the area has been reduced to below the cap.

An exception to the 3 percent disturbance cap is provided in designated utility corridors for achieving a net conservation gain to the species. This exception is limited to projects that fulfill the use that the corridors were designated for (e.g., transmission lines and pipelines) and within the designated width of a corridor. This exception will concentrate future ROW surface disturbance in areas of existing disturbance and will avoid new development of infrastructure corridors in PHMAs, which is consistent with guidance in the COT Report. In addition, the Oregon and Nevada/Northeast California ARMPAs include variations to the disturbance cap. Oregon does not allow more than 1 percent new human disturbance per decade, not to exceed 3 percent disturbance at any time. In Nevada, the 3 percent disturbance cap can be exceeded at the BSU or project level provided that the outcome results in a net conservation benefit to the species with the concurrence of the BLM, the Nevada Department of Wildlife, and the FWS in each exception.

In the Dillon Field Office in southwest Montana, the BLM will limit disturbance to 3 percent until the State institutes its Sage Grouse Plan's disturbance calculation method, at which time disturbance will be permitted up to a 5 percent cap. As with the Wyoming Core Area Strategy, this is to recognize the importance of the all-lands/all-disturbances strategy that Montana will institute for GRSG conservation (Montana Office of the Governor Executive Order No. 10-2014; State of Montana 2014). Appendix E of each of the attached ARMPAs includes additional information about the method for calculating human disturbance at the BSU and project scales.

The ARMPAs also incorporate a cap on the density of energy and mining facilities to encourage collocating structures to reduce habitat fragmentation in PHMAs. The limit is an average of one facility per 640 acres in PHMAs in a project authorization area. This is consistent with guidance contained in the NTT Report. If the disturbance density in the PHMAs in a proposed project area is, on average, less than 1 facility per 640 acres, the project can proceed through the NEPA analysis, incorporating mitigation measures into an alternative. If the disturbance density in the proposed project area is greater than an average of 1 facility per 640 acres, the proposed project will either be deferred until the density of energy and mining facilities is less than the cap or redesigned so facilities are collocated into an existing disturbed area, subject to applicable laws and regulations, such as the 1872 Mining Law and valid existing rights. The 1 facility per 640 density decision does not apply to Nevada, as described in **Section I.7**.

GHMAs—While restrictions on future development in PHMAs are intended to avoid or minimize additional surface disturbance, restrictions on development in GHMAs are intended to allow disturbance

but minimize any adverse effects of disturbance with restrictions on development activities to ensure compatibility with GRSG habitat needs. In addition, mitigation to avoid, minimize, and compensate for unavoidable impacts will be required for proposed projects in GHMAs, as will the application of the RDFs discussed below.

Disturbance associated with oil and gas development, for example, is subject to a controlled surface use and timing limitation stipulation rather than an NSO stipulation. (See **Table I-4** for more details on GHMAs management decisions.) Any disturbance is subject to mitigation, with the objective of first avoiding and minimizing potential impacts on GRSG or its habitat and then compensating for unavoidable impacts on GRSG or its habitat, to a net conservation gain standard for the species. This is consistent with guidance in the COT Report which states: “Conservation of habitats outside of PACs should include minimization of impacts to sage-grouse and healthy native plant communities. If minimization is not possible due to valid existing rights, mitigation for impacted habitats should occur... If development or vegetation manipulation activities outside of PACs are proposed, the project proponent should work with federal, state or local agencies and interested stakeholders to ensure consistency with sage-grouse habitat needs” (FWS 2013).

These conservation measures are intended to ensure that areas of GHMAs are protected. GHMAs provide connectivity between PHMAs; may be important seasonal habitats not identified or incorporated into previously mapped areas of PHMAs; or can provide important habitat to replace areas of important habitat lost to fire or human disturbance. This strategy is particularly important given the recent USGS report by Crist et al. (2015), *Range-Wide Network of Priority Areas for Greater Sage-Grouse—A Design for Conserving Connected Distributions or Isolating Individual Zoos?*

For management decisions and allocations associated with IHMAs in Idaho, see **Table I-4**.

Habitat Protection and Surface Disturbance Measures in PHMAs and GHMAs

The measures below are related to habitat protection and surface disturbance. They will be applied in both PHMAs and GHMAs.

Prioritization Objective—In addition to allocations that limit disturbance in PHMAs and GHMAs, the ARMPAs prioritize oil and gas leasing and development outside of identified PHMAs and GHMAs to further limit future surface disturbance and to encourage new development in areas that would not conflict with GRSG. This objective is intended to guide development to lower conflict areas and, as such, protect important habitat and reduce the time and cost associated with oil and gas leasing development. It would do this by avoiding sensitive areas, reducing the complexity of environmental review and analysis of potential impacts on sensitive species, and decreasing the need for compensatory mitigation.

Grazing—While improper livestock grazing can be a threat to GRSG habitat, grazing is not considered a discrete surface-disturbing activity for the purposes of monitoring and calculating disturbance. The plans address grazing management to conserve GRSG and its habitat and are further described in **Section I.6.2**.

Lek Buffers—In addition to any other relevant information determined to be appropriate, the BLM will further assess and address impacts from certain activities using the lek buffer distances, as identified in the [USGS report, Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for GRSG – A Review](#) (Manier et al. 2014). Lek buffer distances will be applied at the project-specific level as required conservation measures to address

the impacts on leks identified in the NEPA analysis. The lek buffer distances vary by type of disturbance, such as road, energy development, and infrastructure; justifiable departures may be appropriate, as fully described in Appendix B of the ARMPAs. In both PHMAs and GHMAs, impacts should be avoided first by locating the action outside of the applicable lek buffer-distances, as defined in the ARMPAs. In PHMAs, the BLM will ensure that any impacts within the buffer distance from a lek are fully addressed. In GHMAs, the BLM will minimize and compensate for any unavoidable impacts to the extent possible. This approach to determining relevant lek buffer distances is consistent with the COT Report recommendation that “conservation plans should be based on the best available science and use local data on threats and ecological conditions” (FWS 2013).

Required Design Features—RDFs are used for certain activities in all GRSG habitat, including oil and gas development, infrastructure, and other surface-disturbing activities and are fully described in Appendix C of the attached ARMPAs. RDFs establish the minimum specifications for certain activities to help mitigate adverse impacts on GRSG and its habitat from threats, such as those posed by standing water that can facilitate West Nile virus or tall structures that can serve as perches for predators. The applicability and overall effectiveness of each RDF, however, cannot be fully assessed until the BLM knows the project level, project location, and design. Because of site-specific circumstances, some RDFs may not apply to some projects, such as when a resource is not present on a given site, or may require slight variations, such as a larger or smaller protective area. In Nevada and Northeastern California, RDFs are also applied to identified OHMAs.

In summary, all forms of new development in PHMAs and GHMAs would either be closed, excluded, avoided, or developed only if the resultant effect were a net conservation gain to the GRSG or its habitat, ensuring that existing habitat would be protected or restored through compensatory mitigation.

1.6.2 Improving Habitat Condition

In addition to prescribing land use allocations and managing resource uses to minimize and avoid further surface disturbance, the ARMPAs identify management actions to restore and improve GRSG habitat.

Habitat Management—The ARMPAs contain an overall habitat management objective that “[i]n all Sagebrush Focal Areas and Priority Habitat Management Areas, the desired condition is to maintain all lands ecologically capable of producing sagebrush (but no less than 70 percent) with a minimum of 15 percent sagebrush canopy cover, consistent with specific ecological site conditions.” To move toward this goal, the ARMPAs specify GRSG habitat objectives to be incorporated into land management programs, including wild horses and burros (WHBs), grazing, and habitat restoration. These habitat objectives were developed for each of the GRSG’s life history stages within each ARMPA’s sub-region. These objectives will be used to meet the applicable land health standard in GRSG habitats.

The ARMPAs also include specific decisions to improve habitat conditions and meet the habitat objectives by treating invasive annual grasses and removing encroaching conifers in SFAs, PHMAs, and GHMAs and by restoring degraded landscapes, including those impacted by fires (see **Section 1.6.3**)

Livestock Grazing—The BLM recognizes that improper grazing can be a threat to GRSG and its habitat. Because grazing is the most widespread use of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, the ARMPAs address improper grazing. The COT Report (FWS 2013) recommends conducting “grazing management for all ungulates in a manner consistent with local ecological conditions that maintains or restores healthy

sagebrush shrub and native perennial grass and forb communities and conserves the essential habitat components for sage-grouse (e.g., shrub cover, nesting cover).” To ensure that grazing continues in a manner consistent with the objective of conserving the GRSG and its habitat, the Great Basin ARMPAs require incorporating terms and conditions informed by GRSG habitat objectives into grazing permits, consistent with the ecological site potential of the local areas, prioritizing reviewing and processing authorizations and field checks of grazing permits, and taking numerous actions to avoid and minimize the impacts of range management structures (see **Table I-4**).

The BLM will prioritize reviewing and processing grazing authorizations, as well as field checking grazing permits in the habitat that is most important to GRSG populations: first in SFAs, then PHMAs, followed by GHMAs, focusing first on riparian and wet meadows. The decision to prioritize in this way does not indicate that grazing is more of a threat or is an incompatible use in any given area; rather it reflects a decision to prioritize resources to ensure that permittees and the BLM manage grazing properly in those areas most important to GRSG. If the BLM were to find that relevant habitat objectives are not being met due to improper grazing, it would work with the permittee to ensure progress toward habitat objectives.

Wild Horses and Burros—To address the localized threat due to negative influences of grazing by free-roaming WHBs, the BLM will focus on maintaining WHB herd management areas in GRSG habitat in established AML ranges. This is to achieve and maintain GRSG habitat objectives. It includes completing rangeland health assessments, prioritizing gathers and population growth suppression techniques, and developing or amending herd management area plans to incorporate GRSG habitat objectives and management considerations. The BLM will prioritize WHB management first in SFAs, then the remainder of PHMAs, and then GHMAs. In SFAs and PHMAs, the BLM will assess and adjust AMLs through the NEPA process within herd management areas when WHBs are identified as a significant factor in not meeting land health standards, even if current AML is not being exceeded.

Mitigation and Net Conservation Benefit—During the implementation of the ARMPAs, and subject to valid existing rights and consistent with applicable law, in authorizing third-party actions that result in GRSG habitat loss and degradation, the BLM will require mitigation that provides a net conservation gain (the actual benefit or gain above baseline conditions) to the species. This will include accounting for any uncertainty associated with the effectiveness of such mitigation. This will be achieved by avoiding, minimizing, and compensating for unavoidable impacts by applying beneficial conservation actions to offset remaining impacts associated with the action.

This standard is consistent with the recommendation in the [Greater Sage-Grouse Range-wide Mitigation Framework: Version 1.0](#) (FWS 2014b), which states that mitigation “should be strategically designed to result in net overall positive outcomes for sage-grouse.” Mitigation will follow the regulations from the CEQ NEPA regulatory requirements (40 CFR 1508.20; e.g., avoid, minimize, and compensate). It would be implemented on BLM-administered lands in a manner consistent with Department of the Interior guidance for landscape mitigation, pursuant to [Secretarial Order 3330](#). If impacts from BLM management actions and authorized third-party actions result in habitat loss and degradation that remain after avoidance and minimization measures are applied, then compensatory mitigation projects would be used to provide a net conservation gain to the species. Any compensatory mitigation will be durable, timely, and in addition to that which would have resulted without the compensatory mitigation.

To help achieve the mitigation goal of net conservation gain across the range, the BLM will establish GRSG Conservation Teams, based on WAFWA MZs and including representatives from the respective States, the Forest Service, FWS, and NRCS. These Conservation Teams will facilitate cross-state issues, such as regional mitigation and adaptive management monitoring and response. They will convene and respond to issues at the appropriate scale and will use existing coordination and management structures to the extent possible.

Climate Change—With regard to the threat of climate change, the ARMPAs set goals and objectives and describe actions intended to build resilience in the sagebrush steppe landscape to the impacts of climate change through habitat conservation and restoration measures. The coordinated landscape approach to addressing rangeland fire and invasive species described in the [Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy: Final Report to the Secretary of the Interior](#) (US Department of the Interior 2015) will further these goals and objectives.

The Fire and Invasives Assessment Team (FIAT) assessments that informed the ARMPAs and supported the development of the Fire Strategy (US Department of the Interior 2015) were designed to identify landscapes of high resistance and resilience based on research by Chambers et al. (2014). Additionally, limiting or eliminating human surface disturbance, especially in the SFAs, would ensure the integrity of the PHMAs and would restore habitat through fuels management, post-fire restoration, and mitigation efforts. Connectivity and availability of sagebrush habitat would increase, thus contributing to increased climate resilience. The SFAs in particular were identified as key areas to conserve as the climate changes. The Oregon ARMPA commits to using climate change science concerning projected changes in species ranges and changes in site capability. This would be used to adjust expected and desired native species compositions as that information becomes available.

As identified by the FWS 2010 listing decision and the COT Report, climate change can impact efforts to conserve the GRSG and its habitat in a number of ways. While several ARMPAs acknowledge the potential impact of climate change on GRSG habitat and conservation, specific strategies to address the impacts of climate change are limited. The BLM and Forest Service, in coordination with the FWS, will continue to assess the potential impacts of climate change on GRSG and its habitat and will develop strategies to mitigate the anticipated effects on GRSG conservation efforts, as necessary and appropriate. Changes to management decisions will require a plan revision or amendment, as appropriate, recognizing the need to ensure that future management direction improves the resilience of habitat areas essential to the conservation of the species.

1.6.3 Reducing Threats of Rangeland Fire to GRSG and Sagebrush Habitat

The COT Report emphasized that “rangeland fire (both lightning-caused and human-caused fire) in sagebrush ecosystems is one of the primary risks to the greater sage-grouse, especially as part of the positive feedback loop between exotic invasive annual grasses and fire frequency” (FWS 2013). Recent USGS studies by Brooks et al. (2015) and Coates et al. (2015) reinforce the importance of a comprehensive management strategy to prevent and suppress rangeland fires in the western part of GRSG range and to aggressively restore habitat areas impacted by fire.

For this reason, the ARMPAs seek to improve efforts to strategically develop fuel breaks, in collaboration with GRSG biologists. This would be done to reduce potential habitat loss from rangeland fires, accelerate the restoration of fire-impacted landscapes to native grasses and sagebrush, and fight

the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive species that increase the frequency and intensity of rangeland fires. However, prescribed fire will not be used in sagebrush steppe. The exception would be if the NEPA analysis for the burn plan were to provide a clear rationale for why alternative techniques were not selected as a viable option. The analysis also would need to explain how GRSG habitat management goals and objectives would be met by its use and how the COT Report objectives would be met. It would require a risk assessment to address how potential threats to GRSG habitat would be minimized.

Recent scientific research on resistance and resilience of Great Basin ecosystems (Chambers et al. 2014) provides the basis for improved targeting of fire management activities on BLM-administered lands. The BLM, the Forest Service, FWS, and other cooperating agencies agreed to incorporate this approach into the ARMPAs. This information is being used to identify and design projects to change vegetation composition and structure to modify potential fire behavior to improve fire suppression effectiveness and limit fire spread and intensity due to invasive grasses and conifer encroachment. The BLM [Greater Sage Grouse Invasive Wildfire, Annual Grasses and Conifer Expansion Assessment](#) (FIAT 2014) modeled conifer expansion for PACs to provide an initial stratification. It was done to determine where conifer removal would benefit important sagebrush habitats.

Consistent with this assessment, the BLM ARMPAs include management actions to remove invading conifers and other undesirable species and to prioritize vegetation treatments for the purpose closest to occupied GRSG habitats and near occupied leks.

In addition to and complementing the fire management measures in the ARMPAs described in this ROD, [Secretarial Order 3336](#) on Rangeland Fire made clear that **“protecting, conserving, and restoring the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem and, in particular, priority GRSG habitat, while maintaining safe and efficient operations, is a critical fire management priority for the Department”** (emphasis added; US Department of the Interior 2015).

Secretarial Order 3336 directed the development of the *Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy* (Strategy) which places a Departmental priority on activities to prevent, suppress, and restore fire-impacted landscapes. It focused on priority GRSG habitat, including that identified by the FIAT for the Great Basin Region, using recent information derived from a report prepared by WAFWA to assist in addressing the threat of rangeland fire. The FIAT Assessments provide critical guidance to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat consistent with best available science and identify highly resistant and resilient landscapes to target fire management in these most important lands.

A key element of the Strategy is a commitment to address the invasion and expansion of cheatgrass, medusahead rye, and other invasive grasses through expanded efforts to treat impacted acres. Efforts are underway to increase the acreages to be treated with chemical and biological agents to stem the spread of invasive species and to accelerate the registration of other biologicals useful in addressing the threat of cheatgrass invasion. In addition, recently adopted Department of the Interior guidance will allocate Emergency Stabilization and Burned Area Rehabilitation (ES & BAR) funds on a risk-based approach using historic acres burned to accelerate and expand the restoration of burned lands with native grasses and sagebrush seedlings. The BLM recently announced a Native Seed Strategy to accelerate and expand the production, storage, and allocation of seed for native vegetation and sagebrush. The strategy is to restore and rehabilitate burned areas and accelerate the improvement of the sagebrush ecosystem and habitat for GRSG.

Finally, by issuing a leaders' intent letter, signed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, rangeland fire was identified as an "additional priority" for the firefighting community in making strategic decisions about firefighting resource allocation in 2015. Additional resources have been allocated and will be targeted at the following:

- Fuel treatments, including invasive species control
- Suppression, by positioning firefighting resources and training additional Rangeland Fire Protection Associations, local volunteer firefighters, and veteran fire fighters
- Restoring habitat in these areas

Firefighting assets (aircraft, firefighters, and related equipment) were positioned in advance of the 2015 fire season to improve capacity and reduce acres of rangelands lost to fire by improving the success of the initial attack. In future years, BLM firefighting assets will be located near PHMAs to limit habitat losses from rangeland fire.

1.6.4 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management

The COT Report preparers noted that "a monitoring program is necessary to track the success of conservation plans and proactive conservation activities. Without this information, the actual benefit of conservation activities cannot be measured and there is no capacity to adapt if current management actions are determined to be ineffective" (FWS 2013). The NTT further notes that "Monitoring is necessary to provide an objective appraisal of the effects of potentially positive conservation actions, and to assess the relative negative effects of management actions to sage-grouse populations and their habitats" (NTT 2011).

A range-wide monitoring and evaluation framework will be established and implemented, as described in the Monitoring Framework (Appendix D of each attached ARMPA). This monitoring strategy has two parts, as follows:

- Implementation monitoring (i.e., are decisions being implemented in a timely manner? are actions taken consistent with the plan decisions?)
- Effectiveness monitoring (i.e., are the decisions and implementation actions achieving the desired conservation goals?)

Through effectiveness monitoring, the BLM can determine how management decisions and actions implemented through the ARMPAs affect GRSG habitat. This would be to determine if the desired management objectives, such as avoiding and minimizing additional surface disturbance in PHMAs, have been achieved. Understanding the effectiveness and validating results of ARMPA management decisions is an essential part of the GRSG conservation strategy and provides the means for determining if desired outcomes are being achieved.

Monitoring that is applicable for evaluating management effectiveness can also be used to address a number of other critical habitat variables (e.g., location, condition, habitat loss or gain, and size of patches). Ideally, monitoring attributes of GRSG habitat, in coordination with population monitoring by State wildlife agencies and other partners, will allow real or potential habitat changes from both natural events and management actions to be linked to vital rates of GRSG populations. This analysis will enable

managers to identify indicators associated with population change across large landscapes and to lessen the negative effects with appropriate conservation actions. The WAFWA Zone GRSG Conservation Teams (as described in **Section 1.6.2**) will also be used to advise regional monitoring strategies and data analysis, as described in the plans.

Each ARMPA includes an overarching adaptive management strategy that includes soft and hard triggers and responses. These triggers are habitat and population thresholds and are based on the two key metrics that are being monitored: habitat condition and population numbers. At a minimum, the BLM will assess annually whether hard and soft trigger thresholds have been met when the population or habitat information becomes available, beginning after this ROD executed.

Soft triggers represent an intermediate threshold indicating that management changes are needed at the implementation level to address habitat or population losses. If a soft trigger is tripped during the life of the ARMPAs, the BLM will implement more conservative or restrictive conservation measures on a project-by-project basis to mitigate for the specific cause in the decline of populations or habitats, taking into consideration local knowledge and conditions. In each ARMPA, a soft trigger begins a dialogue between the State, FWS, and the BLM to see if the cause can be determined and what implementation-level activities can be used to reverse any trend. These adjustments will be made to prevent tripping a hard trigger, which signals more severe habitat loss or population declines.

Hard triggers represent a threshold indicating that immediate action is necessary to stop a severe deviation from GRSG conservation objectives set forth in the BLM ARMPAs. In the event that a hard trigger were tripped, the BLM would implement plan-level decisions, such as allocation changes, to immediately institute greater protection for GRSG and its habitat. If a hard trigger were tripped in a PAC that crosses State boundaries, the WAFWA MZ GRSG Conservation Team would convene to discuss causes and identify potential responses.

In the event that new scientific information becomes available, demonstrating that the hard trigger response is insufficient to stop a severe deviation from GRSG conservation objectives set forth in the BLM ARMPAs, the BLM would immediately assess what further actions may be needed to protect GRSG and its habitat and to ensure that conservation options are not foreclosed. This could include a formal directive, such as an instruction memorandum (IM) or a plan amendment.

I.7 UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE GREAT BASIN ARMPAS

The ARMPAs and their associated EISs were developed through four planning efforts across the Great Basin Region (as described in **Section 1.1**). To develop these plans, the BLM employed a landscape-scale approach to achieve a common set of management objectives across the range of GRSG recognizing. In particular, it implemented measures to limit anthropogenic disturbance in important habitats. Within this framework, management actions were developed and incorporated into the plans that are tailored to achieve these objectives and accommodate differences in resource conditions, severity of threats, and State-specific management approaches.

This flexible landscape approach provided the opportunity to incorporate recommendations resulting from collaboration with the States and local cooperators and from public comments in each Planning Area. The plans and their future implementation are strengthened by the contributions of local partners and their knowledge, expertise, and experience.

Measures incorporated into the plans remain consistent with the range-wide objective of conserving, enhancing, and restoring GRS habitat by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing threats to GRS habitat, such that the need for additional protections under the ESA may be avoided.

Below is a brief description of the unique aspects of each of the Great Basin Region's ARMPAs.

Idaho and Southwestern Montana

The Idaho and Southwestern Montana ARMPA adopted specific aspects of the [State of Idaho's Conservation Plan for GRS](#). The most significant aspect adopted from the State's plan is a third category of habitat referred to as IHMA. IHMA are BLM-administered and National Forest System lands that provide a management buffer for PHMA and connect patches of PHMA. IHMA encompass areas of generally moderate to high conservation value habitat and/or populations.

In a landscape that is most threatened by fire and invasive species, this three-tiered approach allows land managers to focus suppression and restoration resources on those areas of highest importance. It also provides an acceptable additional level of flexibility in IHMA and GHMA because surface disturbance due to development is not as great a threat to habitat in the sub-region. The three tiers also are the foundation for an adaptive management approach that includes habitat and population hard and soft triggers. The adaptive management approach requires that when a hard trigger is reached, IHMA will be managed as PHMA to maintain sufficient PHMA to support GRS populations.

The Idaho portion of the Idaho and Southwestern Montana GRS ARMPA also includes a unique approach to calculating disturbance to account for effective habitat. This is described in Appendix E of the attached Idaho and Southwestern Montana ARMPA, which the BLM developed in concert with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Forest Service, and the FWS. The ARMPA also includes additional RDFs based on lek avoidance distances, which were developed in coordination with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the local FWS office. Examples are avoiding building new wire fences within 2 kilometers of occupied leks and placing new taller structures out of sightlines or at least one kilometer from occupied leks. The BLM will also work with the State of Idaho in setting priorities for reviewing and processing grazing permits and leases in SFAs, consistent with the method recommended by the State of Idaho in its proposed plan for managing BLM-administered lands in the State.

On August 7, 2015, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Act was signed into law (House Resolution 1138). In accordance with the Wilderness Act (16 USC, Section 1131 et seq.), certain Federal lands in the Challis National Forest and Challis District of the BLM in Idaho were designated as Wilderness, as a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System, known as the Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness. Approximately 12,430 acres of this Wilderness area is within BLM-administered SFAs. This area will now also be managed as Wilderness consistent with the Wilderness Act. As specified in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Act, a wilderness management plan will be developed within five years of the signing of the act and it will outline specific management guidance for the new wilderness area.

This statute also released the Jerry Peak West, Corral-Horse Basin, and Boulder Creek Wilderness Study Areas and they are no longer subject to management, pursuant to Section 603(c) of the FLPMA. The acres of wilderness study areas released include approximately 71,194 acres of PHMA, 11,923

acres of IHMAs, and 5,912 acres of GHMAs. The ARMPA decisions for these areas will not change as a result of the release.

Finally the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Act also directed the BLM to convey certain public lands to Blaine County, Custer County, the City of Challis, the City of Clayton, and the City of Stanley. These conveyances include approximately 53 acres of PHMAs, 10 acres of IHMAs, and 828 acres of GHMAs that are reflected in the ARMPA as being administered by the BLM. Once conveyed, these lands will not be subject to the BLM management decisions outlined in the Idaho and Southwestern Montana GRSG ARMPA.

The decisions affecting Southwestern Montana in the ARMPA are consistent with the objectives of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program ([Montana Office of the Governor Executive Order No. 10-2014](#); State of Montana 2014) by establishing conservation measures and strategies to minimize disturbance and habitat loss, particularly as a result of surface disturbance from energy exploration and development.

The BLM plan will permit the disturbance limit to go from a 3 percent to a 5 percent disturbance cap, consistent with the Montana Plan when the process for implementing that State's disturbance calculation method is instituted and effective. Additionally, if the BLM finds that the State of Montana is implementing an effective GRSG habitat conservation program, the BLM would review their management actions to determine if additional GRSG-related management actions should be adjusted. This would be coordinated with the State of Montana and the FWS to achieve consistent and effective conservation across all lands, regardless of ownership.

Nevada and Northeastern California

The Nevada portion of the Nevada and Northeastern California ARMPA is unique from other Great Basin ARMPAs because of how the sub-regional habitat map was developed. The ARMPA uses the 2014 Coates Maps, developed locally using the best available science. The ARMPA included OHMAs, where RDFs will be applied at the project level. Decisions for BLM-administered lands in California include allocations and management direction that is generally similar to other ARMPAs in the Great Basin, while carrying forward some decisions identified in the [Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy Final EIS](#) (BLM 2008).

Decisions for BLM-administered lands in Nevada incorporate key elements of the [State of Nevada Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan](#) (State of Nevada 2014), including consideration of the [State of Nevada Conservation Credit System](#) (Nevada Natural Heritage Program and Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team 2014) as the ARMPA is implemented and as projects are proposed within the Planning Area. This mitigation strategy focuses restoration on the key areas most valuable to the GRSG. The ARMPA adopts a disturbance management protocol to provide for a 3 percent limit on disturbance. The exception would be in situations where a biological analysis indicates a net conservation gain to the species, with concurrence from the BLM, the State of Nevada, and the FWS. The plan provides for this exception due to the development of mitigation tools in Nevada, including the Conservation Credit System (Nevada Natural Heritage Program and Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team 2014), in collaboration with the FWS.

Furthermore, given the concurrence of the Nevada Department of Wildlife and FWS in each exception, this approach is consistent with conservation objectives. The Nevada ARMPA does not use a disturbance density cap, required in the three other Great Basin Region ARMPAs, in light of the disturbance management protocol for BLM-administered lands in Nevada.

In coordination with the FWS, the Nevada ARMPA also allows for an exception to the geothermal NSO, which is an energy development priority for the State and is projected to create very limited disturbance in predictable areas over the life of the plan. For those reasons, this exception is consistent with overall conservation objectives.

Utah

The Utah ARMPA incorporates a number of key strategies for GRSG conservation developed by the State of Utah ([Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse in Utah](#); Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Working Group 2013) and the State of Wyoming (Executive Orders [2011-5](#), [2013-3](#), and [2015-4](#)), which establish conservation measures for protecting GRSG and also focus conservation and restoration within key areas deemed most valuable to GRSG. The Utah ARMPA also integrates the State's strategic focus on increasing areas available to GRSG through vegetation treatments and reducing threats from wildfire. The ARMPA provides additional flexibility for development in GHMAs because 96 percent of the breeding GRSG in Utah are within PHMAs. Here, conservation measures are applied in a more targeted manner at the project-implementation stage through the use of lek buffers and RDFs, as well as requiring that compensatory mitigation achieve a net conservation benefit outcome. As such, the Utah ARMPA designates GHMAs as open to wind energy and high voltage transmission ROW development (consistent with the net conservation gain mitigation framework for the ARMPA). The Utah ARMPA also designates GHMAs open to oil and gas development with standard constraints.

Because there is no potential for coal development in the Great Basin Region outside of Utah, only the Utah ARMPA addresses this threat.

Oregon

The Oregon ARMPA incorporates key elements of the [Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon: A Plan to Maintain and Enhance Populations and Habitat](#) (Hagen 2011). This establishes unique conservation measures for protecting GRSG and also focuses restoration within key areas most valuable to GRSG. The BLM plan adopts the unique disturbance cap approach developed with the State of Oregon in which disturbance is capped at 1 percent per decade, in addition to the 3 percent cap in BSUs and project analysis areas. The Governor of Oregon has issued an executive order (September 16, 2015) that directs state agencies to implement the Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan in coordination with Federal and local partners. The Action Plan, supported by new rules passed by both the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Land Conservation and Development Commission, contains strategic direction that aims to align with many elements of the Oregon ARMPA.

The BLM Oregon plans provide additional flexibility for wind development in PHMAs in Harney, Lake, and Malheur Counties by allocating them as avoidance areas (rather than exclusion areas) within PHMAs that are outside of the SFAs. In these counties, priority would be placed on locating commercial-scale wind and solar energy development in nonhabitat areas (i.e., outside of PHMAs and GHMAs) before approving development in PHMAs. The BLM provided this flexibility after recognizing the following:

- The extent of high and medium potential wind areas in PHMAs in these counties
- The fact that wind energy is excluded in SFAs in these counties
- After coordinating with the FWS, determining that the more rigorous disturbance cap of 1 percent per decade and adaptive management triggers adopted by the Oregon plan would compensate for the likely limited wind development in these areas

Due to these factors, the BLM finds these limited areas of flexibility for wind development are consistent with overall conservation objectives of the plan. In addition, the Oregon ARMPA identifies strategic areas where habitat enhancement and restoration are encouraged, as well as other strategic areas to address the impacts associated with climate change.

For additional information on the unique aspects of each plan, refer to Table I-6 of the attached [Idaho and Southwestern Montana](#), [Nevada and Northeastern California](#), [Oregon](#), and [Utah](#) ARMPAs. The tables provide a crosswalk as to how the ARMPAs address specific threats to GRSG identified in the COT Report through these State-specific management prescriptions.

I.8 DECISION RATIONALE

The ARMPAs provide a comprehensive, coordinated, and effective conservation strategy for addressing the threats to the GRSG identified by the FWS such that the need for additional protections under the ESA may be avoided. The ARMPAs strive to conserve GRSG and their habitat on BLM-administered lands across the remaining range of the species. This is consistent with measures identified or recommended in the NTT Report, the COT Report, recent USGS studies, and other relevant research and analysis.

The BLM and Forest Service land use plans are an essential component to conserve the GRSG and its habitat. This is in combination with the GRSG conservation actions taken by the individual States in the remaining range of the species and initiatives to address the threat of rangeland fire, to curb the spread of nonnative invasive grasses, and to promote conservation measures to benefit GRSG on private lands. Combined, all of the ARMPs and ARMPAs associated with the BLM's National GRSG Conservation Strategy, as well as the Forest Service LRMPs, would affect approximately 67 million acres of the remaining habitat for the species.

The BLM GRSG Conservation Strategy is built on the following key concepts:

- **Landscape-level**—The planning effort encompasses the remaining habitat of the GRSG on BLM-administered lands, covering 10 western states in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountain Regions. As such, the strategy provides a coherent framework across the BLM land use plans to implement landscape-level conservation for GRSG, while allowing for flexibility essential to effectively address threats to the GRSG in the context of the agency's multiple-use and sustained yield mandates under FLPMA. The conservation measures included as part of this landscape-level conservation effort address identified threats to the species, recognizing local ecological conditions and incorporating existing conservation efforts where they are consistent with the overall objective of conserving GRSG across its remaining range.

- **Best available science**—The ARMPAs are grounded in the best available science, drawn from published literature and input from recognized experts, State agencies, the USGS, the FWS, and other sources. The COT Report provided a blueprint for GRSG conservation by identifying specific threats to each remaining GRSG population and recommending measures to address each category of threat. The NTT Report provided additional guidance for addressing the most significant threats to the GRSG. The concepts set forth in a number of reports prepared by the USGS regarding specific threats to GRSG, habitat connectivity, and related issues are reflected in the land allocation and resource management decisions. Also informing GRSG conservation was a series of reports on how to better reduce the threats of rangeland fire and invasive species, prepared in collaboration with the WAFWA, and a report to the Secretary of the Interior entitled *An Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy: Final Report to the Secretary of the Interior* (US Department of the Interior 2015).
- **Targeted, multi-tiered approach**—The ARMPAs were designed to incorporate a layered management approach to target habitat protection and restoration to the most important habitat management areas, as determined by State and Federal GRSG experts, largely consistent with the PACs identified in the COT Report, where land allocations and management direction avoid and minimize additional surface disturbance. These areas are designated as PHMAs. Within PHMAs, the ARMPAs provide an added level of protection to eliminate most surface disturbance by delineating SFAs, derived from areas identified by the FWS as strongholds essential for the species' survival. GHMAs recognize the potential value of habitat areas outside of PACs—as recommended by the COT Report—where surface disturbance is minimized, while providing greater flexibility for other land resource uses.
- **Coordinated**—The ARMPAs were developed through a joint planning process between the BLM and the Forest Service (as a cooperating agency). As a result, Federally administered lands essential to the conservation of the GRSG are managed in a coordinated manner. The FWS provided guidance and input throughout the process to aid land managers in understanding the threats to the GRSG and its habitat. The USGS and NRCS also provided key technical and scientific support.
- **Collaborative**—The ARMPAs reflected extensive input from the relevant States, collaborators, and stakeholders and the public from the outset. The ARMPAs were developed with the benefit of input from the individual States and cooperators who signed formal agreements with the BLM to provide input into the planning process. The Western Governors Association Sage Grouse Task Force was particularly useful in facilitating this kind of collaborative input. The ARMPAs incorporate State and local conservation measures where they are consistent with the overall objective of implementing land use plan conservation measures for the GRSG, consistent with the multiple-use and sustained yield mission of the BLM.

The conservation measures in the ARMPAs reflect over a decade of research, analysis, and recommendations for GRSG conservation, including those produced by the WAFWA, the NTT, and the COT. Each of these entities produced a strategy or report that was developed through the collaboration of State and Federal biologists and scientists with extensive experience and expertise in GRSG management and research.

The COT Report, which identified threats to GRSG habitat and the most important habitat to protect, provided an important framework for developing the conservation strategy embodied in the sub-regional ARMPAs. The COT, consisting of State and Federal scientists, wildlife biologists, resource managers, and policy advisors, was tasked by the FWS Director “with development of range-wide conservation objectives for the sage-grouse to define the degree to which threats need to be reduced or ameliorated to conserve sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future” (FWS 2013).

In addition, the [FIAT Report](#) and the USGS compilation and summary of published scientific studies that evaluate the influence of human activities and infrastructure on GRSG populations (such as [Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for Greater Sage-Grouse—A Review](#) (Manier et al. 2014), and the [Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy: Final report to the Secretary](#) [US Department of the Interior 2015]) provided important guidance in developing critical aspects of the ARMPAs and the overall GRSG landscape-level conservation strategy. Beyond these range-wide reports, each of the sub-regional plans used local science, where available, to tailor plan elements to reflect local ecological conditions, threats, and GRSG management experience where consistent with the overall GRSG conservation objectives.

The ARMPAs are the product of extensive coordination, including the active engagement of the FWS in helping to inform land allocation and related management decisions by the land management agencies to ensure they limit or eliminate new surface disturbance as well as improve habitat condition in the most important habitat areas. The ARMPAs also benefit from strong collaboration with the States and reflect the unique landscapes, habitats, approaches, and priorities in each. While the effort to incorporate State-developed conservation measures in each of the sub-regional plans has added complexity in developing the overall conservation strategy, the body of local knowledge and expertise regarding conservation measures for the GRSG is extensive and, ultimately, strengthened the plans. Incorporating these measures in the plans is also likely to increase the commitment of all partners to the task of implementing the plans on completion.

In his transmittal letter accompanying the final COT Report, the FWS Director reaffirmed his charge. “I asked the team to produce a recommendation regarding the degree to which threats need to be reduced or ameliorated to conserve the greater sage-grouse so that it would no longer be in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future. ... Conservation success will be achieved by removing or reducing threats to the species now, such that population trends will eventually be stable or increasing, even if numbers are not restored to historic levels” (FWS 2013).

The ARMPAs are designed to directly address the specific threats to the species identified by the FWS in its 2010 listing determination as more fully explained in the COT Report and the NTT Report. As previously noted, the COT Report stated “Maintenance of the integrity of PACs ... is the essential foundation for sage-grouse conservation.” Specifically, the COT Report preparers recommended “targeted habitat management and restoration” to be achieved by “eliminating activities known to negatively impact sage-grouse and their habitats, or re-designing these activities to achieve the same goal.” The COT further recommended an “avoidance first strategy” and stressed that “threats in PACs must be minimized to the extent that population trends meet the objectives of the 2006 WAFWA Conservation Strategy” (FWS 2013).

In order to address the identified threats and meet the recommendations of the COT Report, the plans are based first on the identification of important habitat areas for GRSG in which the plans protect

remaining habitat and target habitat restoration and improvement actions. Specifically, the plans identify PHMAs that align closely with PACs identified in the COT Report (except for PACs in Nevada and Utah, as specified on page 13 of the COT Report).

Within PHMAs, the plans identify SFAs, based on the FWS analysis of strongholds for the species; this in turn is based on such factors as population density, habitat integrity, and resilience to climate change. The SFAs serve as a landscape-level anchor for the conservation strategy and are closed or excluded from discretionary surface disturbances. SFAs are also used to prioritize fire protection, habitat restoration, and other habitat management actions (e.g., prioritizing reductions in WHB populations to achieve AML). This approach will allow the BLM to target limited resources to those areas identified by the FWS and reinforced by recent USGS analysis. These resources are those most important to long-term sagebrush ecosystem health and species persistence.

PHMAs and GHMAs boundaries are based on PPH and PGH (except in Utah, where PPH was derived from occupied habitat). Consistent with the BLM's IM 2012-044, PPH and PGH are based on data and maps developed through a collaboration between the BLM and the respective State wildlife agency. PPH and PGH (PHMAs and GHMAs in the Final EISs and now the ARMPAs) were developed using the best available data. Criteria for delineating PPH included breeding bird density (Doherty et al. 2010), GRSG proportionality, lek density, and key seasonal habitats, such as known winter concentration areas. PGH (now GHMAs) are areas of occupied seasonal, connectivity, or year-round habitat outside of PPH.

As discussed in **Section 1.6**, allocations and management actions are targeted to habitat management areas to limit or eliminate surface disturbance. All forms of new development in PHMAs—from energy, to transmission lines, to recreation facilities and grazing structures—are excluded, avoided, or allowed only if the resultant effect is neutral or beneficial to the GRSG. The ARMPAs will also prioritize future oil and gas leasing and development outside of identified GRSG habitat management areas (i.e., SFAs, PHMAs, and GHMAs) to reduce the potential for future conflict with GRSG.

The ARMPAs include additional measures to limit surface disturbance in PHMAs by establishing lek buffers and disturbance limits or caps and density restrictions (except in Nevada) of, on average, one energy facility per 640 acres. These requirements reflect recommendations in the NTT Report and are consistent with certain State strategies that were already in place before the initiation of the BLM's National GRSG Conservation Strategy. As described in **Section 1.6.1**, the BLM determined the appropriate lek buffers to analyze based on the USGS report *Conservation Buffer Distance Estimates for GRSG—A Review* (Manier et al. 2014) based on best available science.

The plans also include actions meant to improve habitat condition to the most important areas for conservation through additional, targeted efforts to protect and restore habitat first in SFAs, then in PHMAs, and finally in areas designated as GHMAs.

Mitigation for activities adversely impacting GRSG or GRSG habitat in PHMAs or GHMAs will be designed to a net conservation gain standard consistent with the recommendation included in the September 2014 FWS document, [Greater Sage-Grouse Range-Wide Mitigation Framework Version 1.0](#) (FWS 2014b). According to the authors, the Framework was prepared "...to communicate some of the factors the Service is likely to consider in evaluating the efficacy of mitigation practices and programs in reducing threats to GRSG. The recommendations provided here are consistent with the information

and conservation objectives provided in the 2013 Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Report for sage-grouse” (FWS 2014b).

Grazing, which is the most widespread use of the sagebrush ecosystem, will continue in a manner consistent with the objective of conserving the GRSG. Land health standards will incorporate GRSG habitat objectives and vegetative management objectives consistent with the ecological potential of the landscape as recommended by the COT to “...conduct grazing management for all ungulates in a manner consistent with local ecological conditions that maintains or restores healthy sagebrush shrub and native perennial grass and forb communities and conserves the essential habitat components for GRSG (e.g., shrub cover, nesting cover)” (FWS 2013).

The ARMPAs also address the adverse impacts of free-roaming WHBs on GRSG habitat by prioritizing gathers and removing WHBs to achieve AMLs in SFAs, PHMAs, and GHMAs (in that order). The BLM has been working with the National Academy of Sciences to conduct new research of methods to reduce WHB reproduction rates. Through a combination of targeted gathers and the development of an effective agent for controlling future free-roaming WHB reproductive rates, over time, this threat to GRSG may be effectively managed.

Since the interaction of fire and invasive species represents the primary threat to GRSG survival in the Great Basin region, the ARMPAs provide specific guidance for improving efforts to reduce the risk of GRSG habitat loss to wildfire, including fire prevention and the restoration of habitats impacted by fire. The Department of the Interior took a series of actions over 2014 and 2015 to develop a more complete and comprehensive strategy for dealing with this threat. This led to [Secretarial Order 3336](#) and the subsequent report, [An Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy: Final Report to the Secretary of the Interior](#) (US Department of the Interior 2015).

In accordance with Secretarial Order 3336 and subsequent rangeland fire management strategy, substantial changes in policy and management direction have been made and will continue to be made to enhance BLM’s ability to manage the threat of rangeland fire. These will affect all aspects of the rangeland fire management program; they will range from better coordination between resource managers and fire management officers to the identification and prioritization of prevention, suppression, and restoration in SFAs, PHMAs, and GHMAs; to the commitment of additional equipment and crews for rangeland firefighting; to additional funding and policy direction to improve post-fire restoration; to the completion of an initiative to collect, store, and better utilize native seed and sagebrush in post-fire restoration of sagebrush steppe ecosystems. This and the initiative to fight the spread of nonnative invasive species that contribute to higher rangeland fire risk (e.g., cheatgrass) discussed below have fundamentally changed how rangeland fire is managed to benefit sagebrush ecosystems and GRSG habitat.

The COT Report and other more recent research and analysis amplify concern for the contribution of cheatgrass and other invasive annual species to the loss of GRSG habitat associated with increased fire frequency and intensity. Work initiated by the WAFWA and based on recent research by Chambers et al. (2014) led to the development of the FIAT and a subsequent assessment that identified areas of resistance and resilience to fire in SFAs, PHMAs, and GHMAs. Through use of the FIAT Assessment Tool, land managers can more efficiently allocate and use fire resources at initial attack, to stop fire early and prevent catastrophic habitat loss, and to target restoration at those areas important to the species

where success is more likely. The BLM is also committed to accelerating the registration and use of chemical and biological agents to stem the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive annual species.

Even prior to completion of the FIAT assessment, the BLM shifted funding for fuels management to protect landscapes of importance to the GRSG. Under the FY 2014 Omnibus Appropriation, the BLM prioritized the funding of treatments and activities within each State that benefit GRSG (see this ROD's **Figure I-6**, FY 2015 FIAT Priority Project Planning Areas with Focus on Invasive Annual Grasses and Conifer Expansion Assessments).

To further supplement these efforts, the Department of the Interior has recently committed \$7.5 million to projects in GRSG habitat to create more resilient landscapes. In addition, the BLM has allocated \$12 million to increase firefighting resources aimed at stopping fires while they are small in the Great Basin. In addition, the Department of the Interior has approved policy changes to increase the commitment, flexibility, and time frame for using ES & BAR funding. By adopting a risk-based approach using a rolling average of the acres lost to fire during the previous five fire seasons, ES & BAR funding will be allocated to the BLM to permit an increased focus on restoring priority sagebrush-steppe habitats impacted by fire.

In addition, the Sage Grouse Initiative launched by the NRCS in 2010 also contributes to the effort to protect and restore important GRSG habitat. In collaboration with the States and private landowners on private lands and with the BLM and the Forest Service on Federally administered public lands, the NRCS has worked to reduce the encroachment of pinyon-juniper trees and to restore rangeland habitat on private and BLM-administered lands.

Consistent with recommendations contained in the 2006 WAFWA *Greater Sage-Grouse Range-wide Conservation Strategy* (Stiver et al. 2006), the BLM and Forest Service conservation strategy relies heavily on monitoring and evaluation to assess the success and effectiveness of implementing the management decisions in the ARMPAs. Monitoring plans will be developed in coordination with relevant State and Federal agencies and will incorporate evaluation of GRSG population trends by the States and changes in habitat condition by the Federal land management agencies. The WAFWA report states, "Monitoring provides the 'currency' necessary to evaluate management decisions and to assess progress or problems. Adequate monitoring should be considered an integral and inseparable component of all management actions, and therefore, not optional. Lack of proper monitoring will undoubtedly hinder this large-scale conservation effort" (Stiver et al. 2006).

In addition, the ARMPAs incorporate an adaptive management framework that provides an early warning system of soft triggers to alert resource managers to the need to evaluate the effectiveness of their management strategies should changes occur in population levels or habitat conditions. If the project-level management responses to soft triggers do not adequately address the causes for population or habitat declines and if hard triggers are reached, the ARMPAs identify measures that will be put in place, including plan-level responses, in an effort to reverse the declines.

In summary, the ARMPAs emphasize an "avoidance first" strategy, consistent with the recommendations in the COT Report, by limiting new disturbance and maintaining current intact GRSG habitat. This avoidance first strategy is accomplished by identifying important GRSG habitat areas, then applying allocations that exclude or avoid surface-disturbing activities, appropriately managing grazing, and aggressively suppressing fire that could degrade or fragment remaining GRSG habitat.

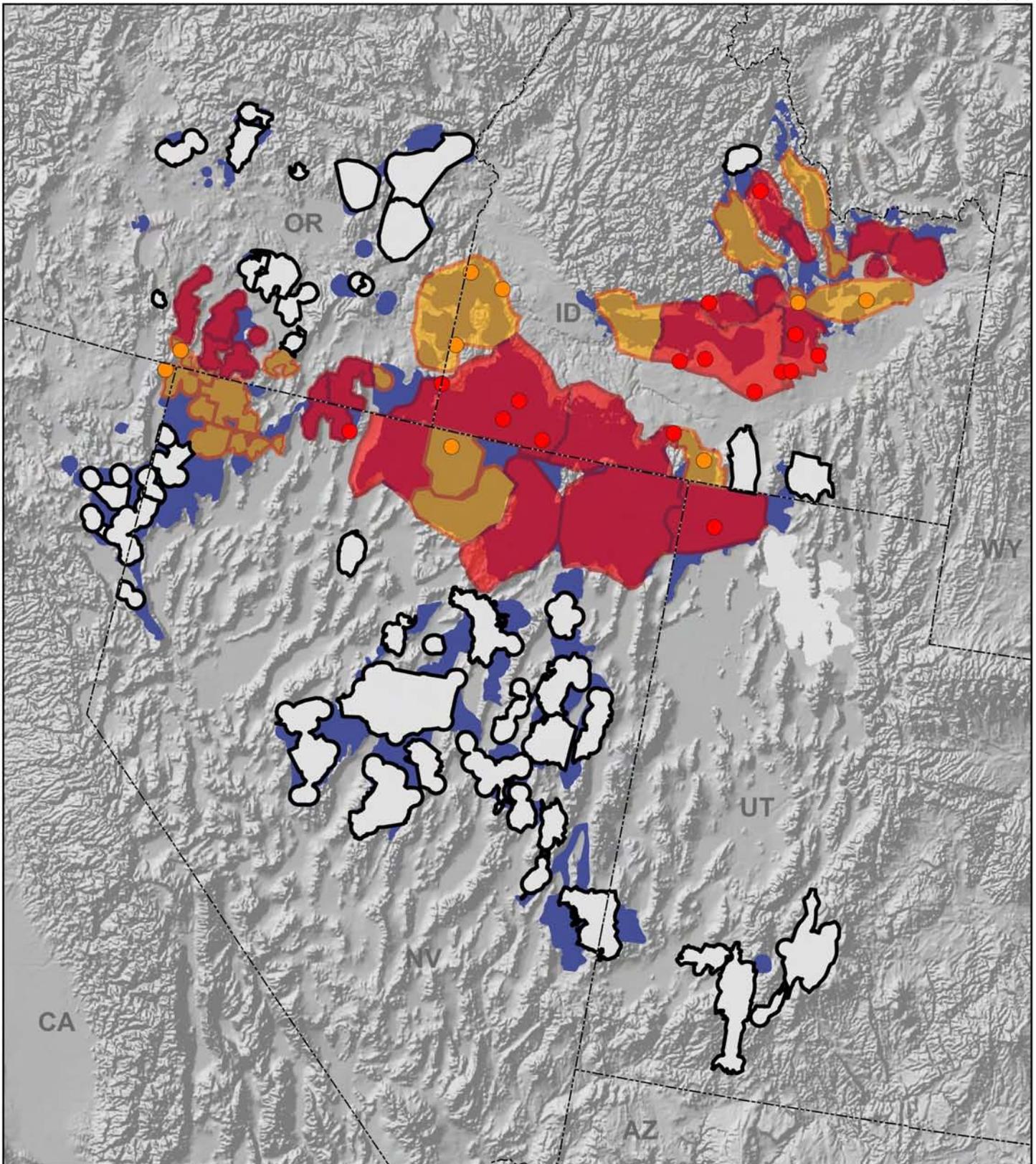


Figure 1-6: FY 2015 FIAT Priority Project Planning Areas with Focus on Invasive Annual Grasses and Conifer Expansion Assessment

Legend

- Priority 1 Potential FY15 Projects
- Priority 2 Potential FY15 Projects
- 👤 FIAT Assessment Areas
- PPA Priority 1
- PPA Priority 2
- PPA Other
- State Boundary

September 2015



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed.

The plans also include decisions to restore degraded habitat, which, although more difficult and requiring a longer time frame, is important to the long-term conservation of GRSG. Restoration decisions include specific habitat objectives and a priority to treat GRSG habitat for invasive species, particularly cheatgrass, and encroaching pinyon and juniper. These decisions are reinforced by Secretarial Order 3336 and the *Integrated Rangeland Fire Management Strategy* (US Department of the Interior 2015) as well as the NRCS's Sage Grouse Initiative investments in private landowners' conservation efforts.

The GRSG Conservation Strategy reflects a high level of commitment by Federal partners to conserve GRSG and its habitat. The actions on BLM and Forest Service lands, which constitute nearly half of the GRSG habitat in the planning area, will anchor and complement the significant actions being taken by State and local governments and private landowners to conserve the species and its habitat.

The landscape-level strategy consisting of new conservation actions that will go into effect through the BLM ARMPAs, as well as actions being implemented currently to conserve the species, reflect a significant change in management direction and philosophy for the BLM since 2010 and a long-term commitment to assure the conservation of the species by protecting, restoring, and enhancing GRSG habitat consistent with the objectives set in the 2006 WAFWA conservation strategy and embraced by both the NTT and the COT.

This change represents a new paradigm in managing the sagebrush landscape for the BLM and amplifies the need for collaboration among Federal, State, tribal, and private partners to conserve the GRSG, consistent with direction articulated in the NTT report, as follows:

Land uses, habitat treatments, and anthropogenic disturbances will need to be managed below thresholds necessary to conserve not only local sage-grouse populations, but sagebrush communities and landscapes as well. Management priorities will need to be shifted and balanced to maximize benefits to GRSG habitats and populations in priority habitats. Adequacy of management adjustments will be measured by science-based effectiveness monitoring of the biological response of sagebrush landscapes and populations. Ultimately, success will be measured by the maintenance and enhancement of sage-grouse populations well into the future. (NTT 2011, p. 6-7)

The benefits of conserving the sagebrush ecosystem and GRSG habitats resulting from the BLM ARMPAs and ARMPAs provide an essential foundation for conserving the GRSG. This, in conjunction with the amended Forest Service Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs), affects approximately 59 percent of the most important GRSG habitat across the remaining range of the species. In conjunction with similar conservation efforts by other Federal and State agencies, private landowners, and local partners, the BLM National GRSG Conservation Strategy constitutes a historic conservation effort; it will benefit more than 350 species and the sagebrush ecosystem on which they depend. It is through these landscape-level, science-based, collaborative efforts to conserve the imperiled sagebrush ecosystem that conservation of the GRSG and other sagebrush obligate species can best be achieved and the listing of the GRSG under the ESA may be avoided.

1.9 IMPLEMENTATION

Future decisions made in conformance with the ARMPAs serve to continuously and actively implement its provisions.

Immediate Decisions—These decisions are the land use planning decisions that go into effect when the ROD is signed. These include goals, objectives, allowable uses, and management direction, such as the allocation of lands as open or closed for salable mineral sales, lands open with stipulations for oil and gas leasing, and OHV area designations. These decisions require no additional analysis and guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions in the Planning Area. Proposals for future actions, such as oil and gas leasing, land adjustments, and other allocation-based actions, will be reviewed against these RMP decisions to determine if the proposal is in conformance with the plan.

One-Time Future Decisions—These are the types of decisions that are not implemented until additional decision-making and site-specific analysis is completed. Examples are implementation of the recommendations to withdraw lands from locatable mineral entry or development of travel management plans. Future one-time decisions require additional analysis and decision-making and are prioritized as part of the BLM budget process. Priorities for implementing one-time RMP decisions will be based on the following criteria:

- Relative importance of the action to the efficacy of the GRSG conservation strategy
- National BLM management direction regarding plan implementation
- Available resources

General Implementation Schedule of One-Time Decisions—Future Decisions discussed in the attached ARMPAs will be implemented over a period of years, depending on budget and staff availability. After issuing the ROD, the BLM will prepare implementation plans that establish tentative time frames for completing one-time decisions identified in these ARMPAs. These actions require additional site-specific decision-making and analysis.

This schedule will assist BLM managers and staff in preparing budget requests and in scheduling work. However, the proposed schedule must be considered tentative and will be affected by future funding, nondiscretionary workloads, and cooperation by partners and the public. Yearly review of the plan will provide consistent tracking of accomplishments and will provide information that can be used to develop annual budget requests to continue implementation.

1.9.1 Additional Implementation Guidance and Considerations

Instructional Memoranda—Additional instruction and management direction will be necessary to implement certain land allocation decisions and management direction included in the ARMPAs. For example, additional guidance will be provided to clarify how the BLM will implement the objective of prioritizing future oil and gas leasing and development outside of GRSG habitat. IMs and related guidance will be completed by the BLM Washington Office. The BLM shall complete IMs for the following management direction and intends to complete these IMs within 90 days of the RODs: oil and gas leasing and development prioritization and livestock grazing. Other IMs, including monitoring and mitigation, will be developed as necessary. Issuance of this national guidance will supersede any related national and field level guidance currently in effect. Additional national, state, and field level guidance will be developed subsequently as necessary to implement the decisions in the plans.

Map Adjustments, GRSG Seasonal Habitats, and Connectivity—PHMAs were designed to include breeding bird density, GRSG proportionality, density of leks, and key seasonal habitats, such as known winter

concentration areas. GHMAs were designed to include the areas of occupied seasonal, connectivity, or year-round habitat outside of PHMAs. As additional important habitats are identified (e.g., winter habitat and key connectivity areas), the BLM will map and incorporate these habitats for GRSG, consistent with best available science, through subsequent plan maintenance, revision, or amendment, as appropriate. Priority should be given to ensuring that wintering habitat is identified and captured in all changes in habitat maps subsequent to this decision. In the interim, the BLM will use the existing maps included in the ARMPAs for all decisions.

Continued Commitment to Research and Use of Best Available Science—Through implementation of this strategy, new management issues and questions are likely to arise that may warrant additional guidance or study by technical experts, scientists, and researchers. The BLM is committed to continue working with individuals and institutions with expertise in relevant fields in order to ensure that land and resource management affecting conservation of the GRSG and the sagebrush ecosystem continues to be guided by sound peer-reviewed research and the best available science.

Training—Given the nature and complexity of the management direction in these ARMPAs, the BLM, in collaboration with the Forest Service and the FWVS, will develop and implement a schedule of training for key functions, actions, and decisions associated with these plans. In this manner, the BLM will seek to better inform its personnel, partners, cooperators, and stakeholders of the changes in management that will result from this new management paradigm.

CHAPTER 2

DECISION

2.1 SUMMARY OF THE APPROVED MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

The decision is hereby made to approve the Great Basin Region GRSG RMPAs for the Great Basin Region GRSG Sub-Regions of Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah (attachments 1 through 4). This ROD serves as the final decision establishing the resource management plan amendment decisions outlined in the ARMPAs and is effective on the date it is signed.

The decisions included in this ROD and attached ARMPAs amend the resource management plans described in Sections 1.1 of attachments 1 through 4.

The RMP decisions include management direction to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG and their habitat by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing threats to their habitat. RMP decisions are expressed as goals, objectives (desired outcomes), allowable uses, and management decisions anticipated to achieve desired outcomes. Although decisions identified in the ARMPAs are final and effective when this ROD is signed, implementing on-the-ground activities requires additional steps before any of them can begin. The BLM will conduct NEPA analyses, as necessary, for such implementation decisions.

2.2 WHAT THE ROD AND ARMPAs PROVIDE

The ARMPAs include RMP-level management decisions in the form of the following:

- Goals
- Objectives (desired future conditions)
- Land use allocations
- Management decisions and actions

Goals are the broad statements of desired outcomes and are usually not quantifiable.

Objectives are specific desired conditions, usually quantifiable and measurable, and may have time frames for achievement.

Land use allocations specify locations in the Planning Area that are available or unavailable for certain uses and are also used to prioritize conservation and restoration management actions. Examples are decisions on the following:

- What lands are available for livestock grazing, mineral material use, oil and gas leasing, and locatable mineral development
- What lands may be available for disposal via exchange or sale
- What lands are open, closed, or limited to motorized travel

Note that all acreages presented in the ARMPAs are estimations, even when they are presented to the nearest acre.

Management decisions and actions are those provisions that help in meeting the established goals and objectives. They are the measures that will be applied to guide day-to-day activities on public lands, including but not limited to, stipulations, guidelines, BMPs, and RDFs.

The management decisions and actions contained in the ARMPAs (attachments 1 through 4) were crafted to incorporate management decisions into RMPs to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing identified threats to GRSG and their habitats.

The EISs conducted for the Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, and Utah ARMPAs sufficiently disclose and analyze all environmental issues associated with mineral leasing on National Forest System lands. The analyses would be relevant should the Forest Service consent to a lease or require consultation before it issues a lease. This would comply with applicable mineral leasing and NEPA regulations and would be subject to further site-specific environmental analysis where applicable.

2.3 WHAT THE ROD AND ARMPAS DO NOT PROVIDE

The attached ARMPAs do not contain decisions for public lands outside of GRSG habitat management areas, except for land use plan-level travel management decisions in the Idaho and Southwestern Montana ARMPA.

The ARMPAs do not violate valid existing rights nor contain decisions for the mineral estates that are not administered by the BLM. ARMPA decisions for surface estate only apply to BLM-administered lands. In addition, many decisions are not appropriate at this level of planning and are not included in the ROD. Examples of these types of decisions are the following:

- *Statutory requirements*—The decision will not change the BLM’s responsibility to comply with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.
- *National policy*—The decision will not change the BLM’s obligation to conform to current or future national policy.
- *Funding levels and budget allocations*—These are determined annually at the national level and are beyond the control of the State, District, or Field Offices.

Implementation decisions (or activity-level decisions) are management actions tied to a specific location. They generally constitute the BLM's final approval allowing on-the-ground actions to proceed and require appropriate site-specific planning and NEPA analysis. Such decisions may be incorporated into implementation plans (activity or project plans) or may be stand-alone decisions. These ARMPAs do not contain implementation decisions. Implementation decisions and management actions that require additional site-specific project planning, as funding becomes available, will require further environmental analysis.

2.4 MODIFICATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

The ARMPAs in the Great Basin Region include minor modifications and clarifications from the Proposed RMPAs. These minor modifications and clarifications were made as a result of internal reviews, response to protests, and recommendations provided to the BLM during the Governors' consistency reviews. These modifications and clarifications are hereby adopted by this ROD.

The following modifications and clarifications were made to all of the ARMPAs in the Great Basin Region:

- *ARMPA Formatting*—The plans were reformatted between the proposed and approved RMPA planning stages for consistency across the Great Basin Region. The order of management actions and the prefixes for the goals, objectives, and management actions were changed in the ARMPAs to provide consistency among the amendments and revisions for GRSG goals and objectives.
- *Forest Service References (applicable only to the Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, and Utah ARMPAs)*—All references to National Forest System lands in both text and on maps have been removed from the ARMPAs. The Forest Service has completed two separate RODs and land and resource management plan amendments under its planning authorities.
- *Fire*—Management actions and decisions were modified to stress that protecting human life is the single overriding priority for fire and fuels management activities.
- *Livestock Grazing*—The statement, “This does not apply to or impact grazing preference transfers, which are addressed in 43 CFR 4110.2-3,” was added to the management action and decision. It reads, “At the time a permittee or lessee voluntarily relinquishes a permit or lease, the BLM will consider whether the public lands where that permitted use was authorized should remain available for livestock grazing or be used for other resource management objectives, such as reserve common allotments or fire breaks.”
- *Glossary*—Numerous glossary definitions were deleted because they were not used or referenced in the ARMPAs. If not already contained in the Proposed RMPA glossaries, the following terms and definitions were added for clarification:
 - **Grazing Relinquishment.** The voluntary and permanent surrender by an existing permittee or lessee, (with concurrence of any base property lienholder), of their priority (preference) to use a livestock forage allocation on public land as well as their permission to use this forage. Relinquishments do not require the BLM's consent or approval. The BLM's receipt of a relinquishment is not a decision to close areas to livestock grazing.

- **Transfer of Grazing Preference.** The BLM’s approval of an application to transfer grazing preference from one party to another or from one base property to another or both. Grazing preference means a superior or priority position against others for the purposes of receiving a grazing permit or lease. This priority is attached to base property owned or controlled by the permittee or lessee.
 - **Valid Existing Right.** Documented legal rights or interests in the land that allow a person or entity to use said land for a specific purpose and that are still in effect. Such rights include, but are not limited to, fee title ownership, mineral rights, ROWs, easements, permits, and licenses. Such rights may have been reserved, acquired, leased, granted, permitted, or otherwise authorized over time.
 - **Mining Claim.** A parcel of land that a miner takes and holds for mining purposes, having acquired the right of possession by complying with the 1872 Mining Law and local laws and rules. A mining claim may contain as many adjoining locations as the locator may make or buy. There are four categories of mining claims: lode, placer, mill site, and tunnel site.
 - **Energy or Mining Facility.** Human-constructed assets designed and created to serve a particular function and to afford a particular convenience or service that is affixed to a specific locations, such as oil and gas well pads and associated infrastructure.
- *GRSG Habitat Mapping*—Information was added to the ARMPAs to clarify that when new information becomes available about GRSG habitat, including seasonal habitats, in coordination with the State wildlife agency and FWWS, and based on best available scientific information, the BLM may revise the GRSG habitat management area maps and associated management decisions through plan maintenance or plan amendment or revision, as appropriate.
 - *Adaptive Management*—The GRSG Adaptive Management Strategy was revised to include a commitment that the hard and soft trigger data will be evaluated as soon as it becomes available after the ROD is signed and then will be analyzed, at a minimum, annually thereafter.
 - *Vegetation*—The desired condition for maintaining a minimum of 70 percent of lands capable of producing sagebrush with 10 to 30 percent sagebrush canopy cover in SFAs and PHMAs was modified to read as follows: “In all Sagebrush Focal Areas and Priority Habitat Management Areas, the desired condition is to maintain all lands ecologically capable of producing sagebrush (but no less than 70 percent) with a minimum of 15 percent sagebrush canopy cover, consistent with specific ecological site conditions. The attributes necessary to sustain these habitats are described in *Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health*” (BLM Technical Reference 1734-6; Pellant 2005).
 - *GRSG Habitat Objectives*—For clarification purposes, within each of the ARMPA GRSG habitat objectives tables, native bunchgrass was provided as an example of a perennial grass cover and residual grass was added to the perennial grass cover and height objective.
 - *Sagebrush Focal Areas*—Examples of the types of vegetation and conservation actions that will be prioritized within SFAs were provided for clarity in the management action and

decision. These examples were land health assessments and WHB management and habitat restoration actions.

- *Required Design Features*—One of the criteria for demonstrating that a variation to an RDF is warranted was modified to include the following statement: “An alternative RDF, a state-implemented conservation measure, or a plan-level protection is determined to provide equal or better protection for GRSG or its habitat.”
- *Lands and Realty*—The following management actions and decisions and objectives were clarified:
 - Effects of infrastructure projects, including siting, will be minimized using the best available science, updated as monitoring information on current infrastructure projects becomes available.
 - Within existing designated utility corridors, the 3 percent disturbance cap may be exceeded at the project scale if the site-specific NEPA analysis indicates that a net conservation gain to the species would be achieved. This exception is limited to projects that fulfill the use for which the corridors were designated (e.g., transmission lines and pipelines) and the designated width of a corridor would not be exceeded as a result of any project collocation.
- *Land Tenure*—Management action associated with land disposals was clarified to include land exchanges as a means of disposal.
- *WAFWA GRSG Conservation Team*—Additional clarification was added to ARMPAs related to the WAFWA GRSG Conservation Teams that were identified in the Proposed RMPAs: “WAFWA management zones will be used to facilitate cross-state issues, such as regional mitigation and adaptive management monitoring and response, through WAFWA GRSG Conservation Teams. These teams will convene and respond to issues at the appropriate scale and will use existing coordination and management structures to the extent possible.”
- *Cheatgrass*—The following management action was included consistent with the purpose and need and objectives of the ARMPAs: “Treat areas that contain cheatgrass and other invasive or noxious species to minimize competition and favor establishment of desired species.”
- *Valid Existing Rights*—The following management action was added to the ARMPAs: “Consider the likelihood of developing not-yet-constructed surface-disturbing activities, as defined in Table 2 of the Monitoring Framework, under valid existing rights before authorizing new projects in PHMPAs.”

Additional modifications and clarifications specific to each sub-region ARMPA are summarized below.

2.4.1 Idaho and Southwestern Montana

General Changes

- All exception language that was in the Final EIS in various places was grouped into a stipulation appendix and added to the ARMPA as Appendix G Stipulations.
- Appendix G, Anthropogenic Disturbance and Adaptive Management from the Proposed RMPA, which is now Appendix E in the ARMPA, was modified to delete the reference to

Tables 2 to 7. These tables were deleted from the Final EIS Appendix G before it was made available to the public for protest, but the reference was not deleted in the appendix text. This discrepancy was identified during protest resolution and the Governor's consistency review. These values will be calculated after the ROD is signed (see Adaptive Management below).

- Many editorial changes, including deleting repeated numbers and correcting spelling errors, were made when finalizing the ARMPA.
- On August 7, 2015, President Obama signed into law the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Act (House Resolution 1138). In accordance with the Wilderness Act (16 USC, Section 1131 et seq.), certain Federal lands in the Challis National Forest and Challis District of the BLM in Idaho, comprising approximately 116,898 acres, were designated as Wilderness, as a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System, known as the Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness.

This bill also released the Jerry Peak West, Corral-Horse Basin, and Boulder Creek Wilderness Study Areas, and they are no longer subject to Section 603(c) of the FLPMA.

Finally the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and Jerry Peak Wilderness Act also directed the BLM to convey certain public lands to Blaine and Custer Counties and the Cities of Challis, Clayton, and Stanley. These conveyances include approximately 53 acres of PHMAs, 10 acres of IHMAs, and 828 acres of GHMAs that are reflected in the ARMPA as being administered by the BLM. Once conveyed, the BLM will adjust the maps and acres as they appear in the ARMPA through plan maintenance to depict that these lands are not subject to the BLM management decisions outlined in the Idaho and Southwestern Montana GRSG ARMPA.

Special Status Species

- The Seasonal Timing Restrictions from Appendix C of the Final EIS were deleted to reduce redundancy because these restrictions were already in the RDFs appendix.

Livestock Grazing

- Livestock Grazing RM 16 and RM 18, which are now MD LG 15 and MD LG 17 in the ARMPA, had the following sentence added as an accepted recommendation made during the Governor's consistency review to clarify management and conservation action prioritization in SFAs: "Management and conservation action prioritization will occur at the Conservation Area (California) scale and be based on GRSG population and habitat trends: Focusing management and conservation actions first in SFAs followed by areas of PHMAs outside SFAs."

Lands and Realty

- Lands and Realty LR-14 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MD LR 13 in the ARMPA, was modified to remove the statement that lands in PHMAs, IHMAs, and GHMAs would be available for disposal only through exchange. This was removed because it was not consistent with BLM policy, and the net conservation gain clause in MD LR-13 would ensure that disposals through any method would be beneficial to GRSG.

2.4.2 Nevada and Northeastern California

General Changes

- Editorial changes, such as changing should to shall and would to will, to reflect the final decision language.
- Re-categorizing some of the management decisions into other common resource programs. For example, all of the fire and fuels management decisions are numbered under FIRE and are not split into different subcategory names.
- Re-lettering the critical appendices and deleting those that are no longer applicable to the ARMPA.

Special Status Species

- Added clarity to MD SSS 2A 3 by describing the energy and mining facilities where this decision would be applicable; taken directly from the Disturbance Appendix E.
- Added clarity to MD SSS 3A by including references to valid existing rights and applicable law for the requirement of a net conservation gain.
- Specified in MD SSS 8 that this activity would be coordinated with the Nevada Department of Wildlife or California Department Fish and Wildlife and that breeding activity surveys would be done for actions involving mineral activities and ROWs.
- Deleted Action PR 4 from the Proposed RMPA because the BLM does not manage landfills and transfer stations.
- Under the Brood-Rearing/Summer category, clarified that the objective of the 7-inch-deep, rooted perennial bunchgrass in upland habitats was only for a 522-foot (200 meter) area around riparian areas and meadows. The additional reference was added for Casazza et al. 2011.
- Footnote #7 was deleted. The original footnote stated that the “specific height requirements needed to meet the objective will be set at the time of habitat assessment framework assessments.” This is incorrect because the height requirements will need to be set well in advance of the habitat assessment framework assessments.
- A new footnote was added as footnote #1: “Any one single habitat indicator does not define whether the habitat objective is or is not met. Instead, the preponderance of evidence from all indicators within that seasonal habitat period must be considered when assessing sage-grouse habitat objectives.” This addition was for the purpose of clarification.

Adaptive Management

- Clarified under MD SSS 21 that the BLM will coordinate with the Nevada Department of Wildlife and that the decision was specific to mineral activities and ROW actions.

Fire and Fuels Management

- Deleted “Field Offices” and “Districts” from MD FIRE 3, as there will be a multilayered approach to coordination, including BLM State Offices.

- In Objective FIRE 3, added “in SFAs first” to provide more emphasis to the SFAs over the rest of the PHMAs for this action.
- Modified MD FIRE 26 to delete “Districts,” as there will be a multilayered approach to identifying treatment needs for wildfire and invasive species management across the State.
- Added “FWS” as a coordination entity to MD FIRE 31, when ensuring that proposed sagebrush treatments are coordinated with the BLM and State fish and wildlife agencies.

Livestock Grazing

- Management Decision LG 1 was modified for clarity and to include the fact that the BLM would conduct appropriate consultation, cooperation, and coordination.
- Management Decision LG 5 was modified to add supplementary management actions and clarifies that the potential modifications include “but are not limited to” to actions on the list.
- Management Decision LG 5 was modified to make it clear that the management strategies listed are not limited to just those listed under LG 5 by adding “but are not limited to.” This was added to clarify a misunderstanding in a protest letter.
- Management Decision LG 7 was clarified to state that “AUMs cannot be applied to another pasture that is already being used by livestock or is being purposefully rested.”
- Management Decision LG 15 was modified to state that removing or modifying water developments must be done “In accordance with state water law and...”

Mineral Resources

- Management Decision MR 18 was modified to provide the Barrick Enabling Agreement (March 2015) as an example of appropriate mitigation that can be considered in the future, and the last sentence was removed because it only repeated BLM regulations and is unnecessary.

Lands and Realty

- In order to resolve a protest, MD LR 3 was modified to state that corridors will be 3,500 feet wide “or a different width is specified for congressional designated corridors.” This is in response to the Lincoln County Conservation Recreation Development Act of 2004, which included congressionally designated corridors that were not included in the plan amendment or the corridor map. The corridor map (Figure 2-10) was also modified to reflect the corridors tied to this statute.
- Action LR-LUA 21 from the Proposed Plan was deleted because the Federal Highway Administration and the Nevada Department of Transportation already have valid existing rights associated with their easements and ROWs, and this planning effort would not change the terms and conditions of their existing easements or ROWs. Making this a management action is repetitive and unnecessary.

Travel and Transportation

- Due to confusion that was outlined in protest letters and in the Governor’s consistency review, MD TTM 2 was clarified to say that limiting off-highway travel to existing routes in

PHMAs and GHMAs would be “subject to valid existing rights, such as for a mine under a plan of operations.”

- Additional language was added to MD TTM 3 to make it clear that the bulleted “guidelines will be considered when undertaking future implementation-level travel planning.” This was in response to protest misunderstandings. In addition, bullet three was amended by deleting “developed in this plan amendment,” as the criteria is not developed through the plan amendment.

Mitigation

- In order to provide consistency across the Great Basin Regional Planning Area, the two mitigation management decisions were removed from the Adaptive Management, Monitoring, and Mitigation section of Chapter 2 in the Proposed RMPA (these are now separate appendices) and inserted as management decisions independently under the Mitigation section.

2.4.3 Oregon

Lands and Realty

- A typographical error in the socioeconomic analysis of the Proposed RMPA was identified during the protest period. Correction to this error in Section 4.20.3, page 4-345, is as follows: Paragraph beginning “Restrictions to ROW development under Alternatives B, C, D, E, F, and the Proposed Plan...” is replaced with the following:

Proposed management under Alternatives B, C, D, E, F, and the Proposed Plan could require investors to consider alternative power line ROW alignments or designs that could increase the costs of constructing new infrastructure. A 2012 WECC study, for example, provides information on transmission line construction costs per mile, which range from \$927,000 to \$2,967,000 depending on voltage and whether lines are single or double circuit lines. The same study provides cost multipliers for difficult terrains, reaching up to 2.25 in the case of forested lands (WECC 2012). Utilities and other infrastructure investors typically pass these costs on to consumers. Where the rate base is smaller, such as in rural areas, per-customer rate impacts associated with constructing a 10-mile, 230kV transmission line, for example, would be greater compared to the economic impacts on rate payers served by a larger metropolitan utility proposing the same line. Under Alternatives B, C, D, E, and the Proposed Plan, rate payers serviced by local utility providers with small rate bases would be impacted more by costs associated with added route lengths or infrastructure design requirements compared with rate payers serviced by larger, multi-State providers. Where technically and financially feasible, Alternatives B, D, and the Proposed Plan identify burial of power lines as a design option to mitigate impacts on GRSG. New construction costs of underground transmission lines can be between 4 and 14 times higher compared to new overhead construction (PSC 2011), depending on terrain. In rural areas, burial of new distribution lines would be more than double the cost of new

overhead construction. Burying existing distribution lines would likely cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000 per mile in rural areas (EIA 2012). Under all alternatives, where burying new lines would be technically unfeasible or result in costs that could not be absorbed by the rate payers, infrastructure investors would explore other route or design options that avoid impacts to GRSG habitat.

Renewable Energy

- Managed Decision RE-2 was modified to include the statement, “In Harney, Lake, and Malheur Counties, priority would be placed on locating commercial scale wind and solar energy development in non-habitat areas first (i.e., outside of PHMAs and GHMAs) before approving development in PHMAs.”

Special Status Species (Greater Sage-Grouse)

- Objective SSS 6 was modified to clarify that the BLM will coordinate with the State of Oregon regarding proposed management changes, the implementation of conservation measures, mitigation, and site-specific monitoring related to adaptive management and human disturbances. This modification was recommended during the Governor’s consistency review.

Leasable Mineral Resources

- Based on internal review, MLS 7 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MD MR 7 in the ARMPA, was modified to include all fluid mineral lease development, including geothermal permits to drill.

2.4.4 Utah

General Changes

- Throughout the Proposed RMPA, the words “would,” “could,” “should,” and “may” were generally removed or revised to reflect the *active* management direction of an ARMPA rather than *potential* management presented when the Proposed RMPA was one of many alternatives that the agency could select.
- Language was added to Objective SSS-3 (Objective GRSG-3 in the Proposed RMPA), MA-SSS-4 (MA-GRSG-4 in the Proposed RMP Amendment), MA-SSS-6 (MA-GRSG-6 in the Proposed RMPA), Objective VEG-I, MA-VEG-I, MA-FIRE-3 and MA-FIRE-4 to clarify that landscapes that include populations of both GRSG and Utah prairie dog, a Federally listed species, be managed for the benefit of both species. This addition is included to ensure that this objective is included in all applicable objectives and management actions, not just the five actions in the Proposed RMPA where this concept and language was already present.
- Throughout the Proposed RMPA there were a number of references to coordinating with the State of Utah, Division of Wildlife Resources, or State biologists. These were all revised to note that such coordination would be with “the appropriate State of Utah agency.” This clarification was made at the request of the Governor during his consistency review.
- The Proposed RMPA introduced the term biologically significant unit (BSU) for adaptive management and the disturbance cap to provide a consistent approach for managing and

monitoring across the GRSG range. In the Utah Sub-Region, the boundaries of the BSUs follow the population area boundaries within PHMAs. As part of resolving protests, the ARMPA was revised to note that BSUs are PHMAs within population areas. Whenever the term BSU was used, it was replaced with the more descriptive text, with a parenthetical reference to BSUs for the purposes of coordinating across State lines.

Special Status Species (formerly Greater Sage-Grouse)

- Objective GRSG-1 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now Objective SSS-1 in the ARMPA, was changed to remove reference to WAFWA MZs when addressing designation of PHMAs. This change was made during the Governor’s consistency review to more closely reflect the management in the State of Utah’s Conservation Plan for GRSG in Utah (2013).
- MA-GRSG-1 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MA-SSS-1 in the ARMPA was revised to include the following text: “The BLM will apply these goals, objectives, and management actions where the agency has discretion to implement them; the actions do not apply in areas where the BLM does not administer the surface or mineral estate.” This is consistent with the planning criteria contained in the sixth bullet on page I-20 of the Final EIS. This language was added based on an accepted recommendation made by the Governor during the Governor’s consistency review.
- The language of MA-GRSG-1 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MA-SSS-1 in the ARMPA, regarding nonhabitat areas within PHMAs and GHMAs was revised to clarify the intent of the action. This revision was made as a result of internal reviews to ensure the text more accurately reflected the intent behind the management action.
- The introductory language of MA-GRSG-3 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MA-SSS-3 in the ARMPA, was revised to clarify the intent of the action. This revision was made as a result of internal reviews to ensure the text accurately reflects the intent behind the management action and to focus on land uses that have been identified as threats to GRSG.
- The language of MA-GRSG-3e from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MA-SSS-3e in the ARMPA, was revised to clarify the intent of the noise restrictions. This revision was made as a result of internal reviews to ensure the text accurately reflects the intent behind the management action to focus on land uses that have been identified as threats to GRSG. Further, language was added to identify when “ambient” noise levels would be assessed to avoid managing for continual incremental increases in noise levels.
- The language of MA-GRSG-6 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MA-SSS-6 in the ARMPA, was revised to clarify the intent of GRSG management outside PHMAs/GHMAs. This revision was made as a result of internal reviews to ensure the text accurately reflects the intent behind the management action. The purpose of this action is to provide direction for managing areas outside PHMAs and GHMAs that have been treated to improve GRSG habitat. The change was necessary to avoid the implication of changing allocations or altering PHMA and GHMA boundaries outside a planning process, while minimizing conflicting land uses in areas where an investment in increasing GRSG habitat have been made.

Livestock Grazing

- The language of MA-GRA-6 from the Proposed RMPA, which is now MA-LG-6 in the ARMPA, was revised. The concepts and intent did not change, but the text was revised to

align with similar concepts and intent in the livestock grazing sections in GRSG amendments throughout the Great Basin.

2.5 PROTEST RESOLUTION

The BLM's planning regulations at 43 CFR 1610.5-2 allow any person who participated in the planning process and has an interest that may be adversely affected by the BLM's planning decisions to protest proposed planning decisions within 30 days of when the notice of availability of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* (May 29, 2015).

The BLM Director concluded that the BLM had followed all applicable laws, regulations, and policies and had considered all relevant resource information and public input in developing the Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs. Each protesting party has been notified in writing of the Director's findings and the disposition of their protests. The Director resolved the protests without making significant changes to the Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs, though minor clarifications were made and are summarized in **Section 2.4**. The Director's decisions on the protests are summarized in each of the Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs Director's Protest Resolution Reports, which are available on the following BLM website: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/planning_overview/protest_resolution/protestreports.html.

Below are descriptions of the protest resolution process for each of the four Great Basin Region Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs.

2.5.1 Idaho and Southwestern Montana

For the Idaho and Southwestern Montana GRSG Proposed RMPA/Final EIS, the BLM Director received 20 timely protest submissions. All of the protesting parties had standing; however, one submission was dismissed as it did not contain any valid protest points, pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.5-2. Valid protest issues addressed in the Director's Protest Resolution Report are as follows:

- Compliance with FLPMA
- Compliance with NEPA
- Compliance with ESA
- Density and disturbance
- Adaptive management
- GRSG habitat objectives
- Livestock grazing
- Mitigation
- Compliance with the Administrative Procedure Act
- Compliance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005
- Areas of critical environmental concern
- Fire and fuels management
- Fluid minerals
- Solid minerals

- Special status species
- Lands and realty
- Travel and transportation management

2.5.2 Nevada and Northeastern California

For the Nevada and Northeastern California GRSG Proposed RMPA/Final EIS, the BLM Director received 40 timely protest submissions. All of the protesting parties had standing; however, two submissions were dismissed as they did not contain any valid protest points, pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.5-2. Valid protest issues addressed in the Director's Protest Resolution Report are as follows:

- Compliance with FLPMA
- Compliance with NEPA
- Compliance with ESA
- Density and disturbance
- Adaptive management
- GRSG habitat objectives
- Livestock grazing
- Mitigation
- Compliance with the Administrative Procedure Act
- Compliance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005
- Air quality
- Climate change
- Noise
- Areas of critical environmental concern
- Solid minerals
- Special status species
- Lands with wilderness characteristics
- Lands and realty
- Tribal issues
- WHBs
- Travel and transportation management

2.5.3 Oregon

For the Oregon GRSG Proposed RMPA/Final EIS, the BLM Director received 30 timely protest submissions. All of the protesting parties had standing; however, three submissions were dismissed as

they did not contain any valid protest points, pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.5-2. Valid protest issues addressed in the Director's Protest Resolution Report are as follows:

- Compliance with FLPMA
- Compliance with NEPA
- Compliance with ESA
- Density and disturbance
- Monitoring
- Areas of critical environmental concern
- Fire and fuels management
- Solid minerals
- Special status species
- Travel and transportation management

2.5.4 Utah

For the Utah GRSG Proposed RMPA/Final EIS, the BLM Director received 43 timely protest submissions. All of the protesting parties had standing; however, three submissions were dismissed as they did not contain any valid protest points, pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.5-2. Valid protest issues addressed in the Director's Protest Resolution Report are as follows:

- Compliance with FLPMA
- Compliance with NEPA
- Compliance with ESA
- Density and disturbance
- Adaptive management
- Land use allocations
- GRSG habitat objectives
- Livestock grazing
- Mitigation
- Compliance with the Administrative Procedure Act
- Compliance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005
- Air quality
- Climate change
- Noise
- Areas of critical environmental concern
- Fire and fuels management

- Fluid minerals
- Solid minerals
- Special status species
- Lands and realty
- Travel and transportation management
- Reasonable foreseeable development scenarios

2.6 GOVERNOR'S CONSISTENCY REVIEW

The BLM's planning regulations require that RMPs be "consistent with officially approved or adopted resource-related plans, and the policies and procedures contained therein, of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes, so long as the guidance and resource management plans also are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of Federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands" (43 CFR 1610.3-2(a)).

The general requirement in FLPMA and planning regulations is to coordinate the resource management planning process with plans of other agencies, States, and local governments to the extent consistent with law (see FLPMA Section 202(c)(9) and 43 CFR 1610.3-1(a)) and the respective duties to be consistent with both officially approved or adopted plans (to the extent those plans are consistent with Federal law or to the maximum extent practical; see 43 CFR 1610.3-2(a)(b)). In accordance with FLPMA, the BLM was aware of and gave consideration to State, local, and tribal land use plans and provided meaningful public involvement throughout the development of the Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs.

The BLM is aware that there are specific State laws and local plans relevant to aspects of public land management that are separate and independent of Federal law. However, the BLM is bound by Federal law; as a consequence, there may be inconsistencies that cannot be reconciled. The FLPMA and its implementing regulations require that the BLM's RMPs be consistent with officially approved State and local plans only if those plans are consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of Federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands.

Where officially approved State and local plans or policies and programs conflict with the purposes, policies, and programs of Federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands, there will be an inconsistency that cannot be resolved. With respect to officially approved State and local policies and programs (as opposed to plans), this consistency provision applies only to the maximum extent practical. While county and Federal planning processes, under FLPMA, are required to be as integrated and consistent as practical, the Federal agency planning process is not bound by or subject to State or county plans, planning processes, policies, or planning stipulations.

The 60-day Governor's consistency review period ended on July 29, 2015. In the Great Basin Region, the Governors of Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Utah submitted letters to their respective BLM State Directors, asserting inconsistencies between the BLM's Proposed RMPAs and their State's or local governments' resource-related plans, policies, and procedures, as well as other concerns that they had with the proposed planning documents.

On August 6, 2015, the BLM State Directors notified the Governors as to whether their recommendations were accepted or rejected. These Governors were then given 30 days to appeal the BLM State Director's decisions to the BLM Director. On September 8, 2015, the BLM Director received appeals from the Governors of Idaho and Nevada; on September 11, 2015, the BLM Director received an appeal from the Governor of Utah. The BLM Director reviewed these appeals and rejected the recommendations of the Governors of Idaho, Nevada, and Utah by letters dated September 16, 2015, before this ROD was issued. The BLM Director's response to these appeals will also be published in the *Federal Register* after this ROD is issued.

In some instances, modifications to the ARMPAs were addressed based on recommendations submitted to the BLM by the applicable Governors. These modifications were made and are summarized in **Section 2.4**.

CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVES

3.1 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Each of the Great Basin sub-regional planning efforts analyzed in detail a set of alternatives in the draft and final sub-regional EISs. The alternatives were developed to provide direction for resource programs. Their intent was to meet purpose and need of this effort; namely, to identify and incorporate appropriate management direction in ARMPAs to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG habitat. This would be accomplished by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing threats to GRSG habitat.

Each alternative emphasized an altered combination of resource uses, allocations, and restoration measures to address issues and resolve conflicts among uses so that GRSG goals and objectives were met in varying degrees across the alternatives. The action alternatives offered a range of possible management approaches for responding to planning issues and concerns identified through public scoping and to maintain or increase GRSG abundance and distribution in the Planning Area. While the resource management plan goal was the same across alternatives for each sub-region, each alternative contained a discrete set of objectives and management actions, constituting a separate RMPA. The goal was met to varying degrees, with the potential for different long-range outcomes and conditions.

The relative emphasis given to particular resources and resource uses differed as well, including allowable uses, restoration measures, and specific direction pertaining to individual resource programs. When resources or resource uses are mandated by law, there are typically few or no distinctions between alternatives.

3.1.1 Alternative A—No Action Alternative

Alternative A meets the CEQ requirement that a no action alternative be considered. This alternative continues current management direction derived from the existing field and district office RMPs, as amended. Goals and objectives for resources and resource uses are based on the most recent RMP decisions, along with associated amendments and other management decision documents. Laws, regulations, and BLM policies that supersede RMP decisions would apply.

Goals and objectives for BLM-administered lands and mineral estate would not change. Appropriate and allowable uses and restrictions pertaining to such activities as mineral leasing and development,

recreation, utility corridor construction, and livestock grazing would also remain the same. The BLM would not modify existing or establish additional criteria for identifying site-specific use levels for implementation activities.

This alternative was not selected for the ARMPAs because it did not meet the purpose and need of this plan amendment. Moreover, it did not include necessary changes to existing decisions based on the FWS 2010 listing decision, which identified the inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms as a significant threat to GRSG and its habitat. This alternative also did not incorporate the best available science pertaining to GRSG or its habitat.

3.1.2 Alternative B—National Technical Team Report Alternative

Alternative B was based on the conservation measures contained within the NTT Report. The GRSG NTT, comprised of BLM, Forest Service, FWS, USGS, NRCS, and State specialists, completed [A Report on National Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Measures](#) in December 2011. The charge of the NTT was to identify science-based management considerations for the GRSG (i.e., conservation measures) necessary to promote sustainable GRSG populations, and which focused on the threats (75 FR 13910) in each of the regional WAFWA MZs. The NTT Report preparers proposed conservation measures based on habitat requirements and other life history aspects of GRSG. It described the scientific basis for the conservation measures proposed within each program area. The report also provided a discussion and emphasized the importance of standardizing monitoring across the WAFWA MZs.

The BLM's Washington Office IM 2012-044 directed the sub-regional planning to analyze the conservation measures developed by the NTT, as appropriate, through the resource management planning process and NEPA.

Alternative B would exclude ROW development in PHMAs and would avoid development in GHMAs. It would close PHMAs to fluid mineral leasing, mineral material sales, and nonenergy leasable minerals and would recommend withdrawal from locatable mineral entry in all PHMAs. These management actions would reduce surface disturbance in PHMAs and would minimize disturbance in GHMAs, thereby maintaining GRSG habitat.

Management actions for wildfire would focus on suppression in PHMAs and GHMAs, while limiting certain types of fuels treatments. Vegetation management would emphasize sagebrush restoration. Collectively, vegetation and wildfire management would conserve GRSG habitat. Grazing would continue, with similar impacts under Alternative B as under Alternative A. The BMPs proposed in the NTT Report would be included as RDFs as part of Alternative B and are listed in Appendix C, Required Design Features, of each of the attached ARMPAs.

Alternative B was not selected in its entirety as the ARMPAs because most of the conservation measures in the NTT Report, as appropriate and applicable, were applied primarily to PHMAs, and few conservation measures in the report were provided for in GHMAs. As a result, this alternative did not provide adequate conservation in GHMAs.

3.1.3 Alternative C—Citizen Groups' Recommended Alternative One

Alternative C was based on an alternative recommended by citizen groups. This alternative emphasizes improving and protecting GRSG habitat and was applied to all occupied GRSG habitat (PHMAs and

GHMAs). Alternative C limited commodity development in areas of occupied GRSG habitat and closed or excluded large portions of the Planning Area to many land uses. This included all PHMAs and GHMAs as being closed to livestock grazing, recommended for withdrawal from locatable mineral entry, closed to fluid mineral leasing, closed to salable mineral and nonenergy leasable mineral development, and exclusion areas for ROWs. The Utah Draft RMPA/EIS combined this alternative with Alternative F (discussed below) and included two sub-alternatives under Alternative C for a reduction in livestock grazing and WHB management.

This alternative was not selected in its entirety as the ARMPAs because it limited the use of public land in PHMAs and GHMAs to such an extent that it did not adequately accommodate local needs, customs, and culture. Also, it included proposed actions that are not necessary for GRSG conservation. For example, this alternative closed all allotments to livestock grazing, which, based on best available science, is not required to conserve GRSG and its habitats. Alternative C was also not selected in its entirety because it does not best achieve the mix of multiple uses necessary to fully implement the mandate of FLPMA.

3.1.4 Alternative D—Draft RMP Amendments' Preferred Alternative

Alternative D was identified as the preferred alternative in the Draft EISs. This alternative balanced opportunities to use and develop the Planning Area, as well as conserving, maintaining, and enhancing GRSG and its habitat. Protective measures were applied to GRSG habitat, while allowing for human disturbances with stringent mitigation measures. This alternative represents the mix and variety of management actions, based on the BLM's analysis and judgment, which best resolve the resource issues and management concerns while meeting laws, regulations, and policies pertaining to BLM management. As a result of public scoping comments, internal review, and cooperating agency coordination on the Draft RMPAs/EISs, this alternative was modified to become the Proposed RMPAs and was analyzed in the Final EISs. The preferred alternatives, with slight variations, became the proposed plans in the Final EISs.

In PHMAs under Alternative D, disturbance in GRSG habitat would be limited by excluding wind and solar energy development (except for certain counties in Southeastern Oregon, where avoidance is applied), avoiding most ROW development (subject to certain conditions), applying NSO stipulations to fluid mineral development, and closing PHMAs to nonenergy leasable mineral development and mineral material sales. These management actions would protect GRSG habitat, while allowing other activities, subject to conditions. In GHMAs under Alternative D, allocations are less stringent but still aim to protect GRSG habitat (for example, applying moderate constraints and stipulations to fluid minerals in GHMAs).

Under Alternative D, the BLM management would support sagebrush/perennial grass ecosystem restoration, would increase fire suppression in PHMAs and GHMAs, and would manage livestock grazing to maintain or enhance sagebrush and perennial grass ecosystems.

3.1.5 Alternative E: State/Governor's Alternative

Alternative E is the alternative based on information provided by the State or Governor's offices for inclusion and analysis in the EISs. In many instances, the BLM had to adjust what was provided by the States and Governors to fit such requirements as BLM language and decision-making constructs. This alternative incorporates guidance from specific State conservation strategies, if developed, or

recommendations from the State for managing Federal lands. It emphasizes managing GRSG seasonal habitats and maintaining habitat connectivity to support population objectives. Alternative E was identified as a co-Preferred Alternative in the Idaho and Southwestern Montana Draft EIS. California did not provide the BLM with a State GRSG conservation plan and, under this alternative, reverted back to Alternative A, the No Action alternative.

For Nevada, Alternative E would apply an “avoid, minimize, and mitigate” strategy to reduce direct and indirect impacts on GRSG from surface-disturbing activities on BLM-administered lands. The effects on GRSG habitat from certain resource programs, such as grazing, lands and realty, wildfire management, and minerals, would not be directly addressed. This is because the State’s plan does not contain land use plan-level allocation decisions, such as ROW exclusion and avoidance areas; it relies largely on the avoid, minimize, and mitigate strategy at the project level.

The FWS March 2010 “warranted, but precluded” ESA listing decision identified the inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms as a significant threat to GRSG. RMP conservation measures were identified as the BLM’s principal regulatory mechanism. The BLM believes Alternative E did not incorporate adequate regulatory mechanisms into the existing plan to meet its purpose and need to conserve, enhance, and restore GRSG and its habitat; therefore, the BLM did not select Alternative E as the ARMPA.

For Oregon, Alternative E contains GRSG conservation guidelines from *Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon: A Plan to Maintain and Enhance Populations and Habitat*. This document describes the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s proposed management of GRSG on Federal lands. It also provides guidance for public land management agencies and land managers for GRSG conservation. GRSG conservation guidelines in the State plan are designed to maintain (at a minimum) or enhance the quality (the optimum) of current habitats. The guidelines would also assist resource managers in achieving the population and habitat objectives of the State plan.

For Idaho, Alternative E incorporates proposed GRSG protection measures recommended by the State of Idaho. Management in Montana would remain unchanged from the current RMPs (Alternative A). Alternative E addresses the following primary threats: fire, invasive weeds, and infrastructure development. It also includes guidance for several secondary GRSG threats, such as recreation, improper livestock grazing, and West Nile virus, for BLM and Forest Service programs that affect GRSG or its habitat.

For Utah, Alternative E1 is based on the State of Utah’s *Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse in Utah* (Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Working Group 2013) and would apply to all BLM-administered lands in Utah. In Alternative E1 conservation measures would be applied to 11 State-identified areas, called Sage-Grouse Management Areas. Emphasis would be placed on expanding GRSG habitat by aggressively treating areas where there are encroaching conifers or invasive species. Alternative E1 includes a general limit on new permanent disturbance of 5 percent of habitat on State or Federally managed lands within any particular GRSG management area; occupied habitat outside of these areas would not receive new management protection and would continue to be managed according to the GRSG actions in existing RMPs and conservation measures associated with existing activity-level plans.

This alternative was not selected in its entirety as the ARMPAs because some components of the State’s plans were not consistent with the purposes, policies, and programs of Federal laws and regulations

applicable to public lands. However, many goals, objectives, and management actions in the alternative were carried forward.

3.1.6 Alternative F—Citizen Groups’ Recommended Alternative Two

Alternative F is also based on a citizen group recommended alternative. This alternative emphasizes improvement and protection of habitat for GRSG and defines different restrictions for PHMAs and GHMAs. Alternative F would limit commodity development in areas of occupied GRSG habitat and would close or designate portions of the Planning Area to some land uses. This alternative does not apply to the Utah sub-regional planning effort, as it was combined with Alternative C. Under Alternative F, wildfire suppression would be prioritized in PHMAs. Concurrent vegetation management would emphasize sagebrush restoration and enhancement. Alternative F would reduce livestock and WHB management use by 25 percent within PHMAs and GHMAs. While the Utah Draft EIS did not include an Alternative F, it did create two sub-alternatives under Alternative C for livestock grazing and WHBs to consider and analyze a similar reduction.

This alternative was not selected in its entirety as the ARMPAs because it limited the use of public land in PHMAs and GHMAs to such an extent that it did not give adequate accommodation to local needs, customs, and culture.

3.1.7 Proposed Plan Amendment

As a result of public comments, best science, cooperating agency coordination, and internal review of the Draft RMPAs/EISs, the BLM developed the Proposed Plan Amendments/Final EISs for managing BLM-administered lands. In these documents, the BLM focused on addressing public comments, while continuing to meet its legal and regulatory mandates.

The Proposed Plan Amendments/Final EISs are a variation of the preferred alternatives (Alternative D) and are within the range of alternatives analyzed in the Draft EISs. The Proposed Plan Amendments, with slight variations (as outlined in **Section 2.4** of this ROD), became ARMPAs. The BLM adopted the Proposed Plan Amendments as the ARMPAs because they also balance resource protections with resource uses to protect resources, while achieving sustainable resource development.

3.1.8 Environmentally Preferable Alternative

CEQ regulations require that a ROD state which alternatives were considered to be “environmentally preferable” (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Question 6A of CEQ’s *40 Most-Asked Questions* regarding CEQ’s NEPA regulations (46 FR 18026) defines that term to ordinarily mean the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Under that definition, Alternative C, as presented in each of the sub-regional Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs, is the most environmentally preferable. However, Section 101 of NEPA expresses a continuing policy of the Federal government to “use all practicable means and measures...to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.” FLPMA Section 302 requires the BLM to manage public lands for multiple-use and sustained yield, and Section 102(12) of FLPMA declares a policy of the United States that “the public lands be managed in a manner which recognizes the Nation’s need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from the public lands including implementation of the Mining and

Minerals Policy Act of 1970 (84 Stat. 1876, 30 USC, Section 21a) as it pertains to the public lands.” For these reasons, Alternative C was not selected (in its entirety) as the sub-regional ARMPAs.

3.2 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL

The alternatives listed below by sub-region were considered but were not carried forward for detailed analysis because of one or more of the following reasons:

- They would not meet the requirements of FLPMA or other existing laws and regulations
- They did not meet the purpose and need
- The alternative was already captured within the range of alternative analyzed in the EIS
- They were already part of an existing plan, policy, or administrative function
- They did not fall within the limits of the planning criteria

For additional rationale as to why each of the alternatives listed below by sub-region were not carried forward for detailed analysis, refer to Section 2.11 of each of the sub-regional Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs.

Idaho and Southwestern Montana

- FWS-Listing Alternative
- Elimination of Recreational Hunting Alternative
- Predation Alternative
- Close All or Portions of PHMAs or GHMAs to OHV Use Alternative
- Consideration of Coal Mining Alternative

Nevada and Northeastern California

- Close All or Portions of PHMAs or GHMAs to OHV Use Alternative
- Elko County Sage-Grouse Plan Alternative
- Increase Grazing Alternative

Oregon

- FWS-Listing Alternative
- Elimination of Livestock Grazing from all BLM Lands Alternative
- Increase Livestock Grazing Alternative
- Close All or Portions of PHMAs or GHMAs to OHV Use Alternative

Utah

- FWS-Listing Alternative
- Increase Livestock Grazing Alternative
- Make GRSG Habitat Available for Oil Shale and Tar Sands Alternative

- Citizen Proposed Alternatives (in their entirety)
- Adoption of the State of Utah's Sage-Grouse Management Areas as PHMAs for All Alternatives
- Use of Other Habitat Maps Alternatives
- County Sage-Grouse Management Plans Alternative
- COT Report Alternative
- BLM Policies and Regulations Alternative

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CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, CONSULTATION, AND COORDINATION

BLM resource management planning is conducted in accordance with NEPA requirements, CEQ regulations, and US Department of the Interior policies and procedures for implementing NEPA, as well as specific BLM planning and NEPA policies. NEPA and associated laws, regulations, and policies require the BLM to seek public involvement early in and throughout the planning process, to develop a range of reasonable alternatives to proposed actions, and to prepare environmental documents that disclose the potential impacts of proposed management.

Public involvement and agency consultation and coordination have been at the heart of the planning process leading to these Great Basin Region ARMPAs. These efforts were achieved through *Federal Register* notices, formal and informal public meetings, individual contacts, media releases, planning bulletins, and a series of GRSG planning-related websites.

This section documents the outreach efforts that have occurred to date. For more plan-specific information related to the public involvement, consultation, and coordination processes that the BLM conducted, please refer to Chapter 3 of the attached ARMPAs.

4.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The scoping period for the National GRSG Planning Strategy began with the publication of the Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on December 9, 2011, and ended on March 23, 2012. Beginning in December and ending in February 2012, the BLM hosted a series of public open house scoping meetings across Northeastern California, Idaho, Southwestern Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Utah. A final National GRSG Planning Strategy Scoping Report was released in May 2012 (BLM and Forest Service 2012).

Notices of Availability for the Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, and Utah Draft RMPAs/EISs were published in the *Federal Register* on November 1, 2013. The Oregon Draft RMPA/EIS was released to the public on November 26, 2013.

For the Great Basin Region GRSG Draft RMPAs/EISs, Idaho and Southwestern Montana conducted seven public meetings, Nevada and Northeastern California conducted seven public meetings, Oregon conducted seven public meetings, and Utah conducted eight public meetings between November 2013 and January 2014.

Comments on the Draft RMPAs/EISs were considered and incorporated, as appropriate, into the Proposed Plan Amendments/Final EISs. The Great Basin Region received approximately 4,990 substantive comments, contained in 74,240 submissions during the Draft RMPAs/EISs' comment periods. Comments on the Draft RMPAs/EISs received from the public and internal BLM review were carefully considered and incorporated as appropriate into the proposed plan amendments. Public comments resulted in the addition of clarifying text but did not significantly change the Proposed RMPAs.

On May 29, 2015, the BLM released an NOA for all of the Great Basin Region GRSG Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs for the Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah Sub-regions. The release of the NOA initiated a 30-day public protest period and a 60-day Governor's consistency review. Refer to **Sections 2.5** and **2.6** for a full description of the protest period and Governor's consistency review outcomes.

4.2 COOPERATING AGENCIES

A cooperating agency is any Federal, State, or local government agency or Native American tribe that enters into a formal agreement with the lead Federal agency to help develop an environmental analysis. Cooperating agencies and tribes "work with the BLM, sharing knowledge and resources, to achieve desired outcomes for public lands and communities within statutory and regulatory frameworks" (BLM 2005). The benefits of enhanced collaboration among agencies in preparing NEPA analyses are as follows:

- Disclosing relevant information early in the analytical process
- Applying available technical expertise and staff support
- Avoiding duplication with other Federal, State, tribal, and local procedures
- Establishing a mechanism for addressing intergovernmental issues

The BLM entered into a formal MOU for the National GRSG Planning Strategy with the FWS and the Forest Service. In addition, the Great Basin sub-regions also invited local, State, other Federal, and tribal representatives to participate as cooperating agencies for these RMPAs/EISs. In total, there were 13 MOUs signed with Federal agencies, 10 signed with State agencies, 55 signed with counties, and 5 signed with tribal entities. The MOUs outline the interests, expertise, and jurisdictional responsibilities of both the BLM and its cooperating agency partners and also outline their respective roles and responsibilities in the planning and NEPA processes. Additional information can be found in Chapter 6 of each of the Proposed Amendments/Final EISs. These cooperating agencies divided by sub-region are provided below.

Great Basin Region-Wide

US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Forest Service

Idaho and Southwestern Montana

Beaverhead County Commissioners
Bingham County Commissioners
Blaine County Commissioners
Cassia County Commissioners
Clark County Commissioners
Craters of the Moon National Monument
Custer County Commissioners
Fremont County Commissioners
Idaho Association of Counties
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation
Idaho National Guard
Jefferson County Commissioners
Lemhi County Commissioners
Madison County Commissioners
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Owyhee County Commissioners
Power County Commissioners
Twin Falls County Commissioners
US Department of Defense
US Department of Energy (INL)

Nevada and Northeastern California

Churchill County
Elko County
Eureka County
Humboldt County
Lander County
Lassen County
Lincoln County
Mineral County
Modoc County
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Nevada Department of Transportation
Nevada Department of Wildlife
Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Nye County
Pershing County
Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
Storey County
Summit Lake Paiute Tribe
Susanville Indian Rancheria
US Department of Defense
US Federal Highway Planning Administration

Washoe County
Washoe Tribe
White Pine County

Oregon

Crook County
Deschutes County
Harney County
Harney Soil and Water Conservation District
Lake County
Malheur County
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon State University
US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Utah

Beaver County
Box Elder County
Carbon County
Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Indian Reservation
Duchesne County
Emery County
Garfield County
Grand County
Iron County
Kane County
Lincoln County (Wyoming)
Millard County
Rich County
Sanpete County
Sevier County
State of Utah (PLPCO)
State of Wyoming
Sweetwater County (Wyoming)
Sweetwater County Conservation District (Wyoming)
Tooele County
Uinta County (Wyoming)
Uintah County (Utah)
Utah County
US Department of Defense
Wayne County
Natural Resources Conservation Service

4.3 FWS SECTION 7 CONSULTATION

Under Section 7 of the ESA, Federal agencies must consult with the FWS when an action the agency carries out, funds, or authorizes *may affect* a listed endangered or threatened species or its designated critical habitat. The four Great Basin sub-regional Final EISs defined potential impacts on threatened and endangered species as a result of management actions proposed in the alternatives analyzed in the Final EISs. (The FWS is a cooperating agency in this planning process.) FWS staff participated in interdisciplinary team meetings and have been provided with drafts of alternative decisions and analyses for discussion and input.

The BLM formally initiated Section 7 consultation with a letter to the FWS, before the release of the Draft RMPAs/EISs, and requested concurrence on which species would require consideration during consultation. Over the ensuing months, regular meetings were held to identify the species that would be analyzed in the biological assessment, to address which actions could affect those species, and to determine whether the implementation of the Proposed Plan amendments “may affect” the species for which this consultation occurred.

Before the release of the Proposed Amendments/Final EISs, the BLM formally submitted the biological assessments to the FWS for review on whether the plans would affect a Federally listed, proposed, or candidate species. The FWS evaluated the biological assessments and concurred with either a “no effect” or “may affect, but not likely to adversely affect” determination via memorandum for Oregon, Nevada and Northeastern California, and Idaho and Southwestern Montana; these memoranda are appendices to each of the ARMPAs. For Utah, formal consultation was required with the FWS due to a “likely to adversely affect” determination associated with the Utah prairie dog, a threatened species under the ESA. The biological opinion from the FWS is attached to the Utah ARMPA (Appendix J).

4.4 NATIVE AMERICAN AND STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE CONSULTATION

In recognition of the government-to-government relationship between individual tribes and the Federal government, the BLM initiated Native American consultation in preparation of the four Great Basin sub-regional RMPAs/EISs. The BLM coordinated with Native American tribes throughout the planning process. In December 2011, the BLM sent letters to 65 tribal governments. The letters provided initial notification of the RMPAs/EISs and background information on the project, an invitation to be a cooperating agency, and notification of subsequent consultation related to the planning process. Tribes have been participating in the RMPAs/EISs processes through numerous meetings and through personal BLM contacts, and in some cases, as cooperating agencies.

As part of the NEPA scoping and consultation process, the BLM notified the Idaho, Montana, Nevada, California, and Oregon State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) of the opportunities to comment on the planning and NEPA documents prepared for these efforts, as they relate to historic properties in the Planning Areas and the land use plan decisions included in the ARMPAs. The BLM sought information about historic properties in consideration of land use planning decisions in accordance with the National Programmatic Agreement between the BLM, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, National Conference of SHPOs, and the Idaho, Montana, and Oregon State Protocol Agreement between the BLM and these SHPOs. If the BLM received comments and information from SHPOs and tribes, then it considered and incorporated that information into the Proposed RMPAs/Final EISs and the ARMPAs.

The BLM has met its obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, 54 USC, Section 306108, as outlined in the National Programmatic Agreement and the State protocols. The BLM will satisfy the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for future implementation-level decisions, such as project proposals, including adequate consultation with SHPOs, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, Native American tribes, and other interested parties. This is consistent with the alternative procedures set forth in the National Programmatic Agreement and relevant State protocols or, where applicable, the Section 106 regulations.

For the Utah ARMPA, the BLM completed consultation with the Utah SHPO, in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800. In July 2015, the BLM submitted a formal letter, concluding that the land use plan amendments would not adversely affect cultural properties and seeking input and concurrence on those findings. The BLM received a concurrence letter from the Utah SHPO on July 30, 2015. It will satisfy the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for future implementation-level decisions, such as project proposals, including adequate consultation with SHPOs, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, Native American tribes, and other interested parties. This is consistent with the alternative procedures set forth in the National Programmatic Agreement and relevant State protocols and programmatic agreements, or where applicable, the Section 106 regulations.

CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

APPROVAL

Land Use Plan Decisions

It is the decision of the Bureau of Land Management to approve the Great Basin Region Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, Utah, and Idaho and Southwestern Montana Sub-regions, as described in this Record of Decision. The Proposed Plan Amendments and related Final Environmental Impact Statements were published on May 29, 2015, in the *Federal Register* (80 FR 30711). I have resolved all protests and, in accordance with BLM regulations 43 CFR 1610.5-2, my decision on the protests is the final decision of the Department of the Interior. The approval is effective on the date this Record of Decision is signed.

Approved by:



Neil Kornze
Director
Bureau of Land Management

Date Sept. 21, 2015

Approval

I hereby approve the land use plan decisions. My approval of the land use plan decisions constitutes the final decision of the Department of the Interior and, in accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 1610.5-2(b) and 43 CFR 4.410(a)(3), it is not subject to appeal under Departmental regulations at 43 CFR Part 4. Any challenge to these land use plan decisions must be brought in Federal district court.

Approved by:



Janice M. Schneider
Assistant Secretary
Land and Minerals Management

Date 9-21-15

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ATTACHMENTS

The following approved resource management plan amendments are included in this Record of Decision and are bound as separate documents.

Attachment 1: Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment

Attachment 2: Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment

Attachment 3: Oregon Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment

Attachment 4: Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment

