Instruction Memorandum 2023-005, Change 1 – Attachment 2

**Guidance for Initial Inventory and Mapping of**

**BLM Areas of Habitat Connectivity**

November 15, 2022

**Introduction**

The overarching policy intent of Attachment 2 is to provide a consistent approach to the inventory of existing priority habitats and areas of habitat connectivity (AHCs) geospatial datasets, as well as a process for submission of these datasets to HQ-230. A comprehensive analysis and assessment of public lands to determine the geographic locations of priority habitats and AHCs for all, or even most, priority species is beyond the scope of this IM. Instead, this initial step will provide a baseline of how the BLM has identified and managed habitat connectivity and migration across the agency. These data sets will provide for development of a consistent data standard and updating process moving forward. They will be informed wherever possible by partnering agencies in state and Tribal governments. BLM preliminary geospatial data will be refined over time and expanded as new science and data are further developed and made available.

**Primary Objectives for Initial AHC Inventory and Mapping**

1. Develop priority habitat and AHC baseline spatial data to illustrate and inform the strategic value of BLM lands in conserving species, habitats, and ecosystem services across the current network of public and private lands.
2. Establish BLM national geospatial layers and associated data standards that identify locations and extent of priority habitats and AHCs.
3. Identify data gaps related to species and habitat inventory needs.

**Organizational Roles and Responsibilities**

The following outline provides general organizational roles and responsibilities related to policy governing the inventory and mapping of priority habitats and AHCs on public lands:

BLM National Office

* HQ230 will serve as the BLM national data steward to:
  + lead a national AHC data development team to implement a national data standard;
  + provide technical support, and guidance to BLM state and field offices; and
  + provide quality assurance oversight.
* HQ220 will provide native plant conservation and restoration coordination and support.
* BLM National Operations Center will provide data management services, technical support, and geospatial program coordination.

BLM State Offices

* Will appoint a representative from the state to provide field office coordination/oversight and serve as a single point of contact for AHC and priority habitat inventory and national data coordination/submission for the state.
* Provide leadership support to ensure adequate staff support and submission of data.

BLM Field Offices

* Appoint a representative to serve as a single point of contact and provide field office coordination/oversight for initial habitat inventories, preliminary mapping, and data submission.
* Provide leadership support to complete initial habitat assessment, inventories, and preliminary mapping of existing priority habitat and AHC geospatial datasets used in BLM, using land use plans, conservation plans, etc.
* Provide staff resources necessary to maintain and update priority habitat and AHC data as new information is obtained.

**Technical Approach:**

The following guidance provides a framework to support a consistent and efficient approach for the inventory and mapping of priority habitats and AHCs on BLM public lands. Offices are encouraged to identify tools and improvements to workflow processes to address site-specific needs and challenges. State and Field offices should begin by reviewing current land use plans for priority habitat designations and allowable use allocation in all programs and by engaging state and Tribal wildlife managers to assess any overlapping priorities and relevant data.

By November 15, 2023 -Review existing data to determine available information and data gaps:

1. State and field offices should complete initial assessment, inventories, and preliminary mapping of existing priority habitat layers in BLM, using land use plans, conservation plans, etc.

* Review and document Resource Management Plan goals, desired conditions, and objectives related to priority habitat allocations and AHCs that meet the intent of this IM.
  + Include geospatial data that is tied to formally identifying locations of priority habitats and movement/connectivity areas for BLM Special Status Species and other priority species.
  + Identify general maps of baseline fish, wildlife, and plant inventories and include designated units and resource allocations identifying geographic locations of important habitats, season of use, and levels/types of management protections provided by decisions.
  + Older land use plans may contain important historical maps not carried forward in subsequent versions and may offer insight into priority habitat and AHCs locations.
* Identify internal and external data sets (geospatial layers and maps) used in the identification of priority habitats, connectivity, refugia, stopovers etc., in the planning area.
* Identify any strategies or reports that identify habitats (geospatial layers, models, and maps) that support connectivity and migrations consistent with informing the implementation of this IM.

1. State and field offices should identify known (publicly available) external efforts that have identified areas that would meet the intent of this IM, such as, for example: Important Bird Areas, Priority Aquatic Systems, wetland complexes, or Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas (PARCA).
2. State and field offices should coordinate and consult with states, Tribes, and other partners to identify and select data sets and develop and implement shared and collaborative ecosystem-based conservation strategies for AHCs and the habitats they serve to connect, especially in areas of mixed land ownership. These strategies must be consistent with the governing land use plan(s).
3. HQ230 and the National Operations Center will develop an initial geospatial layer for AHCs and a data standard to provide a national framework (minimal fields) and definitions.
4. The inventory will be updated periodically and kept current as new information is gained about resource conditions including this ongoing USGS science/data compilation, which incorporates state data [USGS](https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/sir20225008) available on [sciencebase.gov](https://www.sciencebase.gov/catalog/item/61fd7f6ed34e622189cf3fb9).

All data will be submitted to HQ230 Wildlife SharePoint Sites and associated geospatial data layers will be managed on the T: Drive.