

Sage-grouse Habitat Management

September 10, 2013

BACKGROUND

BLM Colorado manages slightly less than 50 percent of Gunnison and Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in the state.

The BLM continues to manage Greater Sage-Grouse as a BLM sensitive species in Colorado. Gunnison Sage-Grouse management will follow any status changes under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The BLM continues to emphasize implementation of state and local sage-grouse conservation strategies; coordination with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and other partners; and better understanding of available sage-grouse research and habitat conditions in Colorado.

BLM Colorado will continue to work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife at a local level in research studies, habitat improvement projects, population and habitat monitoring, and minimizing impacts to sage-grouse from multiple-use activities.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

More than 1.7 million acres of Colorado's Greater Sage-Grouse habitat is found on BLM lands in the Northwest District, almost half of the entire greater sage-grouse habitat in Colorado.

Greater Sage-Grouse were classified as a candidate species following the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) ESA determination of "warranted but precluded from listing due to higher listing priorities." In December 2011, then Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced new Greater Sage-Grouse conservation guidance aimed at conserving the bird and its sagebrush habitat in 11 western states.

The BLM is writing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze incorporating new Greater Sage-Grouse conservation measures into its resource management plans for the five field offices within the Northwest Colorado District: the Colorado River Valley Field Office in Silt, the Grand Junction Field Office, the Kremmling Field Office, the Little Snake Field Office in Craig and the White River Field Office in Meeker. The Routt National Forest is also included in this planning effort. The goal is to specifically provide adequate regulatory measures for the conservation of the species on BLM-administered lands.

The BLM conducted a public scoping period that ended on March 23, 2012, to hear from the public and cooperators about any concerns or issues to consider in this evaluation of Greater Sage-Grouse conservation measures in Northwestern Colorado.

The BLM released the draft EIS to the public on August 16, 2013. The BLM's 90-day public comment period on the draft EIS ends on November 14, 2013.

Public meetings will be held from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. in October at the following locations:

- Oct. 15 in Craig, at the Memorial Hospital at Craig, 750 Hospital Loop



- Oct. 17 in Silt, at the BLM Colorado River Valley Field Office, 2300 River Frontage Road
- Oct. 22 in Walden, at the Wattenburg Community Center, 682 County Road 42
- Oct. 23 in Lakewood, at the Lakewood Heritage Center, 801 S. Yarrow St.

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE

The FWS proposed to list Gunnison Sage-Grouse as endangered under ESA on January 11, 2013. The BLM provided comments on the proposed rule and proposed critical habitat during the public comment. The BLM continues to work with the FWS to clarify specific issues and answer questions as they arise. A final FWS listing decision is delayed until March 31, 2014.

Under the ESA, federal agencies are required to confer with the FWS on any actions that are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Gunnison Sage-Grouse or destroy or adversely modify proposed critical habitat. The BLM is working with the FWS to identify which projects will require conferencing.

BLM Colorado is in the process of developing a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) for Gunnison Sage-Grouse in the Gunnison Basin on federally-managed lands to complement the statewide CCA with Assurances developed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and FWS for use on private or state lands.

BLM Colorado and the FWS have been reviewing ongoing on-the-ground BLM conservation practices as well as measures contained in BLM planning documents, policies and regulations. The two agencies have held several discussions throughout 2013 with a meeting scheduled at the end of September to address threats to specific populations.