



## **COOPERATING AGENCY PARTICIPATION IN BLM PLANNING EFFORTS**

August 26, 2014

Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) authorize the lead federal agency in a planning effort to invite tribal, state, and local governments, as well as other federal agencies, to serve as Cooperating Agencies in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Colorado is embarking on an effort to adopt effective measures to conserve the Gunnison Sage-Grouse and its habitat across the range of the species. The agency will formulate a reasonable range of alternatives for a Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA)/EIS. Cooperating Agencies will be tasked with advising the BLM in order to ensure that the alternatives adequately reflect public input.

While information and comments provided by Cooperating Agencies will be considered and incorporated into planning documents when appropriate, the BLM is responsible for the preparation and quality of the planning documents and will make all final determinations regarding content. In addition, the BLM is responsible for choosing a preferred alternative in the Draft RMPA/EIS.

### **Why the BLM Enlists Cooperating Agency Support**

Cooperating Agencies have both jurisdictional responsibilities and special expertise in many planning-related arenas. The BLM believes that, by working closely with governmental partners, we will improve communication and understanding, identify common goals and objectives, and enhance the quality of our management of public lands. In addition, the BLM hopes to adequately address Cooperating Agency interests and concerns throughout the planning effort, reducing the need for protests following release of the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS. Cooperating Agencies sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BLM to formally accept this relationship.

### **Cooperating Agency Responsibilities**

Cooperating Agencies work closely with the BLM and other agencies throughout the planning process to:

- Identify issues and concerns to be addressed during the planning effort.
- Provide relevant data.

- Review and comment during specified periods on preliminary baseline and other technical reports (appropriate to the agency's special expertise) and on the preliminary Draft EIS.
- Conduct a consolidated comprehensive review of the Draft EIS.
- Assist with analyzing and reviewing public comments and data on the Draft EIS for incorporation into the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS.

### **Expectations for Cooperating Agency Participation**

Adhering to the following expectations will enable the planning effort to stay on schedule and result in an effective and widely supported plan amendment:

- Cooperating Agencies must cover the cost of their participation, including salary, travel, and other expenses.
- Cooperating Agencies' designated representatives are expected to attend all Cooperating Agency meetings. Because consistent participation is critical, representation should not fluctuate throughout the process.
- Cooperating Agencies will review comments received from the public within their area of special expertise and assist in preparing responses.
- Cooperating Agency document reviews must be completed within established timeframes. The compressed planning schedule may not provide sufficient time for Cooperating Agencies to review and comment on every facet of a planning document.
- Cooperating Agencies must not share pre-decisional information with the public or media. Information discussed in meetings and documents shared with Cooperating Agencies must be kept confidential.
- During the planning effort, the BLM will hold internal meetings that Cooperating Agencies will not attend.
- Cooperating Agencies are expected to adequately communicate their interests and concerns throughout the planning effort. We hope that by addressing your interests and concerns at this point, we can avoid the need for protests at the end of the process.