

# Vegetation, Invasive Plants and Wildfire

The Greater Sage-Grouse is a sagebrush obligate species. Juniper encroachment, invasive plants and wildfire have resulted in loss of sagebrush. Many of the native vegetative species of the sagebrush ecosystem are killed by wildfires, and recovery requires many years. Fire has been identified as a primary factor associated with Greater Sage-Grouse population declines, especially in the western portion of the Greater Sage-Grouse range. Invasive plants may cause loss or degradation of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat because they can out-compete native vegetation. Some invasive plants are difficult to effectively control once they become established. Invasive plants reduce and, in cases where monocultures occur, eliminate vegetation that Greater Sage-Grouse use for food and cover. Pinyon/juniper woodlands can encroach upon, infill, and eventually replace sagebrush habitat. Encroachment of pinyon/juniper into occupied Greater Sage-Grouse habitat reduces, and eventually eliminates sage-grouse occupancy in these areas.

**Issue: What management actions can the BLM and Forest Service take to prevent loss of habitat due to wildfire, invasive plants, and pinyon/juniper encroachment?**

## Management Actions

### Alternative A

#### Vegetation

- Prioritization is given to projects that benefit multiple resources.

#### Wildland Fire

- Prescribed fire and non-fire fuels treatments are allowed.
- Prioritize fire suppression to protect human life and high value resources.

### Alternative B

#### Vegetation

- Prioritize implementation of restoration projects based on environmental variables that improve chances for project success and are most likely to benefit GRSG.

#### Wildland Fire

- In PPMA, design and implement fuels treatments with an emphasis on protecting existing sagebrush ecosystems.
- Do not reduce sagebrush canopy cover to less than 15%.
- Allow no fuels treatments in known winter range unless are designed to strategically reduce wildfire risk.
- Do not use fire to treat sagebrush in less than 12-inch precipitation zones.
- In PPMA, prioritize suppression, immediately after life and property, to conserve the habitat.

### Alternative C

#### Vegetation

- Emphasis on passive restoration.
- Restore areas to meet ecological site description.
- Exotic seedings will be rehabbed, interseeded, restored to recover sagebrush in areas to expand PPMA.

#### Wildland Fire

- Any fuels treatments would focus on interfaces with human habitation or significant existing disturbances.



### Alternative D

#### Vegetation

- Implement rehabilitation projects in areas that have potential to improve GRSG habitat.
- Implement weed management actions for noxious and invasive species populations impacting or threatening GRSG habitat.

#### Wildland Fire

- Prioritize firefighter and public safety, followed by suppression of fires in PPMA, with consideration given to threatened and endangered species habitat. Implement RDFs.
- Design and implement fuels treatments with an emphasis on maintaining, protecting, and expanding sagebrush ecosystems.

### Alternative E

#### Vegetation

- Prioritize the removal of conifers through methods appropriate for the terrain and most likely to facilitate expeditious GRSG population and habitat recovery.
- Actively manage exotic undesirable species sufficient to prevent invasion into areas providing GRSG habitat.

#### Wildland Fire

- In CHZ and IHZ, develop a wildfire suppression plan that improves on the fire suppression baseline.
- Implement specific, more aggressive wildlife and invasive species management practices to prevent further encroachment into the CHZ and IHZ.

### Alternative F

#### Vegetation

- Prioritize implementation of restoration projects based on environmental variables that improve chances for project success and are most likely to benefit GRSG.

- Avoid sagebrush reduction/treatments to increase livestock or big game forage in PPMA and PGMA and include plans to restore high-quality habitat in areas with invasive species.

#### Wildland Fire

- Similar actions as Alternative B that would focus on designing and implementing fuels treatments with an emphasis on protecting existing sagebrush ecosystems.

Idaho and Southwestern Montana  
Greater Sage-Grouse Draft LUPA/EIS

