

Montana/Dakotas BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Conservation Planning Process

November 2011

The Montana/Dakotas BLM manages 8.3 million acres of public land in the three states as well as a 47-million-acre mineral estate. About 30 percent of Montana/Dakotas' greater sage-grouse habitat is on BLM public lands. Overall, the states of Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota contain around 10 million acres of sage-grouse habitat and over 1,000 leks, which account for about 19 percent of the known male population of greater sage-grouse. The BLM manages 27 percent of the high quality breeding and nesting habitat across this area.

Sage-grouse conservation is a multi-jurisdictional challenge due to fragmented land ownership patterns across large portions of sage-grouse habitat, making a collaborative approach essential. The BLM has been working with state fish and wildlife agencies, local working groups, and other organizations to conserve sage-grouse habitat. We have been improving areas of sage-grouse habitat through conifer removal, invasive species control, and native range restoration. In addition, we are the leading agency in funding sage-grouse research in order to understand the impacts of our decisions, the effectiveness of our restoration, and to identify the best places for conservation and restoration of sage-grouse habitat. These actions will maintain or improve tens of thousands of acres of sage-grouse habitat across our three-state area.

We also work closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to coordinate voluntary land management programs across BLM and private lands, leading to larger-scale sage-grouse conservation.

The BLM is revising resource management plans (RMPs) that cover most BLM-managed sage-grouse habitat in the three states. These plan revisions provide an opportunity to update our approaches to sage-grouse conservation. These updated plans will guide on-the-ground decisions for habitat conservation and restoration through three classifications of sage-grouse habitats in the Montana/Dakotas:

Priority Protection Areas – areas that contain good sage-grouse habitat and that have limited disturbances. The focus is on entire landscapes, and protections will apply across that habitat.

Restoration Priority Areas – areas that have the potential to have good sage-grouse habitat, but have existing disturbances (energy development, fire, etc.). The emphasis within these areas will be to restore the habitat or reduce existing disturbances.

General Habitat Areas – sage-grouse habitat outside the priority areas. Management will maintain habitat for continued presence of sage-grouse and connectivity to ensure genetic transfer and movement.

The Montana/Dakotas RMPs currently under revision are Billings/Pompeys Pillar, HiLine, Miles City, and South Dakota. Local managers and RMP team leaders will update cooperating agencies; resource advisory councils; federal, state, and local agencies; other local industry reps; grazing districts/permittees; and other interested publics about on-going efforts to conserve sage-grouse and to comply with the BLM's National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy.

Scoping for the existing RMPs which need to be amended (Lewistown, North Dakota, Butte, and Dillon) will include scoping meetings, tentatively planned for Dillon and Lewistown, Montana, and Dickinson, North Dakota, in January.

