

2.2.12 FISH AND WILDLIFE

The wildlife and their habitats within the planning area are typical representations of northern Great Basin flora and fauna. The planning area contains a rich diversity of diverse habitat types within a relatively small area. Extensive areas of sagebrush steppe provide year-long habitats for mule deer, sage-grouse and pronghorn antelope. Aspen, mountain mahogany and juniper woodlands provide nesting sites for a variety of bird species more commonly found in more heavily timbered areas. Extensive areas of rim rock associated with the canyons and mountainous areas provide cliff and rock slope habitats that are the primary nesting sites for numerous bird species, including high densities of raptors. These rocky areas also provide escape cover and foraging sites for bighorn sheep, denning sites for predators and year-long homes for many small mammal species. Abandoned mine shafts and adits and natural caves provide roosting sites for bat species.

Water sources and the vegetation associated with these spring, seep and streams provide water and dense, green vegetation with importance to most wildlife species that exceeds the very limited distribution within the planning area. Riparian, stream and wetland habitats are used extensively by wildlife, including neotropical migrant bird species, sage-grouse, waterfowl, shorebirds, big game, small game, small mammals, fishes and invertebrates.

This plan shall not diminish the jurisdiction of the State of Nevada with respect to fish and wildlife management, including regulation of hunting, trapping and fishing, on public lands within the conservation area (NCA Act § 5(d)) or lands designated as wilderness (NCA Act § 8(e)(1)).

BLM recognizes the roles of the Nevada Department of Wildlife, Tribal governments and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in the management of habitats and populations of fish and wildlife and will work cooperatively with them to integrate habitat and species management.



Mule Deer

Fish and Wildlife Management

Objectives

- To provide habitat within the planning area to support a diverse range of game and non-game wildlife species and to give visitors high-quality opportunities to hunt, fish, trap, or view wildlife.
- To maintain, restore, or enhance riparian areas and wetlands within the planning area so they provide

diverse and healthy habitat conditions for riparian and wetland obligate species and other wildlife species.

- To manage upland habitats in woodland and rangeland vegetation types to provide forage, water, cover, structure, and security necessary to sustain healthy populations of shrubland and woodland obligate and other wildlife species.
- To provide high-quality habitats for sagebrush-dependent species, including sage-grouse, in the sagebrush steppe portions of the planning area. All existing lek, breeding, brood rearing, and winter sage-grouse habitats will be conserved during the life of the plan.

Chapter 2 –Management Plan

- To provide habitat for migratory birds, including forage, water, cover, structure, and security, to support healthy populations of resident and migrant species.
- To restore, maintain, or improve habitat to provide for diverse and self-sustaining communities of fish and other aquatic organisms in spring systems and streams throughout the planning area.
- To maintain High Rock Canyon, the South Jackson Range and the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Area as Watchable Wildlife Sites.
- To implement management actions for all uses and programs that sustain or improve sage-grouse winter, breeding, nesting, and brooding habitats. Activities that have a high risk of disturbing breeding or brooding sage-grouse will not be allowed within suitable habitats.

Coyote



Photo Credits *

Management

Strutting male sage-grouse

FW-1: Use of aircraft to survey and monitor wildlife populations will continue, but flights will be scheduled to avoid high-visitor-use periods.

FW-2: Habitats for sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species will be managed to retain the vegetation and other attributes necessary for the long-term sustainability of sage-grouse and other sagebrush-dependent wildlife species.

Note: Management will be guided by Rangeland Health Standards, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies guidelines, and the local plans of the Washoe-Modoc and North Central sage-grouse working groups. Periodic adjustments to the management of sage-grouse habitats and the guidelines will be based on the best available information.

FW-3: Activities that may affect migratory bird species will include habitat and population conservation principles, measures and practices appropriate for the affected species and the proposed activities.

Note: Conservation principles, measures and practices will initially be based upon best management practices contained in the “Nevada Bird Conservation Plan” (1999), “BLM Nevada Migratory Bird Best

Chapter 2 –RMP Management Plan

Management Practices for the Sagebrush Biome” (2003), and “Birds in the Sagebrush Sea” (Ritter and Paige, 2000). Best Management Practices will be expected to change during the life of the plan to incorporate new research and experience gained through use of the practices.

FW-4: Construction of new water developments or other wildlife-related projects outside Wilderness may be authorized when the project promotes healthy, viable, and more naturally distributed wildlife populations.

FW-5: Existing or future small game wildlife water developments will be repaired, maintained and reconstructed.

Note: BLM is responsible for the management of wildlife habitats, while the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife Service are more directly responsible for the management of wildlife populations. Therefore objectives and decisions associated with the Land Health Standards, Special Designations, Wilderness, Vegetation, Livestock and Wild Horse and Burro sections of this RMP are the primary tools that BLM uses in achieving the wildlife objectives and managing wildlife habitats.

Wildlife Management in Wilderness

As stated in Section 8(e)(1) and (2) of the legislation that established the NCA, “Nothing in this Act diminishes the jurisdiction of the State of Nevada with respect to fish and wildlife management, including regulation of hunting and fishing on public land in areas designated as wilderness under subsection (a). . . . Any action in the areas designated as wilderness under subsection (a) shall be consistent with the Wilderness Act.”

To remain consistent with the NCA Act of 2000 this plan will not diminish Nevada Department of Wildlife’s (NDOW) jurisdiction, but all actions proposed for the designated wilderness areas will be consistent with the law, regulation and policy that guides the BLM’s management of wilderness. A substantial amount of regulation and policy exists that governs wildlife management in wilderness areas. The Wilderness Act outlines general management; Wilderness Regulations found in 43 CFR 6300 further specify what actions are prohibited and how BLM is to manage wilderness areas, and BLM Manual 8560 and Handbook 8560-1 provide policy guidance for specific wilderness management issues. Chapter III of Handbook 8560-1 was written in conjunction with the International Association of Fish and Game Agencies and provides guidance for specific wildlife management actions in wilderness.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in December 2003 by NDOW and BLM describes the coordination and cooperation between the two agencies regarding management of wildlife and provides guidance and procedures applicable to any wildlife actions proposed within BLM administered Wilderness Areas in the State of Nevada. (See Appendix H for the complete text of this MOU.)

As agreed to in the MOU the BLM and NDOW will hold an annual operations meeting. That meeting will review the previous year’s accomplishments and identify proposed projects for the coming year. Those proposed actions requiring site-specific, “minimum required/tool analyses” will be identified at the operations meetings.

Wildlife projects and actions that are determined by the BLM to be the minimum required action to ensure that natural processes are maintained or that wildlife populations are allowed to operate as freely as possible with minimum interference from humans will be authorized. These kinds of projects could include such actions as reintroducing native California Bighorn sheep into a wilderness area where the sheep were extirpated due to human influence, or constructing a water development where monitoring identifies that vehicle use in High Rock Canyon is having an impact on the bighorn population’s ability to obtain water in the canyon bottom. In such a case, a water development may be constructed inside the

Chapter 2 –Management Plan

Wilderness on the rim of the canyon to mitigate the impacts caused to the canyon-bottom water source by human use.

Site-specific authorizations and minimum required/tool analyses for wildlife projects proposed early enough in the process of developing the Wilderness Management Plan (WMP) may be incorporated in that plan.



Objectives

- Management activities in Wilderness will emphasize the protection of native species and natural population dynamics.
- Ensure that wildlife populations operate as freely as possible with only minimum human influence.

Management

FW-6: The MOU with the NDOW concerning wildlife management in Nevada BLM Wilderness Areas (Appendix H) will be used for guidance on all wildlife actions in the Wilderness Areas.

FW-7: Habitat rehabilitation and restoration projects and activities within Wilderness must be consistent with a site-specific minimum required/tool analysis (Appendix G). Examples of such activities and projects include changes in authorized uses; seeding following fires to enhance recovery of wildlife habitats and to prevent establishment and dominance of invasive, exotic plant species; and construction of protective fencing to recover, establish or enhance riparian systems.

Implementation

FW-7: Existing small game wildlife water developments will be repaired, maintained and reconstructed (Map 3-10 in Volume 2 of the FEIS shows the locations of guzzlers that existed at the time of approval of the RMP). Maintenance of the 14 guzzlers in Wilderness will be limited to normal upkeep and repair of the catchment, tank, lid, ramp and protective fencing as necessary to maintain proper function of the unit and integrity of the enclosed area. Access to the guzzlers may be by foot or horseback unless major reconstruction requires the use of aircraft consistent with the minimum tool analysis contained in Appendix J.