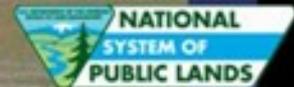


BLM Wind Energy Program and Sage-grouse: Challenges, Approaches, and the Future

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Challenges

- Renewable Energy Development is Happening NOW.
- Renewable Energy Development Must be Overlain on an Already Overstressed Landscape.
- Potential Listing of Greater Sage-Grouse Under ESA.
- Limited Available Research on Effects of Wind Energy Development on Sage-Grouse.

Renewable Energy Development is Happening NOW.

- Energy independence is an essential component of National energy policy
- Development of renewable energy resources is key to moving nation towards energy independence
- Secretary Salazar has identified renewable energy development as a top priority in issuing Secretarial Order 3285
- The BLM is actively implementing Secretarial Order 3285
 - Identification of “fast-track” solar, wind, geothermal and transmission projects
 - Expending ARRA funding directed towards renewable energy projects
 - Solar PEIS (24 “Solar Study Areas”)
 - Processing numerous other ROW applications for renewable energy projects
- Must ensure that renewable energy development occurs in an environmentally responsible manner...Not an insignificant challenge!

Renewable Energy Development Must be Overlain on an Already Overstressed Landscape.

- Many current and competing land uses (oil and gas development, urbanization, recreation, grazing)
- Fire and associated conversion of native vegetation communities to cheatgrass
- Disease (such as West Nile virus)
- Climate change is further exacerbating this set of conditions
 - Increased frequency and intensity of wildfires
 - Broader-scale (northward and higher elevation) invasion of non-native species
- Declining sage-grouse populations
 - Greater sage-grouse populations have declined throughout North America by 33% over the past 30 to 40 years
 - Greater sage-grouse populations have been extirpated from 44% of their historic range

Potential ESA Listing for Greater Sage-Grouse

- USFWS “reconsidered” decision anticipated in February 2010
 - USFWS has identified wind energy development as an issue (recent WY G&F / USFWS letter exchange)
 - USFWS perspective - Existing (albeit limited) research currently available on response of sage-grouse / prairie chickens to wind energy development suggests that wind energy development DOES negatively impact sage-grouse
 - USFWS perspective – Current lack of existing data / research upon which to develop a mitigation plan to ensure offset of impacts of wind energy development on sage-grouse
 - Two above points will be factored into USFWS’ determination as to whether listing of sage-grouse is warranted under ESA
- Significance to BLM
 - Wind energy development will be a factor considered as contributing to the potential need to list sage-grouse
 - Mitigation for anticipated impacts to sage-grouse resulting from wind energy development will not be considered a sufficient “regulatory mechanism” under the USFWS’ PECE policy

Limited Available Research

- Greater sage-grouse research
 - A two year study in California looked at the effects of transmission lines on sage-grouse
 - Mean survival of adult sage-grouse increased as distance from leks to overhead lines and towers increased
 - Effects were detectable up to 20+ km
- Two additional sage-grouse / wind energy research studies are currently underway, but in the very early phases of study
 - Oregon (Lakeview)
 - Idaho (China Mountain)
- Prairie chicken research
 - A recent publication examined effects of existing power lines to radio-collared Lesser Prairie Chickens as well as greater prairie chickens in Oklahoma
 - For both species, a preponderance of leks were found a distance of greater than 2 km from powerline suggesting presence of powerlines influences species distribution
 - LPC - 2 leks out of 23 within 2 km of powerline
 - GPC – 7 leks out of 74 within 2 km of powerline

Limited Available Research

- Good News
 - “Wind Energy Collaborative” has been formed
 - Involves diverse stakeholders (Federal and State Agencies, industry and NGOs)
 - BLM has been involved in the discussion at the Washington Office, State Office and NOC levels
 - Purpose is to develop standardized research and analytical methods to be applied consistently across the range of greater sage-grouse
 - Hopefully Research Collaborative will avoid the “competing science” scenario experienced with oil and gas research
- Bad News
 - A 4-year time lag exists for effects from oil and gas development to be seen on sage-grouse population numbers and distribution
 - A similar time lag will likely play a role for wind energy development as well
 - Thus, well designed and executed studies will take 5 - 7 years for completion

Current Approaches

- Wind Energy Development PEIS and BLM Washington Office Instruction Memorandum No. 2009-043
- BLM State Office Instruction Memorandums
- Application of O&G Development Stipulations to MET Towers and Wind Energy Developments

PEIS and IM 2009-043

- Acknowledges potential need for exclusion of additional areas from wind energy development
- Requires development of monitoring and habitat restoration plans
- Identified required BMPs for the protection of sensitive species and habitats

BLM State Office Instruction Memorandums

- MET Towers
 - 2-mile avoidance areas around active leks or seasonal concentration areas
 - Discourages use of guy wires
 - Requires flagging if guy wires must be used
- Wind Farms
 - Limit construction to no closer than 3 mile radius of sage-grouse lek
 - Goal of no net loss of critical winter brood rearing habitat outside of 3 mile radius

Application of O&G Development Stipulations

- Apply NSOs or CSUs in RMPs to all management activities
- Adopted as required elements of project-specific PODs and / or as ROW authorization stipulations

The Future -- Moving Forward

- Issue Direction from the Washington Office
- Develop Bureau-Wide Sage-Grouse Policy in Close Coordination with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Consider Supplemental EIS to Wind Energy Development PEIS

Issue Direction

- Screen new ROW applications
- Delay authorization of ROW applications until research is completed
- Designation of areas as excluded from wind energy development in RMP revisions & amendments
- Re-routing of proposed transmission corridors

Develop Policy with State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

- BLM Director letter to WAFWA President
- Coordination between DOI and the WGA
- IM to the BLM State Directors
- Roll-up coordination efforts across BLM State Offices

Consider Supplemental EIS to Wind Energy Development PEIS





Questions?