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March 2, 2001

Information Bulletin No. WY-2001-028

To: Field Managers

From: State Director

Subject: Qualitative Assessment and Map Sagebrush/Sage Grouse Habitat in Wyoming

As you are all aware from our discussions at the Management Team Meeting in Casper during the week of February 13, we need to set out on a statewide effort to qualitatively assess our sage grouse habitat on Public Lands throughout the State. This assessment, which will be principally a mapping effort in the short-term, will be used to help guide our own BLM (Wyoming) input to the national sagebrush/sage grouse conservation strategy, as well as an information base for the State-level sage grouse conservation planning effort.

This statewide assessment will be performed by Tom Rinkes and Rob St. John from the Lander Field Office working on detail to the WSO to complete this effort. These two individuals will visit each Field Office to map all the sagebrush habitats in the field area as GIS data, assigning each habitat polygon to one of the following category delineations:

1. Sagebrush/Perennial Grass Habitats - Areas with generally at least 5 percent sagebrush canopy cover and a native or seeded perennial grass understory.
2. Sagebrush/Annual Grass Habitats - Areas with generally at least 5 percent sagebrush canopy cover and an annual grass understory.
3. Perennial Grassland Habitats - Native or seeded grasslands with generally < 5 percent sagebrush canopy cover.
4. Annual Grassland Habitats - Areas dominated by annual grasses with generally < 5 percent sagebrush canopy cover.
5. Conifer/Juniper Encroachment Habitats - Sagebrush or perennial grassland areas with juniper or pine encroachment occurring.

6. Developed Habitats - One or more of the above five habitats where human development activities have disturbed portions of the landscape surface. (These types of habitats would consist of intensive oil/gas development, surface mines, transmission lines and other utility corridors, housing subdivisions, roads (high density or high volume), or other similar types of development).

7. Habitats At Risk - These habitats consist of the initial five vegetation habitats where there is a reasonable foreseeable development potential. To determine Habitats At Risk, Field Office personnel should provide information of proposed projects that may soon have NEPA documentation initiated, or where NEPA documentation has been recently completed for the above described types of development. This mapping theme will be developed further following the reasonable foreseeable development scenarios for minerals in land use planning modification efforts, and in the development of resource assessments scheduled for fiscal years 2001 and 2002.

Since the above delineations will, by necessity, be very subjective, it is important that the people with the best knowledge of the on-the-ground conditions of the local landscapes participate in this mapping effort. For this reason, we are asking that each Field Manager assure the availability of the appropriate staffs with this knowledge to be on hand to work on this effort during the team's visit to your respective offices. Appropriate staffs for this effort might include: wildlife biologist; rangeland management specialists; surface protection specialist; outdoor recreation planner, etc. To the extent possible, we would also like to enlist the input of the local Wyoming Game and Fish Department biologists, Forest Service biologists and rangeland management specialists, NRCS staff, and any other local experts, as appropriate, that could be productive to this assessment. Please make the necessary invitations, as appropriate, for your Field Office.

As the team works in each office, they may need to access a variety of local databases, maps, and information sources. Some of these data sources might include:

- Aerial photography.
- Elevation models and topographic maps.
- Any available vegetation maps (modified SVIM, etc.).
- Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) maps.
- Soil maps.
- Historic wildfires; files, maps, and dates.
- Maps of fire rehabilitation efforts.
- Prescribed fire project files.
- Fire fuels management files and maps.

- Land treatment files and maps.
- EISs/EAs.
- Mine plans of development (coal, trona, uranium, etc.).
- Other project plans of development.

Please assure the above types of habitat information sources, and any other pertinent data you might think of, are readily available and accessible to the assessment team for this effort. The scale for this mapping effort will be at 1:100,000. The data will be refined and updated each year to identify changes in sagebrush habitats over time.

We anticipate the amount of time this effort will take in each Field Office is 2-3 days for the local staff, and some additional time for Tom and Rob to assimilate the data. Because of the need to provide timely input to the above mentioned national and State-level efforts, we need to conduct this mapping effort as soon as reasonably possible. We expect to start the Field Office visits by, or shortly after, the middle of March 2001. Our tentative agenda for this assessment is as follows:

Lander Field Office - March 14-16, 2001.  
Casper Field Office - week of March 19, 2001.  
Buffalo Field Office - week of March 19, 2001  
Worland Field Office - week of April 2, 2001.  
Cody Field Office - week of April 2, 2001.  
Newcastle Field Office - April 9-10, 2001.  
Pinedale Field Office - week of April 23, 2001.  
Kemmerer Field Office - week of April 23, 2001.  
Rock Springs Field Office - week of April 30, 2001.  
Rawlins Field Office - week of April 30, 2001.

Tom Rinkes will be contacting each Field Manager to finalize dates and arrangements for this effort 2-3 weeks prior to each tentative individual office visit. At that point, a schedule can be finalized. We are asking each Field Manager to provide Tom and Rob, and the rest of the assessment personnel, your best possible support during this essential endeavor.

If you have any questions about this matter, please contact Tom Rinkes in the Lander Field Office at (307) 332-8404, or Dave Roberts at (307) 775-6099.

Alan R. Pierson