

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
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To: State Directors

From: Group Manager, Fish, Wildlife and Forests

Subject: Request for Nominations for a BLM Sagebrush Conservation Strategy Group  
and Update on Interagency Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation  
Planning DD: 02/16/2001

Over the past several years, hundreds of special status fish, wildlife and plant species inhabiting sagebrush and prairie grassland ecosystems have been identified as being "at-risk" species. Some are already listed, proposed for listing, or petitioned for listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. More petitions are expected. In 1998, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) began developing a strategy to conserve and restore sagebrush and prairie grassland habitats, to keep at-risk species from declining further and reduce the need to have them listed. The BLM has taken several actions to guide our approach to conserve and restore these ecosystems.

This Information Bulletin addresses some significant BLM actions related to sagebrush ecosystem conservation. In November 1999, the BLM sponsored a Sage Grouse and Sagebrush Habitat Conference in Reno, Nevada, where representatives from states affected by the potential listing of sage grouse shared information for conservation efforts between states and State agencies. The 150 conference attendees produced a comprehensive slate of actions needed to plan and implement a successful conservation and restoration program. Many of the actions are being implemented, as funding and personnel resources permit.

In August 2000, the BLM, the Forest Service (FS), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide for cooperation in the

development of a rangewide strategy for the conservation and management of sage grouse and their sagebrush habitats. As a result of the MOU:

- The States have convened working groups to develop State or local sage grouse and sagebrush conservation plans;
- An interagency Conservation Planning Framework Team was established to develop a Range-wide Conservation Framework;
- The MOU Parties are collecting, analyzing and distributing sage grouse population and habitat data to the working groups for conservation planning.

The MOU also requires the BLM, USFS and FWS to:

- Provide for habitat protection, conservation and restoration ... consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable laws, regulations, directives, and policies;
- Consider the WAFWA Guidelines for Management of Sage Grouse Populations and Habitats, State and Local Conservation Plans, and other appropriate information in their respective planning processes; and,
- Work together to identify research needs and strategies and conduct joint assessments, monitoring and research.

In order to facilitate interagency actions related to the MOU, the BLM and the USFS have established an interagency habitat steering committee to address areas of common concern in planning and conservation actions affecting sagebrush habitats. The approach is similar to that used to coordinate conservation planning for Canada lynx. The steering committee, co-chaired by Jon Foster, Acting Idaho DSD for Resources, and Jack Troyer, USFS Region 4 Deputy Regional Forester, will convene teams to address conservation planning needs for habitat assessment, land use and other planning considerations, and habitat restoration. Mark Hilliard, Wildlife Specialist, is providing steering committee support for the BLM.

Currently, an interagency mapping team is finalizing a proposal to produce a broad-scale map of North American sagebrush habitats by combining remote sensing and ancillary data sets. The map is specific to range-wide needs and is not intended for mid- and fine-scale applications. In concert with conservation planning for sage grouse, the map is expected to have application for broad-scale fire planning and land use planning. We will periodically provide you with updates of this, and other activities conducted by the steering committee and associated teams.

**STATE DIRECTOR ACTION NEEDED:** BLM is establishing an interdisciplinary sagebrush conservation strategy group to address and facilitate the coordination of activities affecting sagebrush habitats on BLM-administered lands, including those

made possible by the Great Basin Restoration Initiative and increases in the fire program budget. The group's task is to coordinate an effective BLM sagebrush ecosystem management strategy that will stem the decline of species dependent on healthy sagebrush landscapes while minimizing impacts to other activities and programs. A separate strategy group for prairie grasslands will be established in the future.

Teri Raml, Klamath Falls Field Office Manager, has agreed to chair the sagebrush conservation strategy group. Conference calls and e-mail will be used to conduct much of the strategy group's work, and it may also be necessary for the group to convene two to three times per year. The first conference call is planned for late February.

State Directors of major sagebrush habitat states (CO, ID, MT, NV, OR/WA, UT, WY) are requested to nominate up to three individuals from their respective states to serve on the strategy group. State Directors of states with limited sagebrush habitat (AZ, CA, NM) are requested to nominate one person per state. Nominees should have experience in one or more of the following areas: wildlife, range, botany, fire, recreation, wilderness, minerals, planning or line management. Nominations should be submitted by February 16, 2001, to Chris Jauhola, Group Manager for Fish, Wildlife and Forests (WO 230).

If you have any questions about either the BLM sagebrush conservation strategy group or the interagency conservation planning effort mentioned above, please contact, by phone or e-mail, either Chris Jauhola (202) 452-7761 or Mark Hilliard (208) 373-4040.

Signed by:  
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Policy & Records Group, WO-560