



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT/FOREST SERVICE UPDATE

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Prepared for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Saratoga Springs, NY



SUBJECT: **Interagency Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Conservation**

SUMMARY: The BLM, USFS and USGS have completed two ecoregional assessments for the Wyoming Basins and Great Basin. The Great Basin Assessment was published as a book, and the Wyoming Basin Assessment is currently under review. The BLM and WAFWA are developing a Habitat Assessment Framework process for assessing sage-grouse habitats at multiple scales that should be completed in 2008. To help ensure opportunity for management for healthy sage grouse populations, BLM, in response to request from WAFWA president, Jeff Vonk, is defining and mapping habitat that is key to the conservation of sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. Projected completion of first operational map: End of summer 2008.

In December of 2007, Judge Winmill (Idaho District Court) remanded the 12 month “not warranted” finding and requested that the Fish and Wildlife Service review their decision. States and federal agencies are working with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and have provided information for the new 12-month review.

The western states organized interagency teams to document conservation actions in a national database, and will also provide population status and trend data. Federal agencies identified regulatory mechanisms aimed at conserving Greater Sage-grouse and their habitats. The Fish and Wildlife Service is evaluating this information using their PECE (Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts) and 5-factor analysis for the status review. WAFWA is now focusing on the Habitat Assessment Framework, earlier planned for delivery by March 31, 2008. It is anticipated that the status review will be complete by December, 2008.

BACKGROUND: The BLM administers approximately 50% of all remaining occupied sage-grouse habitats; the USFS administers approximately 8%. Widespread sage-grouse conservation efforts have been underway since the mid-1990s, when an MOU among WAFWA members was signed to promote sage-grouse conservation. The 2000 MOU, which brought in federal agency partners, was significant in furthering interagency cooperation to conserve sage-grouse. Nearly all States have completed state-level conservation plans. Local working group conservation plans are being developed, tiered to state plans, and federal agencies are actively participating in conservation efforts. In July 2001, the Canadian Sage-grouse Recovery Strategy was released, and working groups are developing action plans to implement the Canadian Strategy.

The Comprehensive Strategy (www.wafwa.org) identifies actions necessary to conserve greater sage-grouse, through conservation plans (local, state, other), implementation and effectiveness monitoring, research and technology, funding, communications, and adaptive management. Three elements identified as essential to the success of the Comprehensive Strategy are funding, leadership, and appropriate administrative structure. To secure long-term funding, the Comprehensive Strategy proposes establishment of a National Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act, modeled after the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. The BLM continues to implement its 2004 National Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy, which is specific to BLM-administered lands and programs (www.blm.gov). An updated interagency MOU currently is being finalized, to facilitate conservation actions and guide future management practices.

In December 2006, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, delivered the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy, a milestone under the August 2000 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among WAFWA, the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Governor Freudenthal (Wyoming) formed two sage-grouse working teams, a Sage-Grouse Implementation Team, and a Science Technical Team to develop recommendations for conserving Greater Sage-Grouse across land ownership boundaries in Wyoming. Other States have active, on-going conservation efforts. Forest Service and BLM were represented on these teams.

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