

2009 Budget Update



Healthy Lands Initiative

IDAHO Snake River Plain

The Southern Idaho-Snake River Plain Healthy Lands Initiative is a coordinated, landscape-level effort to maintain, improve, and restore the sagebrush-steppe rangelands of southern Idaho.

This Initiative will accelerate implementation of the Idaho State Sage-grouse Conservation Plan and will expand ongoing partnerships among Idaho citizens; private landowners; and local, state, and Federal governments.

Southern Idaho contains millions of acres of sagebrush-steppe rangelands that are vital habitat for sage-grouse and other wildlife and plant species. These species include pygmy rabbit, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, black-tailed jackrabbit, and numerous sagebrush-dependent non-game species. Their future is directly connected to the long-term integrity and health of Idaho's sagebrush-steppe.

This spacious landscape is also greatly valued by Idaho citizens. The lands of the sagebrush steppe are highly sought after for hunting, camping, fishing, and other recreational opportunities that constitute a key aspect of Idaho's quality of life.

This area is also important to the livelihood of local communities and the economic future of Idaho. Livestock grazing and minerals production are important uses of these lands, while energy transmission lines form a critical

link in the Nation's energy supply system. Idaho also possesses abundant renewable energy resources—especially wind—that are essential to building a sustainable energy future.

The Southern Idaho Healthy Lands Initiative is focused on ensuring that the wildlife, recreational, and traditional values provided by the sagebrush steppe can be restored and sustained in the face of increasing demand for energy and economic development. The health of the environment and our long-term quality of life depend on meeting this challenge.

By the Numbers

The Southern Idaho-Snake River Plain Emphasis Area

- Percentage of population growth between 2000 and 2005: **10.6**
- Number of acres of vital sagebrush habitat in the Emphasis Area: **5.8 million**
- Number of acres burned by wildfire since 2001: **525,000**
- Estimated potential for increased wind energy production in southern Idaho by 2015: **125-635 megawatts**
- Estimated potential for increased geothermal energy production in southern Idaho by 2015: **860 megawatts**

Meeting both our energy and land health goals requires integrated, landscape-scale habitat protections and resource management. Our initiative combines investments in habitat protection with policy improvements that will protect 800 species, including the sage-grouse.

Secretary Dirk Kempthorne

What is the Healthy Lands Initiative?

Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne launched the Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI) in 2007 to accelerate land restoration, increase productivity, and improve the health of public lands in the Western United States. The goal of the Initiative is to preserve the diversity and productivity of public and private lands across the landscape. The Initiative will enable and encourage local BLM managers to set priorities across a broader scale and mitigate impacts to an array of resources in ways not previously available to them.

The President's 2009 budget includes an increase of \$10 million for HLI over the level enacted in Fiscal Year 2008. The effort has focused on landscape-level restoration effort on southwest Wyoming; northwest and southeast portions of New Mexico; south-central Idaho; southwest Colorado; Utah; and a three-corner area of Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada. In FY 2009, areas in northwest Colorado and parts of California would be added.



Landscape Approach

With so much at stake, the BLM is proposing to implement a new model for land management in important wildlife areas. Instead of continuing a management approach that results in fragmented protection of species and habitat, the BLM will focus on habitat conservation on a landscape scale and emphasize cooperative conservation to maximize benefits to large areas of Federal, state, and private lands.

What We Know

- Southern Idaho is experiencing large wildfires, due in part to flammable invasive species such as cheatgrass. Increasing wildfire is resulting in the loss of large areas of sagebrush and native grasses.
- Large wildfires will continue to occur without appropriate fuels management practices, control of invasive species, and habitat restoration efforts.
- Population increases and growing energy development will further strain the ecological health of native plant communities and wildlife.
- It is more effective and cost efficient to be proactive—to maintain healthy landscapes—than to restore depleted areas.

Collaborative Effort

Wildfire, invasive species, drought, and other threats to the land operate on a vast scale and ignore land ownership boundaries. No single owner, jurisdiction, or agency can tackle these threats individually. The BLM and its partners in southern Idaho recognize this and have formed seven local working groups that are taking a broad-scale, collaborative approach to improving and restoring the land.

This Initiative will expand these partnerships to:

- Increase the amount of land treatments that can be completed in each geographic area.
- Facilitate best-management practices for all land uses.
- Conduct efficient science-based monitoring.
- Maintain and update habitat management plans based on new information and technologies.

Current Successes

- **East Start Lake Bitterbrush Plantings:** Sage-grouse and big game habitat were improved on 2,000 acres by hand-planting of 7,000 containerized

bitterbrush seedlings. This project augmented a recent 14,000-acre hazardous fuels reduction project.

- **Crystal Sage-grouse Restoration Project:**

A combination of domestic sheep grazing and glyphosate was used to reduce cheatgrass dominance on 9,200 acres. The treatment prepared the site for subsequent restoration seeding.

- **Stage Road Sagebrush Planting:**

This project involved interseeding 50,000 sagebrush plugs onto 3,000 acres, by hand and with the aid of a water wheel planter, to re-establish a seed source. The plugs were grown from locally collected seed.

- **Antelope Valley Prescribed Burn:**

Using prescribed fire to create a mosaic, this project will enhance habitat quality and break up fuel continuity on 2,000 acres of sagebrush steppe.

- **Rush Skeletonweed Eradication:**

This project involved treating 60 acres of sage-grouse habitat and critical big game winter range to eradicate rush skeletonweed. The project augmented a larger 16,000-acre integrated weed and fuels management project.

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