

In Reply Refer To:

6500 (930) P

December 17, 2002

Information Bulletin No. WY-2003-009

To: Field Managers

From: Acting State Director

Subject: Transmittal of the "Wyoming Guidelines for Managing Sagebrush Communities with Emphasis on Fire Management"

Beginning with the wildfire season of 1988 in the western United States and continuing to the present, considerable attention has been paid to the issue of fuels accumulation in natural ecosystems, largely as a result of decades of aggressive wildfire suppression practices. In response to this issue, a trend has emerged among many land and natural resource management agencies to develop prescribed fire programs as a tool for controlling fuels accumulation, as well as an ecosystem management tool. In recognition of this trend and the potential effects major burning programs could have on the Wyoming landscape (particularly sagebrush ecosystems), the Director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the BLM (WY) State Director decided in the spring of 1999 to cooperatively assemble an interdisciplinary (ID) team to examine the issue of prescribed burning in sagebrush ecosystems, and as appropriate, to describe some basic operating principles, or guidelines, for conducting prescribed fire operations in sagebrush habitats.

The ID team has now completed its work by developing a set of "Wyoming Guidelines for Managing Sagebrush Communities with Emphasis on Fire Management". This set of guidelines focuses on the health and ecological processes of the basic vegetation resource as it functions in the role of cover and food for wildlife. The field of view presented examines the vegetation resource holistically on the landscape level. In describing management guidelines, we have directed our attention at several of the most prominently occurring shrubby species of sagebrush found in Wyoming. Each of Wyoming's wildlife species has different habitat requirements, and these guidelines are not customized to fit the needs of any individual species that might be found in the sagebrush ecosystem. Instead, the information presented in the guidelines should be the base, or foundation, tier of a multi-tiered evaluation process to use for planning any project in the sagebrush ecosystem. Additional evaluation tiers for specific species of featured management (e.g., sage grouse, mule deer, pronghorn, etc.) will have to overlay these guidelines when evaluating any given project proposal where these species are present. The approach presented in these guidelines leans toward the "pro-active management" of sagebrush ecosystems, but primarily promotes the collaborative planning and execution of resource management based on circumstances present for each specific management site and landscape. Chemical, mechanical and biological treatments can also be effective tools for the management of sagebrush communities. Brief discussions of these tools are provided; however, the emphasis of these guidelines is on prescribed fire management.

These are guidelines, and as such, may be deviated from if absolutely necessary as dictated by circumstances. However, they were written in a broad context with a lot of expert input and should be applicable to most land management situations on Public Lands in Wyoming - there should be very little need to vary from them. Where a particular action deviates from the guidelines, we would expect the rationale for the departure to be well documented.

We envision the guidelines to be used in the following fashion, among others:

- ¢ as a handy desk reference about general sagebrush ecology
- ¢ for helping to develop ecosystem management objectives for land use plans
- ¢ use the landscape objectives to help evaluate broad to mid-scale habitat conditions
- ¢ utilize the sagebrush species management recommendations to collaboratively plan vegetation treatment projects

The guidelines are a large electronic file due in part to the inclusion of a number of photos. For this reason, and also for ease of access from outside the BLM, the guidelines are posted at the following internet site:

URL = <http://www.wy.blm.gov/wildlife/sageburn.htm>

If you have difficulty accessing all or parts of the internet site, try opening the document again, or hit your reload/refresh button. If you still have problems after trying the above solutions, please contact Roger Alexander of the WSO Support Services staff at (307) 775-6047.

If you have any questions about the guidelines, please contact either Dave Roberts or Vicki Herren in this office at (307) 775-6099, or (307) 775-6120, respectively.

Signed by:

Alan L. Kesterke

Acting State Director

1 Attachment:

1 "Wyoming Guidelines for Managing Sagebrush Communities with Emphasis on Fire Management" (pp. 59)