A Report on National Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures

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Introduction

Sagebrush landscapes have changed dramatically over the last two centuries. The vast expanses of sagebrush crossed by early European settlers and used by sage-grouse have been lost, fragmented, or altered due to invasive plants, changes in fire regimes, and impact of land uses (Knick et al. 2003, Knick and Connelly 2011a). As a consequence, sage-grouse and many other wildlife species that depend on sagebrush have undergone long-term range-wide population declines. Sage-grouse populations now occupy approximately one-half of their pre-European settlement distribution (Schroeder et al. 2004). Anthropogenic habitat impacts and lack of regulatory mechanisms to protect against further losses provided the basis for warranting listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2010 (75 FR 13910). The need to address higher priority species and limited funding precluded immediate listing action. However, a litigation settlement requires that a listing decision be made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) by September, 2015.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages approximately 50% of the sagebrush habitats used by sage-grouse (Knick 2011). Therefore, management actions by BLM in concert with other state and federal agencies, and private land owners play a critical role in the future trends of sage-grouse populations. To ensure BLM management actions are effective and based on the best available science, the National Policy Team created a National Technical Team (NTT) in August of 2011. The BLM's objective for chartering this planning strategy effort was to develop new or revised regulatory mechanisms, through Resource Management Plans (RMPs), to conserve and restore the greater sage-grouse and its habitat on BLM-administered lands on a range-wide basis over the long term. The National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy Charter charged the NTT to serve as a scientific and technical forum to:

- Understand current scientific knowledge related to the greater sage-grouse.
- Provide specialized sources of expertise not otherwise available.
- Provide innovative scientific perspectives concerning management approaches for the greater sage-grouse.
- Provide assurance that relevant science is considered, reasonably interpreted, and accurately presented; and that uncertainties and risks are acknowledged and documented.
- Provide science and technical assistance to the Regional Management Team (RMT) and Regional Interdisciplinary Team (RIDT), on request.
- Articulate conservation objectives for the greater sage-grouse in measurable terms to guide overall planning.

- Identify science-based management considerations for the greater sage-grouse (e.g., conservation measures) that are necessary to promote sustainable sage-grouse populations, and which focus on the threats (75 FR 13910) in each of the management zones.[i]

The National Technical Team (NTT) met from August 28 through September 2, 2011, in Denver, Colorado, and a subset of the team met December 5-8 in Phoenix, Arizona, to further articulate the scientific basis for the conservation measures. Members of the team included resource specialists and scientists from the BLM, State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, USFWS, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

This document provides the latest science and best biological judgment to assist in making management decisions. Fortunately, recent emphasis on sage-grouse conservation has resulted in a substantial number of publications dealing with a variety of aspects of sage-grouse ecology and management, summarized in the 2010 listing petition (75 FR 13910), as well as Knick and Connelly (2011b). Habitat requirements and other life history aspects of sage-grouse, excerpted from the USFWS listing decision (75 FR 13910), are summarized in Appendix A to provide context for the proposed conservation measures. We have attempted to describe the scientific basis for the conservation measures proposed within each program area. Perspectives on the nature and interpretation of the available science are in Appendix B.

The conservation measures described in this report are not an end point but, rather, a starting point to be used in the BLM's planning processes. Due to time constraints, they are focused primarily on priority sage-grouse habitat areas. General habitat conservation areas were not thoroughly discussed or vetted through the NTT, and the concept of connectivity between priority sage-grouse habitat areas will need more development through the BLM planning process.

[i] Identified in the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Conservation Strategy (Stiver et al. 2006).

Goals and Objectives

The BLM, along with a host of other state and federal agencies who participated in development of the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (Stiver et al. 2006), endorsed the goal of that document which was "to maintain and enhance populations and distribution of sage-grouse by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations". Although it was understood that at least in the short term this goal of maintaining sage-grouse population size and distribution as based on trends from 1965 - 2003, or enhancing above these levels was aspirational, the NTT supports it as a guiding philosophy against which management actions and policies of BLM should be weighed. Therefore, the conservation measures and strategies that follow assume the goal and objectives below.

Goal

Maintain and/or increase sage-grouse abundance and distribution by conserving, enhancing or restoring the sagebrush ecosystem upon which populations depend in cooperation with other conservation partners.

Until such time as more specific conservation objectives relative to sage-grouse distribution or abundance by sage-grouse management zone, state, or population are developed, BLM will strive to maintain or increase current distribution and abundance of sage-grouse on BLM administered lands in support of the range-wide goals. BLM will specifically address threats identified by the Fish and Wildlife Service in their 2010 listing decision (75 FR 13910).

Sage-grouse populations have the greatest chance of persisting when landscapes are dominated by sagebrush and natural or human disturbances are minimal (Aldridge et al. 2008, Knick and Hanser 2011, Wisdom et al. 2011). Within priority habitat, a minimum range of 50-70% of the acreage in sagebrush cover is required for long-term sage-grouse persistence (Aldridge et al. 2008, Doherty et al. 2010, Wisdom et al. 2011). Fire and invasion by exotic grasses are widespread causes for habitat loss, particularly in the western part of the sage-grouse range (Miller et al. 2011). Human land use, including tillage agriculture, historic grazing management, energy development, roads and power line infrastructure, and even recreation have contributed both individually and cumulatively to lower numbers of sage-grouse across the range (75 FR 13910, Knick et al. 2011).

New Paradigm

Through the establishment of the National Sage-grouse Planning Strategy, the Bureau of Land Management has committed to a new paradigm in managing the sagebrush landscape. That new paradigm will require collaborative conservation efforts among private, state, tribal, and other federal partners to conserve sage-grouse. Land uses, habitat treatments, and anthropogenic disturbances will need to be managed below thresholds necessary to conserve not only local sage-grouse populations, but sagebrush communities and landscapes as well. Management priorities will need to be shifted and balanced to maximize benefits to

sage-grouse habitats and populations in priority habitats. Adequacy of management adjustments will be measured by science-based effectiveness monitoring of the biological response of sagebrush landscapes and sage-grouse populations. Ultimately, success will be measured by the maintenance and enhancement of sage-grouse populations well into the future.

Objectives

The overall objective is to protect priority sage-grouse habitats from anthropogenic disturbances that will reduce distribution or abundance of sage-grouse. Priority sage-grouse habitats are areas that have the highest conservation value to maintaining or increasing sage-grouse populations. These areas would include breeding, late brood-rearing, winter concentration areas, and where known, migration or connectivity corridors. These areas have been, or will be identified by state fish and wildlife agencies in coordination with respective BLM offices. Priority habitat designations must reflect the vision, goals and objectives of this overall plan if the conservation measures are to be effective. Additionally, there is an opportunity for synergy and collaboration with WAFWA in order to identify a consistent way to designate priority sage-grouse habitat areas and develop a range-wide priority habitat area map. This collaborative and overarching approach could help ensure activities immediately outside the priority areas do not impact priority habitat.

To reach this objective, it will be necessary to achieve the following sub-objectives for priority habitat:

- Designate priority sage-grouse habitats for each WAFWA management zone (Stiver et al. 2006) across the current geographic range of sage-grouse that are large enough to stabilize populations in the short term and enhance populations over the long term.
- To maintain or increase current populations, manage or restore priority areas so that at least 70% of the land cover provides adequate sagebrush habitat to meet sage-grouse needs.
- Develop quantifiable habitat and population objectives with WAFWA and other conservation partners at the management zone and/or other appropriate scales. Develop a monitoring and adaptive management strategy to track whether these objectives are being met, and allow for revisions to management approaches if they are not.[ii]
- Manage priority sage-grouse habitats so that discrete anthropogenic disturbances cover less than 3% of the total sage-grouse habitat regardless of ownership. Anthropogenic features include but are not limited to paved highways, graded gravel roads, transmission lines, substations, wind

[ii] As population trends within each Management Zone respond, long-term success can be judged based on comparisons with data from the 1965-2003 period for that specific Management Zone (Stiver et al., 2006).

[iii] Professional judgment as derived from Holloran 2005, Walker et al. 2007, Doherty et al. 2008, Doherty et al. 2011, Naugle et al. 2011a,b.

turbines, oil and gas wells, geothermal wells and associated facilities, pipelines, landfills, homes, and mines. [iii]

- In priority habitats where the 3% disturbance threshold is already exceeded from any source, no further anthropogenic disturbances will be permitted by BLM until enough habitat has been restored to maintain the area under this threshold (subject to valid existing rights).
- In this instance, an additional objective will be designated for the priority area to prioritize and reclaim/restore anthropogenic disturbances so that 3% or less of the total priority habitat area is disturbed within 10 years.

Note to add context to above objective: Disturbance can be described within categories as discrete (having a distinct measureable impact in space and time) or diffuse (pressure is exerted over broad spatial or temporal scales) (Turner and Gardner 1991). Most anthropogenic disturbance (roads, power lines, oil/gas wells, tall structures) are discrete disturbances. Livestock grazing is a diffuse disturbance. Fire can be either discrete or diffuse depending on its characteristics and the scales at which it is measured. Sage-grouse are extremely sensitive to discrete disturbance (Johnson et al. 2011, Naugle et al. 2011a,b) although diffuse disturbance over broad spatial and temporal scales can have similar, but less visible effects.

Spatial and temporal scales are important components in measuring and interpreting the effects of disturbance (Johnson and St-Laurent 2011). A discrete event might be significant to individuals or local communities but have little effect on the larger population or region (See Figure 2 in Appendix B). Therefore, defining the spatial extent (the region bounding the analysis), spatial and temporal scale (the dimension of the event), and the resolution (the precision of the measurement) are fundamental inputs into any assessment of disturbance (Wheatley and Johnson 2009).

Two spatial extents for measuring anthropogenic disturbance will be used: 1) the area contained within individual priority areas and 2) each one-mile section within the priority area. This hierarchical arrangement allows concentrated anthropogenic disturbance to exceed recommended thresholds within a smaller area, yet still maintain an overall level at the scale to which sage-grouse respond within priority areas.

(1) Large-scale disturbances that impact sage grouse distribution and abundance at any level will not be permitted within priority areas (subject to valid existing rights). Other, smaller scale proposed anthropogenic disturbances will not disturb more than a total of 3% of the acreage within each priority area.

[iii] Professional judgment as derived from Holloran 2005, Walker et al. 2007, Doherty et al. 2008, Doherty et al. 2011, Naugle et al. 2011a,b.

(2) Proposed anthropogenic surface disturbances within an individual priority area will be encouraged to occur in areas of existing development, or areas of non-suitable habitats. Suitable buffers, depending on the occurrence of adjacent seasonal habitats and local information (e.g. migratory vs. non-migratory populations; [Connelly et al. 2000]) may be applied in siting a proposed anthropogenic surface disturbance to protect surrounding suitable, undisturbed habitats.

(3) Concentrating or clustering disturbances locally while maintaining total disturbance below 3% at the priority habitat scale may cause some one-mile^2 analysis sections to exceed the 3% anthropogenic disturbance goal. For example, a sand and gravel mine can result in intensive development of 40 acres, effectively rendering that area unsuitable for sage-grouse. The actual 40-acre disturbance may not push total anthropogenic disturbance to more than 3% for the entire priority area, but obviously has a significant local impact. In these situations, 40 acres of off-site mitigation will be necessary to offset this loss of habitat. The priority is to implement off-site mitigation within the priority sage-grouse habitat, followed by general sage-grouse habitat.

If a project proponent agrees to site proposed anthropogenic surface disturbance within areas of existing development or areas of non-suitable habitat in a priority area, and the resulting localized total surface disturbance exceeds 3% (but the anthropogenic surface disturbance of the entire priority area does not exceed 3%), the need for off-site mitigation should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Additionally, there are sub-objectives that must be met in general sage-grouse habitat. General sage-grouse habitat is occupied (seasonal or year-round) habitat outside of priority habitat. These areas have been, or will be identified by state fish and wildlife agencies in coordination with respective BLM offices.

It will be necessary to achieve the following sub-objectives for general habitat:

- Quantify and delineate general habitat for capability to provide connectivity among priority areas (Knick and Hanser 2011).
- Conserve, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat and connectivity (Knick and Hanser 2011) to promote movement and genetic diversity, with emphasis on those habitats occupied by sage-grouse.
- Assess general sage-grouse habitats to determine potential to replace lost priority habitat caused by perturbations and/or disturbances and provide connectivity (Knick and Hanser 2011) between priority areas.
    - These habitats should be given some priority over other general sage-grouse habitats that provide marginal or substandard sage-grouse habitat.

- Restore historical habitat functionality to support sage-grouse populations guided by objectives to maintain or enhance connectivity. Total area and locations will be determined at the Land Use Plan level.
- Enhance general sage-grouse habitat such that population declines in one area are replaced elsewhere within the habitat.

Conservation Measures

The following conservation measures are designed to achieve population and habitat objectives stated in this report. They are organized by resource programs.

Travel and Transportation

The Travel and Transportation program is principally focused on road networks within the sage-grouse range. Roads can range from state or interstate highways to gravel and two-track roads. Within the sage-grouse range, 95% of the mapped sagebrush habitats are within 2.5 km (1.55 miles) of a mapped road; density of secondary roads exceeds 5 km/km^2 (3.1 miles/247 acres) in some regions (Knick et al. 2011).

Roads have multiple impacts on wildlife in terrestrial ecosystems, including:

1) Increased mortality from collision with vehicles;
2) Changes in behavior;
3) Loss, fragmentation, and alteration of habitat;
4) Spread of exotic species; and
5) Increased human access, resulting in facilitation of additional alteration and use of habitats by humans (Formann and Alexander 1998, Jackson 2000, Trombulak and Frissel 2000).

The effect of roads can be expressed directly through changes in habitat and sage-grouse populations and indirectly through avoidance behavior because of noise created by vehicle traffic (Lyon and Anderson 2003, 75 FR 13910).

<u>Priority sage-grouse habitat areas</u>

- Limit motorized travel to designated roads, primitive roads, and trails at a minimum.
- Travel management should evaluate the need for permanent or seasonal road or area closures.
- Complete activity level plans within five years of the record of decision. During activity level planning, where appropriate, designate routes with current administrative/agency purpose or need to administrative access only.
- Limit route construction to realignments of existing designated routes if that realignment has a minimal impact on sage-grouse habitat, eliminates the need to construct a new road, or is necessary for motorist safety
- Use existing roads, or realignments as described above to access valid existing rights that are not yet developed. If valid existing rights cannot be accessed via existing roads, then build any new road constructed to the absolute minimum standard necessary, and add the surface disturbance to the total disturbance in the priority area. If that disturbance exceeds 3 % for that area, then make additional, effective mitigation necessary to offset the resulting loss of sage-grouse habitat (see Objectives).

- Allow no upgrading of existing routes that would change route category (road, primitive road, or trail) or capacity unless the upgrading would have minimal impact on sage-grouse habitat, is necessary for motorist safety, or eliminates the need to construct a new road.
- Conduct restoration of roads, primitive roads and trails not designated in travel management plans. This also includes primitive route/roads that were not designated in Wilderness Study Areas and within lands with wilderness characteristics that have been selected for protection.
- When reseeding roads, primitive roads and trails, use appropriate seed mixes and consider the use of transplanted sagebrush.

Recreation

Recreational activities in sagebrush habitats range from hiking, camping and hunting to lek viewing, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Many of these activities are benign uses in sagebrush habitats. However, excessive use, such as repeated disturbance to leks for viewing that disrupts sage-grouse breeding activities, can have negative effects (75 FR 13910). Off-trail recreation by OHV users can fragment habitat and create corridors for spread of exotic plant species (Knick et al. 2011).

Special Recreation Permits (SRP)

- Only allow SRPs that have neutral or beneficial affects to priority habitat areas.

Lands/Realty

The Lands and Realty program primarily influences rights-of-way (ROWs), land tenure adjustments, and proposed land withdrawals. Existing and proposed developments for ROWs (such as powerlines, pipelines, and renewable energy projects) and access to various mineral claims or energy development locations have the potential to cause habitat loss and fragmentation that decreases habitat and population connectivity. Roads also create corridors that facilitate spread of exotic plant species (Gelbard and Belnap 2003). In addition, roads and infrastructure networks can increase sage-grouse mortality from increased predation and collisions with vehicles. Sage-grouse may avoid areas because of noise from vehicle traffic (Lyon and Anderson 2003). Adjustments for land tenure and strategically-located land withdrawals can be used to increase connectivity within sage-grouse populations and sagebrush habitats (Knick and Hanser 2011). In addition, land acquisitions and withdrawals may be important conservation strategies because increased development on private lands, which is not subject to mitigation, will focus greater needs for conservation of sage-grouse and sagebrush on public lands (Knick et al. 2011).

Rights of Way

<u>Priority sage-grouse habitat areas</u>

- Make priority sage-grouse habitat areas exclusion areas for new ROWs permits. Consider the following exceptions:

  - Within designated ROW corridors encumbered by existing ROW authorizations: new ROWs may be co-located only if the entire footprint of the proposed project (including construction and staging), can be completed within the existing disturbance associated with the authorized ROWs.
  - Subject to valid, existing rights: where new ROWs associated with valid existing rights are required, co-locate new ROWs within existing ROWs or where it best minimizes sage-grouse impacts. Use existing roads, or realignments as described above, to access valid existing rights that are not yet developed. If valid existing rights cannot be accessed via existing roads, then build any new road constructed to the absolute minimum standard necessary, and add the surface disturbance to the total disturbance in the priority area. If that disturbance exceeds 3% for that area, then make additional effective mitigation necessary to offset the resulting loss of sage-grouse.

- Evaluate and take advantage of opportunities to remove, bury, or modify existing power lines within priority sage-grouse habitat areas. Sage-grouse may avoid powerlines because of increased predation risk (Steenhof et al. 1993, Lammers and Collopy 2007). Powerlines effectively influence (direct physical area plus estimated area of effect due to predator movements) at least 39% of the sage-grouse range (Knick et al. 2011). Deaths resulting from collisions with powerlines were an important source of mortality for sage-grouse in southeastern Idaho (Beck et al. 2006, 75 FR 13910)
- Where existing leases or ROWs have had some level of development (road, fence, well, etc.) and are no longer in use, reclaim the site by removing these features and restoring the habitat.

  Planning Direction Note: While engaged in this sage-grouse EIS planning process, relocate existing designated ROW corridors crossing priority sage-grouse habitat void of any authorized ROWs, outside of the priority habitat area. If relocation is not possible, undesignate that entire corridor during the planning process.

<u>General sage-grouse habitat areas</u>

- Make general sage-grouse habitat areas “avoidance areas” for new ROWs.
- Where new ROWs are necessary, co-locate new ROWs within existing ROWs where possible.

Land Tenure Adjustment

<u>Priority sage-grouse habitat areas</u>

- Retain public ownership of priority sage-grouse habitat. Consider exceptions where:
  - There is mixed ownership, and land exchanges would allow for additional or more contiguous federal ownership patterns within the priority sage-grouse habitat area.
  - Under priority sage-grouse habitat areas with minority federal ownership, include an additional, effective mitigation agreement for any disposal of federal land. As a final preservation measure consideration should be given to pursuing a permanent conservation easement.

- Where suitable conservation actions cannot be achieved, seek to acquire state and private lands with intact subsurface mineral estate by donation, purchase or exchange in order to best conserve, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat.

Proposed Land Withdrawals

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Propose lands within priority sage-grouse habitat areas for mineral withdrawal.
- Do not approve withdrawal proposals not associated with mineral activity unless the land management is consistent with sage-grouse conservation measures. (For example; in a proposed withdrawal for a military training range buffer area, manage the buffer area with sage-grouse conservation measures.)

Range Management

Potential impacts of herbivory on sage-grouse and their habitat include:

1) Long-term effects of historic overgrazing on sagebrush habitat;

2) Sage-grouse habitat changes due to herbivory;

3) Direct effects of herbivores on sage-grouse, such as trampling of nests and eggs;

4) Altered sage-grouse behavior due to presence of herbivores; and

5) Impacts to sage-grouse and sage-grouse behavior from structures associated with grazing management (Beck and Mitchell 2000).

Managing livestock grazing to maintain residual cover of herbaceous vegetation so as to reduce predation during nesting may be the most beneficial for sage-grouse populations (Beck and Mitchell 2000, Aldridge and Brigham 2003). Other management objectives that control livestock movements and grazing intensities can be achieved broadly through rotational grazing patterns or locally through water and salt placements (Beck and Mitchell 2000). Treatments used to manipulate vegetation ultimately may have far greater effect on sage-grouse through long-term habitat changes rather than direct impacts of grazing itself (Freilich et al. 2003, Knick et al. 2011). An important objective in managing livestock grazing is to maintain residual cover of herbaceous vegetation to reduce predation during nesting (Beck and Mitchell 2000) and to maintain the integrity of riparian vegetation and other wetlands (Crawford et al. 2004). Proper livestock management (timing, location, and intensity) can assist in meeting sage-grouse habitat objectives and reduce fuels (Briske et al. 2011).

- Within priority sage-grouse habitat, incorporate sage-grouse habitat objectives and management considerations into all BLM grazing allotments through AMPs or permit renewals.

- Work cooperatively on integrated ranch planning within sage-grouse habitat so operations with deeded/BLM allotments can be planned as single units.
- Prioritize completion of land health assessments and processing grazing permits within priority sage-grouse habitat areas. Focus this process on allotments that have the best opportunities for conserving, enhancing or restoring habitat for sage-grouse. Utilize Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) to conduct land health assessments to determine if standards of range-land health are being met.
- Conduct land health assessments that include (at a minimum) indicators and measurements of structure/condition/composition of vegetation specific to achieving sage-grouse habitat objectives (Doherty et al. 2011). If local/state seasonal habitat objectives are not available, use sage-grouse habitat recommendations from Connelly et al. 2000b and Hagen et al. 2007.

Implementing Management Actions after Land Health and Habitat Evaluations

- Develop specific objectives to conserve, enhance or restore priority sage-grouse habitat based on ESDs and assessments (including within wetlands and riparian areas). If an effective grazing system that meets sage-grouse habitat requirements is not already in place, analyze at least one alternative that conserves, restores or enhances sage-grouse habitat in the NEPA document prepared for the permit renewal (Doherty et al. 2011b, Williams et al. 2011).
- Manage for vegetation composition and structure consistent with ecological site potential and within the reference state to achieve sage-grouse seasonal habitat objectives.
- Implement management actions (grazing decisions, AMP/Conservation Plan development, or other agreements) to modify grazing management to meet seasonal sage-grouse habitat requirements (Connelly et al. 2011c). Consider singly, or in combination, changes in:

    1) Season or timing of use;

    2) Numbers of livestock (includes temporary non-use or livestock removal);

    3) Distribution of livestock use;

    4) Intensity of use; and

    5) Type of livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, horses, llamas, alpacas and goats) (Briske et al. 2011).
- During drought periods, prioritize evaluating effects of the drought in priority sage-grouse habitat areas relative to their needs for food and cover. Since there is a lag in vegetation recovery following drought (Thurow and Taylor 1999, Cagney et al. 2010), ensure that post-drought management allows for vegetation recovery that meets sage-grouse needs in priority sage-grouse habitat areas.

Riparian Areas and Wet Meadows

- Manage riparian areas and wet meadows for proper functioning condition within priority sage-grouse habitats.
    - Within priority and general sage-grouse habitats, manage wet meadows to maintain a component of perennial forbs with diverse species richness relative to site potential (e.g., reference state) to facilitate brood rearing. Also conserve or enhance these wet meadow complexes to maintain or increase amount of edge and cover within that edge to minimize elevated mortality during the late brood rearing period (Hagen et al. 2007, Kolada et al. 2009, Atamian et al. 2010).
- Where riparian areas and wet meadows meet proper functioning condition, strive to attain reference state vegetation relative to the ecological site description.
    - For example: Within priority sage-grouse habitat, reduce hot season grazing on riparian and meadow complexes to promote recovery or maintenance of appropriate vegetation and water quality. Utilize fencing/herding techniques or seasonal use or livestock distribution changes to reduce pressure on riparian or wet meadow vegetation used by sage-grouse in the hot season (summer) (Aldridge and Brigham 2002, Crawford et al. 2004, Hagen et al. 2007).
- Authorize new water development for diversion from spring or seep source only when priority sage-grouse habitat would benefit from the development. This includes developing new water sources for livestock as part of an AMP/conservation plan to improve sage-grouse habitat.
- Analyze springs, seeps and associated pipelines to determine if modifications are necessary to maintain the continuity of the predevelopment riparian area within priority sage-grouse habitats. Make modifications where necessary, considering impacts to other water uses when such considerations are neutral or beneficial to sage-grouse.

Treatments to Increase Forage for Livestock/Wild Ungulates

<u>Priority sage-grouse habitat areas</u>

- Only allow treatments that conserve, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat (this includes treatments that benefit livestock as part of an AMP/Conservation Plan to improve sage-grouse habitat.[iv]
- Evaluate the role of existing seedings that are currently composed of primarily introduced perennial grasses in and adjacent to priority sage-grouse habitats to determine if they should be restored to sagebrush or habitat of higher quality for sage-grouse. If these seedings are part of an AMP/

[iv] Conserve or enhance means to allow no degradation and can mean that the improvement or livestock supplement is part of a grazing/AMP/Conservation Plan that facilitates meeting sage-grouse habitat objectives within a pasture or allotment.

Conservation Plan or if they provide value in conserving or enhancing the rest of the priority habitats, then no restoration would be necessary. Assess the compatibility of these seedings for sage-grouse habitat or as a component of a grazing system during the land health assessments (Davies et al. 2011).

- For example: Some introduced grass seedings are an integral part of a livestock management plan and reduce grazing pressure in important sagebrush habitats or serve as a strategic fuels management area.

Structural Range Improvements and Livestock Management Tools

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Design any new structural range improvements and location of supplements (salt or protein blocks) to conserve, enhance, or restore sage-grouse habitat through an improved grazing management system relative to sage-grouse objectives. Structural range improvements, in this context, include but are not limited to: cattleguards, fences, exclosures, corrals or other livestock handling structures; pipelines, troughs, storage tanks (including moveable tanks used in livestock water hauling), windmills, ponds/reservoirs, solar panels and spring developments. Potential for invasive species establishment or increase following construction must be considered in the project planning process and monitored and treated post-construction.
- When developing or modifying water developments, use best management practices (BMPs, see Appendix C) to mitigate potential impacts from West Nile virus (Clark et al. 2006, Doherty 2007, Walker et al. 2007b, Walker and Naugle 2011).
- Evaluate existing structural range improvements and location of supplements (salt or protein blocks) to make sure they conserve, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat.
    - To reduce outright sage-grouse strikes and mortality, remove, modify or mark fences in high risk areas within priority sage-grouse habitat based on proximity to lek, lek size, and topography (Christiansen 2009, Stevens 2011).
    - Monitor for, and treat invasive species associated with existing range improvements (Gelbard and Belnap 2003 and Bergquist et al. 2007).

Retirement of Grazing Privileges

- Maintain retirement of grazing privileges as an option in priority sage-grouse areas when base property is transferred or the current permittee is willing to retire grazing on all or part of an allotment. Analyze the adverse impacts of no livestock use on wildfire and invasive species threats (Crawford et al. 2004) in evaluating retirement proposals.

    Planning direction Note: Each planning effort will identify the specific allotment(s) where permanent retirement of grazing privileges is potentially beneficial.

Wild Horse and Burro Management

Wild horses and burros have the potential to impact habitats used by sage-grouse by reducing grass, shrub, and forb cover and increasing unpalatable forbs and exotic plants including cheatgrass (Beever and Aldridge 2011). Effects of wild equids on habitats may be especially pronounced during periods of drought or vegetation stress. Wild equids have different grazing patterns than domestic livestock, thus increasing the magnitude of grazing across the entire landscape (Beever and Aldridge 2011).

Ongoing Authorizations/Activities

- Manage wild horse and burro population levels within established Appropriate Management Levels (AML).
- Prioritize gathers in priority sage-grouse habitat, unless removals are necessary in other areas to prevent catastrophic environmental issues, including herd health impacts.

Proposed Authorization/Activities

- Within priority sage-grouse habitat, develop or amend herd management area plans (HMAPs) to incorporate sage-grouse habitat objectives and management considerations for all BLM herd management areas (HMAs).
    - For all HMAs within priority sage-grouse habitat, prioritize the evaluation of all AMLs based on indicators that address structure/condition/composition of vegetation and measurements specific to achieving sage-grouse habitat objectives.
- Coordinate with other resources (Range, Wildlife, and Riparian) to conduct land health assessments to determine existing structure/condition/composition of vegetation within all BLM HMAs.
- When conducting NEPA analysis for wild horse and burro management activities, water developments or other rangeland improvements for wild horses in priority sage-grouse habitat, address the direct and indirect effects to sage-grouse populations and habitat. Implement any water developments or rangeland improvements using the criteria identified for domestic livestock identified above in priority habitats.

Minerals

The primary potential risks to sage-grouse from energy and mineral development are:

1) Direct disturbance, displacement, or mortality of grouse;
2) Direct loss of habitat, or loss of effective habitat through fragmentation and reduced habitat patch size and quality; and
3) Cumulative landscape-level impacts (Bergquist et al. 2007, Walston et al. 2009, Naugle et al. 2011).

There is strong evidence from the literature to support that surface-disturbing energy or mineral development within priority sage-grouse habitats is not consistent with a goal to maintain or increase populations or distribution. None of the published science reports a positive influence of development on sage-grouse populations or habitats. Breeding populations are severely reduced at well pad densities commonly permitted (Holloran 2005, Walker et al. 2007a). Magnitude of losses varies from one field to another, but findings suggest that impacts are universally negative and typically severe.

Mechanisms that lead to avoidance and decreased fitness have not been empirically tested but rather suggested from multiple correlative and observational studies. For example, abandonment may increase if leks are repeatedly disturbed by raptors perching on power lines near leks (Ellis 1984), by vehicle traffic on nearby roads (Lyon and Anderson 2003), or by noise and human activity associated with energy development during the breeding season (Remington and Braun 1991, Holloran 2005, Kaiser 2006, Blickley and Patricelli *In review*). One recently completed research study in Wyoming (Blickley et al. *In press*), experimentally validates noise from natural gas drilling and roads resulted in a decline of 29% and 73% respectively in male peak attendance at leks relative to paired controls; declines were immediate and sustained throughout the experiment with low statistical support for a cumulative effect of noise over time. Collisions with nearby power lines and vehicles and increased predation by raptors may also increase mortality of birds at leks (Connelly et al. 2000). Alternatively, roads and power lines may indirectly affect lek persistence by altering productivity of local populations or survival at other times of the year. For example, sage-grouse mortality associated with power lines and roads occurs year-round (Beck et al. 2006, Aldridge and Boyce 2007), and ponds created by coal bed natural gas development may increase the risk of West Nile virus mortality in late summer (Walker et al. 2004, Zou et al. 2006, Walker et al. 2007b). Loss and degradation of sagebrush habitat can also reduce carrying capacity of local breeding populations (Swenson et al. 1987, Braun 1998, Connelly et al. 2000, 2000b, Crawford et al. 2004). Birds may avoid otherwise suitable habitat as the density of roads, power lines, or energy development increases (Lyon and Anderson 2003, Holloran 2005, Kaiser 2006, Doherty et al. 2008, Carpenter et al. 2010).

Negative responses of sage-grouse to energy development were consistent among studies regardless of whether they examined lek dynamics or demographic rates of specific cohorts within populations. Sage-grouse populations decline when birds avoid infrastructure in one or more seasons (Doherty et al. 2008, Carpenter et al. 2010) and when cumulative impacts of development negatively affect reproduction or survival (Aldridge and Boyce 2007), or both demographic rates (Lyon and Anderson 2003, Holloran 2005, Holloran et al. 2010). Avoidance of energy development at the scale of entire oil and gas fields should not be considered a simple shift in habitat use but rather a reduction in the distribution of sage-grouse (Walker et al. 2007). Avoidance is likely to result in true population declines if density dependence, competition, or displacement of birds into poorer-quality adjacent habitats lowers survival or reproduction (Holloran and Anderson 2005, Aldridge and Boyce 2007, Holloran et al. 2010). High site fidelity in sage-grouse also suggests that unfamiliarity with new habitats may also reduce survival, as in other grouse species (Yoder et al. 2004). Sage-grouse in the Powder River Basin were 1.3 times more likely to occupy winter habitats that had not been developed for energy (12 wells per 4 square kilometers or 12 wells per 1.5 square miles), and avoidance of developed areas was most pronounced when it occurred in high-quality winter habitat with abundant sagebrush (Doherty et al. 2008). In a similar study in Alberta, avoidance of otherwise suitable

wintering habitats within a 1.9-kilometer (1.2 mile) radius of energy development resulted in substantial loss of functional habitat surrounding wells (Carpenter et al. 2010).

Long-term studies in the Pinedale Anticline Project Area in southwest Wyoming present the most complete picture of cumulative impacts and provide a mechanistic explanation for declines in populations. Early in development, nest sites were farther from disturbed than undisturbed leks, the rate of nest initiation from disturbed leks was 24 percent lower than for birds breeding on undisturbed leks, and 26 percent fewer females from disturbed leks initiated nests in consecutive years (Lyon and Anderson 2003). As development progressed, adult females remained in traditional nesting areas regardless of increasing levels of development, but yearlings that had not yet imprinted on habitats inside the gas field avoided development by nesting farther from roads (Holloran 2005). The most recent study confirmed that yearling females avoided infrastructure when selecting nest sites, and yearling males avoided leks inside of development and were displaced to the periphery of the gas field (Holloran et al. 2010). Recruitment of males to leks also declined as distance within the external limit of development increased, indicating a high likelihood of lek loss near the center of developed oil and gas fields (Kaiser 2006). The most important finding from studies in Pinedale was that sage-grouse declines are explained in part by lower annual survival of female sage-grouse and that the impact on survival resulted in a population-level decline (Holloran 2005). High site fidelity but low survival of adult sage-grouse combined with lek avoidance by younger birds (Holloran et al. 2010) resulted in a time lag of 3–4 years between the onset of development activities and lek loss (Holloran 2005). The time lag observed by Holloran (2005) in the Anticline matched that for leks that became inactive 3–4 years after natural gas development in the Powder River Basin (Walker et al. 2007a). Analysis of seven oil and gas fields across Wyoming showed time lags of 2–10 years between activities associated with energy development and its measurable effects on sage-grouse populations (Harju et al. 2010).

Impacts as measured by the number of males attending leks are most severe near the lek, remain discernible out to >4 miles (Holloran 2005, Walker et al. 2007, Tack 2009, Johnson et al. 2011), and often result in lek extirpations (Holloran 2005, Walker et al. 2007). Negative effects of well surface occupancy were apparent out to 3.1 miles, the largest radius investigated, in 2 of 7 study areas in Wyoming (Harju et al. 2010). Curvilinear relationships show that lek counts decreased with distance to the nearest active drilling rig, producing well, or main haul road and that development within 3 to 4 miles of leks decrease counts of displaying males (Holloran 2005). All well-supported models in Walker et al. (2007) indicate a strong negative effect, estimated as proportion of development within either 0.5 miles or 2 miles, on lek persistence. A model with development at 4 miles had less support, but the regression coefficient indicated that negative impacts within 4 miles were still apparent. Two additional studies reported negative impacts apparent out to 8 miles on large lek occurrence (>25 males; Tack 2009) and out to 11.7 miles on lek trends (Johnson et al. 2011), the largest scales evaluated.

Past BLM conservation measures have focused on 0.25 mile No Surface Occupancy (NSO) buffers around leks, and timing stipulations applied to 0.6 mile buffers around leks to protect both breeding and nesting activities. Given impacts of large scale disturbances described above that occur across seasons and impact all demographic rates, applying NSO or other buffers around leks at any distance is unlikely to be effective. Even if this approach were to be continued, it should be noted that protecting even 75 to >80% of nesting

hens would require a 4-mile radius buffer (Table 1). Even a 4-mile NSO buffer would not be large enough to offset all the impacts reviewed above. A 4-mile NSO likely would not be practical given most leases are not large enough to accommodate a buffer of this size, and lek spacing within priority habitats is such that lek-based buffers may overlap and preclude all development.

We do not include timing restrictions on construction and drilling during the breeding season because they do not prevent impacts of infrastructure (e.g., avoidance, mortality) at other times of the year, during the production phase, or in other seasonal habitats that are crucial for population persistence (e.g., winter; Walker et al. 2007). Seasonal timing restrictions may be effective during the exploration phase. Instead, we recommend excluding mineral development and other large scale disturbances from priority habitats where possible, and where it is not limit disturbance as much as possible.

For these reasons, we believe the conservation strategy most likely to meet the objective of maintaining or increasing sage-grouse distribution and abundance is to exclude energy development and other large scale disturbances from priority habitats, and where valid existing rights exist, minimize those impacts by keeping disturbances to 1 per section with direct surface disturbance impacts held to 3% of the area or less.

Table 1. Distance Of Greater Sage-Grouse Nests From Lek Of Capture[1]

% Nests within 2-mi. radius	% Nests Within 4-mi. radius	Location	Study
46.4 (n = 13/28)	85.7 (n = 24/28)	North Park, CO	Peterson (1980)
59.5 (n = 182/306)	85 (n = 260/306)	Idaho	Autenrieth (1981)
71.8 (n = 51/71)	90.1 (n = 64/71)	North Park, CO	Giesen (1995)
49.5 (n = 192/388)	77.1 (n = 299/388)	Moffat County, CO	Thompson et al. 2005, Thompson 2006
48.4 (n = 15/31)	96.8 (n = 30/31)	Eagle and South Routt Counties, CO	Graham and McConnell 2004, Graham and Jones 2005
44.7 (n = 152/340)	74.4 (n = 243/340)	Wyoming	Holloran and Anderson (2005)
35.5 (n = 86/238)	61 (n = 145/238) @ 3 miles (data unavailable at this time for 4 miles)	Montana	Moynahan and Lindberg (2006)
35.5 (n = 27/76)	76.3 (n = 58/76)	Montana	Tack (2009)
50 (n = 495)	>80 (n = 495)	Oregon	Hagen (2011)

[1]Data obtained from Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan and additional recent studies/plans.

Fluid Minerals

Unleased Federal Fluid Mineral Estate

Alternative A

- Close priority sage-grouse habitat areas to fluid mineral leasing. Upon expiration or termination of existing leases, do not accept nominations/expressions of interest for parcels within priority areas.
- Allow geophysical exploration within priority sage-grouse habitat areas to obtain exploratory information for areas outside of and adjacent to priority sage-grouse habitat areas. Allow geophysical operations only by helicopter-portable drilling methods and in accordance with seasonal timing restrictions and/or other restrictions that may apply.

Alternative B

- Close priority sage-grouse habitat areas to fluid mineral leasing. Consider an exception:
    - When there is an opportunity for the BLM to influence conservation measures where surface and/or mineral ownership is not entirely federally owned (i.e., checkerboard ownership). In this case, a plan amendment may be developed that opens the priority area for new leasing. The plan must demonstrate long-term population increases in the priority area through mitigation (prior to issuing the lease) including lease stipulations, off-site mitigation, etc., and avoid short-term losses that put the sage-grouse population at risk from stochastic events leading to extirpation.
- Allow geophysical exploration within priority sage-grouse habitat areas to obtain exploratory information for areas outside of and adjacent to priority sage-grouse habitat areas. Only allow geophysical operations by helicopter-portable drilling methods and in accordance with seasonal timing restrictions and/or other restrictions that may apply.

Leased Federal Fluid Mineral Estate

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas (with varying levels of exploration & development)

Apply the following conservation measures through Resource Management Plan (RMP) implementation decisions (e.g., approval of an Application for Permit to Drill, Sundry Notice, etc.) and upon completion of the environmental record of review (43 CFR 3162.5), including appropriate documentation of compliance with NEPA. In this process evaluate, among other things:

1. Whether the conservation measure is "reasonable" (43 CFR 3101.1-2) with the valid existing rights; and
2. Whether the action is in conformance with the approved RMP.[v]

[v] Plan conformance means, "a resource management action shall be specifically provided for in the plan, or if not specifically mentioned, shall be clearly consistent with the terms, conditions, and decisions of the approved plan or amendment." 43 CFR 1601.0-5(b).

Provide the following conservation measures as terms and conditions of the approved RMP:

- Do not allow new surface occupancy on federal leases within priority habitats, this includes winter concentration areas (Doherty et al. 2008, Carpenter et al. 2010) during any time of the year. Consider an exception:
    - If the lease is entirely within priority habitats, apply a 4-mile NSO around the lek, and limit permitted disturbances to 1 per section with no more than 3% surface disturbance in that section.
    - If the entire lease is within the 4-mile lek perimeter, limit permitted disturbances to 1 per section with no more than 3% surface disturbance in that section. Require any development to be placed at the most distal part of the lease from the lek, or, depending on topography and other habitat aspects, in an area that is less demonstrably harmful to sage-grouse.
- Apply a seasonal restriction on exploratory drilling that prohibits surface-disturbing activities during the nesting and early brood-rearing season in all priority sage-grouse habitat during this period.
- Do not use Categorical Exclusions (CXs) including under the Energy Policy Act of 2005, Section 390 in priority sage-grouse habitats due to resource conflicts.
- Complete Master Development Plans in lieu of Application for Permit to Drill (APD)-by-APD processing for all but wildcat wells.
- When permitting APDs on existing leases that are not yet developed, the proposed surface disturbance cannot exceed 3% for that area. Consider an exception if:
    - Additional, effective mitigation is demonstrated to offset the resulting loss of sage-grouse (see Objectives).
        - When necessary, conduct additional, effective mitigation in 1) priority sage-grouse habitat areas or – less preferably – 2) general sage-grouse habitat (dependent upon the area-specific ability to increase sage-grouse populations).
        - Conduct additional, effective mitigation first within the same population area where the impact is realized, and if not possible then conduct mitigation within the same Management Zone as the impact, per 2006 WAFWA Strategy – pg 2-17.
- Require unitization when deemed necessary for proper development and operation of an area (with strong oversight and monitoring) to minimize adverse impacts to sage-grouse according to the Federal Lease Form, 3100-11, Sections 4 and 6.
- Identify areas where acquisitions (including subsurface mineral rights) or conservation easements, would benefit sage-grouse habitat.
- Require a full reclamation bond specific to the site. Insure bonds are sufficient for costs relative to reclamation (Connelly et al. 2000, Hagen et al. 2007) that would result in full restoration. Base the reclamation costs on the assumption that contractors for the BLM will perform the work.

- Make applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs, see Appendix D) mandatory as Conditions of Approval within priority sage-grouse habitat.

Solid Minerals

Coal

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- *Surface mines*: Find unsuitable all surface mining of coal under the criteria set forth in 43 CFR 3461.5.
- *Sub-surface mines:* Grant no new mining leases unless all surface disturbances (appurtenant facilities) are placed outside of the priority sage-grouse habitat area.
- For coal mining operations on existing leases:
    - *Sub-surface mining:* in priority sage-grouse habitat areas, place any new appurtenant facilities outside of priority areas. Where new appurtenant facilities associated with the existing lease cannot be located outside the priority sage-grouse habitat area, co-locate new facilities within existing disturbed areas. If this is not possible, then build any new appurtenant facilities to the absolute minimum standard necessary.

General sage-grouse habitat

- Apply minimization of surface-disturbing or disrupting activities (including operations and maintenance) where needed to reduce the impacts of human activities on important seasonal sage-grouse habitats. Apply these measures during activity level planning.
    - Use additional, effective mitigation to offset impacts as appropriate (determined by local options/needs).

Locatable Minerals

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Propose withdrawal from mineral entry based on risk to the sage-grouse and its habitat from conflicting locatable mineral potential and development.
    - Make any existing claims within the withdrawal area subject to validity patent exams or buy out. Include claims that have been subsequently determined to be null and void in the proposed withdrawal.
    - In plans of operations required prior to any proposed surface disturbing activities, include the following:
        - Additional, effective mitigation in perpetuity for conservation (In accordance with existing policy, WO IM 2008-204). Example: purchase private land and mineral rights or severed subsurface mineral rights within the priority area and deed to US Government).

        - Consider seasonal restrictions if deemed effective.

    - Make applicable Best Management Practices (see Appendix E) mandatory as Conditions of Approval within priority sage-grouse habitat.

Non-energy Leasable Minerals (i.e. sodium, potash)

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Close priority habitat to non-energy leasable mineral leasing. This includes not permitting any new leases to expand an existing mine.
- For existing non-energy leasable mineral leases, in addition to the solid minerals BMPs (Appendix E), follow the same BMPs applied to Fluid Minerals (Appendix D), when wells are used for solution mining.

Saleable Mineral Materials

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Close priority habitat to mineral material sales.
- Restore saleable mineral pits no longer in use to meet sage-grouse habitat conservation objectives.

Mineral Split Estate

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Where the federal government owns the mineral estate, and the surface is in non-federal ownership, apply the conservation measures applied on public lands.
- Where the federal government owns the surface, and the mineral estate is in non-federal ownership, apply appropriate Fluid Mineral BMPs (see Appendix D) to surface development.

Wildfire Suppression, Fuels Management and Fire Rehabilitation

These programs address the threats resulting from wildfires and post-wildfire effects along with a program (fuels management) designed to try to reduce these impacts. Together these programs provide a significant opportunity to influence sagebrush habitats that benefit sage-grouse. Wildfire, particularly in low elevation Wyoming big sagebrush systems, has resulted in significant habitat loss primarily because of subsequent invasion by cheatgrass and other exotic plant species (Miller et al. 2011). The number of fires and total acreage burned has increased throughout the sage-grouse range (Miller et al. 2011). Long-term monitoring following prescribed fire is important because treatments may not increase either yield or nutritional quality of forbs eaten by sage-grouse, and also may decrease abundance of insects that are important for growth of sage-grouse chicks (Beck et al. 2009, Rhodes et al. 2010). Therefore, it is critical

not only to conduct management actions that reduce the long-term loss of sagebrush but also to restore and recover burned areas to habitats that will be used by sage-grouse (Pyke 2011). Prescribed fire is a tool that can assist in the recovery of sagebrush habitat in some vegetation types (Davies et al. 2011).

Fuels Management

Priority sage-grouse habitat areas

- Design and implement fuels treatments with an emphasis on protecting existing sagebrush ecosystems.
    - Do not reduce sagebrush canopy cover to less than 15% (Connelly et al. 2000, Hagen et al. 2007) unless a fuels management objective requires additional reduction in sagebrush cover to meet strategic protection of priority sage-grouse habitat and conserve habitat quality for the species. Closely evaluate the benefits of the fuel break against the additional loss of sagebrush cover in the EA process.
    - Apply appropriate seasonal restrictions for implementing fuels management treatments according to the type of seasonal habitats present in a priority area.
    - Allow no treatments in known winter range unless the treatments are designed to strategically reduce wildfire risk around or in the winter range and will maintain winter range habitat quality.
    - Do not use fire to treat sagebrush in less than 12-inch precipitation zones (e.g., Wyoming big sagebrush or other xeric sagebrush species; Connelly et al. 2000, Hagen et al. 2007, Beck et al. 2009). However, if as a last resort and after all other treatment opportunities have been explored and site specific variables allow, the use of prescribed fire for fuel breaks that would disrupt the fuel continuity across the landscape could be considered, in stands where cheatgrass is a very minor component in the understory (Brown 1982).
    - Monitor and control invasive vegetation post-treatment.
    - Rest treated areas from grazing for two full growing seasons unless vegetation recovery dictates otherwise (WGFD 2011).
    - Require use of native seeds for fuels management treatment based on availability, adaptation (site potential), and probability of success (Richards et al. 1998). Where probability of success or native seed availability is low, non-native seeds may be used as long as they meet sage-grouse habitat objectives (Pyke 2011).
    - Design post fuels management projects to ensure long term persistence of seeded or pre-treatment native plants. This may require temporary or long-term changes in livestock grazing management, wild horse and burro management, travel management, or other activities to achieve and maintain the desired condition of the fuels management project (Eiswerth and Shonkwiler 2006).

- Design fuels management projects in priority sage-grouse habitat to strategically and effectively reduce wildfire threats in the greatest area. This may require fuels treatments implemented in a more linear versus block design (Launchbaugh et al. 2007).

During fuels management project design, consider the utility of using livestock to strategically reduce fine fuels (Diamond et al. 2009), and implement grazing management that will accomplish this objective Davies et al. 2011 and Launchbaugh et al. 2007). Consult with ecologists to minimize impacts to native perennial grasses.

Fire operations

- In priority sage-grouse habitat areas, prioritize suppression, immediately after life and property, to conserve the habitat.
- In general sage-grouse habitat, prioritize suppression where wildfires threaten priority sage-grouse habitat.
- Follow Best Management Practices (WO IM 2011-138, see appendix E.)

Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ES&R)

- Prioritize native seed allocation for use in sage-grouse habitat in years when preferred native seed is in short supply. This may require reallocation of native seed from ES&R projects outside of priority sage-grouse habitat to those inside it. Use of native plant seeds for ES&R seedings is required based on availability, adaptation (site potential), and probability of success Richards et al. 1998). Where probability of success or native seed availability is low, non-native seeds may be used as long as they meet sage-grouse habitat conservation objectives (Pyke 2011). Re-establishment of appropriate sagebrush species/subspecies and important understory plants, relative to site potential, shall be the highest priority for rehabilitation efforts.
- Design post ES&R management to ensure long term persistence of seeded or pre-burn native plants. This may require temporary or long-term changes in livestock grazing, wild horse and burro, and travel management, etc., to achieve and maintain the desired condition of ES&R projects to benefit sage-grouse (Eiswerth and Shonkwiler 2006).
- Consider potential changes in climate (Miller at al. 2011) when proposing post-fire seedings using native plants. Consider seed collections from the warmer component within a species' current range for selection of native seed. (Kramer and Havens 2009).

Habitat Restoration

Habitat restoration cross-cuts all programs. It is an important tool to create and/or maintain a landscape that benefits sage-grouse.

- Prioritize implementation of restoration projects based on environmental variables that improve chances for project success in areas most likely to benefit sage-grouse (Meinke et al. 2009).
    - Prioritize restoration in seasonal habitats that are thought to be limiting sage-grouse distribution and/or abundance.
- Include sage-grouse habitat parameters as defined by Connelly et al. (2000), Hagen et al. (2007) or if available, State Sage-Grouse Conservation plans and appropriate local information in habitat restoration objectives. Make meeting these objectives within priority sage-grouse habitat areas the highest restoration priority.
- Require use of native seeds for restoration based on availability, adaptation (ecological site potential), and probability of success (Richards et al. 1998). Where probability of success or adapted seed availability is low, non-native seeds may be used as long as they support sage-grouse habitat objectives (Pyke 2011).
- Design post restoration management to ensure long term persistence. This could include changes in livestock grazing management, wild horse and burro management and travel management, etc., to achieve and maintain the desired condition of the restoration effort that benefits sage-grouse (Eiswerth and Shonkwiler 2006).
- Consider potential changes in climate (Miller et al. 2011) when proposing restoration seedings when using native plants. Consider collection from the warmer component of the species current range when selecting native species (Kramer and Havens 2009).
- Restore native (or desirable) plants and create landscape patterns which most benefit sage-grouse.
- Make re-establishment of sagebrush cover and desirable understory plants (relative to ecological site potential) the highest priority for restoration efforts.
- In fire prone areas where sagebrush seed is required for sage-grouse habitat restoration, consider establishing seed harvest areas that are managed for seed production (Armstrong 2007) and are a priority for protection from outside disturbances.

Monitoring of Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats

Given the degree of uncertainty associated with managing natural resources, adaptive management approaches that include rigorous monitoring protocols to support them are essential if conservation goals are to be realized (Walters 1986, Burgman et al. 2005, Stankey et al. 2005, Turner 2005, Lyons et al. 2008). Recent efforts to develop range-wide policy and conservation measures for sage-grouse have emphasized the importance of improving monitoring efforts on both sage-grouse distribution and population trends, and the habitat they depend on (Wambolt et al. 2002, Stiver et al. 2006, Reese and Boyer 2007, Connelly et al. 2011a).

Monitoring is necessary to provide an objective appraisal of the effects of potentially positive conservation actions, and to assess the relative negative effects of management actions to sage-grouse populations and their habitats. Adaptive management planning also reveals substantial gaps in knowledge about key processes and functional relationships (Walters 1987), and therefore helps to identify and prioritize research needs. Ideally, monitoring attributes of sage-grouse habitat and sage-grouse populations will allow linking real or potential habitat changes from natural events and management actions to vital rates of sage-grouse populations (Stiver et al. 2006, Naugle and Walker 2007). Population monitoring led by State wildlife agencies and consistent long-term habitat monitoring among all jurisdictions will enable managers to identify indicators associated with population change across large landscapes and to ameliorate negative effects with appropriate conservation actions (Burgman et al. 2005, Turner 2005).

Sage-grouse select habitats at multiple scales across large landscapes (Connelly et al. 2003, Stiver et al. 2006), which monitoring strategies for sage-grouse habitats must reflect. At landscape levels (RMP level), monitoring should track percent of sagebrush and cover and maturity of stands, preservation of key seasonal habitat components, and the degree of connectivity among populations, seasonal habitats and stands. At the project level, a truly effective monitoring strategy will include measures as to how plant communities respond, how that relates to structural and other sage-grouse habitat requirements, and how sage-grouse populations respond demographically. Quantitative data for habitat measurements should be collected that are sensitive to the land use change being proposed (Stiver et al 2006). Monitoring must occur over the proper time frames to evaluate temporal variation of important components of sage-grouse habitats (Stiver et al. 2006).

Recognizing the importance of monitoring both sage-grouse habitat and populations, BLM in November 2004, completed the National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (USDI BLM 2004) to address conservation and management of sage-grouse. The overarching goal was to "provide a consistent and scientifically based approach for collection and use of monitoring data for sagebrush habitats, sage-grouse and other components of the sagebrush community." Four action items were identified to accomplish this goal: 1) Develop, cooperatively with our partners, appropriate monitoring strategies and protocols at the appropriate scale for sage-grouse habitat in conjunction with the development of the range-wide conservation action plan; 2) Develop, cooperatively with our partners, a sage-grouse habitat assessment methodology in conjunction with development of the range-wide conservation action plan; 3) Incorporate the sage-grouse habitat assessment framework into the land health assessment process for evaluating indicators of healthy rangelands; and 4) In conjunction with the development of the range-wide conservation action plan, issue guidance for collecting fine-scale monitoring and assessment information and incorporating requirements into implementation projects and plans.

To date, BLM has completed portions of the above action items. In August 2010, the Sage-Grouse Habitat Assessment Framework: Multi-scale Habitat Assessment Tool was completed (Stiver et al. 2010). The assessment framework provides policy makers, resource managers, and natural resource specialists a comprehensive framework for landscape conservation in sagebrush ecosystems with an emphasis on sage-grouse. Implementation policy directing consistent use of the assessment still needs to be completed by BLM in addition to other guidance identified in the strategy.

BLM has recently completed the agency's Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) Strategy (Toevs 2011). The AIM strategy identifies "core indicators" for reporting landscape level attributes. The AIM strategy has resulted in BLM adopting the Natural Resource Conservation Service's National Resource Inventory (NRI) methodology as part of BLM's Landscape Monitoring Project. The NRI protocols provide BLM a statistical framework for evaluating management actions, and programs and policies at a landscape or regional level. Initial NRI data collection occurred on all lands managed by BLM during the summer of 2011. During the summer of 2012 additional NRI monitoring sites are being incorporated to evaluate sagebrush habitats that contain approximately two-thirds of the sage-grouse populations west wide. At this time, the remaining sage-grouse populations have not been identified for long-term habitat monitoring due to funding short falls. In addition to prioritizing funding to fully achieve this objective, habitat monitoring protocols at a fine scale to evaluate impacts at a project level remain to be developed.

Estimates of sage-grouse population size are not available for any population, rather trends in population size are estimated through a lek count index. Exact estimates of sage grouse abundance, while desirable, are probably less important than trends and particularly how sage grouse respond to management actions.

Counts of males attending leks in the spring have been used by wildlife agencies as the primary index to population trends since Patterson suggested that this method might be useful in 1952 (Patterson 1952). Use of convenience sampling to monitor bird populations has been criticized (Ellingson and Lukacs 2003), and lek counts in particular have been challenged as inconsistently conducted, inherently biased and without any known relationship to population size (Beck and Braun 1980, Walsh et al. 2004, Sedinger 2007). Despite limitations of the method, lek counts remain the best available information on population trends over time, and pragmatic strategies to improve population estimation remain elusive (Reese and Bowyer 2007).

It is beyond the scope of this report to develop methodology to better estimate sage-grouse distribution and abundance, but rather to emphasize that WAFWA should convene a technical group for this purpose, and that this group should consider ways to:

1. Standardize, at least within management zones, lek count methodology.
2. Develop and implement methodology to estimate the number of leks in an unbiased manner (Walsh et al. 2004, Sedinger 2007), and determine the location of new or previously unknown leks (particularly important since priority habitat designations are based in large part on locations of leks).
3. Develop and implement methodology to estimate the proportion of males detected while attending leks, and explore degree and nature of variability.
4. Develop and explore methodology to estimate sex ratios within sage-grouse populations.
5. Use Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping technology and analytical tools to track changes in distribution over time, connectivity among populations and population segments, and explore spatially explicit models that link sage-grouse population performance with ecological indicators (Naugle and Walker 2007).

The standardization of monitoring methods and implementation of a defensible monitoring approach is vital if BLM and other conservation partners are to use the resulting information to guide implementation of conservation activities (Naugle and Walker 2007). Monitoring strategies for sage-grouse habitat and populations must be collaborative, as habitat occurs across varied land ownership (52% BLM, 8% USFS, 31% private 5% state, 4% BIA and other Federal; 75 FR 13910), and state fish and wildlife agencies have primary responsibility for population level management of wildlife, including monitoring.

Acronyms

AML	Appropriate Management Level
AMP	Allotment Management Plan
APD	Application of Permit to Drill
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BMPs	Best Management Practices
CX	Categorical Exclusion
ERMA	Extensive Recreation Management Areas
ESA	Endangered Species Act
ESD	Ecological Site Description
ES&R	Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation
IM	Instruction Memorandum
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	non-governmental organization
NMAC	National Multi-Agency Coordination Group
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NPT	National Policy Team
NTT	National Technical Team
RIDT	Regional Interdisciplinary Team
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RMT	Regional Management Team
ROW	Right-of-Way
SRMA	Special Recreation Management Area
SRP	Special Recreation Permit
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WAFWA	Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Glossary

2008 WAFWA Sage-grouse MOU: A memorandum of understanding (MOU) among Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency. The purpose of the MOU is to provide for cooperation among the participating state and federal land, wildlife management and science agencies in the conservation and management of sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.) habitats and other sagebrush-dependent wildlife throughout the western United States and Canada and a commitment of all agencies to implement the 2006 WAFWA Conservation Strategy.

2011 Partnership MOU: A partnership agreement among the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service, Forest Service, United State Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. This MOU is for range management – to implement NRCS practices on adjacent federal properties.

Administrative Access: A term used to describe access for resource management and administrative purposes such as fire suppression, cadastral surveys, permit compliance, law enforcement and military in the performance of their official duty, or other access needed to administer BLM-managed lands or uses.

Avoidance Areas: Areas to be avoided but that may be available for location of ROWs with special stipulations.

Best Management Practices (BMPs): A suite of techniques that guide or may be applied to management actions to aide in achieving desired outcomes. BMPs are often developed in conjunction with land use plans, but they are not considered a planning decision unless the plans specify that they are mandatory.

Casual Use: Casual use means activities ordinarily resulting in no or negligible disturbance of the public lands, resources, or improvements. For examples for rights of ways see 43 CFR 2801.5. For examples for locatable minerals see 43 CFR 3809.5.

Conservation Plan: The recorded decisions of a landowner or operator, cooperating with a conservation district, on how the landowner or operator plans, within practical limits, to use his/her land according to its capability and to treat it according to its needs for maintenance or improvement of the soil, water, animal, plant, and air resources.

Conserve: To cause no degradation or loss of sage-grouse habitat. Conserve can also refer to maintaining intact sagebrush steppe by fine tuning livestock use, watching for and treating new invasive species and maintaining existing range improvements that benefit sage-grouse etc.

Ecological Site: A distinctive kind of land with specific physical characteristics that differs from other kinds of land in its ability to produce a distinctive kind and amount of vegetation.

Exploration: Active drilling and geophysical operations to:

a. Determine the presence of the mineral resource; or
b. Determine the extent of the reservoir.

Development: Active drilling and production of wells

Development Area: Areas primarily leased with active drilling and wells capable of production in payable quantities.

Enhance: The improvement of habitat by increasing missing or modifying unsatisfactory components and/or attributes of the plant community to meet sage-grouse objectives. Examples include modifying livestock grazing systems to improve the quantity and vigor of desirable forbs, improving water flow in riparian areas by modifying existing spring developments to return more water to the riparian area below the development, or marking fences to minimize sage-grouse hits and mortality.

General Sage-grouse Habitat: Is occupied (seasonal or year-round) habitat outside of priority habitat. These areas have been identified by state fish and wildlife agencies in coordination with respective BLM offices.

Integrated Ranch Planning: A method for ranch planning that takes a holistic look at all elements of the ranching operations, including strategic and tactical planning, rather than approaching planning as several separate enterprises.

Large Scale Anthropogenic Disturbances: Features include but are not limited to paved highways, graded gravel roads, transmission lines, substations, wind turbines, oil and gas wells, geothermal wells and associated facilities, pipelines, landfills, agricultural conversion, homes, and mines.

Late Brood Rearing Area: Habitat includes mesic sagebrush and mixed shrub communities, wet meadows, and riparian habitats as well as some agricultural lands (e.g. alfalfa fields, etc).

Lek:[vi] A traditional courtship display area attended by male sage-grouse in or adjacent to sagebrush dominated habitat. A lek is designated based on observations of two or more male sage-grouse engaged in courtship displays. Sub-dominant males may display on itinerant strutting areas during population peaks. Such areas usually fail to become established leks. Therefore, a site where less than five males are observed strutting should be confirmed active for two years before meeting the definition of a lek (Connelly et al 2000, Connelly et al. 2003, 2004).

> **Lek Complex:** A lek or group of leks within 2.5 km (1.5 mi) of each other between which male sage-grouse may interchange from one day to the next. Fidelity to leks has been well documented.

[vi] Each State may have a slightly different definition of lek, active lek, inactive lek, occupied, and unoccupied leks. Regional planning will use the appropriate definition provided by the State of interest.

Visits to multiple leks are most common among yearlings and less frequent for adult males, suggesting an age-related period of establishment (Connelly et al. 2004).

Active Lek: Any lek that has been attended by male sage-grouse during the strutting season.

Inactive Lek: Any lek where sufficient data suggests that there was no strutting activity throughout a strutting season. Absence of strutting grouse during a single visit is insufficient documentation to establish that a lek is inactive. This designation requires documentation of either: 1) an absence of sage-grouses on the lek during at least 2 ground surveys separated by at least seven days. These surveys must be conducted under ideal conditions (April 1-May 7 (or other appropriate date based on local conditions), no precipitation, light or no wind, half-hour before sunrise to one hour after sunrise) or 2) a ground check of the exact known lek site late in the strutting season (after April 15) that fails to find any sign (tracks, droppings, feathers) of strutting activity. Data collected by aerial surveys should not be used to designate inactive status as the aerial survey may actually disrupt activities.

Occupied Lek: A lek that has been active during at least one strutting season within the prior 10 years.

Unoccupied Lek: A lek that has either been "destroyed" or "abandoned."

Destroyed Lek: A formerly active lek site and surrounding sagebrush habitat that has been destroyed and is no longer suitable for sage-grouse breeding.

Abandoned Lek: A lek in otherwise suitable habitat that has not been active during a period of 10 consecutive years. To be designated abandoned, a lek must be "inactive" (see above criteria) in at least four non-consecutive strutting seasons spanning the 10 years. The site of an "abandoned" lek should be surveyed at least once every 10 years to determine whether it has been re-occupied by sage-grouse.

Master Development Plans: A set of information common to multiple planned wells, including drilling plans, Surface Use Plans of Operations, and plans for future production.

Mitigation: Compensating for resource impacts by replacing or providing substitute resources or habitat.

Notice-level Mining Activities: To qualify for a Notice the mining activity must: 1) constitute exploration, 2) not involve bulk sampling of more than 1,000 tons of presumed ore, 3) must not exceed 5 acres of surface disturbance, and 4) must not occur in one of the special category lands listed in 43 CFR 3809.11(c). The Notice is to be filed in the BLM field office with jurisdiction over the land involved. The Notice does not need to be on a particular form but must contain the information required by 43 CFR 3809.301(b).

Offsite Mitigation: Compensating for resource impacts by replacing or providing substitute resources or habitat at a different location than the project area.

Plan of Operations: A Plan of Operations is required for all mining activity exploration greater than 5 acres or surface disturbance greater than casual use on certain special category lands. Special category lands are described under 43 CFR 3809.11(c) and include such lands as designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, lands within the National Wilderness Preservation System, and areas closed to off-road vehicles, among others. In addition, a plan of operations is required for activity greater than casual use on lands patented under the Stock Raising Homestead Act with Federal minerals where the operator does not have the written consent of the surface owner (43 CFR 3814). The Plan of operations needs to be filed in the BLM field office with jurisdiction over the land involved. The Plan of Operations does not need to be on a particular form but must address the information required by 43 CFR 3809.401(b).

Priority Sage-grouse Habitat: Areas that have been identified as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable sage-grouse populations. These areas would include breeding, late brood-rearing, and winter concentration areas. These areas have been identified by state fish and wildlife agencies in coordination with respective BLM offices.

Range Improvement: The term range improvement means any activity, structure or program on or relating to rangelands which is designed to improve production of forage; change vegetative composition; control patterns of use; provide water; stabilize soil and water conditions; and provide habitat for livestock and wildlife. The term includes, but is not limited to, structures, treatment projects, and use of mechanical means to accomplish the desired results.

Roads, Primitive Roads and Trails: Roads, primitive roads or trails that have been specifically designated for motorized use through a public implementation-level National Environmental Policy Act process in accordance with 43 CFR, Part 8340.

Reclamation: Rehabilitation of a disturbed area to make it acceptable for designated uses. This normally involves re-contouring, replacement of topsoil, re-vegetation, and other work necessary to ensure eventual restoration of the site.

Reference State: The reference state is the state where the functional capacities represented by soil/site stability, hydrologic function, and biotic integrity are performing at an optimum level under the natural disturbance regime. This state usually includes, but is not limited to, what is often referred to as the potential natural plant community.

Restoration: Implementation of a set of actions that promotes plant community diversity and structure that allows plant communities to be more resilient to disturbance and invasive species over the long term. The long-term goal is to create functional, high quality habitat that is occupied by sage-grouse. Short-term goal may be to restore the landform, soils and hydrology and increase the percentage of preferred vegetation, seeding of desired species, or treatment of undesired species.

State: A state is comprised of an integrated soil and vegetation unit having one or more biological communities that occur on a particular ecological site and that are functionally similar with respect to the three attributes (soil/site stability, hydrologic function, and biotic integrity) under natural disturbance regimes.

Stochastic: Randomly determined event, chance event, a condition determined by predictable processes and a random element.

Surface Disruption: Resource uses and activities that are likely to alter the behavior of, displace, or cause stress to sage-grouse occurring at a specific location and/or time. Surface disruption includes those actions that alter behavior or cause the displacement of sage-grouse such that reproductive success is negatively affected, or the physiological ability to cope with environmental stress is compromised. Examples of disruptive activities may include noise, vehicle traffic, or other human presence regardless of the associated activity.

Surface Disturbance: Suitable habitat is considered disturbed when it is removed and unavailable for immediate sage-grouse use.

a. Long-term removal occurs when habitat is physically removed through activities that replace suitable habitat with long term occupancy of unsuitable habitat such as a road, powerline, well pad or active mine. Long-term removal may also result from any activities that cause soil mixing, soil removal, and exposure of the soil to erosive processes.

b. Short–term removal occurs when vegetation is removed in small areas, but restored to suitable habitat within a few years (< 5) of disturbance, such as a successfully reclaimed pipeline, or successfully reclaimed drill hole or pit.

c. Suitable habitat rendered unusable due to numerous anthropogenic disturbances

d. Anthropogenic surface disturbance are surface disturbances meeting the above definitions which result from human activities.

Transition: A shift between two states. Transitions are not reversible by simply altering the intensity or direction of factors that produced the change. Instead, they require new inputs such as revegetation or shrub removal. Practices, such as these, that accelerate succession are often expensive to apply.

Unitization: Operation of multiple leases as a single lease under a single operator

Wildcat Well: An exploratory oil well drilled in land not known to be an oil field.

Wildland Fire: Any non-structure fire that occurs in the vegetation and/or natural fuels. Includes both prescribed fire and wildfire (NWCG Memo #024-2010 April 30, 2010. www.nwcg.gov).

Winter Concentration Areas: Sage-grouse winter habitats which are occupied annually by sage-grouse and provide sufficient sagebrush cover and food to support birds throughout the entire winter (especially periods with above average snow cover). Many of these areas support several different breeding

populations of sage-grouse. Sage-grouse typically show high fidelity for these areas, and loss or fragmentation can result in significant population impacts.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Life History Requirements of Greater Sage-grouse (excerpted from 75 FR 13910)

Greater sage-grouse depend on a variety of shrub-steppe habitats throughout their life cycle, and are considered obligate users of several species of sagebrush (e.g., *Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis* (Wyoming big sagebrush), *A. t.* ssp. *vaseyana* (mountain big sagebrush), and *A. t. tridentata* (basin big sagebrush)) (Patterson 1952, Braun et al. 1976, Connelly et al. 2000a, Connelly et al. 2004, Miller et al. 2011). Greater sage-grouse also use other sagebrush species such as *A. arbuscula* (low sagebrush), *A. nova* (black sagebrush), *A. frigida* (fringed sagebrush), and *A. cana* silver sagebrush (Schroeder et al. 1999, Connelly et al. 2004,). Thus, sage-grouse distribution is strongly correlated with the distribution of sagebrush habitats (Schroeder et al. 2004). Sage-grouse exhibit strong site fidelity (loyalty to a particular area even when the area is no longer of value) to seasonal habitats, which includes breeding, nesting, brood rearing, and wintering areas (Connelly et al. 2004, Connelly et al. 2011b). Adult sage-grouse rarely switch between these habitats once they have been selected, limiting their adaptability to changes.

During the spring breeding season, male sage-grouse gather together to perform courtship displays on areas called leks. The proximity, configuration, and abundance of nesting habitat are key factors influencing lek location (Connelly et al., 1981, and Connelly et al., 2000b, cited in Connelly et al., 2011). Leks can be formed opportunistically at any appropriate site within or adjacent to nesting habitat (Connelly et al. 2000a) and, therefore, lek habitat availability is not considered to be a limiting factor for sage-grouse (Schroeder et al. 1999). Nest sites are selected independent of lek locations, but the reverse is not true (Bradbury et al. 1989,Wakkinen et al. 1992). Thus, leks are indicative of nesting habitat.

Females have been documented to travel more than 20 km (12.5 mi) to their nest site after mating (Connelly et al. 2000a), but distances between a nest site and the lek on which breeding occurred is variable (Connelly et al. 2004, Connelly et al. 2011b). Average distance between a female's nest and the lek on which she was first observed ranged from 3.4 km (2.1 mi) to 7.8 km (4.8 mi) in five studies examining 301 nest locations (Schroeder et al. 1999).

Productive nesting areas are typically characterized by sagebrush with an understory of native grasses and forbs, with horizontal and vertical structural diversity that provides an insect prey base, herbaceous forage for pre-laying and nesting hens, and cover for the hen while she is incubating (Gregg 1991Schroeder et al. 1999, Connelly et al. 2000a, Connelly et al. 2004, Connelly et al. 2011b). Sage-grouse also may use other shrub or bunchgrass species for nest sites (Klebenow 1969, Connelly et al. 2000a, Connelly et al. 2004). Shrub canopy and grass cover provide concealment for sage-grouse nests and young, and are critical for reproductive success (Barnett and Crawford 1994, Gregg et al. 1994, DeLong et al.1995, Connelly et al. 2004).

Hens rear their broods in the vicinity of the nest site for the first 2-3 weeks following hatching (within 0.2-5 km (0.1-3.1 mi)), based on two studies in Wyoming (Connelly et al. 2004). Forbs and insects are essential nutritional components for chicks (Klebenow and Gray 1968, Johnson and Boyce 1991, Connelly et al. 2004). Therefore, early brood-rearing habitat must provide adequate cover (sagebrush canopy cover of 10 to 25 percent; Connelly et al. 2000a) adjacent to areas rich in forbs and insects to ensure chick survival during this period (Connelly et al. 2004, Hagen et al. 2007).

All sage-grouse gradually move from sagebrush uplands to more mesic areas (moist areas such as streambeds or wet meadows) during the late brood-rearing period (3 weeks post-hatch) in response to summer desiccation of herbaceous vegetation (Connelly et al. 2000a). Summer use areas can include sagebrush habitats as well as riparian areas, wet meadows and alfalfa fields (Schroeder et al. 1999). These areas provide an abundance of forbs and insects for both hens and chicks (Schroeder et al. 1999, Connelly et al. 2000a).

As vegetation continues to desiccate through the late summer and fall, sage-grouse shift their diet entirely to sagebrush (Schroeder et al. 1999). Sage-grouse depend entirely on sagebrush throughout the winter for both food and cover (Connelly et al. 2011a). Sagebrush stand selection is influenced by snow depth (Patterson 1952, Hupp and Braun 1989), availability of sagebrush above the snow to provide cover (Connelly et al. 2004, and references therein) and, in some areas, topography (e.g., elevation, slope and aspect, Beck 1977, Crawford et al. 2004).

Many populations of sage-grouse migrate between seasonal ranges in response to habitat distribution (Connelly et al. 2004). Migration can occur between winter and breeding and summer areas, between breeding, summer and winter areas, or not at all. Migration distances of up to 161 km (100 mi) have been recorded (Patterson 1952), however, distances vary depending on the locations of seasonal habitats (Schroeder et al. 1999). Migration distances for female sage-grouse generally are less than for males (Connelly et al. 2004), but in one study in Colorado, females travelled further than males (Beck 1977). Almost no information is available regarding the distribution and characteristics of migration corridors for sage-grouse (Connelly et al. 2004). Sage-grouse dispersal (permanent moves to other areas) is poorly understood (Connelly et al. 2004, Knick and Hanser 2011) and appears to be sporadic (Dunn and Braun 1986). Estimating an “average” home range for sage-grouse is difficult due to the large variation in sage-grouse movements both within and among populations. This variation is related to the spatial availability of habitats required for seasonal use and annual recorded home ranges have varied from 4 to 615 square kilometers (km^2) (1.5 to 237.5 square miles (mi^2)), Connelly et al. *2011b*).

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Appendix B. Scientific Inference

When making natural resource management decisions, managers desire a high level of certainty that their management actions will have the anticipated outcome (Ratti and Garton 1994, Garton et al. 2005). Unfortunately, natural systems have inherent complexity and stochasticity that make certainty in wildlife management decisions challenging (Williams et al. 2002). In an effort to ameliorate some of this uncertainty, managers use quality, published scientific investigations which are reliant upon thoughtful research design (Ratti and Garton 1994, Garton et al. 2005) to guide population and habitat management decisions. When relevant peer reviewed literature does not exist, managers have to resort to best professional judgment and/or unpublished studies. In addition, when using published and unpublished literature, managers must also be cognizant of the research findings for certainty of the conclusions, the scientific method, and if the findings can be applied from the data and results (Murphy and Noon 1991).

Most wildlife research is located along a continuum of field studies (Ratti and Garton 1994, Garton et al. 2005; Fig. 1) and provides varying degrees of reliable knowledge (Romesburg 1981, Hurlbert, 1984, Eberhardt and Thomas 1991). The more rigorous the research design, results, and conclusions, the more confident managers can be in the anticipated outcome (Ratti and Garton 1994, Garton et al. 2005). Research that bases its results and interpretation on an integrated research process includes field level experiments, field study, and modeling (Fig. 1). If designed appropriately, these research efforts can provide for a more broad-based application of research results as opposed to descriptive natural history studies (Ratti and Garton 1994, Garton et al. 2005) (Fig. 1).

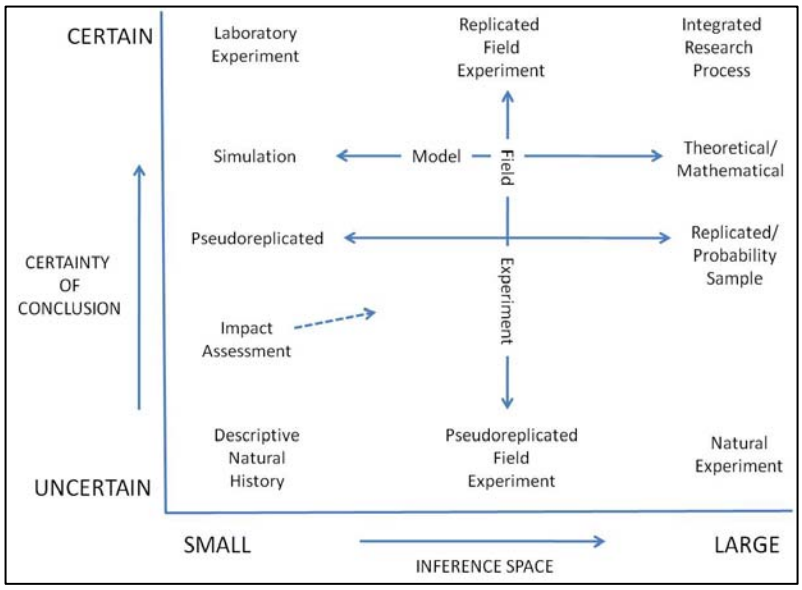

Figure 1. The spectrum of types of wildlife studies that can produce results and conclusions with a large amount of certainty over a very large area of applicability (adapted from Ratti and Garton 1994 and Garton et al. 2005).

Because sage-grouse research has been on-going for over 60 years, managers have access to published literature from several studies (metareplication (Johnson 2002)) that includes different years, study areas, methods, and investigators (Johnson 2002) which leads to more certainty in conclusions (for example see Hagen et al. 2007). In contrast, for some management actions, access to published and unpublished literature may be limited to a single descriptive study. A single descriptive study and/or professional judgment has the lowest level of certainty and lowest inference space. Unfortunately, it may be the only information available on the subject. Ultimately, the result is succinctly summarized by Anderson et al. (2001:312) who stated, "In the long run, science is safeguarded by repeated studies to ascertain what is real and what is merely a spurious result from a single study."

Management in sagebrush ecosystems is further complicated by new forms of development or the unprecedented pace at which traditional uses are increasing. Wind and other renewable energy sources are being proposed and developed in areas that previously had undergone little development. The applicability of results from previous research in other regions on oil and gas development to these new forms of land use is unknown, but is the best information currently available. We also do not know how sagebrush and sage-grouse respond to the increasing intensity of all uses ranging from traditional commodity development to nonconsumptive activities, such as recreation and OHV travel that is occurring across their range. Although previous research can guide management decisions, the changes due to the cumulative effect of this new level of increased development may take years to be fully expressed in habitat and population response.

No single research study, or even a series of studies, regardless of design, and/or inference extent can provide complete certainty in their conclusion(s). As a result, managers must be vigilant in their judgment of research study design, its inference space, and applicability to their management issue when making management decisions. This report cites a large number of published and unpublished studies that can be placed along the continuum of certainty of conclusion and inference space (Fig. 1). Many of the studies cited are from different researchers, study sites, methodologies, and/or years which assists and improves the certainty of the conclusion and inference space (Fig. 1), but ultimately, it is incumbent upon managers to assess their level of risk (consequences of being wrong) with management decisions based upon the cited findings.

The large spatial scales occupied by sage-grouse seasonally (as much as 1,700 mi ^{2}; Leonard et al. 2000) have made research on how they respond to habitat perturbations difficult to conduct. Although strength of inference is strongest for replicated experiments, studies of this nature have not been conducted on large scale perturbations such as oil and gas developments, wind farms, coal mines, powerlines, etc. We therefore relied on retrospective and correlational studies that looked at changes in sage-grouse distribution, abundance or demographic rates over time following these developments. We gave greater credence to conclusions obtained from multiple studies conducted at different locations at different times that showed similar results.

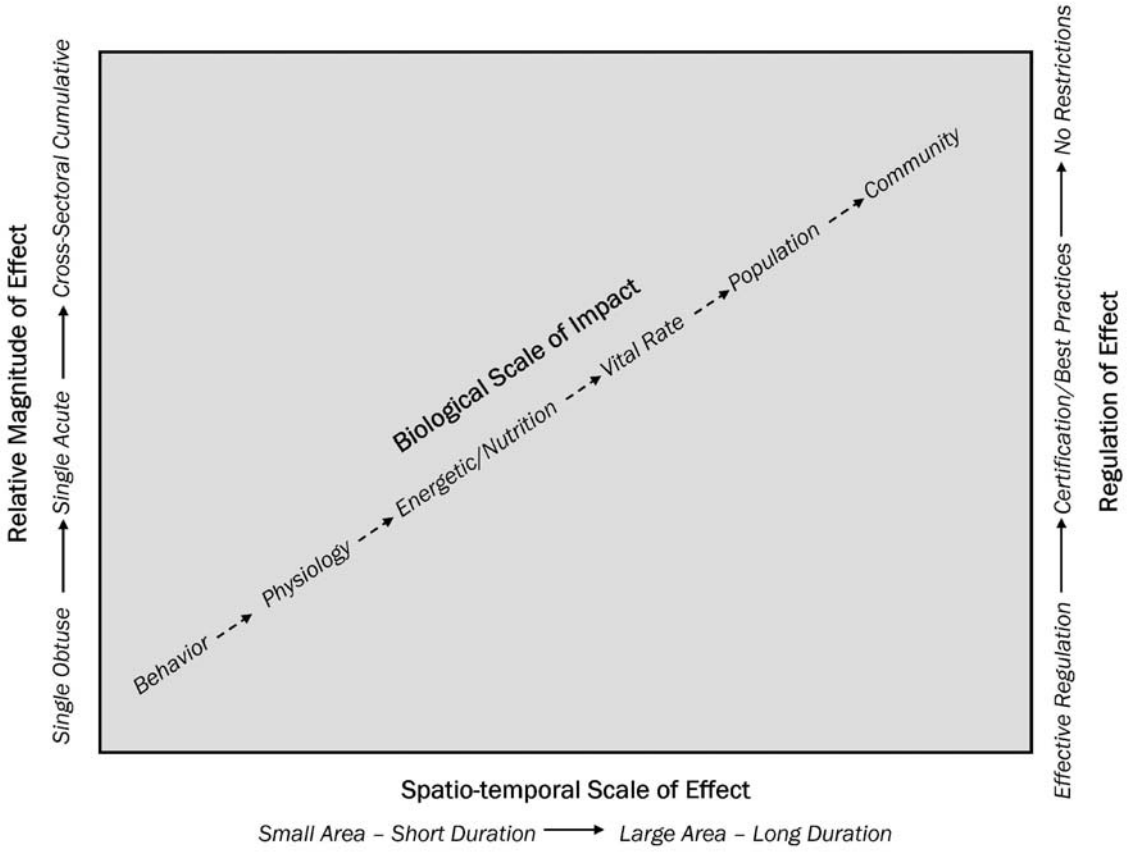

Figure 2. Schematic representation of a typology for classifying and predicting the impacts of human-wildlife interactions (as modified from Johnson and St-Laurent 2011).

Conservation measures described in this report are derived from interpretation of the best available scientific studies using our best professional judgment. Because there is a degree of uncertainty about the

effectiveness of these conservation measures, we recommend a rigorous adaptive management process be employed, with population and habitat monitoring as well as feedback loops so that conservation measures or policies that are ineffective can be changed (Lyons et al. 2008).

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Appendix C. BMPs for how to make a pond that won't produce mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus (from Doherty (2007)).

The following are seven distinct site modifications that if adhered to, would minimize exploitation of CBNG ponds by *Culex tarsalis*:

1. Increase the size of ponds to accommodate a greater volume of water than is discharged. This will result in un-vegetated and muddy shorelines that breeding *Cx. tarsalis* avoid (De Szalay and Resh 2000). This modification may reduce *Cx. tarsalis* habitat but could create larval habitat for *Culicoides sonorensis*, a vector of blue tongue disease, and should be used sparingly (Schmidtmann et al. 2000). Steep shorelines should be used in combination with this technique whenever possible (Knight et al. 2003).

2. Build steep shorelines to reduce shallow water (>60 cm) and aquatic vegetation around the perimeter of impoundments (Knight et al. 2003). Construction of steep shorelines also will create more permanent ponds that are a deterrent to colonizing mosquito species like *Cx. tarsalis* which prefer newly flooded sites with high primary productivity (Knight et al. 2003).

3. Maintain the water level below that of rooted vegetation for a muddy shoreline that is unfavorable habitat for mosquito larvae. Rooted vegetation includes both aquatic and upland vegetative types. Avoid flooding terrestrial vegetation in flat terrain or low lying areas. Aquatic habitats with a vegetated inflow and outflow separated by open water produce 5-10 fold fewer Culex mosquitoes than completely vegetated wetlands (Walton and Workman 1998). Wetlands with open water also had significantly fewer stage III and IV instars which may be attributed to increased predator abundances in open water habitats (Walton and Workman 1998).

4. Construct dams or impoundments that restrict down slope seepage or overflow by digging ponds in flat areas rather than damming natural draws for effluent water storage, or lining constructed ponds in areas where seepage is anticipated (Knight et al. 2003).

5. Line the channel where discharge water flows into the pond with crushed rock, or use a horizontal pipe to discharge inflow directly into existing open water, thus precluding shallow surface inflow and accumulation of sediment that promotes aquatic vegetation.

6. Line the overflow spillway with crushed rock, and construct the spillway with steep sides to preclude the accumulation of shallow water and vegetation.

7. Fence pond site to restrict access by livestock and other wild ungulates that trample and disturb shorelines, enrich sediments with manure and create hoof print pockets of water that are attractive to breeding mosquitoes.

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Appendix D. Best Management Practices for Fluid Mineral Development

Priority Habitats - BMPs are continuously improving as new science and technology become available and therefore are subject to change. Include from the following BMPs those that are appropriate to mitigate effects from the approved action.

Roads

- Design roads to an appropriate standard no higher than necessary to accommodate their intended purpose.
- Locate roads to avoid important areas and habitats.
- Coordinate road construction and use among ROW holders.
- Construct road crossing at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings.
- Establish speed limits on BLM system roads to reduce vehicle/wildlife collisions or design roads to be driven at slower speeds.
- Establish trip restrictions (Lyon and Anderson 2003) or minimization through use of telemetry and remote well control (e.g., Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition).
- Do not issue ROWs to counties on newly constructed energy development roads, unless for a temporary use consistent with all other terms and conditions included in this document.
- Restrict vehicle traffic to only authorized users on newly constructed routes (use signing, gates, etc.)
- Use dust abatement practices on roads and pads.
- Close and rehabilitate duplicate roads.

Operations

- Cluster disturbances, operations (fracture stimulation, liquids gathering, etc.), and facilities.
- Use directional and horizontal drilling to reduce surface disturbance.
- Place infrastructure in already disturbed locations where the habitat has not been restored.
- Consider using oak (or other material) mats for drilling activities to reduce vegetation disturbance and for roads between closely spaced wells to reduce soil compaction and maintain soil structure to increase likelihood of vegetation reestablishment following drilling.
- Apply a phased development approach with concurrent reclamation.
- Place liquid gathering facilities outside of priority areas. Have no tanks at well locations within priority areas (minimizes perching and nesting opportunities for ravens and raptors and truck traffic). Pipelines must be under or immediately adjacent to the road (Bui et al. 2010).

- Restrict the construction of tall facilities and fences to the minimum number and amount needed.
- Site and/or minimize linear ROWs to reduce disturbance to sagebrush habitats.
- Place new utility developments (power lines, pipelines, etc.) and transportation routes in existing utility or transportation corridors.
- Bury distribution power lines.
- Corridor power, flow, and small pipelines under or immediately adjacent to roads.
- Design or site permanent structures which create movement (e.g. a pump jack) to minimize impacts to sage-grouse.
- Cover (e.g., fine mesh netting or use other effective techniques) all drilling and production pits and tanks regardless of size to reduce sage-grouse mortality.
- Equip tanks and other above ground facilities with structures or devices that discourage nesting of raptors and corvids.
- Control the spread and effects of non-native plant species (Evangelista et al. 2011). (E.g. by washing vehicles and equipment.)
- Use only closed-loop systems for drilling operations and no reserve pits.
- Restrict pit and impoundment construction to reduce or eliminate threats from West Nile virus (Doherty 2007).
- Remove or re-inject produced water to reduce habitat for mosquitoes that vector West Nile virus. If surface disposal of produced water continues, use the following steps for reservoir design to limit favorable mosquito habitat:
    - Overbuild size of ponds for muddy and non-vegetated shorelines.
    - Build steep shorelines to decrease vegetation and increase wave actions.
    - Avoid flooding terrestrial vegetation in flat terrain or low lying areas.
    - Construct dams or impoundments that restrict down slope seepage or overflow.
    - Line the channel where discharge water flows into the pond with crushed rock.
    - Construct spillway with steep sides and line it with crushed rock.
    - Treat waters with larvicides to reduce mosquito production where water occurs on the surface.
- Limit noise to less than 10 decibels above ambient measures (20-24 dBA) at sunrise at the perimeter of a lek during active lek season (Patricelli et al. 2010, Blickley et al. *In preparation*).
- Require noise shields when drilling during the lek, nesting, broodrearing, or wintering season.
- Fit transmission towers with anti-perch devices (Lammers and Collopy 2007).

- Require sage-grouse-safe fences.
- Locate new compressor stations outside priority habitats and design them to reduce noise that may be directed towards priority habitat.
- Clean up refuse (Bui et al. 2011).
- Locate man camps outside of priority habitats.

Reclamation

- Include objectives for ensuring habitat restoration to meet sage-grouse habitat needs in reclamation practices/sites (Pyke 2011). . Address post reclamation management in reclamation plan such that goals and objectives are to protect and improve sage-grouse habitat needs.
- Maximize the area of interim reclamation on long-term access roads and well pads including reshaping, topsoiling and revegetating cut and fill slopes.
- Restore disturbed areas at final reclamation to the pre-disturbance landforms and desired plant community.
- Irrigate interim reclamation if necessary for establishing seedlings more quickly.
- Utilize mulching techniques to expedite reclamation and to protect soils.

<u>General sage-grouse habitat</u>

Best Management Practices

Make applicable BMPs mandatory as Conditions of Approval within general sage-grouse habitat. BMPs are continuously improving as new science and technology become available and therefore are subject to change. At a minimum include the following BMPs:

Roads

- Design roads to an appropriate standard no higher than necessary to accommodate their intended purpose.
- Do not issue ROWs to counties on energy development roads, unless for a temporary use consistent with all other terms and conditions included in this document.
- Establish speed limits to reduce vehicle/wildlife collisions or design roads to be driven at slower speeds.
- Coordinate road construction and use among ROW holders.
- Construct road crossing at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings.
- Use dust abatement practices on roads and pads.

- Close and reclaim duplicate roads, by restoring original landform and establishing desired vegetation.

Operations

- Cluster disturbances, operations (fracture stimulation, liquids gathering, etc.), and facilities.
- Use directional and horizontal drilling to reduce surface disturbance.
- Clean up refuse (Bui et al. 2010).
- Restrict the construction of tall facilities and fences to the minimum number and amount needed.
- Cover (e.g., fine mesh netting or use other effective techniques) all drilling and production pits and tanks regardless of size to reduce sage-grouse mortality.
- Equip tanks and other above ground facilities with structures or devices that discourage nesting of raptors and corvids.
- Use remote monitoring techniques for production facilities and develop a plan to reduce the frequency of vehicle use.
- Control the spread and effects from non-native plant species. (e.g. by washing vehicles and equipment.)
- Restrict pit and impoundment construction to reduce or eliminate augmenting threats from West Nile virus (Dougherty 2007).

Reclamation

- Include restoration objectives to meet sage-grouse habitat needs in reclamation practices/sites (Pyke 2011). Address post reclamation management in reclamation plan such that goals and objectives are to enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat.

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Appendix E. Best Management Practices for Locatable Mineral Development

BMPs are continuously improving as new science and technology become available and therefore are subject to change. Include from the following BMPs those that are appropriate to mitigate effects from the approved action.

Roads

- Design roads to an appropriate standard no higher than necessary to accommodate their intended purpose.
- Locate roads to avoid important areas and habitats.
- Coordinate road construction and use among ROW holders.
- Construct road crossing at right angles to ephemeral drainages and stream crossings.
- Establish speed limits on BLM system roads to reduce vehicle/wildlife collisions or design roads to be driven at slower speeds.
- Do not issue ROWs to counties on mining development roads, unless for a temporary use consistent with all other terms and conditions included in this document.
- Restrict vehicle traffic to only authorized users on newly constructed routes (e. g., use signing, gates, etc.)
- Use dust abatement practices on roads and pads.
- Close and reclaim duplicate roads, by restoring original landform and establishing desired vegetation.

Operations

- Cluster disturbances associated with operations and facilities as close as possible.
- Place infrastructure in already disturbed locations where the habitat has not been restored.
- Restrict the construction of tall facilities and fences to the minimum number and amount needed.
- Site and/or minimize linear ROWs to reduce disturbance to sagebrush habitats.
- Place new utility developments (power lines, pipelines, etc.) and transportation routes in existing utility or transportation corridors.
- Bury power lines.
- Cover (e.g., fine mesh netting or use other effective techniques) all pits and tanks regardless of size to reduce sage-grouse mortality.
- Equip tanks and other above ground facilities with structures or devices that discourage nesting of raptors and corvids.

- Control the spread and effects of non-native plant species (Gelbard and Belnap 2003, Bergquist et al. 2007).
- Restrict pit and impoundment construction to reduce or eliminate threats from West Nile virus (Doherty 2007).
- Remove or re-inject produced water to reduce habitat for mosquitoes that vector West Nile virus. If surface disposal of produced water continues, use the following steps for reservoir design to limit favorable mosquito habitat:
    - Overbuild size of ponds for muddy and non-vegetated shorelines.
    - Build steep shorelines to decrease vegetation and increase wave actions.
    - Avoid flooding terrestrial vegetation in flat terrain or low lying areas.
    - Construct dams or impoundments that restrict down slope seepage or overflow.
    - Line the channel where discharge water flows into the pond with crushed rock.
    - Construct spillway with steep sides and line it with crushed rock.
    - Treat waters with larvicides to reduce mosquito production where water occurs on the surface.
- Require sage-grouse-safe fences around sumps.
- Clean up refuse (Bui et al. 2010).
- Locate man camps outside of priority sage-grouse habitats.

Reclamation

- Include restoration objectives to meet sage-grouse habitat needs in reclamation practices/sites. Address post reclamation management in reclamation plan such that goals and objectives are to protect and improve sage-grouse habitat needs.
- Maximize the area of interim reclamation on long-term access roads and well pads including reshaping, topsoiling and revegetating cut and fill slopes.
- Restore disturbed areas at final reclamation to pre-disturbance landform and desired plant community.
- Irrigate interim reclamation as necessary during dry periods.

Utilize mulching techniques to expedite reclamation.

Literature Cited:

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Appendix F. Best Management Practices for Fire & Fuels (wo IM 2011-138)

Fuels Management BMPs:

1. Where applicable, design fuels treatment objective to protect existing sagebrush ecosystems, modify fire behavior, restore native plants, and create landscape patters which most benefit sage-grouse habitat.

2. Provide training to fuels treatment personnel on sage-grouse biology, habitat requirements, and identification of areas utilized locally.

3. Use fire prescriptions that minimize undesirable effects on vegetation or soils (e.g., minimize mortality of desirable perennial plant species and reduce risk of hydrophobicity).

4. Ensure proposed sagebrush treatments are planned with interdisciplinary input from BLM and /or state wildlife agency biologist and that treatment acreage is conservative in the context of surrounding sage-grouse seasonal habitats and landscape.

5. Where appropriate, ensure that treatments are configured in a manner (e.g., strips) that promotes use by sage-grouse (See Connelly et al., 2000*)

6. Where applicable, incorporate roads and natural fuel breaks into fuel break design.

7. Power-wash all vehicles and equipment involved in fuels management activities prior to entering the area to minimize the introduction of undesirable and/or invasive plant species.

8. Design vegetation treatment in areas of high frequency to facilitate firefighting safety, reduce the risk of extreme fire behavior; and to reduce the risk and rate of fire spread to key and restoration habitats.

9. Give priority for implementing specific sage-grouse habitat restoration projects in annual grasslands first to sites which are adjacent to or surrounded by sage-grouse key habitats. Annual grasslands are second priority for restoration when the sites not adjacent to key habitat, but within 2 miles of key habitat. The third priority for annual grasslands habitat restoration projects are sites beyond 2 miles of key habitat. The intent is to focus restoration outward from existing, intact habitat.

10. As funding and logistics permit, restore annual grasslands to a species composition characterized by perennial grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

11. Emphasize the use of native plant species, recognizing that non-native species may be necessary depending on the availability of native seed and prevailing site conditions.

12. Remove standing and encroaching trees within at least 100 meters of occupied sage-grouse leks and other habitats (e.g., nesting, wintering, and brood rearing) to reduce the availability of perch sites for avian predators, as appropriate, and resources permit.

13. Protect wildland areas from wildfire originating on private lands, infrastructure corridors, and recreational areas.

14. Reduce the risk of vehicle or human-caused wildfires and the spread of invasive species by planting perennial vegetation (e.g., green-strips) paralleling road rights-of-way.

15. Strategically place and maintain pre-treated strips/areas (e.g., mowing, herbicide application, and strictly managed grazed strips) to ail in controlling wildfire should wildfire occur near key habitats or important restoration areas (such as where investments in restoration have already been made).

Fire Management BMPs:

1. Develop state-specific sage-grouse toolboxes containing maps, a list of resource advisors, contact information, local guidance, and other relevant information.

2. Provide localized maps to dispatch offices and extended attack incident commanders for use in prioritizing wildfire suppression resources and designing suppression tactics.

3. Assign a sage-grouse resource advisor to all extended attack fires in or near key sage-grouse habitat areas. Prior to the fire season, provide training to sage-grouse resource advisors on wildfire suppression organization, objectives, tactics, and procedures to develop a cadre of qualified individuals.

4. On critical fire weather days, pre-position additional fire suppression resources to optimize a quick and efficient response in sage-grouse habitat areas.

5. During periods of multiple fires, ensure line officers are involved in setting priorities.

6. To the extent possible, locate wildfire suppression facilities (i.e., base camps, spike camps, drop points, staging areas, heli-bases) in areas where physical disturbance to sage-grouse habitat can be minimized. These include disturbed areas, grasslands, near roads/trails or in other areas where there is existing disturbance or minimal sagebrush cover.

7. Power-wash all firefighting vehicles, to the extent possible, including engines, water tenders, personnel vehicles, and ATVs prior to deploying in or near sage-grouse habitat areas to minimize noxious weed spread.

8. Minimize unnecessary cross-country vehicle travel during fire operations in sage-grouse habitat.

9. Minimize burnout operations in key sage-grouse habitat areas by constructing direct fireline whenever safe and practical to do so.

10. Utilize retardant and mechanized equipment to minimize burned acreage during initial attack.

11. As safety allows, conduct mop-up where the black adjoins unburned islands, dog legs, or other habitat features to minimize sagebrush loss.

Literature Cited:

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Appendix G. National Technical Team Members

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