From: Beyer, Emily
To: Lauren Bogard; Janice Schneider; Anne Kinsinger; Christine Wiley; Edwin Roberson; Helen Riggs; Jacquelynn Hanley; James Douglas; James Lyons; Jerold Gidner; Jolie Pollet; Lori Caramanian; Michael Black; Rodina Cave; Ronald Dunton; Sarah Greenberger; Sarah Peterson; Stephen Small; Theresa Rabot; Kimberly Thorsen; Press_Review; Frank Quimby
Subject: Re: Clips: Rangeland fire initial report
Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2015 2:12:07 PM

5.
WILDFIRE:
Interior report will guide efforts to protect sagebrush, grouse

Phil Taylor, E&E reporter

Published: Tuesday, March 10, 2015

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E&E's Power Plan Hub

A new Interior Department report calls for targeted investments to prevent and respond to rangeland fires that pose a top threat to the greater sage grouse and hundreds of other species in the Great Basin.

The **report**, released today by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, tasks fire crews to develop response plans that prioritize landscapes most susceptible to wildfire and invasive species in Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon and California.

It also calls for increased training for thousands who serve in rural and volunteer fire departments and rangeland fire protection associations so they can help Interior respond more quickly to fast-moving rangeland fires.

For those fires that do escape control, the report calls for faster rangeland restoration using genetically appropriate and locally adapted native plants and grasses, as well as a strategy to acquire, store and distribute those seeds.

Lastly, the strategy calls for digital maps and software so firefighters can be better informed of priority sage grouse habitat, landscape conditions and fire.

The report was required under Jewell's Jan. 5 **secretarial order** calling for a more unified and sophisticated approach to preventing and suppressing rangeland fires and for restoring landscapes that do burn.

The order set a Feb. 1 deadline for an initial **report** on how a new rangeland fire task force would implement the order. Today's report, which was delivered by Deputy Secretary Michael Connor, the task force chairman, details actions that can be implemented prior to the 2015 wildfire season. A final report is

due May 1 on actions to be taken prior to the 2016 season and beyond.

The order comes as invasive species, namely cheatgrass and medusahead rye, have led to larger and more frequent wildfires in the Great Basin, burning up habitat for the greater sage grouse. Interior's response to those threats will help the Fish and Wildlife Service determine whether the ground-dwelling bird is in need of Endangered Species Act protections. FWS's decision is due by September.

"Cheatgrass and other invasive species have contributed to making rangeland fire one of the greatest threats in the Great Basin -- not only to sagebrush habitat, but to wildlife, ranching, and other economic activities that depend on a healthy landscape," Jewell said in a statement. "As we head into the 2015 fire season, the actions recommended in this report will help ensure that our preparedness, response and recovery strategies better align with the threats facing the West."

The recommendations in today's report stem in part from comments received during an Interior conference last November in Boise that brought together top rangeland scientists, land managers and policymakers.

One **report** that was presented at that conference seeks to help land managers prioritize the placement and use of finite wildfire-fighting resources. It mapped lands that are most resilient to disturbances like fire and drought and most resistant to stressors like invasive species, and layered the results onto maps showing the density of sagebrush cover, which is a key indicator of sage grouse, and the density of breeding birds in a given area.

Rangeland fire and invasive species are among several threats facing the grouse across its 11-state Western range. Other threats include oil and gas development, transmission lines, roads, and even ravens.

On Tue, Mar 10, 2015 at 12:36 PM, Beyer, Emily <emily_beyer@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

> http://www.turnto10.com/story/28354692/apnewsbreak-firefighting-plan-aims-to-protect-west-habitat
>
> # APNewsBreak: Firefighting plan aims to protect West habitat
>
> By KEITH RIDLER
> Associated Press
>
> BOISE, Idaho (AP) - U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell has released the initial plan for a new wildfire-fighting strategy to protect a wide swath of intermountain West sagebrush country that supports cattle ranching and is home to a struggling bird species.
>
> The 27-page report released Tuesday calls for protecting areas most at risk by using veteran crews, rural fire departments and fire protection associations made up of ranchers who can respond quickly. The previous strategy didn't call for specific efforts to protect the habitat.
>
> The plan heading into the 2015 wildfire season also calls for accelerating efforts to restore burned rangelands by developing a strategy for storing and distributing locally adapted seeds.
>
> The intent is to protect greater sage grouse habitat while contending with fires that have been especially destructive in the Great Basin region of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon and California.
>
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On Mon, Mar 9, 2015 at 2:40 PM, Beyer, Emily <emily_beyer@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

Hi all,

Below and attached is the current draft of this release. We're aiming to send this out tomorrow, and as such are **looking for edits by 6pm ET this evening**. Please send all edits directly to me, and let me know if you have further questions.

Thanks,

Emily

Date: March 10, 2015

Contact: Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov

Secretary Jewell Issues Initial Strategy to

Protect, Restore Sagebrush Lands for 2015 Fire Season

Report advances work with federal, state, tribal and non-government partners

to protect economic activity and wildlife habitat vital to the Western way of life

WASHINGTON, DC – Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today issued the initial recommendations of her Rangeland Fire Task Force to immediately address the threat of rangeland fire to Western sagebrush-steppe landscapes. The recommendations aim to improve fire management efforts before the start of the 2015 wildfire season.

"Cheatgrass and other invasive species have contributed to making rangeland fire one of the greatest threats in the Great Basin – not only to sagebrush habitat, but to wildlife, ranching, and other economic activities that depend on a healthy landscape," Secretary Jewell said. "As we head into the 2015 fire season, the actions recommended in this report will help ensure that our preparedness, response and recovery strategies better align with the threats facing the West."

Secretarial Order 3336, signed by Secretary Jewell on January 5, 2015, mandated the

development of a comprehensive science-based strategy to reduce the size, severity and cost of rangeland fires; address the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive species; and position wildland fire management resources for more effective rangeland fire response. The Order called for the creation of an implementation plan, initial report, and final report. The Implementation Plan, completed on January 31, 2015, established a roadmap to accomplish the objectives of the Order. This initial report[BEJ1], the second outcome of the Order, outlines short-term actions and activities that the Department, in collaboration with our partners and interested stakeholders, can take prior to the onset of the 2015 Western wildfire season. The goal is to protect, restore and conserve vital sagebrush landscapes and productive rangelands, particularly in the Great Basin region of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon and California.

The increasing frequency and intensity of rangeland fire in Great Basin sagebrush ecosystems significantly damaged the landscapes relied on by many tribal and local communities, ranchers, livestock managers, hunters, and outdoor enthusiasts. The unnatural fire cycle puts at risk the landscapes that, for generations, Westerners have depended on to sustain their ways of life.

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) found that these developments present a significant threat to the greater sage-grouse in that portion of its remaining range. Once occupying more than 290 million acres of sagebrush in the West, the greater sage-grouse, known for its flamboyant mating ritual at sites called leks, has lost more than half of its habitat since then. Settlers reported millions of birds once took to the skies; current estimates place population numbers between 200,000 and 500,000 birds in 11 states and 2 Canadian provinces. The FWS is now considering whether protections under the Endangered Species Act are warranted.

The recommended activities in the Initial Report involve targeted, strategic investments of Departmental resources to enhance the management of rangeland fire in specific portions of the Great Basin, consistent with the Federal Government's trust responsibility to American Indian tribes and other statutory obligations. The recommendations include the following:

- Developing a geospatial tool that highlights areas of concern in the Great Basin.

- Designing and implementing comprehensive, integrated fire response plans that prioritize protection of the low resilience landscapes that are the most at-risk to detrimental impacts of rangeland fire and invasives. This will include an expanded use of veterans crews by increasing the use of rural and volunteer fire departments and Rangeland Fire Protection Associations.

- Placing added emphasis on the need to protect, conserve, and restore the health of sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, emphasizing that this is a critical natural resource and fire management priority for Department agencies and bureaus.

- Accelerating efforts to restore rangelands damaged by wildfire with native plants and grasses to help improve the health of this ecosystem.

- Developing a comprehensive strategy for acquisition, storage, and distribution of seeds and other plant materials. The spread of invasive species, altered wildfire regimes, habitat fragmentation, and climate change negatively affected many native plant communities and the species that depend upon them. To slow and ultimately reverse these trends in the greater sage-grouse habitat areas requires, a reliable supply of genetically appropriate and locally adapted seed, as well as seeding technology and equipment for successful and expanded effective restoration of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem.

In the coming months, the Task Force will oversee nine interagency task groups that will work with other federal, tribal, state, and local governmental partners and stakeholders to identify and implement longer-term actions and activities to achieve effective rangeland management, fire prevention, fire suppression and post-fire restoration efforts at a landscape scale. This long-term report is expected to be delivered to the Secretary by May 1, as called for in the Secretarial Order.

“These efforts do not divert needed resources from other places,” Deputy Secretary Michael Connor said, who oversees the Task Force. “They enable us to more efficiently coordinate and use our existing resources, so we can benefit from better science and technological innovations, react more quickly, put our resources where they'll do the most good, and have a more effective impact. They demonstrate our commitment to work with our partners to reduce the likelihood and severity of rangeland fire, stem the spread of invasive species and restore the health and resilience of sagebrush ecosystems.”

Interior’s work to reduce the size, severity and cost of rangeland fires is a key part of a larger, unprecedented federal-state partnership to provide strong habitat protection and conservation measures on public and private lands to protect the greater sage-grouse. More information on the ongoing, collaborative work to conserve the sagebrush landscape is available at www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse.

The Initial Report: A Strategic Plan for Addressing Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration in 2015 is available online here[BEJ2] . Additional information on the Secretarial Order is available here.

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