From:	Mackey, Dennis
To:	Carrier, Michael
Subject:	Re: Elements of the Idaho Plan
Date:	Friday, March 13, 2015 2:37:23 PM
Attachments:	Elements of the Idaho BLM Sage March 2015 DM Edits.docx

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Mike:

Here are a few edits in redline/strikeout. Thanks.

Dennis

On Fri, Mar 13, 2015 at 3:19 PM, Carrier, Michael <michael_carrier@fws.gov> wrote:

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Elements of the Idaho BLM Sage-grouse Conservation Plan

Relationship of the BLM's Plan to the State of Idaho's Plan: In March of 2012, Idaho Governor Otter established a Sage-Grouse Task Force (Task Force) comprising a diverse group of stakeholders that included The Nature Conservancy, Idaho Conservation League, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, state and local officials, Idaho Cattlemen's Association, Idaho Power Company, ~~and~~ Simplot Corporation, and others. The Task Force identified conservation goals with population and habitat objectives for long-term sage-grouse conservation in Idaho.

The Task Force adopted the objective that conservation of year-round habitats (i.e. nesting, brood-rearing, migration and wintering habitats) associated with 73% of the breeding males surveyed in 2011 would provide a sustainable long-term population across the State of Idaho. The leks and associated year-round habitats necessary to support this population were mapped and delineated as a **Core Management Zone**. The Task Force also recognized that additional leks and associated year-round habitats must be conserved to ensure that the population objective is maintained or exceeded to offset fire-related loss of habitat in the **Core Management Zone**. To address this need the Task Force delineated a significant amount of what would otherwise have been designated as general habitat as an **Important Management Zone**, which includes year-round habitats necessary to support an additional 22% of the 2011 breeding males. Combined, the **Core** and **Important Management Zones** support 95% of the breeding male sage-grouse in Idaho. The remaining Idaho sage-grouse habitat has been delineated as a **General Habitat Zone**, which is outside of PACs and lower-quality habitat and mostly permanently isolated from the intact sage grouse populations supported by the **Core and Important Management Zone** habitat. In addition to these biological goals and objectives, the Task Force developed a conservation strategy that effectively addresses habitat fragmentation from wildfire, invasive annual grasses, large-scale infrastructure, and other threats. The goals and conservation strategy were adopted as one of two co-preferred alternatives in BLM's Idaho Southwest Montana RMP/DEIS. Informed by NPT guidance, the Service's Sage-grouse Focal Areas memo and other national direction, the co-preferred alternatives are being integrated into a Final Environmental Impact Statement slated for completion in late May.

Restrictions and Allowable Activities in the Management Zones: Historic large-scale infrastructure development is very limited within Idaho's two sage-grouse PACs identified in the COT. To ensure that the **Core** and **Important Management Zones**, which comprise the PACs, are not fragmented by large-scale infrastructure, the following conservation measures were adopted: exclusion areas, required design features, spatial/temporal buffers for leks and seasonal habitats, an anthropogenic disturbance cap of 3% measured at the sub-Conservation Area scale, and compensatory mitigation for any impacts in all three sage-grouse habitat categories (Core, Important and General). Limited development that might occur in the **Important and General Management Zone** will require mitigation and monetary investments that will be leveraged, and focused ~~o~~in priority restoration areas. While the Plan's **Core** and **General Management Zones** are equivalent in concept and application to Priority and General Habitat in the NPT guidance, the guidance does not have a designation similar to the **Important Management Zone** proposed in the Plan. The **Important Management Zone** is a foundational component designed to address the primary threats of wildfire and invasive annual grasses. In the Plan, the **Important Management Zone** habitat is managed more similarly to **Core Management Zone** habitat than to **General** habitat, and would be managed as **Core Habitat** if the adaptive management hard triggers are tripped within any of the four Conservation Areas.

Mitigation: The Idaho Plan commits to a mitigation standard of "net conservation benefit" for sage-grouse and allows for mitigation to occur where it will produce the greatest benefit within each of the four Conservation Areas. The BLM has expressed its intent to develop a detailed mitigation plan within a year of adoption of the Plan.

Adaptive Management: In the Plan, the two large Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs) in Idaho are divided into four Conservation Areas. The Plan includes habitat and population-based monitoring (described in Appendix E of the Plan) that are tied to adaptive management triggers. While allowing some tolerance for natural sage-grouse population and habitat fluctuations, soft (10%) and hard (20%)

population and habitat loss triggers are established at a sub-Conservation Area scale. If a habitat or population soft trigger is tripped, an Implementation Team, informed by technical experts, will identify causal factors and actions to arrest and reverse the trend. If a habitat or population hard trigger is tripped the **Important Management Zone** within the entire Conservation Area will be managed under **Core Management Zone** restrictions and additional necessary conservation actions will be implemented until the trigger is released. These thresholds were developed based on recent relevant research and scientific findings, including local scientific information from Idaho. To ensure that this approach to adaptive management is implemented, the plan calls for the State of Idaho to have “cooperating agency” status in assisting in Plan implementation to include creation of an Implementation Team by executive order of the Governor. For Idaho, the three zone approach was essential to securing the support and participation of all stakeholders, by creating a substantial incentive to maximize conservation efforts, especially those that address the threats of wildfire and invasive annual grasses, and ultimately to meet the conservation goals of the National Tech Team Report (NTT) and the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report.