

From: [Norman, Kate](#)
To: [Michael Thabault](#); [Nicole Alt](#)
Subject: GRSG 2015: FOR MIKE, State Webinar Materials (2/24/2015)
Date: Monday, February 23, 2015 3:20:55 PM
Attachments: [20150224_StateWebinar_Agenda.docx](#)
[20150224_GRSGstateWebinar_DirTalkPts.docx](#)
[20150224_GRSGstateWebinar_Presentation.pptx](#)
[20141027_GRSGStrongholdsMemoToBLMandUSFS.pdf](#)
[20150205_FWS_GrSG_RangelandOwnerAndGrazingMemo.pdf](#)
[201502_GrazingMemoOAFinal_022015.docx](#)
[20141117_FWSGrSGmap_TalkPts.docx](#)

Hey Mike-

In preparation for tomorrow, I wanted to make sure you had the latest and greatest and a plethora of support materials. This is all posted to the SharePoint portal under the 02/24 meeting (<https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/Forms/0224.aspx>) and attached here for reference.

I've included:

- 1- Updated Agenda
- 2- Director's Talking Points (same as what I sent Noreen)
- 3- Revised Presentation (same as what I sent Noreen)
- 4- Support Materials
 - *Strongholds Memo
 - *Strongholds Talking Points
 - *Grazing Memo
 - *Grazing Memo QandAs

If you have any questions or need anything further, please let me know!

Thanks,
K

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Greater Sage-Grouse 2015 Status Review – State Webinar

Goal

The purpose of this call is to touch base on deliverables, discuss communications with external affairs, and provide an update on tasks assigned at in-person meeting.

Call Information

PHONE:

877-357-9157

Participant # 9960360

Leader # 5338033

WEBINAR:

<http://www.mymeetings.com/nc/join.php?sigKey=mymeetings&i=748158230&p=GRSGwebinar&t=c>

Materials

Materials for this meeting are available to Service personnel through SharePoint (<https://portal.doi.net/usfws/SG/docs/Forms/0224.aspx>). They will be posted to the national greater sage-grouse website following the webinar: <http://www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse/>

Invitees

State Directors

FWS – Director, RDs, ARDs

Agenda

| Tuesday, February 24, 2014 | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Time | Item | Lead |
| 2:00 pm MT | Welcome | Dan Ashe |
| 2:05 pm | Species Report (Recreation/Disease) | Mike Thabault |
| 2:10 pm | CED Update | Mike Thabault |
| 2:20 pm | Fire Update | Dawn Davis |
| 2:40 pm | Heads Up <ul style="list-style-type: none">Media ScheduleStrongholds (available online)Grazing Memo (available online) | Theo Stein Mike Thabault Mike Thabault |
| 2:45 pm | Strongholds and Grazing Memo | |
| 2:50 pm | What's Missing | Mike Thabault |
| 3:00 pm MT | ADJOURN | |

Director's Talking Points

Greater sage-grouse Status Review, State Webinar 2/24/2015

- We appreciate our state partners and your ongoing commitment to conservation of the greater sage-grouse.
- We realize this isn't easy or simple, but we've come a long way.
- Thank you for providing your information through our Conservation Efforts Database so that we can better understand the scope of on-the-ground conservation efforts.
- We're committed to inclusiveness and transparency.
- We wanted to take this opportunity, as we did in October and January, to keep you informed of our progress on the status review for greater sage-grouse.
- But we want to keep this conversation broad and dynamic.
- We want to have a conversation and discussion about how we move forward (beyond September 30, 2015).
- This is a long term effort; we'd like to continue to engage the states so we can work collaboratively together into the future.



Greater Sage-grouse Update for States

February 24, 2015

Goals for Today

- **Species Report Progress**
 - Disease
 - Recreation
- **Conservation Efforts Database (CED)**
- **Fire**
- **Additional Updates**
 - Media Schedule (IJNR)
 - Grazing Memo
 - Stronghold Memo



Conversation: Conservation now and in the future

Species Report: Disease - West Nile Virus

- In 2010, we concluded that disease was not a significant threat to the species
- Non-native, mosquito-borne pathogen
- Occurs throughout range of sage-grouse
- Occurrence influenced by temperature, mosquito breeding habitat, precipitation
- July – September transmission season
- For individuals impacted: High mortality, very low resistance
- Greatest impacts to small, isolated populations



Species Report: Recreation

- **Uses:**

- Recreational use of GRSG (Bird watching and photography)
- Recreational Activities in GRSG habitat (hiking, camping, OHV use, etc.)

- **Impacts:**

- Habitat impacts – Localized degradation and fragmentation
- Disturbance to individuals (Noise, Predation, Mortality from crushing/collision)



Conservation Efforts Database

- **Number of Data Providers:**
43 groups (including agencies from 9 states, federal agencies, soil and water conservation districts, industry, and NGOs)
- **Number of Projects Entered:** **6,148**
- **Number of Plans Entered:**
110



Fire – SO 3336

Timeline and Deliverables:

- **2/1/2015:** Implementation Plan
 - Organizing document
- **3/1/2015:** Initial Plan – Due March 1
 - Details actions for the 2015 fire season
- **5/1/2015:** Final Plan – Due May 1
 - Details actions for the 2016 fire season and beyond



Fire – SO 3336

Forests and Rangelands

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- Resources »
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- Stewardship Contracting
- Tools
- Woody Biomass Utilization »

Rangeland Management

- Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration

Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration



Secretarial Order Number 3336 sets in motion options...

On January 5, 2015, U. S. Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell signed [Secretarial Order Number 3336, Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration \("Order"\)](#) (PDF, 86 KB). The Order sets in motion actions to enhance the protection, conservation, and restoration of a healthy sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, and to address important public safety, economic, cultural, and social concerns. This effort builds upon the experience and success of addressing rangeland fire and the broader wildland fire prevention, suppression and restoration efforts to date. This includes the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#) and the recent [The Next Steppe: Sage-Grouse and Rangeland Fire in the Great Basin](#) conference, and ensures improved coordination with local, state, tribal and regional efforts to address the threat of rangeland fire at a landscape-level.

Highlights

- [DRAFT February 17, 2015: SO 3336 The Initial Report A Strategic Plan for Addressing Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration in 2015](#) (PDF, 564 KB)
 - [Submit comments about the report online...](#)
- [The Implementation Plan, Secretarial Order 3336 - Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management, and Restoration](#) (PDF, 219 KB)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about Secretarial Order 3336](#)

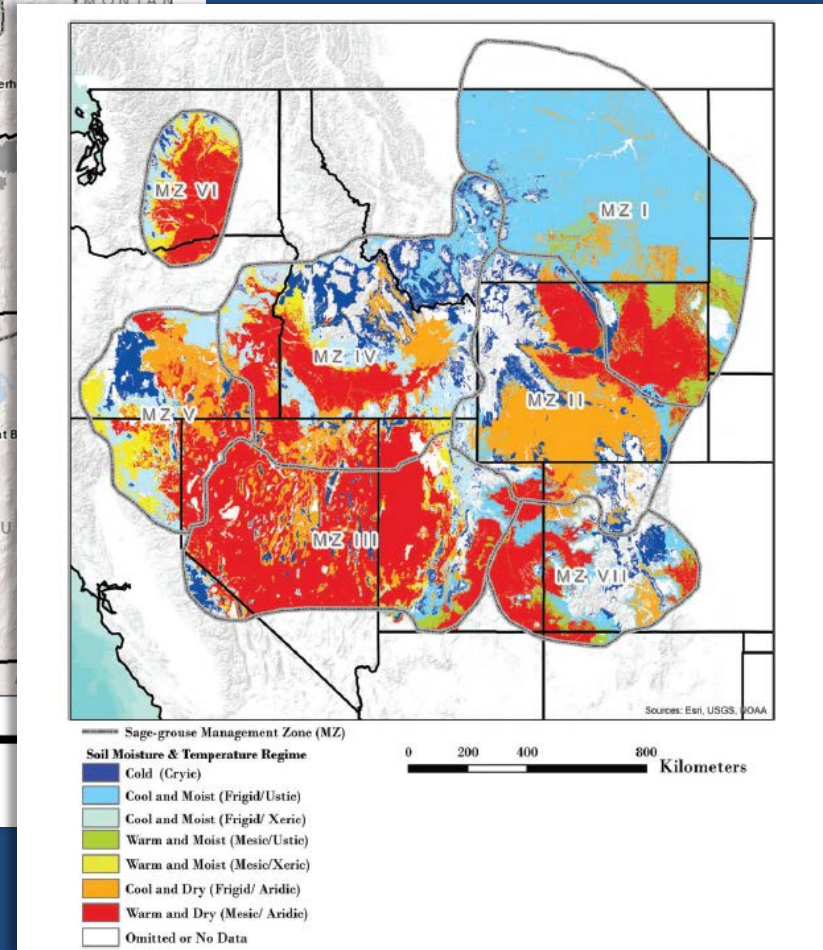
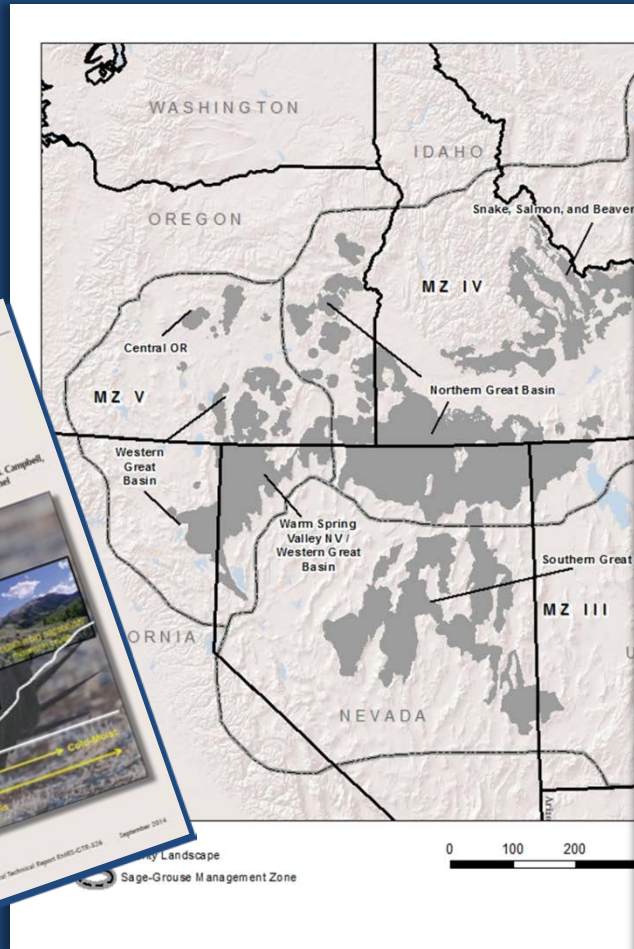
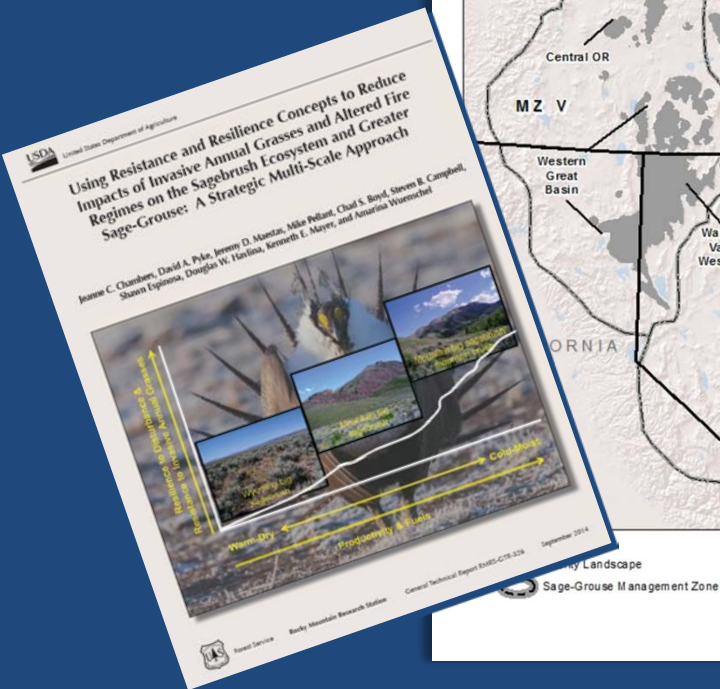
Events

- Stakeholder Outreach Listening Session:**
Friday, February 20, 2015
Time: 8:30 - 10:00 a.m. PST
Call Number: 1-877-915-2768
Passcode: 7530552#
- Tribal Consultations:**
 - February 19, 2015,

<http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/rangeland/index.shtml>



Fire - FIAT



http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr326.pdf

Update: Sagebrush Country Institute

The USFWS supporting a field-based journalism learning expedition with Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources.

4/6: Utah

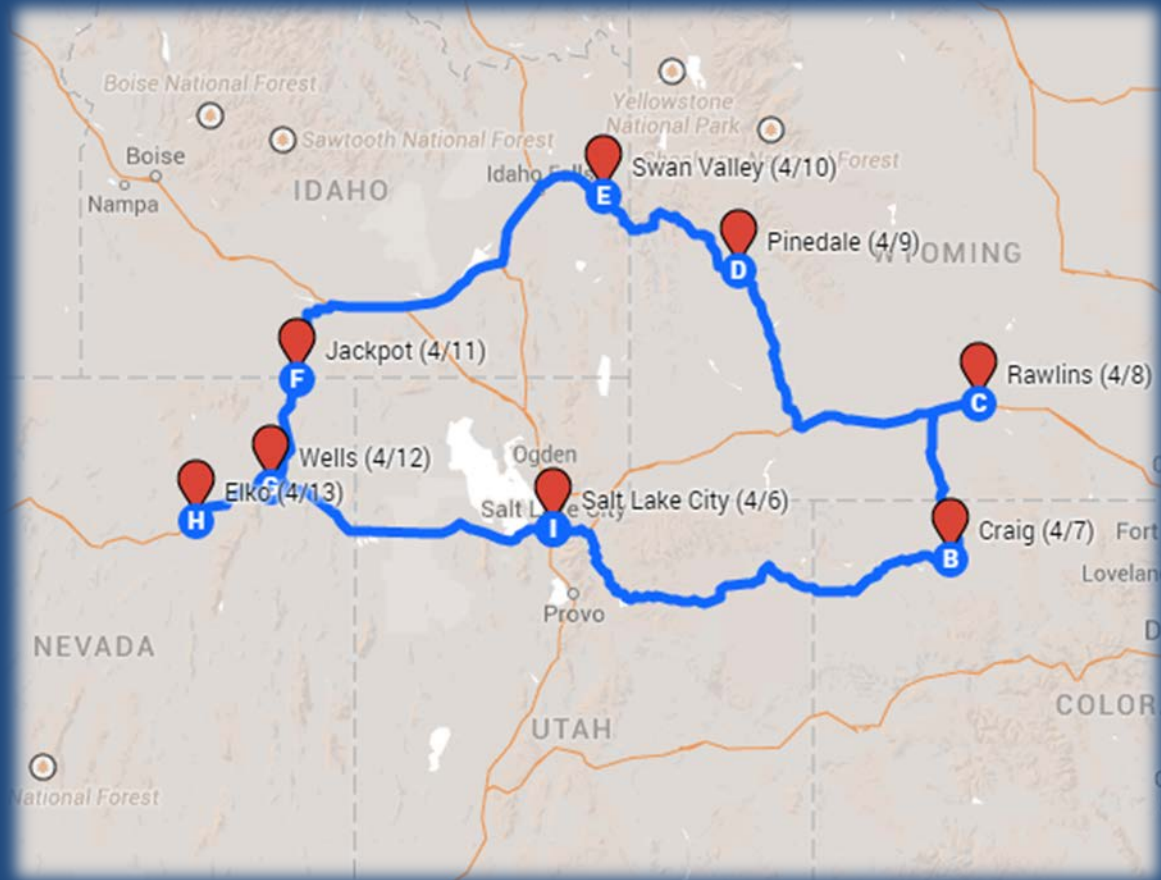
4/7: Colorado

4/8 – 4/9: Wyoming

4/10: Idaho

4/11- 4/12: Nevada

4/13: Nevada and Utah



Other Updates

Grazing and Conservation Collaboration:

The Service recently issued a memo to our personnel providing guidance on our work with rangeland owners.

Strongholds:

At their request, the Service provided to federal landowners recommendation for important areas for sage-grouse conservation.

<https://www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse/>



Conversation: Conservation now and into the future



Questions





United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Reply Refer To:
FWS/AES/058711

OCT 27 2014

Memorandum

To: Director, Bureau of Land Management
Chief, U.S. Forest Service

From: Director

Subject: Greater Sage-Grouse: Additional Recommendations to Refine Land Use Allocations in Highly Important Landscapes

Pursuant to our October 1, 2014 leadership discussion regarding the federal land management planning process for greater sage-grouse (sage-grouse) conservation and as a continuation of our ongoing coordination and advice regarding your land management plan revisions and amendments, we are providing recommendations to further assist your agencies in the important management decisions you are currently finalizing. During the ongoing coordination effort for the planning process, we have provided conservation advice in the form of the 2013 Conservation Objectives Team final report (COT report), our comments on the draft federal plans including comprehensive analyses of alternatives, and the National Policy Team (NPT) Guidance, as well as other consultative activities.

This memorandum and associated maps respond to a request from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to identify a subset of priority habitat most vital to the species persistence, within which we recommend the strongest levels of protection. The areas we have identified on the attached map are a subset of the already identified Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA). The areas we have identified within PHMA represent recognized "strongholds" for the species that have been noted and referenced by the conservation community as having the highest densities of the species and other criteria important for the persistence of the species. For example, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' 2004 Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats (Connelly, et al., 2004; Figure 13.1, attached) included a similar geographic distribution of these stronghold areas for breeding populations of sage-grouse. In addition, in 2010, Doherty et al. produced the first sets of breeding density maps, which clearly illustrate high densities of breeding birds exist in very similar locations. Most recently, Chambers et al. (2014) produced maps of relative resilience and resistance to invasive species and wildfire impacts to sagebrush habitats that also align closely with the subset of priority habitats we have identified in the Great Basin region.

Strong, durable, and meaningful protection of federally administered lands in these areas will provide additional certainty and help obtain confidence for long-term sage-grouse persistence. To be clear, enhanced protections in the stronghold areas do not obviate the need to follow the NPT guidance in the entirety of PHMAs (and in PACs in those instances where gaps between PHMA and PACs exist) and in general habitat.

We have previously advised and continue to recommend that BLM and US Forest Service (Forest Service) land management plans be designed to meet the objectives outlined in COT report. The attached maps highlight areas where it is most important that BLM and Forest Service institutionalize the highest degree of protection to help promote persistence of the species.

Criteria, Methodology and Rationale

We used the following criteria to identify areas within PHMAs in which the most conservative approach should be applied:

- Existing high-quality sagebrush habitat for sage-grouse;
- Highest breeding densities of sage-grouse;
- Areas identified in the literature as essential to conservation and persistence of the species (Knick and Hanser 2011); and,
- A preponderance of current federal ownership, and in some cases, adjacent protected areas that serve to anchor the conservation importance of the landscape.

In addition, we evaluated these areas against related efforts by partner organizations (NatureServe and Conservation Biology Institute) to determine relative agreement between analyses. Using Data Basin, a mapping and analysis platform, we verified our analysis is consistent with landscape-level sage-grouse conservation opportunities and needs, as defined by the above criteria as well as additional considerations, including the modeled “velocity” of climate change onset in various parts of the range and the potential for fire and invasive species impacts on sage-grouse habitat. In the process of this comparative exercise, we determined there was generally good spatial relationship between these areas and other important habitat conservation values in the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, including shrub-steppe passerine birds (Hanser and Knick 2011) and mule deer winter range (identified by the Western Governors Association Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool).

Rangewide Map (Map 1)

See below for regional maps and individual unit descriptions.

Great Basin Region (Map 2)

- **Southern Idaho/northern Nevada:** This general area is comprised almost entirely of federal surface lands. The area contains five designated federal Wilderness areas, and protected areas for bighorn sheep conservation. Sage-grouse breeding densities are very high.
- **North-central Idaho:** This area is anchored by Craters of the Moon National Monument, is comprised of mostly federal surface land ownership, and has a high density of breeding sage-grouse.
- **Areas adjacent to the Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Oregon and Nevada:** This area occurs predominately on federal surface lands, and includes several Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). It contains some of the highest sage-grouse breeding densities in Oregon and both of these national wildlife refuges (NWRs) are actively managing for sage-grouse conservation.

- **Southeastern Oregon/north-central Nevada:** This area is predominately federal surface lands and contains five designated WSAs. Breeding densities of sage-grouse are high.

Rocky Mountain Region (Maps 3 and 4):

- **Southwestern/south-central Wyoming** (Map 3): This expansive area is predominately federal surface estate and represents some of the best remaining sage-grouse habitat within the entire range of the species. The area includes four currently designated WSAs, one federal Wilderness area, and several areas managed for historic and cultural resources (which exclude development). Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge is in the vicinity.
- **Bear River Watershed** (Northeastern Utah/Southwestern Wyoming, Map 3): This area has a high density of breeding sage-grouse. Cokeville Meadows NWR is located nearby.
- **North-central Montana** (Map 4): This area comprises the highest breeding sage-grouse densities in Montana. It follows the Missouri River, is adjacent to Charles M. Russell NWR. This area also provides wintering habitat for sage-grouse migrating seasonally from Alberta, Canada, where the species listed as endangered under the Canadian Species at Risk Act.

References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Conservation objectives: final report. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, CO.

Connelly, J.W., S.T. Knick, M.A. Schroeder, and S.J. Stiver. 2004. Conservation assessment of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Unpublished Report. Cheyenne, WY.

Doherty, K.E., J.D. Tack, J.S. Evans, and D.E. Naugle. 2010. Mapping breeding densities of greater sage-grouse: A tool for range-wide conservation planning. BLM Completion Report. Interagency Agreement # L10PG00911.

Chambers, J. C.; Pyke, D. A.; Maestas, J. D.; Pellant, M.; Boyd, C. S.; Campbell, S. B.; Espinosa, S.; Havlina, D. W.; Mayer, K. E.; Wuenschel, A. 2014b. Using resistance and resilience concepts to reduce impacts of invasive annual grasses and altered fire regimes on the sagebrush ecosystem and greater sage-grouse: A strategic multi-scale approach. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-326. Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. 73p.

Knick, S.T., and S.E. Hanser. 2011. Connecting pattern and process in greater sage-grouse populations and sagebrush landscapes. Pp. 383 – 405 in S.T. Knick and J.W. Connelly (editors). Greater Sage-Grouse: ecology and conservation of a landscape species and its habitats. Studies in Avian Biology (vol. 38), University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Hanser, S.E. and Knick, S.T. 2011. Greater Sage-Grouse as an Umbrella Species for Shrub and Passerine Birds: A Multi-Scale Assessment. Pp. 475 – 487 *in* S.T. Knick and J.W. Connelly (editors). Greater Sage-Grouse: ecology and conservation of a landscape species and its habitats. Studies in Avian Biology (vol. 38), University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

References, cont.

State Wildlife Agencies of the Western United States. West-wide Crucial Habitat Data Set. Western Governors' Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool: Mapping Fish and Wildlife Across the West. Western Governors' Association. Published October 15, 2014. Accessed October 15, 2014.
<http://www.westgovchat.org>

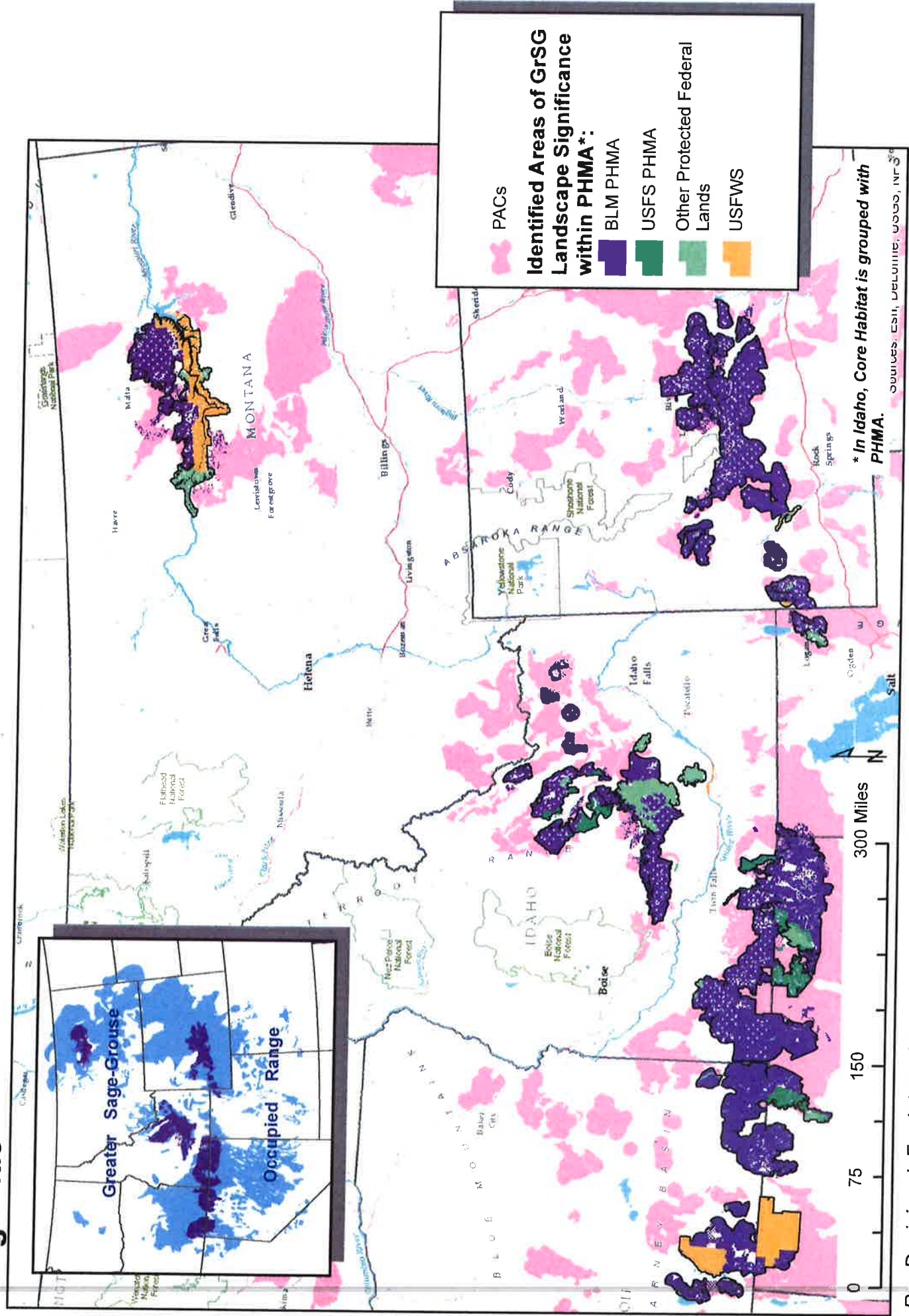
Data Basin, *see* <http://databasin.org/>

Enclosures

Maps 1-4

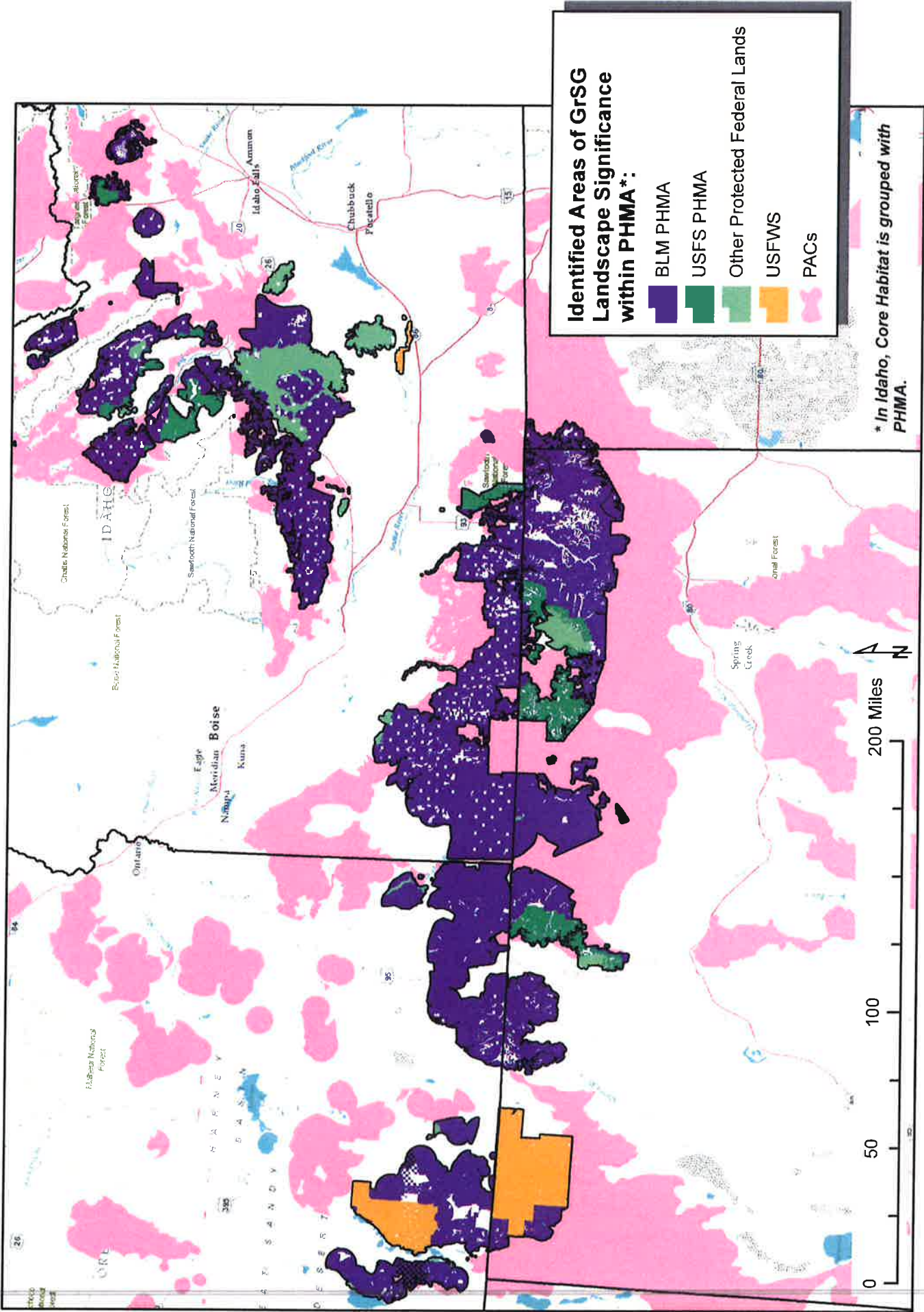
Figure 13.1, from Connelly, et al, 2004.

Identified Areas of GrSG Landscape Significance within BLM/USFS PHMA: Rangewide

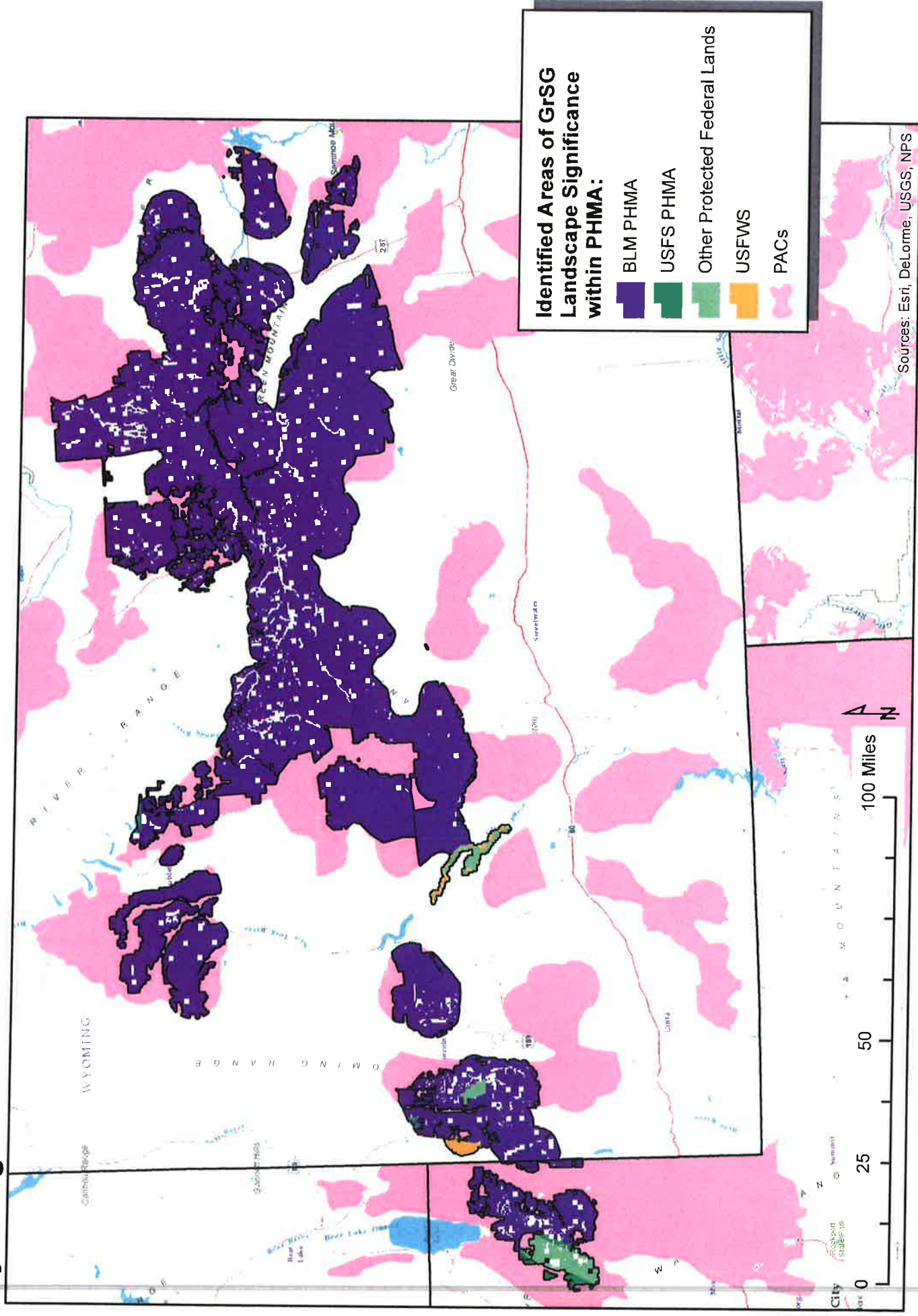


Pre-Decisional; For Internal Review Purposes Only. Do Not Distribute. PHMA current as of October, 2014.

Identified Areas of GrSG Landscape Significance within BLM/USFS PHMA: Northern Great Basin

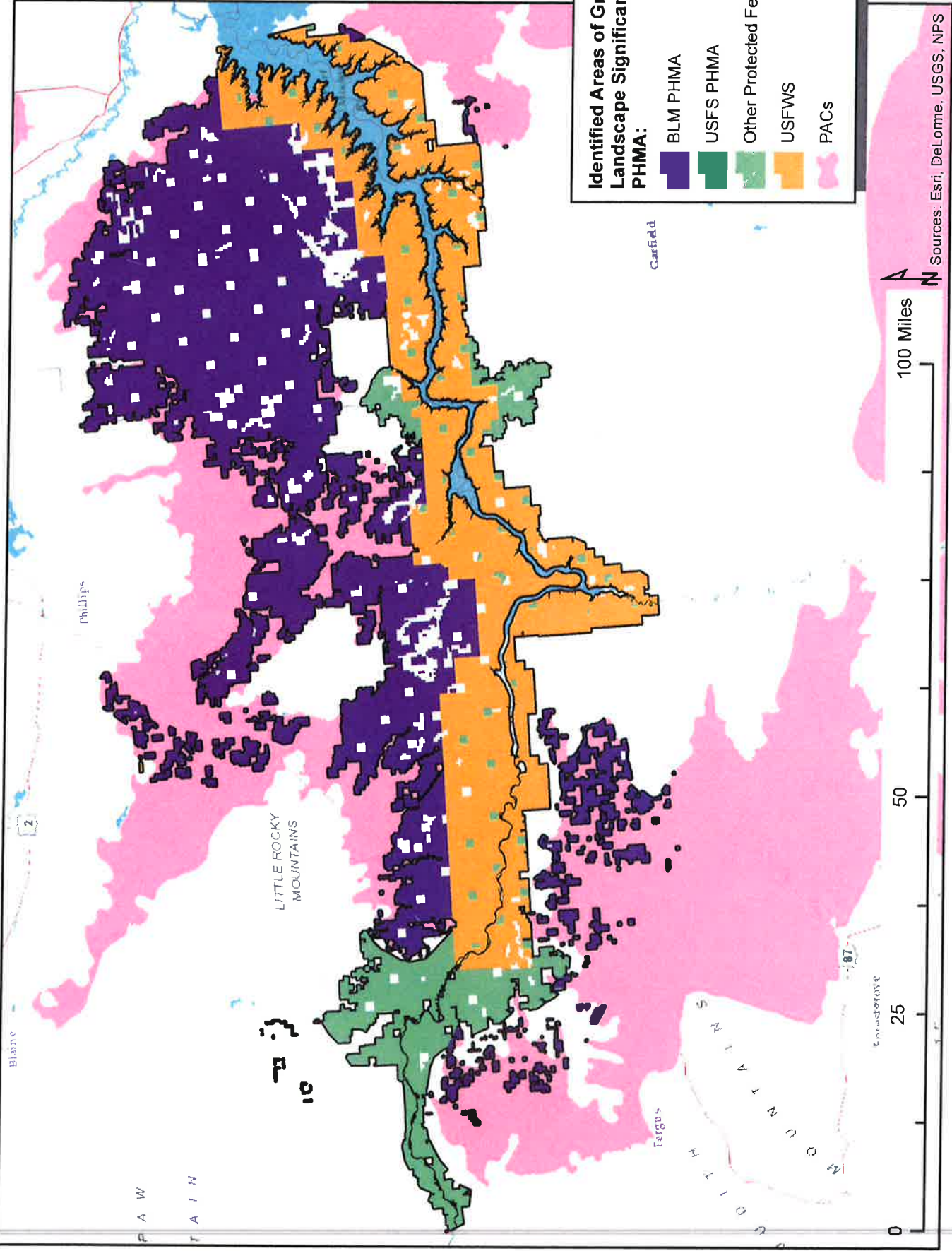


Identified Areas of GrSG Landscape Significance within BLM/USFS PHMA: Wyoming Basin



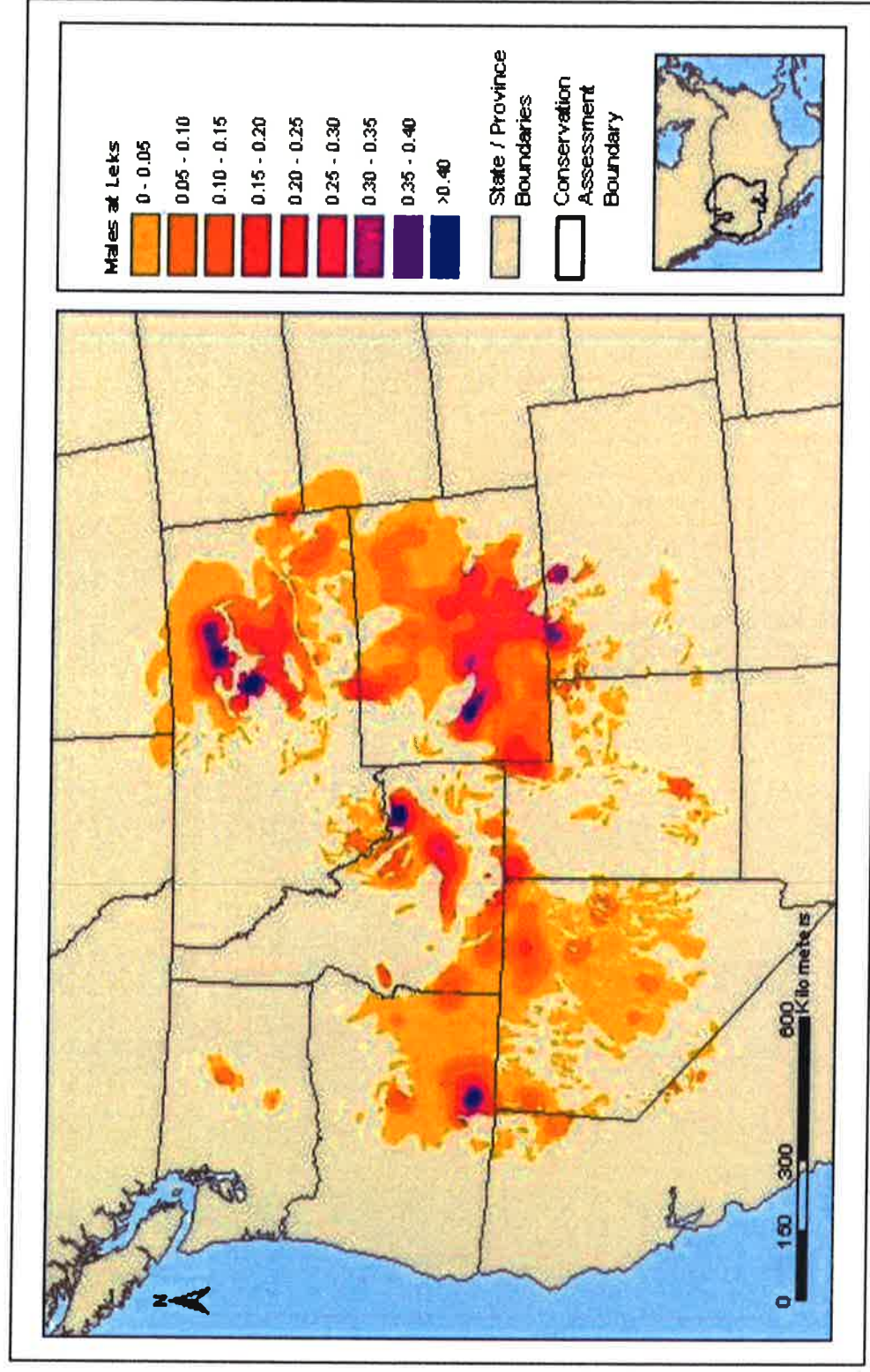
Pre-Decisional; For Internal Review Purposes Only. Do Not Distribute.
PHMA current as of October, 2014.

Identified Areas of GrSG Landscape Significance within BLM/USFS PHMA: North Central Montana



Pre-Decisional; For Internal Review Purposes Only. Do Not Distribute.
PHMA current as of October, 2014.

Figure 13.1 Strongholds for breeding populations of sage-grouse in western North America.



Note: The darker shades represent the greatest densities of males/km²

Source: Connelly, J.W., Knick, S.T., Schroeder, M.A., and Stiver, S.J., 2004. Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Unpublished Report. Cheyenne, Wyoming.



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region



IN REPLY REFER TO:
FWS/R6/ES

MAILING ADDRESS:

Post Office Box 25486
Denver Federal Center
Denver, Colorado 80225-0486

STREET LOCATION:

134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228-1807

Memorandum

To: See Attached Addressee List

From: Assistant Regional Directors – Ecological Services
Region 1, Portland, Oregon
Region 6, Denver, Colorado
Region 8, Sacramento, California

Subject: Service Position on Livestock Grazing and Working with Rangeland Owners to Conserve Sage-Grouse

Introduction

The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify the Service's perspective on the relationship between livestock grazing and the conservation of sagebrush ecosystems on private lands occurring within the range of greater sage-grouse. This document provides more specific guidance to Service staff as they carry out their conservation mission in this area, including the development and implementation of Candidate Conservation Agreements/with Assurances (CCAs/CCAAs), Partners for Fish and Wildlife program projects, and other activities and technical assistance. Credit goes to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, under Dr. Paul Henson's leadership, for providing this direction recently to all employees of that station. Because this direction is relevant throughout the sage-grouse range in Region One, we are now expanding the coverage to all Service offices in greater sage-grouse range to assist in their efforts to conserve sage-grouse. Many of you have already been working in the manner described below for many years, and this memorandum simply affirms and supports your approach and communicates it to others.

Background

The mission of the Service is, "Working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people." One of our challenges, consistent with this mission, is to identify or help improve land use practices that are compatible with the conservation of the greater sage-grouse. For those practices that have negative impacts, we want to identify ways to moderate these impacts such that they are compatible with the species' conservation and the economic, recreational, or other appropriate uses of these habitat areas.

Researchers have documented both positive and negative effects of livestock grazing on western grouse species and their habitats (Beck and Mitchell 2000; Davies et al. 2011; Pyke 2011; Boyd et al. 2014a,b; Chambers et al. 2014a,b). However, there are conflicting opinions about the respective magnitude of the positive and negative impacts on sagebrush systems (e.g., Beschta et al. 2013, Svejcar et al. 2014), especially when comparing historic grazing versus current practices.

There is clear scientific documentation that historic grazing by non-native ungulates has in some instances altered sagebrush ecosystems during the previous 150 years and in some places affected sage-grouse habitat conditions. Many of the grazing-associated problems we face today are a legacy of these past impacts. Grazing of various intensities can degrade habitat conditions and exacerbate sage-grouse nest predation and nest abandonment; modify vegetation structure and plant species composition in ways that decrease food and cover; increase the spread of nonnative plant species; and aggravate fire conditions (Reisner et al. 2013; Boyd et al. 2014a,b; Chambers et al. 2014a,b). Although less pressing than several other widespread threats, the Service's Conservation Objectives Team report notes the need to ameliorate grazing-related threats to secure a number of sage-grouse populations.

On the positive side, grazing can improve habitat and food conditions in certain habitats at certain times and under certain conditions. For example, it can reduce excessive shrub cover conditions for sage-grouse; increase habitat heterogeneity; improve stand establishment of some desirable woody species; and reduce fine fuels and some fire risk (Strand et al. 2008; Davies et al. 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014; Boyd et al. 2011; Strand and Launchbaugh 2013; Chambers et al. 2014a; Sheley et al. 2014). As most of you know, there is little that is black and white in this area – there is tremendous complexity in interpreting this information and deciding where and how to apply different types of management under varied local ecological conditions (Boyd and Svejcar 2009).

Taking this complexity into account, this scientific information forms the foundation for our decisions and recommendations regarding sage-grouse conservation. However, another important consideration that also informs our decisions is the potential positive and negative impacts of our policies on the land management decisions of private landowners. This includes effects on the economic and social stability of ranching communities and the subsequent effect these impacts might have on decisions made by landowners regarding conservation of fish and wildlife on their working rangelands.

It is good for conservation across the range of sage-grouse to have healthy, economically stable private rangelands. In many places, functioning livestock ranches provide wildlife habitat and often maintain many basic ecological processes on these landscapes (Davies et al. 2011). In contrast, unsuccessful ranches are often sold, developed, broken up into smaller land parcels, or converted to other uses (Brunson and Huntsinger 2008). Also, intact rural communities provide local services, expertise and infrastructure to help address important landscape level conservation challenges, such as suppressing undesirable wildfire, treating exotic species invasions, and monitoring local field conditions (Murphy et al. 2013, Davies et al. 2014). Loss or decline of these local communities can make meeting these challenges more difficult.

Last, but no less important, is the Service's ability to maintain and improve positive working relationships with private landowners that better enable long-term conservation. Recent research has documented the disproportionately high value of privately-owned lands in the Great Basin to wildlife such as sage-grouse. This is especially true for summering habitat such as natural and farmed wet meadows used by sage-grouse broods on private lands (Donnelly et al. unpublished data).

Unfortunately, many landowners view ESA-listed species on their property as a financial and legal liability (Jackson-Smith et al. 2005; Paulich 2010; Sorice et al. 2011, 2013) and are sometimes discouraged from working collaboratively on conservation (Baur et al. 2009). Although many of these same landowners have a strong land stewardship ethic that often results in positive conservation, these values sometimes conflict with perceived legal or financial liabilities posed by environmental regulation (Olive and Raymond 2010, Mir and Dick 2012). As a result, some landowners may actively or passively resist maintaining or improving habitat conditions on their property to protect their long-term financial or legal interests.

An important role for the Service, then, is to find ways to reduce or eliminate this real or perceived conflict so that more conservation occurs on private lands. We accomplish this by developing relationships with these landowners and their representative organizations (e.g., Farm Bureau, Cattlemen's Association, etc.), understanding their concerns and operational constraints, and addressing financial and legal disincentives for species conservation. We also need to understand how these ranches use neighboring public lands and the extent to which some of these private operations depend on public rangelands to maintain an economically viable ranch. We do not just sign individual agreements or provide technical advice; we develop collaborative strategies that provide for long-term conservation while enabling basic economic goals to be met. This approach will increase the likelihood of landowners actively allowing or implementing conservation on their private lands (Brook et al. 2003, Henderson et al. 2014). Sometimes these strategies must accept some localized negative impacts to sage-grouse while encouraging broader or longer term beneficial practices that outweigh these short term impacts. Evaluating these tradeoffs is rarely a simple or straightforward exercise, but it is one that must be done to achieve durable and broader conservation outcomes.

The Service's job – whether for sage-grouse or any other fish, wildlife, and plant species – is to work with others to find the most effective ways to protect the nation's natural heritage. We will always advocate a conservative approach that helps address threats to a species, in this case sage-grouse, now and into the future. Given the complexities and unknowns surrounding sage-grouse, which include climate change, fire, and other variables that we are hard-pressed to control, we are recommending our Federal partners embrace a conservative approach to managing these highly important landscape and remove any potential for development and additional disturbance, whether that potential is imminent or distant, and add a significant degree of certainty to the protections afforded these landscapes into the future.

Service Policy Perspective

The Service recognizes that well-managed grazing practices can be compatible with long-term sage-grouse conservation. The following list summarizes the Service's perspective on livestock grazing and how the Service will proceed on working with private rangeland owners to conserve sage-grouse.

1. Historically, grazing has altered the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in parts of sage-grouse range.
2. In more recent times, poorly managed grazing continues to degrade sagebrush-steppe ecosystems and exacerbate existing negative conditions for sagebrush and sage-grouse in some areas.
3. In many areas across the range of sage-grouse, well-managed grazing practices can improve habitat conditions or minimize future negative declines.
4. Grazing practices need to be better defined, scientifically evaluated, and strategically applied as CCAs/CCAAs and BLM RMPs are implemented.
5. Working with agency staff and local range scientists, private range managers and landowners can provide important information, expertise, and the capacity to help monitor and improve local range conditions on both private and public lands.
6. Private rangelands provide important open space, habitat, and ecological processes for conserving sagebrush ecosystems. They are critically important components of sage-grouse habitats, especially wet meadows.
7. The Service will work with landowners to improve habitat conditions wherever possible. Even if well-managed grazing practices result in some local adverse impacts to sage-grouse, the Service will weigh these impacts in the context of achieving broader sagebrush conservation goals on private lands and a landscape scale.
8. The Service will actively add to the knowledge base on appropriate sage-grouse management.
9. Maintaining healthy, viable, locally managed private rangelands and ranching operations is integral to achieving sage-grouse conservation for the reasons described above.
10. The Service will work with BLM and FS on ensuring areas of high priority to sage-grouse are not experiencing poorly managed grazing practices, but instead use well-managed grazing practices to improve existing conditions.

Conclusion

Conserving sage-grouse in the face of multiple threats is no easy task and it will take successful collaboration with local communities to meet this goal. One cause for optimism is that many stakeholders with different perspectives are coming together on some key issues and discovering the issues on which they agree outnumber those about which they disagree. For example, most of us agree that fire and invasive species are the largest threats to sage-grouse in the Great Basin. We also agree that we want to improve the conservation of private lands and the economic well-being of rural communities. Community health is directly tied to maintaining undeveloped open landscapes where actions such as wildfire management and restoration can be applied, and private lands have some of the most important sage-grouse habitat. If we continue to focus on these and other areas of agreement, we believe we have a good chance at stabilizing and maintaining viable populations of sage-grouse through much of their historic range in a way that is sensitive to local community goals.

Thank you for applying this vision in your area of jurisdiction, and please feel free to discuss this perspective with your ARD at any time.

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**US Fish and Wildlife Service, Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation
Rangewide Grazing Guidance Memo discussion
Draft, 02/20/15**

Recently, the ARDS-ES in sage-grouse regions finalized and distributed to Service sage-grouse project leaders and personnel a Rangewide Guidance Memo that outlined the Service's position on livestock grazing and working with rangeland owners to conserve sage-grouse.

While the purpose of the memo is to provide specific guidance to Service personnel as they work with rangeland landowners, the memo is likely to receive attention from external stakeholders ranging from livestock producers to organizations advocating for cessation of livestock grazing on the federal estate in sage-grouse range.

The following questions and answers are for use by Service personnel speaking publically about this memo. By embracing a common set of public information on this topic, the Service can deliver a clear, consistent message about our position on grazing and sage-grouse conservation.

What is the purpose of the grazing memo?

The purpose of the memo is to communicate - in accessible, unambiguous fashion – that the Service wants to work with livestock producers to help them understand the value of maintaining the habitat conditions that sage-grouse need - both for the long-term conservation of wildlife and for the improved range conditions that will benefit their cattle operations.

Who wrote it?

The memo was written by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Field Office and was refined to provide guidance across the three regions.

How is it being used?

The memo is being used to provide guidance to all Service field personnel (Regions 1, 6, and 8) working with rangeland owners on sage-grouse conservation efforts to ensure we are working in an informed, constructive and consistent manner with these partners to find durable solutions to conservation questions related to livestock grazing and sage-grouse protection.

It also provides specific guidance to Service staff who develop and implement Candidate Conservation Agreements/with Assurances (CCAs/CCAAs), Partners for Fish and Wildlife program projects, and perform other activities such as provision of technical assistance.

What is the Service's position on grazing with regard to sage-grouse conservation?

- The Service wants to work collaboratively with ranchers to benefit their ranching operations and wildlife.
- Livestock grazing can have either positive or negative effects on sage-grouse habitat depending on a host of variables including site potential, climatic conditions along with historic and current stocking rates.

- There is no black or white in this area. Interpreting rangeland conditions, rangeland potential, and stocking rates is tremendously complex.
- Deciding where and how to apply different types of management under varied local ecological conditions is also very complex.

What are the Service's concerns relating to overgrazing?

- Generally speaking, overgrazing degrades habitat conditions needed by sage-grouse.
- Overgrazing can decrease food and cover by modifying vegetation structure and plant composition, exacerbate sage-grouse nest predation and nest abandonment, increase the spread of nonnative plant species and aggravate fire conditions.

What are some of the benefits of properly managed grazing?

- Properly managed grazing can create or sustain conditions sage-grouse need during their life-cycle.
- Properly managed grazing can increase the diversity of vegetative cover by reducing excessive shrub cover, promoting growth of grasses and forbs, and improving conditions of some desirable woody species.
- Grazing can also remove excessive levels of fine fuels and reduce some fire risk.

Why is it important that ranchers understand the benefits of proper grazing management?

- It is good for conservation across the range of sage-grouse to have healthy, economically stable private rangelands.
- Functioning livestock ranches often provide wildlife habitat for sage-grouse and many other species while helping to maintain many basic ecological processes on these landscapes.
- Private ranchlands commonly include wetlands and drainages with wetter, richer soils that sage-grouse need during the brooding season.
- Conditions that support sage-grouse also provide better forage for livestock, which improves ranchers' bottom line.

Why is it important to support sustainable livestock production operations?

- Livestock ranching is an important cultural tradition and a significant economic driver across much of the West.
- Economically viable ranches help maintain large, contiguous tracts of sagebrush.
- When ranches are sold or subdivided, loss of sagebrush to development or degradation of sagebrush by non-agricultural uses often ensues.
- Healthy rural communities provide local services, expertise and infrastructure to help address important conservation challenges that the Service cannot manage on its own such as suppressing undesirable wildfire, treating exotic species invasions, and monitoring local field conditions.
- Struggling communities may be distracted by challenges and discouraged from investing time and energy in conservation.

Why is the Service so interested in working with ranchers?

- The Service's job – whether for sage-grouse or any other fish, wildlife, and plant species – is to work with others to find the most effective ways to protect the nation's natural heritage.
- We will always advocate a collaborative approach that helps address threats to a species, in this case sage-grouse, now and into the future.
- If we continue to work collaboratively with ranchers, we believe we have a good chance at stabilizing and maintaining viable populations of sage-grouse through much of their historic range in a way that is sensitive to local community goals.

Where should staff direct media calls regarding this memo?

Please direct media questions to the sage-grouse Public Affairs Specialists

- Theo Stein, 303-236-4336, theo_stein@fws.gov
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US Fish and Wildlife Service

Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation

Internal Talking Points: FWS Recommendations to BLM and FS re: federal planning effort

Working draft, 11/17/14

- Greater sage-grouse conservation is a complex conservation issue, unprecedented in scope and scale. The Service has been and remains an active partner in a broad and historic campaign to protect this bird and the 350 other species that depend on healthy sagebrush.
- The Service has invested significantly in the ongoing sage-grouse conservation effort to secure adequate on-the-ground protections to make an ESA listing unnecessary. Our role has been to provide the best available technical and scientific information to help our federal, state and other partners understand what the bird needs to persist into the future and what measures can help secure those needs in a meaningful way and provide certainty .
- Greater sage-grouse need large, unbroken expanses of sagebrush to survive. Habitat loss and fragmentation, coupled with a lack of regulatory protection, are the primary threats facing greater sage-grouse. To avoid a listing, our federal and state partners must establish effective and consistent measures to address these threats across the bird's 11-state range.
- Working with state and federal partners, we developed the 2013 Conservation Objectives Team Final Report, which identifies the primary threats to sage-grouse and recommends objective, science-based approaches for how to address those threats and conserve the species and its habitat.
- The COT report mapped those places on the landscape most important for sage-grouse conservation, which the team termed Priority Areas for Conservation. Our number one recommendation to our partners has been to avoid further disturbance in PACs.
- Throughout the federal planning process, we have worked closely with BLM and Forest Service at all levels of our respective organizations to evaluate how well their draft management plans addressed threats identified in the COT report. In March, 2014 we provided our federal partners with a comprehensive summary of our outstanding concerns. In particular, we advised the plans should, to the maximum extent, be consistent and work in concert to create a comprehensive, rangewide conservation strategy that adequately protects greater sage-grouse.
- That feedback resulted in the development of the National Policy Team guidance, which is intended to further help the BLM and Forest Service develop consistent and effective land use plans. BLM and the Forest Service adopted the NPT guidance in May, 2014.
- Since then, we have continued to work closely with BLM and Forest Service as they finalize their proposed plans.
- As we await final land use allocation and other important planning decisions from BLM and Forest Service, we have provided our federal partners an additional product:
 - A series of landscape-scale maps identifying highly important areas for sage-grouse conservation. Within these areas, we suggested that BLM and Forest Service ensure the areas are well conserved and we noted that one threat not otherwise addressed at all via the planning process is that of locatable minerals (e.g., gold, uranium). We suggested the land management agencies consider withdrawal to mineral entry in these areas. These maps, which are not intended to supersede or otherwise alter the PACs or to diminish the

conservation priority of the PACs as a whole, simply highlight those places on the landscape that contain the following criteria:

- Existing high-quality sagebrush habitat for sage-grouse;
 - Highest breeding densities of sage-grouse;
 - Areas identified in the literature as essential to conservation and persistence of the species
 - (Knick and Hanser 2011); and,
 - A preponderance of current federal ownership, and in some cases, adjacent protected areas that serve to anchor the conservation importance of the landscape.
- Our intent in providing our federal partners with this additive product is to continue to refine and focus the ongoing conversation about sage-grouse conservation planning on the federal estate on those places and issues where we believe strong, durable protections for the bird and the places it lives will make a significant contribution to the long-term persistence of the species. We feel it is important for the Service to provide this advice now, as our federal partners work to finalize their plans and culminate the multi-year federal planning process.
 - It is important to note that the landscape-scale maps we provided the federal partners do not represent “new” recommendations; the conservation community has for more than a decade indicated these areas are “strongholds” for sage-grouse and critical to the long term persistence of the species. The Service is highlighting these areas and opportunities for meaningful and durable conservation because the scientific literature assigns so much value to these places and because we have identified an opportunity for the federal land managers to enhance their approach to conservation and safeguard these places.
 - The Service’s job - whether for sage-grouse or any other fish, wildlife and plant species – is to work with others to find the most effective ways to protect the nation’s natural heritage. We will always advocate a conservative approach that helps ensure threats to a species, in this case sage-grouse, are fully addressed, now and into the future. Given the complexities and unknowns surrounding sage-grouse, which include climate change, fire, and other variables we are hard-pressed to control, we are recommending our federal partners embrace a conservative approach to managing these highly important landscape and remove any potential for development and additional disturbance, whether that potential is imminent or distant, and add a significant degree of certainty to the protections afforded these landscapes into the future.