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**Subject:** FIAT Prioritization and Strongholds  
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**Attachments:** [Strongholds&FIAT\\_Draft20150224.docx](#)

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All,

Attached is a draft outlining my thoughts on prioritizing fire-related management actions in strongholds, incorporating some of the original strongholds talking points. I believe that the general guidance outlined in the FIAT step-down assessments will be sufficient and that no additional prioritization in areas designated as strongholds is needed.

Your comments and feedback are appreciated - thanks!

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Given the complexities and unknowns surrounding sage-grouse, which include fire and invasives, the strongholds memo recommended, in part, that 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. It is important to note that the landscape-scale maps we provided with the strongholds memo do not represent “new” recommendations. The Service highlighted 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.

In order to provide additional certainty of long-term sage-grouse persistence, the Service recommends that prioritization of management strategies/actions and habitat restoration needs across four primary federal agency program areas (i.e., fuels management, fire operations, habitat restoration/recovery, and post fire-rehabilitation) within strongholds should follow the FIAT step-down process and guidelines established by Chambers et al. 2014.

The Fire and Invasives Assessment Tool (FIAT) looks at wildland fire, invasive annual grasses, and conifer encroachment and provides priorities for wildfire, fuels, sagebrush and juniper treatments through the use of the Fire and Invasives Assessments. These assessments follow the strategic approach detailed in Chambers et al. 2014. This strategic approach for conservation of sagebrush ecosystems and sage-grouse focuses on the sagebrush ecosystems and their resilience to disturbance and resistance to invasive annual grasses. Additionally, it considers the distribution, relative abundance, and persistence of sage-grouse populations in order to develop conservation strategies at both broad landscape and site specific scales. A resistance and resilience (R&R) habitat matrix links the relative resilience and resistance of sagebrush ecosystems with sage-grouse habitat requirements to help land managers assess the relative risks and determine the appropriate management strategies to mitigate those risks. Emphasis areas for management actions are prioritized by overlaying matrix components with sage-grouse PACs, breeding bird densities, and specific habitat threats. Decision tools are also included to help determine the most appropriate management treatments for each of the emphasis areas that are identified.

We have previously advised and continue to recommend that the FIAT assessments provide clear direction on project prioritization and encourage the consistent application of management actions across the R&R matrix. The Service will continue to work closely with the our federal partners to ensure a consistent approach and delivery of effective products across the FIAT planning area.