

From: [Davis, Dawn](#)
To: [FW6 Sage-grouse FMT](#); [FW6 Sage-grouse Biologists](#)
Subject: GRSG 2015: Service Participation on FIAT Assessments
Date: Tuesday, January 06, 2015 3:31:53 PM
Attachments: [FWS FIAT Memo - Signed Final.pdf](#)

All,

As you may know, the federally-led Fire and Invasives Assessment Team (FIAT) assessment is currently being used to develop collaborative implementation plans that address the threats of invasive species and altered fire regimes, within the context of resistant and resilient sagebrush ecosystems. While several USFWS offices across three Regions have assisted in the development of these assessments, we also believe a need and an opportunity still exists to ensure the final FIAT assessments contain the measures necessary to adequately conserve sage-grouse into the future.

The purpose of the attached memorandum is to clarify the USFWS's perspective on implementation of the FIAT assessments. This document provides more specific guidance to FO staff as we continue to provide advice and technical assistance that, ultimately, will result in optimal conservation outcomes.

Thank you to everyone participating on the FIAT teams and to those who have provided input to these assessments. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further please don't hesitate to contact me.

Dawn

--

Dawn Davis, Ph.D.
Certified Wildlife Biologist ®
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pacific Regional Office
911 NE 11th Avenue, 4th Floor, Portland, OR 97232
Phone: 503.231.6194; FAX: 503.231.6243
dawn_davis@fws.gov



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181



In Reply Refer To:
FWS/R1/ES

MEMORANDUM

To: See Attached Addressee List

From: Assistant Regional Director – Ecological Services
Region 1, Portland, Oregon

Assistant Regional Director – Ecological Services
Region 6, Denver, Colorado

per Assistant Regional Director – Ecological Services
Region 8, Sacramento, California

Chen E. Pelt
[Signature]
May [Signature]

Subject: Service Participation on Federal Land Management Agency Implementation of the Fire and Invasive Species Assessment Team (FIAT) Assessments

The primary landscape-scale threat to greater sage-grouse in the Great Basin is the invasion of non-native annual grasses and subsequent wildfire that can cause a “catastrophic regime shift” from sagebrush-dominated to annual grass-dominated ecosystems (Resiner et al. 2013). The lack of existing coordinated landscape-scale measures to reduce this key threat prompted the BLM to commission a federally-led team (the Fire and Invasive Species Assessment Team, or FIAT) to develop spatial planning tools for local (or step-down) assessments to be used in Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs) within the Great Basin. Step-down assessments are now underway and several Service offices across three Regions are providing input to these assessments. In order to ensure our advice to these various teams is consistent, the Assistant Regional Directors from Regions 1, 6, and 8, are providing the following guiding principles:

- Principle 1. Step-down assessments must be completed quickly to inform the Services sage-grouse listing decision and should have an associated implementation schedule. The Service has not seen a timeline or final template for the individual step-down assessments.
- Principle 2. Assessments should be well coordinated with interagency, cross-jurisdictional involvement, including National Forests within priority landscapes, State wildlife agencies, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Service, tribes, rangeland fire protection agencies (RFPAs), and other local partners. In order to have consistent outcomes across the first six PACs, we recommend an interagency review of products and cross-state coordination (where applicable).

- Principle 3. Step-down assessments should be completed with an eye toward landscape-scale conservation. We recommend consistency across planning efforts and jurisdictional boundaries. To the extent possible, use existing base layers and available spatial data and avoid pursuing additional analyses. Breeding bird density (BBD) boundaries have previously been described and are not expected to change substantially. Given the time constraints, we believe using the BBD maps developed during 2010 is appropriate. If a decision is made to re-run the BBD, we recommend the BLM use current lek data (i.e., 2014) and that a consistent approach be applied across all six priority landscapes.
- Principle 4. Step-down assessments should incorporate the management strategies identified in the “Resistance and Resilience Report” produced by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Fire and Invasives Working Group (Chambers et al. 2014). Applying these activities strategically across the landscape over time and adaptively through the FIAT process provides the best opportunity to stop the decline of sagebrush ecosystems in the Great Basin.
- Principle 5. It is essential that the FIAT process facilitate a greater emphasis on proactive approaches and not just increase the application of reactive approaches. The Service must continue to emphasize this through our participation in the FIAT process. Reactive strategies, which are fire-centric and responsive to human safety concerns and socio-economic costs, can overwhelm longer-term, ecological objectives like proactive habitat restoration. If the FIAT is to achieve the goal of resistant and resilient native ecosystems, our approach to managing wildfire must shift toward the proactive strategies necessary to increase native plant density, diversity, and vigor; reduce soil disturbance (e.g., protection of biological soil crust); and prevent or reduce invasion of nonnative annual grasses in sagebrush understory – before reactive wildfire management becomes necessary.
- Principle 6. Use of native, genetically appropriate and locally-adapted seeds and plant stock should be emphasized. In the Great Basin, it is common to purposefully introduce nonnative species such as forage kochia and crested wheatgrass for “reactive” post-fire rehabilitation (soil stabilization) and “proactive” fuels management (fuel breaks). However, purposeful introductions of nonnative species may undermine the long-term resistance and resilience of native plant communities, potentially negating the benefits of their use. Shortfalls in seed availability, seeding knowledge, and seed handling practices often hamper rehabilitation and restoration outcomes. Botanists and plant ecologists need to be involved in seeding/planting decisions to ensure that genetic and climatic factors are considered to select the best seed, seed mix, and restoration technique to maximize plant establishment. Funding must be directed to support seed collection, seed increase, seed storage, seed and plug planting, and vegetation monitoring.
- Principle 7. Once the FIAT step-down assessments are completed, and on-the-ground actions are being implemented, there must be a robust and consistent monitoring program to ensure that the actions are providing the expected results. If restoration of sage-grouse habitat is not achieved for a particular project (and some failures should be expected)

then we need to assess what is not working and why, and use adaptive management to correct future actions.

- Principle 8. The FIAT assessments must demonstrate reasonable certainty that they will be implemented and effective. Because the Service is looking at population-level responses, FIAT assessments need to demonstrate areas where habitat restoration will be most effective across the landscape.

Conclusion

The Service supports the completion of the FIAT step-down assessments currently underway and applauds the land management agencies for moving swiftly in this regard. We recommend FIAT assessments be completed by the January 30, 2015 deadline as stated in BLM's Instructional Memorandum 2014-134. Assessments should be well coordinated with interagency, cross-jurisdictional involvement. We recommend these assessments be quickly developed into implementation plans and that the step-down assessments include specific actions to provide further certainty of implementation for efforts to address this primary threat to sage-grouse and its habitat.

Literature Cited

Chambers, Jeanne C.; Pyke, David A.; Maestas, Jeremy D.; Pellant, Mike; Boyd, Chad S.; Campbell, Steven B.; Espinosa, Shawn; Havlina, Douglas W.; Mayer, Kenneth E.; Wuenschel, Amarina. 2014. 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. 73 p.

Reisner, M. D., J. B., D. A. Pyke, and P. S. Doescher. 2013. Conditions favouring *Bromus tectorum* dominance of endangered sagebrush steppe ecosystems. *Journal of Applied Ecology* doi: 10.1111/1365-2664.12097

Addressee List:

State Supervisor, Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office, Boise, Idaho
State Supervisor, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, Reno, Nevada
State Supervisor, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, Portland, Oregon
Field Supervisor, Utah Ecological Services Field Office, West Valley City, Utah