

Sage-grouse Threats, Conservation Actions, and Metrics; Relationship between Various Reports, Analytical Tools, and Databases

Draft

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Introduction

There is extensive coordination amongst federal agencies and state partners in identifying the relevant threats, conservation actions, and metrics that should be considered for the FWS's 2015 listing determination. This coordination has resulted in a number of reports, analytical tools, and databases. This white paper describes these various instruments and provides context for how each will be used in informing a listing decision.

Conservation Objectives Team Report

In March 2013 the Service completed a peer-reviewed Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report that identified the primary threats to the greater sage-grouse and its habitats, as well as identifying the degree by which those threats needed to be ameliorated to ensure the long-term conservation of the species. Recognizing the expertise of the states and their primacy in managing the species, all states were afforded the opportunity to assist the Service in developing this report. Ten of the 11 states within the extant range of the species actively participated in this effort. In this report, the primary threats to the species (which resulted in the 2010 warranted determination) are identified spatially (by population and Management Zones) so that any agency reviewing this tool can focus appropriate resources on the appropriate threats to the species. The report is not prescriptive, allowing for the flexibility of developing local solutions, but is considered the authoritative document describing the primary threats to the sage-grouse populations. The COT report threats and the extent to which those threats have been reduced through conservation efforts will form the basis for the FWS's 2015 listing determination.

Conservation Efforts Database

The Service, in cooperation with State and Federal partners, are developing a spatially-explicit database to account for those actions that are having a substantive positive effect on sage-grouse populations and their habitats. The conservation actions, and the units of measurement for the positive effects of those actions (conservation metrics), that will be captured in our conservation efforts database are currently under review by the Governor's Sage-grouse Task Force and WAFWA's Range-wide Interagency Sage-grouse Conservation Team (RISCT). The Task Force has been asked to focus primarily on the actions that should be tracked, while the RISCT team has been asked for their technical expertise on how to best quantify the positive impact of those actions in a way that can be rolled-up across the landscape. Once we receive feedback from the Task Force and RISCT the Service will make a

final determination regarding what actions and metrics the final conservation efforts database will include by December 2013. Our intent is to have the database ready for use in early 2014.

State Self-Assessments

During the September Task Force meeting the Service agreed to provide state members a template by which to review their individual state conservation efforts. This was meant as a “mid-term check-in” as opposed to the more thorough accounting that will be done through the conservation efforts database. The self-assessment form provided to the states does not completely overlap with the format presented for the conservation efforts database, which is still a work in progress. However, both efforts capture the main tenants of, and the primary threats identified by, the Conservation Objectives Team report.

Subregional BLM and Forest Service Plan Assessments (COT Matrices)

The BLM and Forest Service are revising or amending 96 RMPs/LRMPs through the development of 15 EISs. In the review of the draft BLM/FS planning documents the Service has developed a matrix, based on the objectives identified in the COT report, that highlights the degree to which each program area (e.g., grazing management, mineral leasing) meets the objectives identified in the COT report (i.e., meeting, not meeting, or uncertain). This planning matrix will be completed for each alternative analyzed in each planning effort at the draft EIS stage, thereby providing a reference to the land management agencies for forming a final proposed alternative that is consistent with the COT report objectives.

Baseline Environmental Report (BER)

Completed by USGS in 2013, this report compiles and summarizes data and technical literature on sage-grouse, their habitats, and threats to provide guidance to BLM and Forest Service for their planning efforts. The data layers and quantitative evaluation of threats in this report will allow a before/after evaluation of how BLM and Forest Service Planning efforts have benefitted sage-grouse conservation.

BLM/Forest Service Cumulative Effects Analysis

The BLM and Forest Service will be completing a three-tiered cumulative effects analysis for their sage-grouse planning efforts. The first tier will analyze the effects of the planning effort within the planning subregion using the same data layers presented in the Baseline Environmental Report. The second tier will roll-up the effects (using the same consistency indicators in tier one) of multiple planning efforts at the WAFWA Management Zone scale. This second tier will also allow for analysis of smaller units such as populations or Priority Areas for Conservation. . Finally, after completion of the planning efforts and selection of proposed plans across the 15 EISs, the BLM will draft a third tier “landscape report”, examining the impact of their planning efforts on the species as a whole.