

December 2, 2011

INFORMATON MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM: Dan Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bob Abbey, Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management

SUBJECT: Greater Sage-Grouse Range-wide Status and Conservation Efforts

I. SUMMARY

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required to issue a proposed rule to list, or a proposed withdrawal, for the Greater sage-grouse by the end of 2015. On December 9, 2011, Secretary Salazar is scheduled to co-host a meeting with Wyoming's Governor Mead with Governors from States where Greater sage-grouse occur to discuss the need for action on Greater sage-grouse conservation. This briefing paper provides an overview of existing conservation efforts to date.

II. DISCUSSION

In March 2010, the Service published its listing decision for the Greater sage-grouse as "Warranted but Precluded." Loss and modification of habitat and the inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms were identified as the two primary threats resulting in the recommendation. As part of the Multi-district Litigation (MDL) settlement agreement, the Service is bound to issue a proposed rule to list, or a proposed withdrawal, for the Greater sage-grouse by the end of 2015.

Rangewide Efforts

State-led Conservation Strategy: In 2008, all States within the range of the Greater Sage-grouse, along with 6 Federal agencies (Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Services Agency) signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to implement a 2006 Comprehensive Conservation Strategy for Greater Sage-Grouse. Several of the key components of this Strategy have either been initiated or in progress. Both the BLM and Service are co-authors of this Conservation Strategy. One key component of the Conservation Strategy is development of the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA) – Federal legislation modeled on the North American Waterfowl Act. NASECA is conceptualized to provide a long-term vehicle for sagebrush conservation, with a goal of creating healthy, sustainable sagebrush ecosystems and their associated flora and fauna.

BLM Sage-Grouse Strategy: In recognition of the fact that BLM administers over 50% of sage-grouse habitat range-wide, BLM has embarked upon a strategy to revise or amend up to 98 Resource Management Plans to provide enhanced regulatory mechanisms that will address loss and fragmentation of habitat. Revisions or amendments are scheduled to be completed the end of Fiscal Year 2014.

NRCS Sage-Grouse Initiative: The NRCS has initiated the Sage-Grouse Initiative, which provides technical assistance and funding for conservation actions on private lands. This well-funded effort is working within priority areas across the 11-State range to fund easements and restoration of habitats.

State Efforts

All States within the range of the Greater Sage-grouse have drafted State conservation strategies for this species. While all of these efforts are focused on conservation, their proposed conservation actions vary widely. The conservation efficacy of all these plans has not been formally evaluated. Only Wyoming's strategy has a regulatory structure for implementing their conservation efforts (see attached).

Local Efforts

Several local working groups of various stakeholders have been functioning at the local level for many years. These groups are often part of an overall State conservation strategy, and primarily address localized conservation needs.

Conservation of the Greater sage-grouse is a high priority for Federal and State wildlife and land managements across the specie's range. Implementation of necessary conservation actions, which are likely to be different than current procedures, will likely result in some initial resistance from all agencies (and their stakeholders). State wildlife agencies may be most concerned given their long-term management authority for the species. Some may perceive Federal conservation efforts as a potential infringement of, or statement on, their abilities to effectively manage sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystems. Conflict resolution on implementation of mutual conservation efforts may be necessary; however, there is universal support for conservation of this species. All signatories of the 2006 Conservation Strategy support the development and passage of NASECA. While initial progress has been made in drafting and securing sponsorship for this proposed legislation, efforts have stalled under the current political climate.

The Service's determination that listing was warranted but precluded by higher priority actions was challenged by Western Watersheds. This litigation is ongoing, oral arguments are scheduled for December 21, 2011, and the plaintiffs seek to have the court compel the Service to move immediately to issue a proposed rule to list.

State	WA	OR	ID	CA	NV	UT	MT	CO	WY	SD	ND
Date Plan Approved	May 2004 (recovery plan)	Aug. 2005	July 2006	April 2010	June 2004	2002	Feb. 2005	March 2008	2008	2008	Dec. 2005
Date Plan Revised	NA	April 2011	Partial, 2009	NA	Currently being revisited	2009	NA	NA	June 2011	NA	NA
FWS help with plan?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
FWS sign plan?	No	No	No	Refuge signed local plan	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
FWS approve plan?	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No, have concerns	No	Implied by signature	Yes	No	No
Plan codified?	Parts at the county level	Administrative Rules only	No, but considered in hunting	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Primary threats addressed?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Local only	Not all	All but energy devel.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Primary threats ameliorated?	Yes, but plan is voluntary	No, not without reg. mech.	No, not without reg. mech.	Yes	Likely, but provides recommendations only	No due to variances provided	No, not without reg. mech.	Likely, but untested	Yes, in key areas	No	No
Any land management agency incorporate state plan in their efforts?	BLM, NRCS, FWS, CDs	BLM in process	Some BLM IMs	NRCS, local CD	Being used, but not incorporated into plans	BLM using in mgmt., but not in plans	BLM in spirit	No	BLM in process	No	No