

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Mountain-Prairie Region

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June 10, 2015

TO: Greater Sage-Grouse Status Review Team (Attn: Pat Deibert and Kate Norman)

FROM: Michael Carrier, State Supervisor, Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office

SUBJECT: Greater Sage-grouse Status Review: Comments

General Comments

1. The document makes reference to Idaho's three-tier habitat classification approach but lacks a description of each category and their role in Idaho's approach to adaptive management. *Recommend that PHMA, IHMA and GHMA be fully described along with a description of their role in adaptive management.*
2. The document does not mention Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) in Idaho. *Recommend a short narrative on Idaho RFPAs such as: There are currently 230 trained ranchers/landowners in southern Idaho who are members of 7 RFPAs supporting wildland firefighters to protect over 3,500,000 acres of sagebrush steppe from catastrophic wildfire. (Placeholder: Proven effectiveness)*
3. Generally, the summaries of each chapter lack sufficient description of or clear conclusions on the degree to which Land Use Plan Amendments or other regulatory mechanisms ameliorate the described threats. *Recommend that the chapter summaries be expanded to address threat amelioration.*
4. There are multiple references in the document (e.g., chapter 14) to 'overgrazing.' *Recommend change the term to "poorly-managed grazing" consistent with the Service's February, 2015 memo.*

5. A new chapter describing, state-by-state, plans in development or completed by federal agencies, states and others and some detail about those plans would be very helpful in understanding some of the nuanced differences between states' plans as well as capturing the totality of conservation effort in one place.

Specific Comments

1. Chapter 5, Page 39, Line 19: *The document references a "Threats Interactions" section but this section cannot be found.*
2. Chapter 5, Page 55, Local Fire Management Programs Section: This section lacks adequate detail to describe the purpose, need and effectiveness of RFPAs; especially in Idaho. *Recommend a short narrative on Idaho RFPAs such as: There are currently 250 trained ranchers/landowners who are members of 6 RFPAs supporting wildland firefighters to protect over 5 million acres of sagebrush steppe in Idaho from catastrophic wildfire. During the 2013 and 2014 fire seasons ranchers assisted the BLM on at least 50 separate fires in southern Idaho which included assistance to the Jordon Valley Oregon RFA with the 395,000-acre Buzzard Complex fire in 2014. In 2014, two Idaho RFPAs and the BLM received the Pulaski Award, a prestigious national recognition for contributions to wildland firefighting. Ranchers know the land, access routes, where water is and where fires have burned before. They are the perfect first responders and can often put out a fire before it becomes an issue thus saving precious firefighting resources for the large fires.*
3. Chapter 5, Page 52, State Plans Section: *Recommend language be added to clarify the status of the State Plan in Idaho: Although not yet implemented, an Executive Order was enacted on May 27th, 2015 carrying the force and effect of State Law.ⁱ Idaho's State Plan will have regulatory mechanisms that require lek buffers, direct fire prevention, fuels management, suppression, wildfire restoration and rehabilitation, and habitat restoration activities on Idaho State Trust Lands (Idaho Department of State Lands).*
4. Chapter 5, Page 57, Assessment of Potential Threat Section: *Recommend this section expand on the detail to describe the beneficial impacts of RFPAs for initial attack on wildfires.*
5. Chapter 6, Page 70, Line 1111: There is language missing at the beginning of this paragraph. *Recommend revise/add beginning of paragraph.*
6. Chapter 11, Page 129, Line 3343: Document states "In Idaho wind power is currently unregulated at any level of government (AFWA and USFWS 2007, p. 14)." *Recommend correct/delete this erroneous statement.* This section also states that in Montana, wind energy development will be excluded from Core Areas. *Recommend that the document explain exclusion rules across the range, for example wind energy will be also excluded from PHMA and avoided in IHMA in Idaho.*

7. Chapter 11, Page 138, Assessment of Potential Threat Section: *Recommend a more detailed analysis of the direct and indirect threats to sage-grouse and their habitats in this section and chapter.*
8. Chapter 12, Page 160, Threat Amelioration Summary: *Recommend a more detailed analysis of the direct and indirect threats to sage-grouse and their habitats in this section and chapter.*
9. Chapter 14 General Comments: The chapter discusses that diverting water from waterways for livestock can reduce riparian and wet meadow habitats for sage-grouse, which provide key brood-rearing habitats. Water diversions may, therefore, reduce the availability of these habitats, and potentially brood condition and survival. *Recommend this chapter also discuss the potential for off-stream water (away from riparian) to be a method of reducing intensity of use by influencing distribution of livestock to promote riparian health.*
10. Chapter 14 General Comments: The chapter discusses how fences across the sage-grouse range are used to manage domestic livestock and that fences cause direct mortality through collision and indirect mortality through the creation of avian predator perch sites, the potential creation of predator corridors along fences, the incursion of invasive plants along the fencing corridor, and habitat fragmentation. *Recommend that this section also discuss how fences may help facilitate intensive rangeland management strategies that promote rangeland health and wildlife habitat.*
11. Chapter 14, Page 178 Line 4744, Other Conservation Efforts: This section covered information relating to the direct and indirect impacts of grazing on sage-grouse habitats but did not provide a thorough review of literature regarding methods or strategies for compatible use. *Recommend that the document include discussion on how grazing systems or prescribed grazing is or can be beneficial to sage-grouse. Describe what makes a good grazing system. Also recommend that the document discuss the Service's position on grazing as outlined in the memorandum "Livestock Grazing and Working with Rangeland Owners to Conserve Sage-Grouse." (February, 2015)*
12. Chapter 27, Page 259, Line 119 and Page 265, Line 386: Table and text states that State Plan has been developed and is regulatory. *Recommend that text describe the recent EO that the Governor of Idaho signed on May 27th, 2015, which Idaho statute prescribes as having the force and effect of State Law.*
13. Chapter 27, Page 289, Line 974, Table 27-14: The table may be in error. It describes a 1.2 mile buffer for tall structures such as communication towers, transmission towers and transmission lines. The BLM "drop-in" language prescribes 2 miles. *Recommend rechecking the USGS report and the BLM guidance and correcting table if necessary.*

14. Chapter 27, Page 291, Line 1019-1029: States that if a soft trigger is identified, the BLM will apply more conservative or restrictive implementation conservation measures to mitigate for the specific causal factor in the decline of populations and/or habitats, with consideration of local knowledge and conditions....Hitting a hard trigger will result in BLM or USFS switching to a more restrictive alternative from the FEIS either in whole or in part to address the causal factors. *Recommend that the narrative be expanded to include a description of soft triggers specific to Idaho, such as: If a habitat or population soft trigger is tripped within any of Idaho's four conservation areas, an Implementation Team, informed by technical experts, will identify causal factors and actions to arrest and reverse the trend. If a habitat or population hard trigger is tripped, the IHMA within the entire conservation area will be managed under PHMA restrictions and additional necessary conservation actions will be implemented until the trigger is released.*

ⁱ TITLE 67

STATE GOVERNMENT AND STATE AFFAIRS

CHAPTER 8

EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS -- GOVERNOR AND LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

67-802. OFFICE OF GOVERNOR -- DUTIES OF GOVERNOR.

..... The supreme executive power of the state is vested by section 5, article IV, of the constitution of the state of Idaho, in the governor, who is expressly charged with the duty of seeing that the laws are faithfully executed. In order that he may exercise a portion of the authority so vested, the governor is authorized and empowered to implement and exercise those powers and perform those duties by issuing executive orders from time to time which shall have the force and effect of law when issued in accordance with this section and within the limits imposed by the constitution and laws of this state. Such executive orders, when issued, shall be serially numbered for each calendar year and may be referred to and cited by such numerical designation and title. Each executive order issued hereunder shall be effective only after signature by the governor, attestation by and filing with the secretary of state, who shall keep a permanent register and file of such orders in the same manner as applies to acts of the legislature. In addition, each executive order required by [chapter 52, title 67](#), Idaho Code, to be published in the administrative bulletin shall be filed with the administrative rules coordinator and published in the bulletin. Each such executive order issued by the governor must prescribe a date after which it shall cease to be effective, which shall be within four (4) calendar years of the effective date of such order, and if no date after which such order shall cease to be effective is contained in the order, then such order shall cease to be effective four (4) calendar years from the issuance thereof, unless renewed by subsequent executive order. The governor may modify or repeal any executive order by issuance of a new executive order. The procedures expressly set forth in this section shall be sufficient to make an executive order effective.