

July 8, 2004

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION PLANNING STRATEGY

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

Growing concern about the status of sagebrush on western rangelands and declines in greater sage-grouse numbers have led to petitioning the US Fish and Wildlife Service to protect populations in western states under provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). A decision about whether or not a listing is warranted is expected by December 30, 2004. BLM is providing FWS a report describing the agency's management authority and conservation efforts for sage-grouse.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks initiated the Montana statewide workgroup, of which BLM is a member, in May 2000. The workgroup developed and released a draft *Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana* (Plan). A final draft plan should be officially adopted by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in September 2004. Local implementation groups have been initiated in Dillon, Miles City and Glasgow. BLM is developing a strategy and guidance for BLM's implementation of the state plan.

ISSUES:

BLM made a list of commitments in the Plan that includes support for local workgroups, data acquisition, habitat evaluations, and consideration of conservation actions. As BLM develops state-specific strategies for implementing sage grouse conservation, the Montana state agency-led Plan will provide the basis for identifying appropriate actions to minimize or eliminate threats to sage-grouse on BLM-managed lands.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

Loss of sagebrush-grasslands in some western states has approached or exceeded 50 percent. Habitat loss in Montana, in terms of quality or quantity, may not be as high as in other states, but is significant enough at least in part of the state to negatively influence greater sage-grouse numbers and population trends. More than half of the remaining greater sage-grouse habitat in Montana is found on public lands.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

The Director recognizes BLM's role in greater sage-grouse conservation and wants to avoid the need to list under the Endangered Species Act through proactive consultation and cooperation with the public. A *BLM National Strategy for Sage-grouse Habitat* (Strategy) has undergone public review and been finalized. This document will be the framework for implementing sage-grouse conservation on BLM managed lands.

Public interest is high because sagebrush is the dominant habitat type in Montana, and conservation has the potential to influence all programs.

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