

USDA Forest Service Greater Sage-Grouse Forest Plan Amendments

Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council
December 11, 2019



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

October 2018



**Greater Sage-grouse
Proposed Land Management
Plan Amendments (LMPA)
and Draft Environmental
Impact Statement (DEIS) for
the Intermountain and Rocky
Mountain Regions**



Idaho (Boise, Caribou-Targhee, Salmon-Challis, and Sawtooth National Forests and Curlew National Grassland); Nevada (Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest); Utah (Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, and Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forests); Wyoming (Bridger-Teton National Forest); and Wyoming/Colorado (Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest and Thunder Basin National Grassland)



Timeline

- DEIS: released October 5, 2018
 - Comments close January 3, 2019
 - Cooperating agencies reviewed administrative copy
 - Hosted public meetings in Sparks and Elko in November
 - Meeting with cooperating agencies before January 3
- FEIS and draft ROD: Publish late February, 2019
 - Do not anticipate hosting public or cooperator meetings for FEIS
- Objection period (60 days): End late April, 2019
- Final ROD: Issue May/June 2019, depending on objections

Purpose and Need



“...to incorporate new information to improve the clarity, efficiency, and implementation of greater sage-grouse plans, including better alignment with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and state plans, in order to benefit greater sage-grouse conservation on the landscape scale”

DEIS Comments



- Examine issues brought up by commenters.
- Use comments to modify alternatives or develop new alternatives.
- Use comments to improve the effects analysis.



Proposed Changes: Habitat

- Removed Sagebrush Focal Areas and references.
- Updated Habitat Management Area Maps, consistent with State and BLM (PHMA, GHMA, OHMA).
- Updated lek definitions, consistent with NDOW (changed “occupied lek” to “active or pending lek” throughout).

Proposed Changes: Adaptive Management



- Partnered with other State and Federal agencies to draft a proactive and responsive Adaptive Management Plan.
- Includes formation of Statewide Technical Team and Local Adaptive Management Response Teams.
- Population warnings are based on analyses of monitoring information by the USGS. Habitat warnings and triggers are based on known natural and human-caused disturbances and future fire risk.

Proposed Changes: Management Approach



- A management approach can describe the principal strategies and program priorities the Responsible Official intends to employ to carry out projects and activities developed under the LMP (including analysis, assessment, project planning, monitoring).
- **Management Approach 39**—*In designing post wildfire recovery treatments, consider resistance and resilience, ecological site descriptions, and state and transition models.*
- **Management Approach 71**—*In priority and general habitat management areas, herd gathering should be prioritized when wild horse and burro populations exceed the upper limit of the established appropriate management level.*



Proposed Changes: Exceptions

- Maintained exception that management direction does not apply in areas of non-habitat in PHMA or GHMA *if the proposed activity does not preclude effective use of adjacent sage-grouse habitats.*
- Introduced standardized exception process for anthropogenic disturbances.
 - Applies to special use authorizations (e.g., powerlines, pipelines, communication towers).
 - Applies to surface occupancy for oil, gas, and geothermal.
 - Does not apply to wind and solar.



Proposed Changes: Exceptions

- **Standard 16:** *In priority and general habitat management areas do not authorize new or amended lands special uses for infrastructure, such as high-voltage transmission lines, major pipelines, distribution lines, and communication tower sites, outside of existing designated corridors and rights-of-way. Exceptions may be made if any of the following apply:*
- **Standard 85:** *In priority habitat management areas, any new oil and gas leases or geothermal leases must include a no surface occupancy stipulation. There will be no waivers or modifications. An exception could be granted by the authorized officer if one of the following applies:*



Proposed Changes: Exceptions

- i. The location of the proposed authorization is determined to be unsuitable habitat or non-habitat; lacks the ecological potential to become marginal or suitable habitat; and would not result in direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts on greater sage-grouse and its habitat.*
- ii. Impacts from the proposed action could be offset through use of the mitigation hierarchy (avoid (e.g., relocate, co-locate, bury), minimize, mitigate) to achieve a net conservation gain and demonstrate that the individual and cumulative impacts of the project would not result in habitat fragmentation or other impacts that would cause greater sage-grouse populations to decline.*



Proposed Changes: Exceptions

- iii. The proposed action would be authorized to address public health and safety concerns, specifically as they relate to local, state, and national priorities.*
- iv. Renewals or re-authorizations of existing infrastructure in previously disturbed sites or expansions of existing infrastructure that have de minimis impacts or do not result in direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts on Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat.*
- v. The proposed action would be determined a routine administrative function conducted by State or local governments, including prior existing uses, authorized uses, valid existing rights and existing infrastructure (i.e., rights-of-way for roads) that serve such a public purpose.*

Proposed Changes: Livestock Grazing



- **Desired Condition 40**—*Grazing management contributes to maintaining sustainable riparian communities needed for proper functioning condition in riparian areas and mesic meadows in priority, general, and other habitat management areas.*
- **Standard 41**—*In priority and general habitat management areas, do not approve construction of water developments that would cause adverse effects to greater sage-grouse habitat.*
- **Guideline 43**—*In greater sage-grouse habitat, if livestock grazing is limiting achievement of seasonal desired conditions, adjust livestock management, as appropriate, to address greater sage-grouse habitat requirements.*



Proposed Changes: Livestock Grazing

- **Guideline 44**—*In priority, general, and other habitat management areas, grazing utilization in riparian areas and mesic meadows should be managed to promote cover, diversity, and health of important/key plant species to support sage-grouse during brood-rearing season; and, during the growing season, manage grazing in riparian areas and mesic meadows to allow recovery of riparian vegetation (e.g. using riparian pastures, water developments, stockmanship, rotational grazing).*
- **Management Approach 45**—*Conduct greater sage-grouse habitat assessments in allotments. If the assessment identifies the habitat is in less than desired seasonal habitat condition, determine factors limiting achievement of the desired seasonal habitat conditions.*

For Details

- Download DEIS online
- Find Chapter 2
- State(s) of Interest
- Activities of Interest

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r4/home/?cid=stelprd3843381>



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Table of Proposed Changes



1st Column: current language, deletions in red

2nd Column: proposed language, new in blue

3rd Column: purpose of change

No Action Alternative (Nevada)	Proposed Action (Nevada)	Issue/Clarification
<p>GRSG-LG-GL-042-Guideline</p> <p>Grazing guidelines should be applied in each of the seasonal habitats in Table 3. If values in Table 3 guidelines cannot be achieved based upon a site-specific analysis using Ecological Site Descriptions, long-term ecological site potential analysis, or other similar analysis, adjust grazing management to move towards desired habitat conditions in Table 1a or 1b consistent with the ecological site potential. Do not use drought and</p>	<p><u>GRSG-LG-GL-043-Guideline</u></p> <p><u>In greater sage-grouse habitat, if livestock grazing is limiting achievement of seasonal desired conditions, adjust livestock management, as appropriate, to address greater sage-grouse habitat requirements.</u></p>	<p>Changing Livestock Grazing Guidelines</p>

