Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Draft Land Use Plan Amendment/ Environmental Impact Statement

December 2013

Project Overview

This initiative is the result of the March 2010, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) *12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) as Threatened or Endangered* (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010). In that 12-Month Finding, the USFWS concluded that Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) was "warranted, but precluded" for listing as a threatened or endangered species. The USFWS reviewed the status and threats to the GRSG in relation to the five Listing Factors provided in Section 4(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Of the five Listing Factors reviewed, the USFWS determined that Factor A, "the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the habitat or range of the Greater Sage-Grouse," and Factor D, "the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms." posed "**a significant threat to the Greater Sage-Grouse now and in the foreseeable future"** (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010; emphasis added). The USFWS identified the principal regulatory mechanisms for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and National Forest Service (Forest Service) as conservation measures in land use plans (LUPs).

In response to the USFWS findings, the BLM and Forest Service are preparing LUP amendments (LUPAs) with associated environmental impact statements (EISs) to incorporate specific conservation measures across the range of the GRSG, consistent with national BLM and Forest Service policy. The planning strategy will evaluate the adequacy of BLM and Forest Service LUPs and address, as necessary, amendments throughout the range of the GRSG. These EISs have been coordinated under two administrative planning regions: the Rocky Mountain Region and the Great Basin Region. These regions are drawn roughly to correspond with the threats identified by the USFWS in the 2010 listing decision, along with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Management Zones framework.

The Great Basin Region comprises LUPs in California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, and portions of Utah and Montana. This region comprises the WAFWA Management Zones III (Southern Great Basin), IV (Snake River Plain), and V (Northern Great Basin). The USFWS has identified a number of threats in this region, the major ones being wildfire, loss of native habitat to invasive species, and habitat fragmentation.

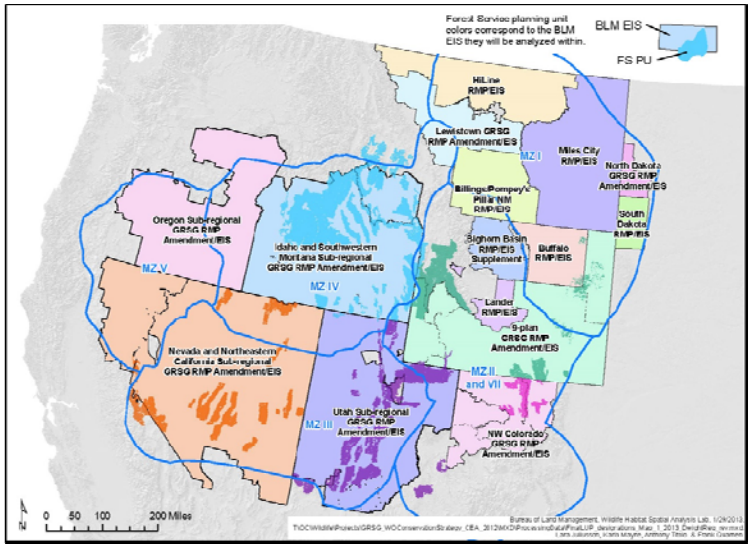

Image shows the BLM and Forest Service GRSG planning strategy sub-region/EIS boundaries

On a sub-regional level, the BLM Nevada State Office and Forest Service Intermountain Region (Region 4) are proposing to complete this Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-Region LUPA/EIS to analyze the effects of amending up to 12 BLM and 2 Forest Service LUPs in order to provide sub-region wide consistent management of GRSG habitat for all included BLM and Forest Service-administered lands. These proposed LUP amendments would identify and incorporate appropriate regulatory mechanisms to conserve, enhance, and/or restore GRSG habitat, and would be designed to eliminate, reduce, or minimize threats to PPH and PGH on BLM and Forest Service-administered lands in the Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-Region. The proposed LUPAs address both USFWS Listing Factors A and D (above) and are intended to provide consistency in the management of GRSG habitats across the sub-region's BLM and Forest Service administered lands. The BLM and Forest Service intend to issue separate Records of Decision. The Records of Decision, which will be issued by September 30, 2014, are expected to offer sufficient evidence for the USFWS to consider preclusion of a potential listing for GRSG as a threatened or endangered species under the ESA.

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Planning Area Overview

The planning area is the geographic area within which the BLM and Forest Service will make decisions during a planning effort. A planning area boundary includes all lands regardless of jurisdiction; however, the BLM and Forest Service only make decisions on lands that fall under their respective jurisdiction. Land use plan amendments would be limited to providing land use planning direction specific to the conservation of GRSG and their habitat.

For this draft LUPA/EIS, the planning area includes lands in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest; Battle Mountain, Carson City, Elko, Ely, and Winnemucca BLM district offices in Nevada; and the Alturas, Eagle Lake, and Surprise BLM field offices in California. A remote portion of the planning area in the Elko District Office that is contiguous with BLM-administered lands in Idaho is and will continue to be administered via a memorandum of understanding between the Nevada BLM and Idaho BLM.

The planning area covers all or a portion of 16 counties in northern Nevada and portions of 4 counties in northeastern California. Of these 20 counties, 12 contain PPH/PGH. Lands within the planning area include a mix of private, federal, and state lands. In total, there are 65,004,400 acres in the planning area.

The decision area includes all preliminary priority habitat (PPH) and preliminary general habitat (PGH) within the planning area for which the BLM and Forest Service have authority to make management decisions. The BLM and Forest Service have jurisdiction over all BLM– and Forest Service-administered lands, respectively. In addition, the BLM has jurisdiction over federal minerals on Forest Service-administered lands and in some areas where the surface is owned by a non-federal entity. For the purpose of this planning process, lands with federal mineral interests refers to areas with state or private surface. **In total, there are 20,964,700 acres of PPH/PGH in the decision area**. Any decisions in the LUPAs would apply only to BLM- and Forest Service-administered lands (the decision area).

The table below depicts the total acreage of PPH and PGH by each county in the decision area.

Acres of PPH/PGH by County

County Name	PPH Acres	PGH Acres	Total Acres
Carson City	0	0	0
Churchill	192,500	92,700	285,200
Douglas	0	0	0
Elko	5,897,900	1,974,200	7,872,100
Esmeralda	0	0	0
Eureka	811,200	640,900	1,452,100
Humboldt	1,509,700	365,400	1,875,100
Lander	1,438,800	482,700	1,921,500
Lassen	681,100	69,300	750,400
Lincoln	362,700	362,500	725,200
Lyon	0	0	0
Mineral	0	0	0
Modoc	75,600	38,200	113,800
Nye	617,500	739,700	1,357,000
Pershing	79,000	148,700	227,700
Plumas	0	0	0
Sierra	0	0	0
Storey	0	0	0
Washoe	1,579,300	273,800	1,853,100
White Pine	1,775,200	756,200	2,531,400
Total Acres	**15,020,300**	**5,944,200**	**20,964,700**

Source: BLM and Forest Service GIS 2013

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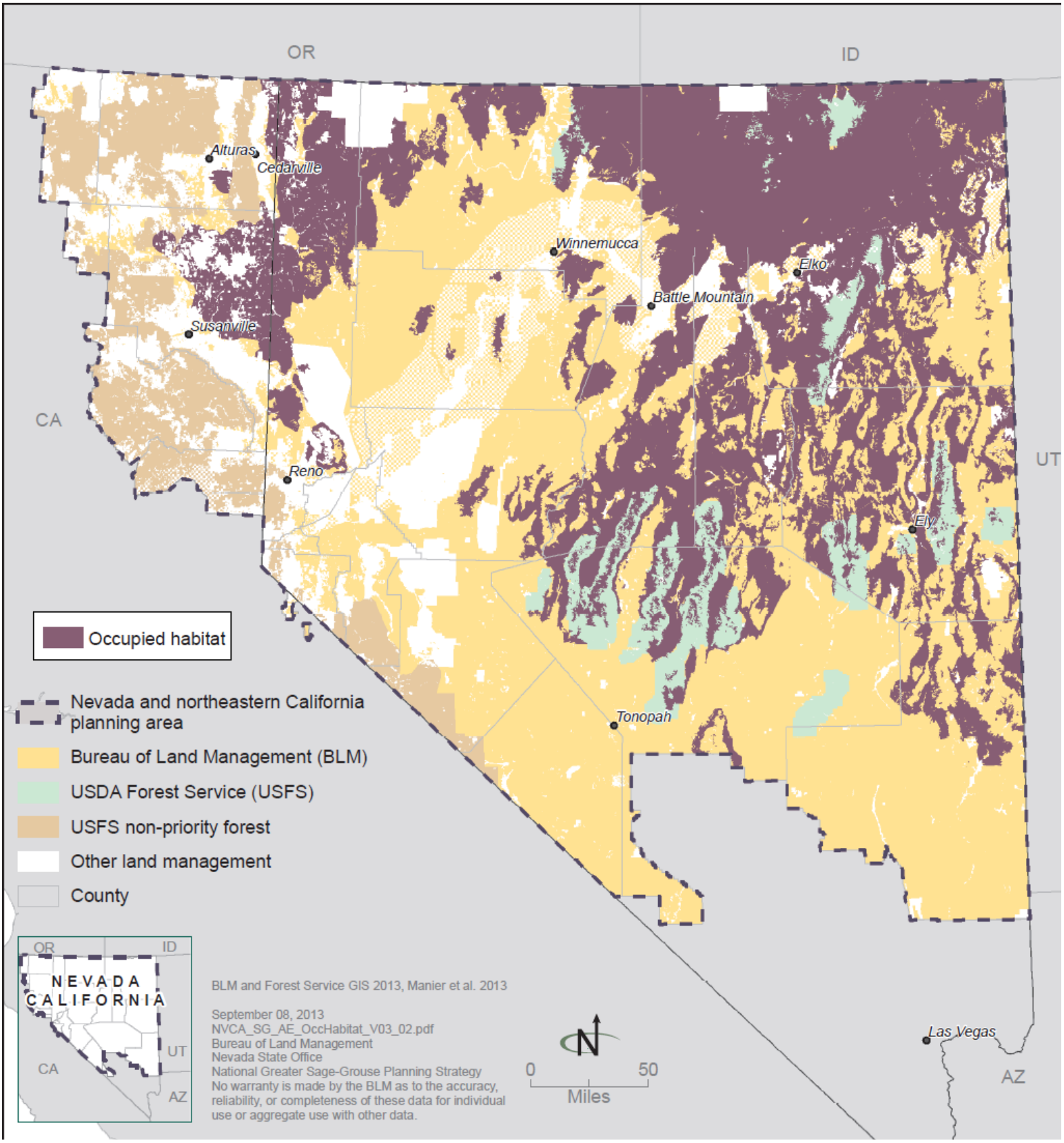
Planning Area Map



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Planning Process

Issue Notice of Intent to prepare LUPAs/EIS and begin scoping

Issued

Dec 9 2011

Document Existing Conditions and Management

Conduct Scoping

Provide minimum 60-day comment period on issues & planning criteria

Document results in **Scoping Report**

December 2011-

February 2012

Formulate Alternatives

Analyze Effects of Alternatives

Select Preferred Alternative

Spring 2012-

Summer 2013

Prepare Draft LUPAs/Draft EIS

Summer-Fall

2013

Publish Notices of Availability

Provide 90-day public comment period

November 1, 2013-

January 29, 2014

Prepare Proposed LUPAs/Final EIS

Winter-

Spring 2014

Publish Notices of Availability

Provide 30-day protest periods

Resolve protests

Provide 60-day Governor's Consistency Review periods

Prepare Records of Decisions/Approved LUPAs

Summer-Fall

2014

Implement, Monitor and Evaluate Plan Decisions

Indicates Opportunity for Public Involvement

* documents for public review in **black**

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Guide to Commenting

Why Public Comments are Important

This is an opportunity for you to be involved in the decision-making process and to offer your thoughts on alternative ways for the BLM and Forest Service to accomplish what they are proposing, and to offer your comments on the agencies' analysis of the environmental effects of the proposed action and possible mitigation of potential harmful effects of such actions.

The National Environmental Policy Act "… is intended to help public officials make decisions that are based on the understanding of environmental consequences…" (40 CFR 1501(c).) To achieve this, the DEIS considers the effects of our actions on, economic and natural resources within the planning area. Citizens, such as yourself, often have valuable information about places and resources they consider important and the potential effects proposed federal actions may have on those places and resources. This is your opportunity to work with us so we can take your information into account.

The BLM and Forest Service are responsible for managing public lands in the public interest. Comments that provide relevant and new information with sufficient detail are most useful and are referred to as substantive comments. The BLM and Forest Service review all comments and identify the topics that are substantive for consideration in the final published document.

Viewing the Document

The BLM and Forest Service encourage the public to review the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Draft LUPA/Draft EIS and provide comments. The public can view the document in the following ways:

Electronically:
http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/wildlife/greater_sage-grouse.html

In-Person:
BLM Nevada State Office
1340 Financial Blvd.
Reno, NV 89502

How to Submit Comments

Comments may be submitted in the following ways:

- Electronically by e-mail to:
  blm_nv_ca_sagegrouse_eis_comments@blm.gov
- Via the Internet: **http://on.doi.gov/14ZD3Rb** (address is case sensitive)
- By US mail to:
  BLM-Greater Sage-Grouse EIS
  Attn: Joe Tague
  1340 Financial Blvd.
  Reno, NV 89502

To facilitate analysis of comments and information submitted, we strongly encourage you to submit comments in an electronic format.

Public comments will be accepted until January 29, 2014

Protecting your Privacy

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Questions About Commenting or About the Document?

If you have questions about commenting or about the document, please contact:
Joe Tague, Project Lead – Greater Sage-Grouse LUPA/EIS, Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-Region.
Telephone: 775-861-6556

Guide to Commenting (continued)

Substantive Comments

A substantive comment is one that does one or more of the following (BLM Handbook H-1790, *National Environmental Policy Act Handbook*):

- Questions, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of information in the RMP and EIS
- Questions, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of, methodology for, or assumptions used for the environmental analysis
- Presents new information relevant to the analysis
- Presents reasonable alternatives other than those analyzed in the EIS
- Causes changes or revisions in one or more of the alternatives

Nonsubstantive Comments

A nonsubstantive comment is one that can be categorized as one or more of the following (BLM Handbook H-1790, *National Environmental Policy Act Handbook*):

- Comments in favor of or against the proposed action or alternatives without reasoning that meet the criteria for a substantive comment
- Comments that only agree or disagree with BLM policy or resource decisions without justification or supporting data that meet the criteria for a substantive comment
- Comments that don't pertain to the project area or the project
- Comments that take the form of vague, open-ended questions

Tips for Providing Helpful Comments

- Provide specific and detailed text changes. Include the section, management action or page number to help us find the exact location of the subject of your comment. Clearly identify:
  - Where the issue or error is located
  - Why you believe there is an error
  - Alternative ideas to address the issue/errors
- Provide constructive solutions with documentation or resources to support your recommendations.
- Include any knowledge, experience or evidence as it relates to your observations and comments.
- Provide GPS readings if possible when referring to specific locations.
- Avoid vague statements or concerns. These don't give the BLM something on which to act.
- Comments are not votes for or against a decision. BLM must rely on supporting information, not the number of comments received. Multiple comments/ topics with the same concern are considered one comment.
- Avoid using form letters to convey your opinion. Your unique way of writing a comment helps the BLM understand your point of view.

Examples of substantive and nonsubstantive comments can be found on the BLM NEPA Web Guide: *http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/nepa/webguide/document_pages/6_9_2_1__examples.html.*