

## **BLM and U.S. Forest Service Preliminary Habitat Map Background**

### **Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy**

The BLM and USFS National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy is a framework for identifying two categories of sage-grouse habitat: Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH). Areas of PPH or PGH indicate where land-use changes could result in an expected negative impact to sage-grouse population health.

The Preliminary Habitat Map identifies PPH and PGH areas in Nevada. This map is a planning support tool that incorporates the best available data (lek observations, telemetry locations, survey and inventory reports, vegetation cover, soils information, and aerial photography) into a statewide preliminary spatial view of greater sage-grouse habitat. This tool provides resource managers with broad-scale information to guide conservation and land-use planning efforts in the context of greater sage-grouse management at the landscape scale (1:100,000). This map is not intended to be used to delineate sage-grouse habitat at the project-level scale. To apply these results to specific locations it is necessary to conduct a field investigation by a qualified biologist for the purpose of impact assessment.

This Preliminary Habitat Map was derived from the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) Sage-grouse Habitat Categorization data. The data were spatially intersected with Nevada Land Status data and lands managed by BLM and USFS were extracted from the results. The NDOW Category 1 – Essential/Irreplaceable Habitat and Category 2 -- Important Habitat were combined to create the PPH areas (bright pink). The NDOW Category 3 – Moderate Importance Habitat is shown as the PGH areas (blue). The NDOW Category 4 – Transitional Range, Category 5 – Unsuitable Habitat, and Non-Habitat areas are not shown. The habitat categorization analysis was performed only for areas within the sage-grouse population management units (PMUs) identified by the Governor’s Sage-grouse Conservation Team (2002). It is noted that sage-grouse occur outside of the PMUs.

This map will provide information for the BLM and USFS greater sage-grouse planning process. It will be used in the development of alternatives to be considered in the NEPA EIS process to amend the agency’s Resource Management Plans. The final PPH and PGH areas with resultant land use direction will be developed through this process. Therefore, this map is a starting point in the process and the boundaries of these areas are expected to change.

This Preliminary Habitat Map replaces the 75% Breeding Bird Density Map and provides the basis for application of the BLM’s Greater sage-grouse interim guidance.

### **Preliminary Priority Habitat**

In the context of the NDOW Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Categorization Map, PPH consists of a combination of essential and irreplaceable (Category 1) and important (Category 2) habitats. These areas include breeding habitat (lek sites and nesting habitat), brood-rearing habitat, winter range, and important movement corridors. PPH primarily consists of sagebrush, but may also include riparian communities, perennial grasslands, agriculturally-developed land, and restored habitat, including recovering burned areas. The BLM and the USFS defines PPH as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable sage-grouse populations.

### **Preliminary General Habitat**

The NDOW Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Categorization Map typically identifies PGH as habitat types of moderate importance (Category 3), however, PGH may also include areas of higher quality habitat that lacks bird survey and inventory data to support a priority habitat ranking. PGH provides some benefit to greater sage-grouse populations but, in many instances, lacks a key component, such as adequate shrub height or density or sufficient herbaceous understory, which prevents it from meeting its full ecological potential. PGH also may include areas recently burned that have not sufficiently recovered or sagebrush communities with pinyon-juniper encroachment. PGH has the potential to be reclassified as PPH if restoration efforts enhance the habitat quality or ongoing field efforts document sage-grouse use.

### **Input and Questions on the Preliminary Habitat Map**

Questions on this map can be submitted through [SageQuery@blm.gov](mailto:SageQuery@blm.gov).

Comments on this map for the planning effort scoping will be accepted until March 23, 2012 through [sagewest@blm.gov](mailto:sagewest@blm.gov). There will be an opportunity for additional public input during the comment period for the draft EIS.