

Record of Decision and Approved Pocatello Resource Management Plan

April 2012



Pocatello Field Office / Idaho Falls District

**U.S. Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management**



Mission Statement – It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply Refer To:
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April 2012

Dear Reader:

Enclosed please find the Record of Decision (ROD) and the Pocatello Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP). This plan guides future management of public lands, federal minerals, resources, and resource uses administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Pocatello Field Office, in Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Bonneville, Caribou, Cassia, Franklin, Oneida, and Power counties of southeastern Idaho. The Approved RMP, signed by the BLM Idaho State Director, is the result of collaboration with interested parties and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. This ROD serves as BLM's final decision for the land-use planning decisions as described in this Approved RMP.

The BLM developed and analyzed four alternatives in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Proposed RMP/Final EIS was published and released on May 7, 2010. The BLM received two protest letters regarding the Pocatello Proposed RMP. Protest issues were reviewed, analyzed, and considered by the Director of the BLM to ensure the RMP decisions approved by the Idaho State Director:

- followed established procedures,
- considered relevant information, and
- were consistent with BLM policy, regulation, and statute.

These two protests were resolved by the BLM Director prior to the Idaho BLM Director's approval of this RMP. The BLM Director's *Protest Resolution Report*, response to the protest letters, can be found at: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/planning_overview/protest_resolution/protestreports.html. The BLM Director has upheld all of the land use plan decisions of the Proposed RMP resulting in no land use plan decisions of the Approved RMP being changed as a result of the protests.

In addition to providing land-use planning direction for travel management, this Approved RMP also designates several motorized travel routes. According to BLM policy, such route designations are implementation-level decisions that are subject to administrative appeal. Therefore, any party who feels they may be adversely affected by these route designations may appeal these designations within 30-days of the publication date of the Notice of Availability for this ROD and Approved RMP in the *Federal Register*. The ROD contains detailed information on appeal procedures.

It is the hope of the Pocatello Field Office that your interest and involvement in the management of these public lands will continue as we move forward to implement and monitor this Approved RMP.

Sincerely,

David A. Pacioretty,
Field Manager

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronym or Abbreviation	Full Phrase
ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
AD	administrative designation
AMR	appropriate management response
AQ	air quality
ARMP	Approved Resource Management Plan
AUM	animal unit month
BLM	United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
BA	biological assessment
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
BMP	best management practice
BOR	United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
BPA	Bonneville Power Authority
BSD	Blackfoot Stock Driveway
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CR	cultural resources
CRMP	Cultural Resources Management Plan
DoD	Department of Defense
DOQ	digital ortho quads
EIS	environmental impact statement
EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
ERMA	Extensive Recreation Management Area
ESA	Endangered Species Act of 1973
ES&R	emergency stabilization and rehabilitation
FLPMA	Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FO	forestry
FRCC	fire regime condition class
FW	fish and wildlife
GE	general
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICBEMP	Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project
ID	Idaho
IDEQ	Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
IDFG	Idaho Department of Fish and Game
IDL	Idaho Department of Lands

LIST OF ACRONYMS *(continued)*

Acronym or Abbreviation

Full Phrase

IM	Instruction Memorandum
IPMP	Interagency Area-Wide Investigation of Phosphate Mine Contamination and Final Risk Management Plan
LAC	limits of acceptable change
LG	livestock grazing
LHC	land health conditions
LR	lands and realty
LUA	land use authorizations
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
MBF	thousand board feet
ME	minerals and energy
MFP	Management Framework Plan
MIAG	Montana/Idaho Airshed Group
NAIP	National Agricultural Imagery Program
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
NIFC	National Interagency Fire Center
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NSO	no surface occupancy
NTT	National Technical Team
NWSRS	National Wild and Scenic Rivers System
OHV	off-highway vehicle
PFC	proper functioning condition
PFO	BLM, Idaho Falls District, Pocatello Field Office
planning area	Pocatello Field Office boundary and scope for the RMP
PM _{2.5}	particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter
PM ₁₀	particulate matter smaller than 10 microns in diameter
PO	Plan of Operation
PR	paleontological resources
PRMP	Proposed Resource Management Plan
public lands	National System of Public lands
RE	recreation
RHCA	Riparian Habitat Conservation Area
RMP	Resource Management Plan
RMZ	recreation management zone
RNA	research natural area
ROD	Record of Decision

LIST OF ACRONYMS *(continued)*

Acronym or Abbreviation	Full Phrase
ROS	recreation opportunity spectrum
ROW	right-of-way
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SIR	supplemental information report
SRMA	Special Recreation Management Area
SS	special status species
SW	soil and water
TM	comprehensive trails and travel management
TR	tribal treaty rights and interest
USC	United States Code
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDI	United States Department of the Interior
USFS	United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
USFWS	United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Department of the Interior, Geological Survey
VE	vegetation
VR	visual resources
VRM	visual resource management
WF	wildland fire management
WFU	wildland fire use
WSA	Wilderness Study Area
WUI	wildland urban interface

RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION

The accompanying resource management plan (RMP) to this Record of Decision (ROD) is hereby approved for the National System of Public Lands (public lands) and resources/resource uses managed by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Idaho Falls District, Pocatello Field Office (PFO). The lands and resources are in the counties of Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Bonneville, Caribou, Cassia, Franklin, Oneida, and Power in southeastern Idaho. This plan supersedes the Malad Management Framework Plan (MFP) (BLM 1981) and the Pocatello RMP (BLM 1988a), previously used to guide management of public lands in the PFO.

The BLM prepared this plan under the regulations implementing the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA; 43 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR], Part 1600). An environmental impact statement (EIS) was prepared for this RMP, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

OVERVIEW OF THE ALTERNATIVES

The BLM developed four RMP alternatives, including a No Action Alternative, and analyzed them in detail in a Final EIS (FEIS; BLM 2010). Each alternative emphasizes a different combination of resource uses, allocations, and restoration measures to address issues and to resolve conflicts among uses, with each alternative meeting program goals to a different extent. The four alternatives considered are summarized below.

Alternative A (No Action Alternative)

Alternative A is the continuation of the present management situation, implementing the direction and actions contained in existing guidance, laws, plans, and policies that are in effect, in compliance with the 1988 Pocatello RMP and the 1981 Malad MFP. Valid decisions contained in these guiding documents would be implemented if they are not already completed. Alternative A would continue current levels, methods, and a mix of multiple use resource management of public lands in the PFO planning area. The current rate of implementation would continue.

Alternative B (Approved Resource Management Plan)

Alternative B is the Approved RMP (ARMP). It balances resource conservation and ecosystem health with the production of commodities and use of the land that provides benefits for the broadest range of public uses. When compared with the other alternatives analyzed in the FEIS (BLM 2010), the Approved Resource Management Plan (ARMP) provides an intermediate level of protection, restoration, enhancement, and use of resources and services that would meet ongoing programs and land uses. The management strategy uses an array of proactive and prescriptive measures that protect vegetation and habitat and promote continued multiple resource management. The BLM believes this ARMP represents a mix and variety of management actions that best resolves the issues identified during scoping, while assessing the need for change topics, identified in the FEIS (BLM 2010) and future management considerations.

Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes management strategies to preserve and protect ecosystem health through protection, restoration, and enhancement of the land resources, while providing for multiple uses, including livestock grazing and mineral development. Producing commodities from public lands administered by the PFO would be secondary to protecting, enhancing, and expanding such resources such as the sagebrush steppe and sage-grouse habitat. In some cases and some areas, production would be excluded to protect sensitive resources. Management actions would be applied to broad areas containing important sagebrush steppe and sage-grouse habitat, as well as specific priority geographical areas. Such management actions would benefit sensitive resources and an array of associated species, such as special status species, fish, and wildlife.

Alternative C is also consistent with the National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (BLM 2004) and Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho (Idaho Department of Fish and Game [IDFG] 2006). Alternative C incorporates conservation measures from the Conservation Plan (IDFG 2006) and addresses threats to sage-grouse habitat, resulting in reasonable, feasible, and effective options for conserving sagebrush habitats and associated species. This would be in accordance with the BLM's multiple use mandate in FLPMA.

According to the Proposed RMP (PRMP)/FEIS (BLM 2010), Alternative C includes “specific measures to protect or enhance resource values . . . emphasizes active and specific measures to protect and enhance vegetation and habitat for special status species, fish, and wildlife . . . [and] reflect[s] a reduction in resource production goals for forage, fiber, and minerals. Management actions would be applied to broad areas containing important habitat, as well as specific priority geographical areas. Such management actions would benefit sensitive resources and a broad array of associated species” This is consistent with the National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy, where one alternative needs to describe and analyze the conservation of sagebrush habitat (emphasizing special status species habitat).

Special Status Species Objective C-SS-1.2 and Action C-SS-1.2.1 in the PRMP provide management direction for resources and uses, such as livestock grazing, lands and realty, vegetation/riparian, and fluid minerals, for five greater sage-grouse priority areas. These areas total approximately 267,400 acres (44 percent) of the BLM-administered public lands in the planning area and approximately 70 percent of the entire sagebrush steppe type.

Alternative D

Alternative D emphasizes the production of natural resource commodities and public use opportunities. Management of public lands in the PFO planning area would focus on developing and maintaining a variety of recreation and other multiple use opportunities. Potential impacts on sensitive resources would be mitigated on a case-by-case basis. Economic benefits tied to livestock grazing and other commercial uses of public lands would also be promoted, and commodity production of resources in the planning area would be emphasized. Under this alternative, management emphasizes economic return and community stability. Protection and enhancement of resources is secondary, except as mandated by laws, regulations, and policies.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The BLM determined Alternative B, the ARMP, to be the environmentally preferable alternative, taking into account both the human (social and economic) environment and the natural environment. The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the environmentally preferable alternative as the one that will promote the national environmental policy, as expressed in Section 101 of NEPA. This section lists the following goals for all federal plans, programs, and policies:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- Ensure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- Preserve important historical, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Based on these criteria, identifying the environmentally preferable alternative involves balancing current and potential resource uses, resource impacts, and mitigation to maintain a healthy environment, while meeting human needs. Alternative B, the ARMP, provides this balance. Alternative A does not address the changing ecological, socioeconomic, institutional, and regulatory conditions that have occurred since the approval of the Malad MFP in 1981 and Pocatello RMP in 1988 as stated in the Purpose and Need of the FEIS (BLM 2010). Alternative C would be more protective of natural and biological resources than the other alternatives. This reflects a reduction in production goals for forage, fiber, and minerals. Alternative D is the least environmentally preferable alternative because it offers the most intensive active management for uses of the PFO planning area, while providing the fewest restrictions for protecting resources.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS AND DECISION RATIONALE

The decision about the ARMP is based on consideration and evaluation of the following:

- How well the purpose and need is met;
- How well the planning issues are addressed; and
- How it relates to associated environmental consequences.

The facts found through analysis in the FEIS (BLM 2010) provide the basis for determining how well the purpose and need is met and the planning issues are addressed and for considering the

environmental consequences of implementing the plan. The decision to select the PRMP (Alternative B) as the ARMP is based on the conclusion that the management direction in the PRMP best meets the identified purpose and need and addresses the planning issues, as summarized below. The decision is also based on the conclusion that the PRMP has relatively few adverse environmental impacts and relatively favorable outcomes for various resources and programs, compared to the other alternatives.

Purpose and Need

As stated in the FEIS (BLM 2010), the RMP is needed to respond to changing ecological, socioeconomic, institutional, and regulatory conditions that have occurred since the approval of the 1981 Malad MFP and the 1988 Pocatello RMP. Many new laws, regulations, and policies have created additional public land management considerations. As a result, some of the decisions in the MFP and RMP are no longer valid or have been superseded by requirements that did not exist when they were prepared. Likewise, user demands and impacts have evolved, requiring new management direction. Additionally, the use of two separate plans to manage one administrative unit represents a fragmented approach and complicates decision making.

The purpose of the Pocatello RMP is to provide a single, comprehensive land use plan that will replace both the 1981 Malad MFP and 1988 Pocatello RMP. This ARMP guides multiple use management of the public lands and interests administered by the PFO. The plan provides objectives, land use allocations, and management direction to maintain, improve, or restore resource conditions and provide for the economic needs of local communities over the long term. The RMP incorporates new data, addresses land use issues and conflicts, specifies where and under what circumstances particular activities are allowed on public lands, and incorporates the mandate of multiple use in accordance with FLPMA. The RMP does not describe how particular programs or projects would be implemented or prioritized; rather, those decisions are deferred to more-detailed implementation-level planning.

Meeting the Purpose and Need, Addressing the Planning Issues, and Analyzing the Environmental Consequences

The analysis and conclusions in the FEIS (BLM 2010) support the conclusions that Alternative B, now the ARMP, best meets the purpose and need and best addresses the planning issues. The conclusions also acknowledge that the ARMP has relatively few adverse environmental impacts and relatively favorable outcomes for resources and resource uses, compared to the other alternatives. The BLM believes that the ARMP provides management direction that best balances restoration of resource conditions with resource use and enjoyment. This balance is expressed in how the ARMP addresses the six planning issues, which are detailed below.

Issue 1: Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Management—How will the increasing OHV use and associated conflicts be managed within the planning area?

Goal TM-1 of the ARMP aims to “establish a comprehensive approach to travel planning and management.” To achieve this goal and to accommodate the anticipated increase in demand for OHV uses in the planning area, approximately 601,100 acres would be designated as limited for OHV use, with the remaining 12,700 acres designated as closed to OHV use. The “limited” designation restricts OHV uses in specified areas in order to meet specific resource management objectives. This may include restricting the number or types of vehicles, limiting the time or

season of use, restricting to permitted or licensed use only, limiting use to existing and designated roads and trails.

Table 1 provides the approximate acres for OHV area designations (i.e., open, limited, or closed) under the ARMP.

Table 1. Summary of OHV Designations

OHV Designation	ARMP (acres)
Open	0
Limited	601,100
All vehicles limited to designated routes; snowmobiles not allowed.	62,100
All vehicles limited to designated routes, including snowmobiles.	286,500
All vehicles limited to designated routes, except snowmobiles; snowmobiling not restricted.	252,500
Closed	12,700
Not Designated	0

In addition to these designations, the BLM will conduct a public travel management planning process to further define how OHV use would be managed in the areas designated as limited. The ARMP provides for legitimate intensive uses, such as rock crawling, motorcross riding, or any other valid motorized activities, by emphasizing designated appropriate areas for these activities in front country or rural settings. Intensive use areas would not exceed 80 acres.

Issue 2: Phosphate Mining and Selenium Release—How does the BLM best manage the process of mining and reclamation to ensure containment and control of hazardous substances, such as selenium and other potential contaminants?

Reclamation of lands disturbed by mining is required under various federal and state laws, and is addressed in the minerals and energy section of the ARMP. Operational standards and guidelines will be implemented to reduce impacts from mineral exploration and development, including the State of Idaho Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Mining (Appendix A of the ARMP) and the BLM Gold Book (DOI/DOA 2007). The ARMP also includes Goal ME-2, which aims to develop mineral resources, such as oil, gas, geothermal, and solid minerals, while considering the health of the natural environment and interrelated ecosystems. As such, the ARMP provides several objectives and actions to achieve this goal; notably, Objective ME-2.3 states that the BLM will “regulate mineral development activities to prevent or control sediment and the release of contaminants such as selenium and metals into the environment.” Appendix A of the ARMP provides examples of BMPs to achieve this objective, as follows:

- Using BMPs to control acid rock drainage (Action ME-2.3.1) and sedimentation and the release of contaminants;
- Monitoring hydrologic functions during mineral operations to ensure watershed health;
- Establishing interagency contaminant levels for groundwater, surface water, and vegetation for reclamation;

- Retaining suitable topsoil and subsoil for use during reclamation;
- Using native species known to reduce the risk of bioaccumulation of hazardous substances and to monitor the success of this procedure; and
- Creating phosphate mine site plans to achieve the goals set in the *Interagency Area-Wide Investigation of Phosphate Mine Contamination and Final Risk Management Plan* (IPMP) (IPMP 2004). A summary of this report is in the ARMP's Appendix F.

Goal GE-3, Objective GE-3.1, and Action GE-3.1.1 of the ARMP aim to restore and improve the public lands, following the guidelines contained in the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM 1997). Mine operators will use these guidelines to design reclamation plans as part of the operating plans, rehabilitation, and restoration associated with surface-disturbing activities from mining operations. The standards will also be used to determine the success of reclamation and to determine if additional work needs to be done.

These goals, objectives, and actions would ensure that provisions are made at the minerals and energy operations planning stage to reduce environmental impacts and to ensure that impacted lands are rehabilitated, as practical, to properly functioning conditions at the end of minerals and energy development.

Issue 3: Public Access – Acquiring/Maintaining—How will the planning process address the need for acquiring and maintaining access to public lands, while protecting private property rights?

Goal LR-3 will require the BLM to “maintain and acquire legal access to public land.” The BLM will put an emphasis on priority areas (Figure 8, page 77 of the ARMP), including areas with known access conflicts, which would be secured through a variety of realty tools, as described in Action LR-3.1.4. Examples of these tools are fee acquisition, easements, and donations to acquire access to public lands from willing sellers. Action LR-3.1.2 provides the BLM with land tenure adjustments to be used as needed to acquire public access to public lands. Use of land tenure adjustments would include public access as part of the proposed screening process and as provided in Goal LR-5. Access to public lands would be retained across lands transferred out of federal ownership. The BLM will coordinate with other entities, such as counties, to identify legal access and use its Cooperative Rights-of-Way Agreement with the State of Idaho to acquire access across state lands, as needed.

Issue 4: Recreation Management—How will the increase in recreational use and demand for quality recreation opportunities be balanced in the planning area?

The BLM anticipated that population, visitor use, and the demand for recreational use in the PFO planning area would continue to increase and that new forms of recreation may evolve into major recreation issues during the planning period. To accommodate this increase, the ARMP establishes two new Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs)—the 3,600-acre Oneida Narrows area and the 430-acre Campground SRMA—bringing the total number of acres of public lands managed as SRMAs to approximately 59,230 (Table 2). The Oneida Narrows and Campground SRMAs would be managed to maintain or enhance targeted recreation opportunities, experiences, and benefits, with the primary market-based strategy being “destination” for a market base of southeastern Idaho and northern Utah. The Oneida Narrows

SRMA would primarily provide water-based recreation, based on the River Recreation Management Zone (RMZ) (1,900 acres) and the Reservoir RMZ (1,700 acres).

The ARMP will provide specific structured recreation, experience, and benefit opportunities in all SRMAs. SRMAs will be priority areas for recreation funding and will be managed to target specific activities, thereby controlling user conflicts.

Table 2. Acres Allocated to SRMAs and the Extensive Recreation Management Area

SRMA or Extensive Recreation Management Area	ARMP (acres)
Pocatello SRMA	33,400
Blackfoot River SRMA	21,800
Oneida Narrows SRMA	3,600
Campgrounds SRMA	430
Total SRMAs	59,230
Pocatello Extensive Recreation Management Area	554,570

The remaining public lands in the planning area would be managed as an Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA; Table 2), which generally provides a less developed, primitive experience. In the ARMP, 554,570 acres of ERMAs would be custodially managed and would provide basic recreation functions, such as travel management signs and general maps.

Goal TM-1 and Objective TM-1.2 identify how travel management (i.e., motorized, nonmotorized, nonmechanized) is managed under the ARMP by identifying OHV area designations. Figure 18 (page 137 of the ARMP) identifies OHV area designations, and Action TM-1.2.5 describes how travel will be managed (e.g., limit motorized travel to existing routes, implement seasonal and specific closures) in the interim until travel management plans are completed following implementation of the ARMP. These designations will protect resources and reduce conflicts with other user groups.

Issue 5: Sagebrush Ecosystems—What effects will future management of sagebrush ecosystems have on greater sage-grouse and sagebrush-obligate species?

Goal VE-4 and Objective VE-4.1 of the ARMP will focus on managing shrub steppe vegetation to achieve Land Health Conditions (LHC) A, which represents a healthy and diversified sagebrush ecosystem. Objective WF-1.3 provides the BLM with a variety of fire and nonfire vegetation treatments to achieve LHC A, as specified by Goal WF-2. Table 3 provides the expected acreage of the public lands shrub steppe type, achieving the different LHCs at year 30, post treatments.

Table 3. Acres of Shrub Steppe by LHC Class at Year 30

LHC	Current	ARMP (acres)
A	295,972	359,000
B	111,596	0.0
C	77,632	126,200

Goal SS-1 and Action SS-1.1.3 provide the BLM with tools to consider what would contribute to the continued presence and conservation of special status species. Action SS-1.3.6 specifically identifies IDFG's Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho (IDFG 2006) as BLM guidance for sage-grouse species and sage-grouse habitat management.

In addition to vegetation treatments, the BLM will close or limit OHV travel (see Issue 4, above). This will help protect the remaining healthy sagebrush ecosystems. Management of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and Research Natural Areas (RNA), most notably the Dairy Hollow RNA, would help protect sagebrush from conflicting uses.

Issue 6: Socioeconomics—How will social and economic benefits of commodity and amenity uses be balanced within the planning area?

As discussed in Chapter 1 of the FEIS (BLM 2010), the vision of the RMP is to sustain healthy and functional ecosystems, while meeting the multiple use mandate of FLPMA. The ARMP follows this vision, while meeting all federal laws. Socioeconomic and environmental justice effects from implementing management actions for resources and resource uses is described in the FEIS (BLM 2010); this states that Alternative B, now the ARMP, is not expected to notably alter local population trends, employment levels, demands for public services, or other demographics. The ARMP provides long-term economic opportunities by balancing resource development and extraction with resource conservation and ecosystem health. Additionally, up to five percent of public lands may be disposed of, most of which is in fragmented ownership patterns, so any market-based activities, such as grazing, would likely continue. Table 4 provides some indicators to highlight some of the social and economic benefits and tradeoffs of the ARMP.

Table 4. Example Social and Economic Tradeoff Indicators

Example Social and Economic Tradeoff Indicators	ARMP (acres)
Available for livestock grazing	560,000
Open to solid minerals leasing	582,400
Discretionary closure for solid leasable minerals	20,200
Discretionary closure for mineral materials	20,200
Discretionary closure for locatable minerals	19,200
Wildlife habitat protected by a fluid mineral a no surface occupancy stipulation	98,000
Possible disposal acres (Zone 4)	56,300
Excluded from land use authorizations (e.g., rights-of-way)	1,900
Acres in Wilderness Study Areas, ACECs, and RNAs	22,100

All figures are rounded to nearest 100 acres.

Rationale for Livestock Grazing Range of Alternatives

The Pocatello planning team identified need for change topics through an extensive review of the Malad MFP (1981) and Pocatello RMP (1988a). This resulted in the identification of resources and resource uses where management direction was absent or more current direction was needed

to address: 1) new laws, regulations and policies, 2) changed conditions on the public lands, and 3) new and emerging demands on the public lands. These three factors provided the basis for the purpose and need for the Pocatello RMP as a whole. That is, when evaluating land use allocations and management direction across the planning area, the BLM considered changes in the regulatory, physical and socio-economic environments and developed alternatives that addressed those changes.

These need for change topics were provided to the public and Tribes in a Public Scoping Briefing Package¹. During scoping, the public and Tribes were asked to comment on the topics and identify issues or concerns. These comments were analyzed by the planning team and were condensed into six planning issues². Similar concerns from each of the six planning issues were grouped together and used to develop the action alternatives (FEIS/PRMP, Chapter 2, pg 2-5). Each action alternative had a specific theme/emphasis (i.e., Alternative D–Commodity Production, Alternative C–Preserve and Maintain Ecosystem Health, and Alternative B³–Balancing Commodity/Production with Conservation and Ecosystem Health) based upon the issues/concerns that drove them.

Based upon this approach, the specific management direction for a particular resource or resource use was driven by the theme/emphasis of each action alternative. Thus, management direction for one resource could require changes in management direction for other interdependent resources or uses (FEIS/PRMP, Chapter 1, pg 1-3). Livestock grazing management direction is interdependent with various resources, such as special status species and vegetation. That is, where a particular theme/emphasis resulted in specific management objectives to address resource concerns or achieve resource objectives for special status species or vegetation, grazing management direction was adjusted to support those management objectives (FEIS/PRMP, Chapter 1, pg 1-3).

With respect to grazing, most allotments are meeting rangeland health standards. Therefore, it was not reasonable to consider major reductions in grazing allocations or a wholesale ban on grazing throughout the planning period. Changes in grazing management at the implementation stage, through permit renewal, will adequately address the impacts of livestock grazing. That is not to say that there are no changes to grazing allocations in the various alternatives. However, the range of alternatives, in which public lands are identified as available or not available for livestock grazing (BLM 2005a), is a result of resource use management direction (i.e., land tenure adjustment, ACECs, solid/fluid mineral lease areas, public land withdrawals/recreation areas, and livestock grazing) (FEIS/PRMP, Chapter 4, pg 4-304). Resource use management direction influenced the range of alternatives for livestock grazing. For example:

- Land Tenure Adjustment, Zone 4 Disposal – Small to medium sized, non-contiguous/isolated parcels of public lands identified for exchange or sale by alternative constitute the 24,950 acres (Alternative C) to 60,700 acres (Alternative D) identified as

¹ Public Scoping Briefing Package, Pocatello RMP Revision. BLM. Pocatello Field Office. Idaho Falls District. April 2003.

² Planning issues identify a major controversy or dispute regarding management of resources or uses on the public lands that can be addressed in a variety of ways.

³ Alternative B is the Proposed RMP as identified in the FEIS.

not available for livestock grazing because these parcels would be removed from the public land base administered by the BLM.

- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern – Certain ACECs identified by alternative constitute the 910 acres (Alternatives B/D) to 2,050 acres (Alternative C) not available for livestock grazing to protect resource values and unique characteristics such as special status plants, vegetative communities, and geologic features.
- Solid Leasables and Fluid Minerals – Areas of disturbance associated with mining and fluid minerals development and production constitute about 780 acres (Alternatives A-D) not available for livestock grazing to avoid conflicts between livestock and mining operations/vehicular/heavy equipment traffic.
- Withdrawals/Recreation Areas – Public lands identified for specific purposes (i.e. administrative sites, use by other federal agencies, and recreation areas designated “open” for OHV use) constitute about 24,500 acres (Alternatives A-D) not available for livestock grazing to avoid conflicts between livestock and these types of uses.
- Livestock Grazing – Specifically, riparian allotments and public lands currently not allocated⁴ or allotted⁵ for livestock grazing constitute the 300 acres (Alternative B) to 7,500 acres (Alternative C) not available for livestock grazing.

Periodic allotment evaluations of vegetative conditions and rangeland health have been completed with 367 allotments being assessed to determine if allotments are meeting or making significant progress towards meeting Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health (BLM 1997). Of these allotments, approximately 83 percent (463,774 acres of public lands) are meeting standards or making significant progress towards meeting standards. Approximately 15 percent (82,524 acres of public lands) are not meeting standards with appropriate action being taken to ensure significant progress toward meeting the standards. The remaining two percent of lands have yet to be assessed.

Consequently, with about 98 percent (546,298 acres) of the public lands available for livestock grazing having been assessed and the vast majority of those acres are meeting or making significant progress towards standards, the need to identify additional BLM-administered public lands as unavailable is not reasonable. This is explained in 2.5.1 Exclusive Use or Protection of the PRMP/FEIS (pg 2-8). Key points are summarized as follows:

- Closures and adjustments to livestock grazing use have been incorporated into the action alternatives in order to address issues.
- BLM has considerable discretion through the grazing regulations (43 CFR 4100) to determine and adjust stocking levels, seasons of use, grazing management activities, and allocate forage for uses of the public lands.
- Analysis of an alternative which would make all public lands unavailable to livestock grazing through the resource management planning process would not be consistent with the intent of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934.

⁴ Public lands currently available for grazing but no grazing preference established.

⁵ Public lands currently available for grazing with a grazing preference but no authorized permittee or lessee.

- FLPMA requires that public lands be managed on a “multiple use and sustained yield basis” (Sections 302[a] and 102[7]) which includes livestock grazing as a “principal or major” use of public lands.
- Multiple use does not require that all public lands be used for livestock grazing. Conversely, in the absence of identified resource conflicts, making all BLM-administered public lands unavailable to livestock grazing would be arbitrary and would not meet the principle of multiple use and sustained yield.
- Reduced or no livestock grazing at the site-specific level (e.g., allotment or pasture) for the term or portion of the grazing permit/lease may be appropriate to consider in response to findings associated with Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health (BLM 1997) assessments.

Nonetheless, as periodic allotment evaluations continue and site-specific or implementation level activities associated with livestock grazing management are undertaken, and considering the issues or concerns associated with these actions/activities, future environmental assessments may consider a “reduced” or “no grazing” alternative.

Restrictions and Protections for Greater Sage-grouse⁶

Alternatives considered and analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS include management actions that restrict resources and resource uses thus providing protections for greater sage-grouse. The types of restrictions considered in the action alternatives include:

- incorporating Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health;
- identifying seasonal restrictions for wildlife;
- identifying distances of 0.6 mile and 2.0 miles from greater sage-grouse leks (active and occupied) for temporary human disturbance and permanent infrastructure development respectively;
- identifying 258,100 acres as administratively unavailable for fluid mineral leasing;
- identifying areas with a “no surface occupancy stipulation” for fluid mineral leasing;

⁶ The FEIS includes extensive discussion of greater sage-grouse and livestock management mechanisms the BLM will use to address impacts to the greater sage grouse. Specific discussion is found at FEIS ES-11, ES-12, 2-21 and 2-22 (specifically PP-VE-4.1.2), 2-39 and 2-40 (specifically PP-SS-1.3.5), 3-50 through 3-55 (general discussion of sharp tail and greater sage-grouse and the habitat within the Pocatello FO), 4-188 (impact of livestock grazing is lessened by direction to abide by Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management; modifications to seasons of use and livestock related improvements will be guided by the Conservation Plan for Greater Sage Grouse in Idaho (2006); and 4-309 (livestock grazing will be subject to seasonal restrictions to protect habitat for sensitive species). The FEIS recognized additional guidance regarding the greater sage-grouse will be forthcoming, and the proposed RMP alternative (now the ARMP) commits to following the most current guidance.

After the USFWS issued its “warranted but precluded” decision, the Pocatello FO prepared a supplemental information report (SIR) that addressed the information contained in the USFWS’s March 2010 Federal Register Notice. The SIR is incorporated into the ROD as Attachment I. The SIR concludes that several of the protective measures adopted in the ARMP (including a .6 mile temporary human disturbance buffer from active leks and a 2.0-mile radius buffer for permanent infrastructure projects around occupied leks (see PP-SS-1.3.5, FEIS 2-39) would adequately protect Greater sage-grouse breeding habitat. This radius is based on information contained in the Conservation Plan for Greater Sage Grouse in Idaho, which is referenced in both the FEIS and the SIR. The SIR notes that protective standards can be further refined in response to project-level NEPA reviews (SIR Attachment I-7). Livestock management response to impacts on Greater sage-grouse is described in SIR Attachment I-13 and I-14. In addition, the SIR explains that infrastructure such as fences, will be constructed to minimize impacts on sage grouse (SIR Attachment I-11).

- identifying priority habitat areas for greater sage-grouse with specific management direction for each area involving livestock grazing, lands & realty, vegetation, recreation, and fluid minerals;
- designing fuels and vegetation treatments in strategic areas to protect greater sage-grouse source habitats;
- implementing conservation measures from the *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho*; and
- identifying avoidance and exclusion areas for rights-of way.

Management direction of this nature is consistent with the USFWS 12-Month Findings for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse; the Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (IDFG 2006); and the Supplemental Information Report - Information Pertaining to the Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and the Pocatello Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Attachment I). This management direction integrates greater sage-grouse habitat management with resources and resource uses such as vegetation, wildland fire management, lands and realty, livestock grazing, and recreation. The theme/emphasis of the action alternatives provides the framework in which management direction (restrictions and protections) for resources and resource uses was developed to address the identified issues.

As announced on December 9, 2011 in a published Notice of Intent, the BLM and the United States Forest Service (USFS) initiated a process to incorporate consistent objectives and conservation measures for the protection of greater sage-grouse into multiple land use plans throughout the range of the greater sage-grouse, including the Pocatello ARMP. These conservation measures would be incorporated into land use plans through RMP amendment and revision processes. The BLM plans to issue a sub-regional EIS that will amend land use plans in Idaho and Southwestern Montana, including the Pocatello ARMP. The ROD for the Idaho/Southwestern Montana sub-regional EIS is scheduled for completion in September 2014.

CLARIFICATION OF DECISIONS

This section clarifies several management decisions that may be of particular interest to the public and tribes.

Administrative Designations

ACECs, RNAs, and Wilderness Study Areas

The ARMP designates one new RNA and redesignates seven RNAs and six ACECs to protect unique geological, vegetative, visual, cultural, historical, and wildlife resource values (Figure 23, page 147 of the ARMP). The new Petticoat Peak RNA is approximately 400 acres, and its relevant and important values are the abundant diversity of mountain sagebrush, mountain mahogany, Douglas-fir, sub-alpine fir, bigtooth maple, and aspen. The RNA is closed to OHVs, solid leasable and salable minerals, with a no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulation for fluid minerals. Rights-of-way (ROW) are excluded from the RNA, and vegetation will be inventoried and monitored to understand natural ecological processes and determine trends. The Petticoat Peak RNA is in the 11,200-acre Petticoat Peak Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

The Petticoat Peak WSA and Worm Creek WSA (Figure 23, page 147 of the ARMP) both continue to be managed under the BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review until Congress formally designates these WSAs as wilderness areas or releases them from further consideration.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Wild and Scenic River evaluations completed for the PFO planning area found ten segments of the Blackfoot and Bear rivers eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS). This ARMP does not recommend any of the ten eligible river segments identified in the Final Resource Assessment, Blackfoot River and Bear River Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study (BLM 2003b) as suitable for inclusion in the NWSRS. Therefore, no rivers within the PFO area are managed under the Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968.

Comprehensive Trails and Travel Management

The RMP designates eleven motorized routes for public use within the Soda Hills Management Area, Formation Cave RNA, Robbers Roost RNA, and Oneida Narrows in the ARMP (Figures 19, 20, 21, and 22; pages 140, 141, 142, and 143, respectively). These specific designated routes will be carried forward into future travel management plans. The ARMP provides for legitimate intensive uses, such as rock crawling, motorcross riding, and other valid motorized activities, in appropriate designated areas for these activities in front country or rural settings. Each intensive use area will not exceed 80 acres.

Land Tenure Adjustment (Disposal of Public Lands)

The ARMP (Objectives LR-5.1 and LR-5.2, pages 76 and 80 of the ARMP) provides for a land tenure adjustment program that includes both the acquisition and disposal of public lands. Disposal of public lands can be accomplished by sale or exchange and provides for the following:

- The reconfiguration of land ownership patterns to better facilitate resource management;
- Contributes to administrative efficiency of managing public lands; and
- Allows for increased effectiveness of the allocation of fiscal and human resources.

The ARMP land tenure adjustment program (Action LR-5.2.1, page 80) identifies four zones, as follows and in Figure 9, page 81 of the ARMP:

- **Zone 1**— Identifies lands which would be retained in public ownership;
- **Zone 2**—Identifies lands which have a fairly well consolidated ownership pattern and contain potentially high resource values that would be retained and consolidated;
- **Zone 3**—Identifies lands which are small to medium-sized blocks of public lands, interspersed with state or private lands, where management efficiencies can be improved through acquisition or disposal to consolidate with other jurisdictional ownerships (e.g., other federal lands, state, county, or private); and
- **Zone 4**—Identifies lands which are isolated, difficult, and uneconomical to manage (in accordance with Sec. 203[a][1] of FLPMA) and are available through all forms of disposal, including sale.

Authority for land tenure adjustments of public lands is authorized under FLPMA through sale (Sec. 203), acquisition (Sec. 205), or exchange (Sec. 206). Based on the values identified through the planning process for the various zones, acquisition could likely occur in Zones 1, 2, or 3, exchange in Zones 1, 2, 3, or 4, and sale in Zones 2, 3, or 4. Public lands identified in Zone 4 meet one or more of the disposal criteria described in Sec. 203(a)(1), which qualifies them for sale. Zones 2 and 3 may contain public lands where a sale proposal would be considered through the land use planning process, provided they follow the screening and criteria process identified in the ARMP (Action LR-5.1.3, page 76). Upon evaluation of such proposals, specific parcels within Zones 3 and 4 may be shown to contain potentially high resource values that may not be suitable for disposal, except through exchange for equal or higher resource value lands.

In addition to the public lands identified in Zone 4 (Figure 9, page 81 of the ARMP), other public lands qualify for disposal (including sale) under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act of 2000 (Appendix D of the ARMP). Disposal of these public lands will serve important public objectives that cannot be achieved prudently or feasibly on land other than public land and that outweigh other public objectives and values.

Mineral Development and Reclamation Standards

Phosphate mining and selenium release was identified as one of six major issues to be addressed in preparing the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010). Management direction to address this issue was developed to assist in the administration and oversight of phosphate mining and reclamation. This direction includes setting operational standards and guidelines (Action ME-2.2.2, of the ARMP, page 98) that will be incorporated into future phosphate mining and reclamation plan designs. Planning direction Objectives ME-2.2 and 2.3 of the ARMP (pages 97 and 99, respectively) will be used to judge the suitability of mine reclamation activities, such as revegetation, reestablishment of watershed functions, and standards for contaminants to ensure that water and vegetation do not contain harmful amounts of selenium or other contaminants.

Operational standards and guidelines (Action ME-2.2.2, of the ARMP, page 98) apply to all types of mineral development activities, and reclamation standards (Action GE-3.1.1 of the ARMP, page 14) apply to all surface disturbing activities (e.g., mineral and energy development, wildland fire, and ROW development). This is to provide clear and consistent direction in the ARMP for other surface-disturbing activities besides phosphate mining.

Fluid Mineral Leasing

The BLM has a statutory responsibility under NEPA to analyze and document the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions resulting from federally authorized fluid minerals activities. By law, these impacts must be analyzed before the agency makes an irreversible commitment. In the fluid minerals program, this commitment occurs when the lease is issued; therefore, the FEIS (BLM 2010) prepared with the PRMP is intended to satisfy NEPA requirements for issuing fluid mineral leases (BLM Manual H-1624-1, *Planning for Fluid Mineral Resources*).

The ARMP allocates public lands for leasing fluid minerals (oil and gas and geothermal resources) and identifies stipulations to be placed on leases, in addition to the standard lease terms and conditions and if resource conditions warrant (Appendix E). Potential impacts from the reasonably foreseeable development of the fluid mineral resource (oil and gas and

geothermal, Appendices Q and R of the PRMP/FEIS [BLM 2010]) for public lands administered by the PFO were assessed in the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010).

The FEIS (BLM 2010) associated with the PRMP is anticipated to meet the NEPA requirements in support of most fluid mineral leasing decisions. When public entities nominate lands for leasing, the FEIS (BLM 2010) will be thoroughly reviewed to determine whether the environmental analysis is adequate, in light of issues and circumstances that arise (documented in a Determination of NEPA Adequacy). If the FEIS (BLM 2010) is determined to be adequate, appropriate stipulations from Appendix E of the ARMP will be applied to any lease that is offered. If the FEIS (BLM 2010) is determined to be inadequate, due to new circumstances or new information bearing on the environmental consequences of leasing not within the broad scope analyzed in the FEIS (BLM 2010), additional NEPA analyses will be prepared to assess whether a lease should be offered and what stipulations would apply.

Through RMP effectiveness monitoring and periodic evaluations, the PFO will examine resource management decisions to determine whether the fluid mineral leasing direction in the RMP adequately protects important resource values in light of changing circumstances, updated policies, and new information. The results of such reviews and evaluations may require PFO resource information updates and PRMP maintenance, amendment, or revision. In some cases, the BLM may determine that the public interest would be better served by further analysis and planning before deciding whether to lease. For instance, new information may be available or relevant or environmental conditions may have changed (e.g., species habitat and population levels may have decreased). While the ARMP designates public land as open to possible leasing, such a designation does not mandate leasing. In such circumstances, additional review may better inform the decision maker.

It is important to note that leasing does not authorize surface-disturbing activities, such as exploration drilling or production to be undertaken on the lease. When permit applications or notices for these activities are submitted and operations are proposed on a fluid mineral lease, additional site- and project-specific NEPA analyses will be conducted. If warranted to protect other resources, conditions of approval may be included in the approved permit, or the project may even need to be relocated or modified. Management direction in the ARMP, along with other established requirements (e.g., the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and federal regulations) will guide the BLM's processing of post-leasing operations applications for exploration or development. This ensures that alternatives are considered and appropriate resource protections or mitigation measures are applied.

MITIGATION MEASURES

The ARMP requires that public land resources and uses be managed to avoid, mitigate, or minimize environmental impacts where practicable. Management actions identified in the ARMP are based on guidelines, techniques, and practices and agency input to ensure compliance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations. Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health (BLM 1997) will be used to assess the health of the public lands and the success of reclamation, rehabilitation, and restoration. BMPs, guidelines, and techniques are associated with implementing various management actions identified in the ARMP. These will be used to reduce impacts from human activities on natural resources, as identified in the FEIS (BLM 2010). Additional mitigation may also be developed during site-specific activity and project level NEPA analysis.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

BLM planning regulation (43 CFR, 1610.4-9) requires continuous monitoring of RMPs and periodic formal evaluations. The success of this ARMP will be measured by the degree to which it is implemented and the degree to which the goals and objectives are met.

Following is a framework for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the ARMP through an adaptive management process.

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is a continual process of planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and assessing public lands to adjust management strategies. The systematic process of adaptive management can be used to determine the success of management actions in obtaining the goals and objectives (plan decisions), as described in this ARMP. This ARMP is based on current scientific knowledge and best available data. For the plan to be successful, it must respond to new information and changing conditions.

Adaptive management enables managers to monitor and evaluate the success of land use plan decisions and to determine what steps are necessary to modify management actions to improve success and to make progress toward or achieve goals and objectives. Under the process, once the plan is implemented and monitoring data is collected or obtained, this information would be evaluated as to the effectiveness of achieving the plan's goals and objectives. Adaptive management improves the effectiveness of the plan by permitting dynamic responses to new data and changes in public expectations and desires and a changing landscape.

Implementation

Implementation is the process of putting the ARMP's management decisions into effect. Many of the management actions require implementation plans, such as designating routes in areas identified as limited to designated routes, producing management plans for a SRMA, or identifying treatments to reduce hazardous fuels. These implementation plans provide the site-specific management emphasis necessary to achieve the objectives for that particular area and in turn work toward achieving the plan's goals and objectives for identified resources and resource uses.

As the ARMP is implemented, priority projects for each major workload area (resource or resource use) will be identified, and then priority projects across the major workload areas will be identified. Through this process, implementation helps to focus budget and staff on the highest priorities and issues determined to have the greatest significance in meeting the needs of resources and resource uses.

Implementation decisions represent the final approval of the on-the-ground actions needed to implement the decisions identified in the ARMP and generally require site-specific planning and NEPA analysis.

Plan Monitoring

Plan monitoring differs from activity or program-specific monitoring in that it looks at progress on a landscape basis and focuses on trends in achieving the plan decisions. Plan monitoring focuses on how the plan is implemented (implementation monitoring) and the effectiveness of

the actions implemented (effectiveness monitoring). Because land use plan monitoring is the process of tracking the implementation of land use planning decisions and of collecting and assessing data and information to evaluate the effectiveness of land use planning decisions, most monitoring related to the plan consists of implementation and effectiveness monitoring. Plan monitoring is usually completed annually.

Evaluation

Under plan evaluation, the plan and information obtained through effectiveness monitoring are reviewed to determine if goals and objectives are being met and if management direction is sound.

Land use plans are evaluated to determine the following:

- If decisions remain relevant to current issues;
- If decisions are effective in achieving (or making progress toward achieving) desired outcomes;
- If any decisions need to be revised;
- If any decisions need to be dropped from further consideration; and
- If any areas require new decisions.

Plans are evaluated about every five years. Evaluations may identify resource needs and means for correcting deficiencies and addressing issues through plan maintenance, amendments, or new planning starts. They should also identify where new and emerging resource issues and other values have surfaced.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The planning process for this RMP began with the publication of the notice of intent to prepare an RMP (*Federal Register*, Vol. 66, No. 220, page 57110, November 14, 2001). To assist in the process, the BLM implemented a public scoping and collaboration program and produced a public scoping letter and briefing package. The BLM mailed these items on April 23, 2003, to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council, Land Use Policy Commission, federal, state, and local agencies, interest groups, and members of the general public. The BLM PFO compiled the mailing list, which included over 800 entries. The scoping letter and briefing package were also made available for public view on the Internet in April 2003. The briefing package informed the recipients of the public scoping process, the scheduled open house scoping meetings, and background information on the purpose and need for the planning activity. It also identified the need for change topics. The official close of the scoping period was June 30, 2003.

The BLM conducted an extensive public outreach program to encourage broad public participation during the development of this ARMP. Participation by the public, state and federal agencies, and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes enhanced the BLM's understanding of the various viewpoints to be considered in developing the alternatives for the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006), developing the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010), and this ROD and ARMP. The participation of the public, state, and federal agencies and tribes also helped in selecting the preferred alternative in

the DEIS (BLM 2006), the proposed alternative for the FEIS (BLM 2010), and the final decision implementing the ARMP.

Scoping

The BLM conducted formal open house scoping meetings throughout southeastern Idaho; in Montpelier on May 28, 2003, in Malad City on May 29, 2003, in Fort Hall on June 5, 2003, in Pocatello on June 10, 2003, and in Soda Springs on June 11, 2003. The BLM provided the local media with press releases announcing the time, location, and purpose of these meetings. In addition, the BLM published newsletters throughout the planning process, established a project website (http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/pocatello/planning/pocatello_resource.html), and published notices in the *Federal Register* and local newspapers. The format for the scoping meetings featured informal one-on-one presentations by BLM interdisciplinary team members, and individual information stations were set up detailing the proposed action, resource issues, planning criteria, and a proposed schedule for the planning process. Geographic Information System inventory maps highlighted various resources.

Following presentations, attendees were encouraged to mail written comments and questions or to fill out comment cards specific to the planning effort. Copies of the aforementioned briefing package and planning criteria were also made available at the comment table. The BLM received 44 comment letters, containing 1,304 unique comments. The BLM analyzed these comments and used the results to identify the planning issues to confirm that the planning criteria were appropriate (page 5 of the ARMP), to develop alternatives, and to analyze the alternatives.

Tribal Participation

Before public scoping, a meeting was held on May 15, 2003, with the Land Use Commission and resources and wildlife staff specialists of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, to offer information on developing the RMP and to solicit input. In addition, the Tribal Council, members of the Land Use Commission, and resource staff specialists were sent individual scoping letters and briefing packages in April 2003.

A public scoping meeting was held on the reservation at Fort Hall on June 5, 2003. The BLM recognizes the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe's policy statements identified in the ARMP as Appendix H and continues to consider and consult on potential effects on natural resources related to the tribes' treaty rights and interests.

Draft RMP/EIS

The BLM published a Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 72, No. 3, pp. 577-578, Friday, January 5, 2007), announcing the availability of the Pocatello Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006) for public review and a 90-day formal comment period, which ended on April 4, 2007. The BLM made the document available on the project website and distributed it on request. The document was also available at the BLM's PFO and the BLM's Idaho State Office in Boise. The BLM issued press releases on January 4 and 25, 2007, which announced the availability of the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006) and the open houses in Soda Springs, Malad City, Pocatello, and Fort Hall, Idaho, to be held during the 90-day public review period. A total of 88 people attended the open houses.

The BLM received 52 written submissions, including one form e-mail sent by multiple parties (over 1,150 recorded e-mails), which were counted only once in the totals. Most of the 52 written submissions contained multiple comments on different topics, for a total of 1,404 individual comments.

Proposed RMP/Final EIS

Preparers of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) considered and incorporated tribal and public comments on the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006). A notice of availability was published in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 75, No. 88, pp. 25288-25289, Friday, May 7, 2010), which began a 30-day protest period, ending on June 7, 2010, and a 60-day governors consistency review, which ended on July 25, 2010, in accordance with planning regulations at 43 CFR, Part 1610.3-2(e).

Appendix U of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) contained responses to all substantive comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006). The BLM distributed copies of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) on request and made the document available on the project website and at the BLM's PFO and Idaho State Office in Boise. The BLM published notices in local newspapers.

The Governor's office did not identify any inconsistencies between the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) and state or local plans, policies, or programs during the 60-day Governor's Consistency Review.

Record of Decision/Approved RMP

Copies of this ROD and ARMP are available on request, on the project website (http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/pocatello/planning/pocatello_resource.html), at the PFO, and at the BLM Idaho State Office in Boise.

Tribal, Federal, and State Agency Collaboration

At the onset of this planning effort, counties, state agencies (e.g., IDFG, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality [IDEQ]) and other federal agencies (e.g., United States Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS], USFS) and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes were contacted and invited to participate. As a result, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, IDFG, IDEQ, and the USFWS participated on the BLM's interdisciplinary team charged with developing the Pocatello RMP. During the 90-day comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006), the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, USFWS, IDFG, and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes submitted comment letters.

Consultation with the USFWS is required under Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 before the BLM begins any project that may affect any federally listed threatened or endangered species or its habitat. On April 30, 2008, as part of the formal consultation with the USFWS on the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010), the PFO Manager provided a biological assessment (BA) of the Utah valvata snail to the USFWS. In the BA, the BLM determined that the implementation of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the Utah valvata snail on which this consultation occurred. The USFWS concurred with the BLM's determination via a memorandum dated May 20, 2008.

On August 5, 2008, the PFO sent the USFWS an addendum to the original BA. The gray wolf was not included in the original BA because it had been delisted on March 28, 2008, as an experimental/nonessential population (including Idaho). The need for the addendum was because a federal court in Montana reinstated the gray wolf to the Endangered Species List on July 18,

2008. In the addendum, the PFO determined that the implementation of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) “would not jeopardize the continued existence of gray wolves.” The USFWS acknowledged the BLM’s determination via a memorandum, dated August 21, 2008 (Appendix I).

PROTEST AND APPEALS

BLM policy, outlined in its Land Use Planning Handbook (BLM 2005a), specifies the types of decisions that are considered land use planning decisions and those that are considered implementation level decisions. Land use planning decisions are subject to protest, in accordance with land use planning regulations (43 CFR, Part 1610.5-2). These regulations state that the decision of the BLM Director on protests is the final decision for the Department of the Interior and is not subject to further administrative appeal.

All decisions covered by this ROD, except for the route designations for motorized travel, are land use planning decisions that were protestable on publication of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010). Route designations described in this ROD/ARMP are decisions subject to administrative appeal, as described by 43 CFR, Part 4.4.

Results of Protest Review

The BLM received two protest letters on the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010). The BLM’s policy and process for resolving protests is outlined on its national website, at www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/protest_resolution.html.

The main issues raised in the protest letters were compliance with NEPA and FLPMA and the adequacy of baseline data and subsequent analysis of resources and resource uses.

The BLM resolved all protest issues and responded to each protest issue raised by a party with a standing to protest, to each planning issue that had been previously raised in comments during the planning process, and to each planning issue that was germane to the planning process.

Primary issues raised in the protest letters pertained to the following:

- NEPA compliance, specifically the range of alternatives analyzed and the adequacy of the baseline data used for subsequent impact analysis;
- Whether the FEIS (BLM 2010) adequately disclosed impacts on various resources and resource uses, including travel management, tribal interests, cultural resources, vegetation, wildlife, visuals, and water quality;
- Compliance with FLPMA, fire management, the RMP’s compliance with the BLM’s Special Status Species Policy, as it relates to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat;
- Whether comments by the public were adequately considered;
- The RMP’s adequacy in considering impacts of livestock grazing; and
- Whether the analysis took a hard look at impacts from mining, specifically phosphate mining and its impact on the natural environment.

The BLM addressed all protests without needing to make changes to the PRMP. BLM responses to all substantive comments contained in the protest letters are available on the Internet at http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/planning/protest_resolution/protestreports.html and at the BLM's PFO in Pocatello and at its State Office in Boise.

In addition to the two protest letters, the BLM received a letter from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region X that recommended consideration both at the planning level and implementation stage of site-specific projects implemented under the RMP. These recommendations are consistent with the ARMP direction and are summarized below for the areas identified.

Mining

- Provide financial assurance information in NEPA documents pertaining to mining proposals that stem from this programmatic RMP and
- Clarify what land use restrictions, such as administrative withdrawals, would apply to geothermal field development.

Water Resources

- Include road density among the criteria for evaluating management actions regarding roads and sedimentation, regarding habitat fragmentation and wildlife disturbance, and regarding fish, water quality, antidegradation requirements, protection of drinking water sources, and critical aquifer recharge areas.

Climate Change

- Remain informed of current and ongoing development of climate change science to develop appropriate management actions. Use such information to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to climate change effects, and educate public land users.

Sensitive Species, Habitats, and Resources

- Disclose the nature and extent of implementation and effectiveness monitoring, any results that illustrate how often and in what circumstance protection shortfalls have occurred, and the resulting environmental consequences.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION REPORT

In light of the USFWS March 23, 2010, notice in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 75, No. 55, pp. 13910-14014), regarding the “warranted but precluded from listing” finding for the greater sage-grouse, the PFO prepared a supplemental information report (SIR) (CFR, Part 1502.9) following the release of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010). The PFO has reviewed this *Federal Register* notice and other relevant information to evaluate its bearing on the PRMP decisions and environmental consequences. It took this step to ensure that current information on greater sage-grouse was used in the FEIS (BLM 2010). The SIR is Attachment I to this ROD. Based on this review and analysis, the BLM has concluded that supplementing the PRMP with the SIR is not required.

APPEALABLE DECISIONS AND PROCEDURES

Approved route designations for motorized travel are subject to appeal. The administrative appeal period for all other decisions ended with the close of the protest period following

publication of the PRMP. Any party adversely affected by the motorized route designations may appeal within the 30-day period for this decision, in accordance with the provisions of 43 CFR, Part 4.4. The appeal period will begin on publication of the notice of availability of this ROD/ARMP in the *Federal Register*. An appeal should state the specific route(s) by township, range, and section on which the decision is being appealed. The appeal must be filed with the Field Manager, at the following address:

Bureau of Land Management
Pocatello Field Office
4350 Cliffs Drive
Pocatello, ID 83204

Those wishing to appeal may include a statement of reasons with the notice of appeal or may file the statement of reasons within 30 days after filing the appeal. If the statement of reasons is filed separately, it must be sent to the address listed above and to the following address:

Interior Board of Land Appeals
Office of Hearings and Appeals
801 N. Quincy Street, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22203

Any appeal should be sent certified mail, return receipt requested.

A copy of the appeal, statement of reasons and all other supporting documents must be sent to:

Office of the Field Solicitor
US Department of the Interior
University Plaza
960 Broadway Avenue, Suite 400
Boise, ID 83706

DECISION RATIONALE AND APPROVAL

The BLM, tribes, participating federal and state agencies, and interested members of the public have invested time and effort in developing this resource management plan for the PFO. The interdisciplinary planning team preparing this land use plan received information, ideas, and comments throughout the planning process during public scoping, open houses, and a 90-day comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006). This information was informative and useful in developing alternatives with goals, objectives, and management actions for the natural, biological, and cultural resources and resource uses administered by the PFO on public lands and analyzed in both the Draft and Final EIS.

A full disclosure of the direct and indirect and cumulative impacts of management direction associated with these alternatives has been described in the FEIS (BLM 2010), with no significant effects identified.

Six key issues were identified through public scoping comments received at the onset of the planning effort, specifically OHV management, phosphate mining and selenium release, public access—acquiring/maintaining, recreation management, sagebrush ecosystems, and

socioeconomics. Four action alternatives were developed with management direction that addressed these issues in various ways. Management direction of the ARMP best addresses these issues, which are discussed on pages 4 through 8 of this ROD.

Substantive comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 2006) were used in revising and developing new management actions, updating environmental impact analyses, and preparing the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010). Protest points received on the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010), as discussed on pages 20 and 21 of this ROD, addressed a number of issues including compliance with NEPA and FLPMA, adequacy of baseline data, inadequacy of impact analysis, and range of alternatives. These protest points are addressed in the Director's Protest Resolution Report.

The USFWS published its 12-month findings for petitions to list the greater sage-grouse on March 23, 2010. The BLM released the Pocatello PRMP/FEIS in May 2010. The BLM prepared a SIR to document that the 2010 information contained in the 12-month findings was reviewed and used in making relevant decisions about greater sage-grouse in the ARMP. The purpose of the SIR was to: 1) review information presented in the 12-month findings (USFWS 2010) with regards to the PFO planning area, 2) determine if any information presented in the findings changed the analysis or management actions presented in the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010), and 3) inform the Idaho State Director of the adequacy of the analysis presented in the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010).

After the USFWS issued its 12-month findings, the BLM convened the Sage-Grouse National Technical Team (NTT), which brought together resource specialists and scientists from the BLM, State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the USFWS, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The NTT developed a series of science-based conservation measures in a report issued in December 2011. That same month, the BLM released a National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy (Washington Office Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-044) requiring consideration of conservation measures when revising or amending RMPs in greater sage-grouse habitat.

At the time the NTT report and Instruction Memorandum (IM) 2012-044 were issued, the BLM already issued the Pocatello PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2010) and the Director's protest period had closed. Although the ARMP does not analyze the specific conservation measures developed by the NTT, it does include management decisions for protection of greater sage-grouse that are more protective than management direction in the previous plans. Additionally, as announced on December 9, 2011 in a published Notice of Intent, the BLM and the USFS initiated a process to incorporate consistent objectives and conservation measures for the protection of greater sage-grouse into multiple land use plans throughout the range of the greater sage-grouse, including the Pocatello ARMP. These conservation measures would be incorporated into land use plans through RMP amendment and revision processes. Through this ongoing effort, the BLM plans to issue a sub-regional EIS that will amend BLM and USFS land use plans in Idaho and Southwestern Montana, including the Pocatello ARMP. The ROD for the Idaho/Southwestern Montana sub-regional EIS is scheduled for completion in September 2014.

This ARMP has been developed to be consistent with established policy, regulation, and statutes such as the BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook (BLM 2005a), NEPA, and FLPMA. The ARMP meets the purpose and need by responding to changing ecological, socioeconomic,

institutional, and regulatory conditions and providing a single, comprehensive land use plan that will guide multiple use management on approximately 613,800 acres of public lands.

The ARMP makes decisions regarding the allocation of resources and resource uses (e.g., wildlife, special status species, vegetation, livestock grazing, minerals and energy exploration and development, land use authorizations [LUA]) and provides for the prohibition, restriction, or stipulation of resource uses to ensure natural, biological, and cultural resources are effectively managed to sustain the health and productivity of ecosystems.

It is the BLM's belief that the ARMP, when implemented, will maintain and improve public lands. It will provide a balanced approach, minimizing conflicts between resources and resource uses, while maintaining the health and sustainability of natural, biological, cultural resources, and nonrenewable resources for present and future generations.

For the reasons stated above and throughout this ROD, having considered a full range of reasonable alternatives, associated effects, and public input, I approve the Pocatello Resource Management Plan.

This document meets the requirements for a ROD, as provided for in 40 CFR, Part 1505.2, and the RMP, as described in 43 CFR, Part 1610.0-5(k).



Steven A. Ellis
Idaho State Director
Bureau of Land Management



Date



Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)

**Supplemental Information Report
(Attachment I)**

ACRONYMS

Acronym or Abbreviation

Full Phrase

AMR	appropriate management response
ARMP	Approved Resource Management Plan
BLM	United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
CPID	Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho
EIS	environmental impact statement
ESA	Endangered Species Act of 1973
FEIS	final environmental impact statement
FRCC	Fire Regime Condition Class
FRN	Federal Register Notice
FWS	United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
IDT	interdisciplinary planning team
ISAC	Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee
LHC	Land Health Condition Class
LWG	local working group
NSO	no surface occupancy
PFO	Pocatello Field Office
PRMP	Proposed Resource Management Plan
RMP	Resource Management Plan
ROD	Record of Decision
SIR	supplemental information report
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WNV	West Nile virus

***Information Pertaining to the Greater sage-grouse
(Centrocercus urophasianus)
and the Pocatello Proposed Resource Management Plan
and Final Environmental Impact Statement***

Introduction

On, March 23, 2010 after thoroughly analyzing the best scientific and commercial information available, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) published a twelve-month finding on the status of greater sage-grouse and concluded that listing the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) is warranted range-wide, but issuance of a proposed rule to list the species is precluded by higher priority listing actions (Federal Register Vol. 75 No. 55 pages 13910-14014). FWS indicated it will develop a proposed rule to list the species as priorities allow. As a result of that determination, the greater sage-grouse has been added to the list of species that are “candidates” for ESA protection. The FWS will review the species’ status annually to determine if any further listing action should be taken based on scientific data. Potential actions include one of the following: proposing the species for immediate listing, removing the species from the candidate list, changing the species’ listing priority number, or no change in the species’ current status.

On May 7, 2010, the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Pocatello Field Office (PFO), Idaho Falls District, released its Proposed Resource Management Plan (PRMP)/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (BLM 2010) for a 30-day administrative review/protest period by interested parties, tribes and governmental agencies that participated in this planning effort. This PRMP/FEIS identified goals, objectives and management actions for resources and resource uses administered by the BLM on the nation’s public lands as required by the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act of 1976.

Specifically, the PRMP/FEIS addressed the management of special status species, such as the greater sage-grouse (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-39, Action PP-SS-1.3.5.). BLM policy states that candidate species are considered as sensitive species (BLM 2008) and are to be managed as such to be precluded from listing as threatened or endangered under the ESA. Management direction and analysis for the greater sage-grouse were revised following external and internal comments on the *Pocatello Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* (BLM 2006) in preparation/release of the PRMP/FEIS. These changes were identified in *Chapter 1 – 1.13 Changes from the Draft Resource Management Plan to the Proposed Resource Management Plan* (PRMP/FEIS, pg 1-18).

Following the release of the PRMP/FEIS a protest was received from the Western Watersheds Project during the 30-day administrative review/protest period (May 7 through June 7, 2010) in which concern was expressed that the PRMP/FEIS did not consider the “warranted but precluded from listing” determination made by the FWS.

This protest resulted in the review of the *12-Month Findings for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus) as Threatened or Endangered* (FWS 2010) and information used in the preparation of the PRMP/FEIS and subsequent analysis of environmental impacts.

This Supplemental Information Report (SIR) is included with the Record of Decision (ROD) to document that the pertinent and most current information has been reviewed and used in making relevant decisions about the greater sage-grouse in the Approved RMP (ARMP). The information used and analysis

completed for the PRMP/FEIS is sufficient to support the decisions made in the ARMP and will not contribute to the listing of the greater sage-grouse under the ESA.

The purpose of this SIR is:

- 1) to review the information presented in the 12 Month Findings (FWS 2010) with regards to the Pocatello Field Office planning area,
- 2) to review the information used and presented in the PRMP/FEIS,
- 3) determine if any new or relevant information presented in the 12 Month Findings (FWS 2010) influences the analysis or management actions presented in the PRMP/FEIS, and
- 4) inform the BLM Idaho State Director of the adequacy of the analysis presented in the PRMP/FEIS prior to the signing of the ROD.

This SIR has been prepared to determine if “*there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts*” as described in 40 CFR 1502.9 Draft, final, and supplemental statements. (c)(1)(ii).

Analysis of Information Relevant to Environmental Concerns

Management direction for greater sage-grouse is described in the *Special Status Species* section of the PRMP/FEIS and is consistent with the conservation measures for greater sage-grouse identified in the *Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho* (Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (ISAC) 2006). The PRMP/FEIS also integrated management of greater sage-grouse habitat with other resources and resource uses such as vegetation, wildland fire management, minerals and energy, livestock grazing, and recreation.

Subsequently, additional information regarding greater sage-grouse management, specific to Idaho, and nationally has been published and is briefly described in the following section.

Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho

The Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (CPID) (ISAC 2006) replaced the 1997 Idaho Sage-grouse Management Plan and was written by the Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee, under coordination of Idaho Department of Fish and Game. It incorporated significant new information and data, documents threats to greater sage-grouse in Idaho, ranked the severity of the threats, and provided goals and recommended conservation measures to eliminate or reduce these threats. The plan also provided Local Working Groups (LWG) with scientific information and a framework to develop greater sage-grouse plans for LWG areas.

Federal Register Notice¹ (FRN)

In the 12-month finding, the FWS considered the status of greater sage-grouse in relation to five factors set forth in ESA Section 4 (a)(1), including (A) Present or threatened destruction, modification or curtailment of habitat or range; (B) overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes; (C) disease or predation; (D) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and (E) other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence. In its finding, FWS determined factors A and D pose significant threats to the species now and in the foreseeable future, rangewide. For factor A, urbanization, permanent infrastructure (e.g. roads, powerlines, and fences), wildland fire, invasive plants, pinyon-juniper woodland encroachment, grazing, energy development, and climate change individually

¹ 12-Month Findings for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) as Threatened or Endangered (FWS 2010). Volume 75, No. 55. Tuesday, March 23, 2010 (pg 13910-14014).

and in combination are of concern. In the western portion of the species' range, the effects of fire and invasive plants are particularly great. For factor D, FWS noted that current agency regulatory mechanisms fall short of meeting the conservation needs of the species. FWS also noted that RMPs provide a regulatory mechanism that has the potential to ensure greater sage-grouse and its habitat are protected during permitting and other decision-making on BLM-administered public lands.

Prior to the signing of the ROD for the ARMP, a review of the FRN is warranted to be certain that the threats identified to greater sage-grouse and that are applicable to BLM-administered public lands of the PFO are adequately addressed in the PRMP/FEIS.

In addition to these threats, the FRN also noted the importance of sagebrush steppe habitat, restrictions/best management practices, and wildfire suppression/fuels treatment priorities considered by federal land management agencies in managing greater sage-grouse habitat. During the planning process these topics were considered by the interdisciplinary planning team (IDT) and addressed in the PRMP/FEIS. Following is a discussion of how these topics were addressed in the PRMP/FEIS.

Sagebrush Steppe Habitat

The FRN identified that greater sage-grouse distribution is strongly correlated with the distribution of sagebrush habitats (FRN, pg 13915) although sagebrush is more widely distributed. Sagebrush is the most widespread vegetation in the intermountain lowlands in the western United States and is considered one of the most imperiled ecosystems in North America (FRN, pg 13916) which does not always provide suitable habitat for greater sage-grouse due to fragmentation and degradation (FRN pg 13918).

These same types of concerns were identified during initial public scoping sessions for the Pocatello planning effort and were described in the Scoping Report (BLM, 2003) and the PRMP/FEIS (pg 1-7) in the following manner.

“Sagebrush plant communities across the West are besieged by an array of threats such as wildfire, weed invasions, conversion to agriculture and herbivory. Given the wide scale loss, fragmentation, and degradation of low elevation big sagebrush communities, the RMP should identify strategies to protect, improve, and restore them. Connectivity of sagebrush communities is a key component of greater sage-grouse habitat. Reestablishing connectivity of sagebrush communities, particularly communities occupied by sage grouse have long-term benefits for sage grouse populations. The RMP must focus on unfragmented core habitat for greater sage-grouse, pygmy rabbit, antelope, sage-steppe obligate migratory birds as well as gray flycatcher and other juniper dependent species. Actions are needed to ensure that there will not be a future need to list greater sage-grouse or other sagebrush-dependent species in Idaho as threatened or endangered. Efforts should be made to conserve and restore these species and their habitats.”

These concerns resulted in the identification of a *Sagebrush Ecosystems* issue stated as, *What effects will future management of sagebrush ecosystems have on greater sage-grouse and sagebrush-obligate species?* This issue was one of five others used to develop three action alternatives described and analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS (pgs 2-5 through 2-8).

Sections 3.2.5 Vegetation (PRMP/FEIS, pg 3-21 through 3-23) and 3.2.7 Special Status Species (PRMP/FEIS, pg 3-51 through 3-55) address the distribution and fragmentation of the sagebrush steppe and greater sage-grouse habitat within the PFO planning area. Approximately 80 to 90% of BLM-administered public lands are sagebrush steppe (PRMP/FEIS, pg 3-19). Greater sage-grouse habitat is fragmented within the planning area due to a variety of land ownership patterns and is complicated by the

fact that about 48% of the entire land base is privately owned and only about 12% is BLM-administered public lands (PRMP/FEIS, pg 1-2, Table 1-1).

Management direction related to greater sage-grouse habitat has been developed and incorporated among resources and resource uses such as vegetation (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-21, Objective PP-VE-4.1, Action PP-VE-4.1.2.), special status species (PRMP/FEIS, pgs 2-28/29, Objective PP-SS-1.1, Action PP-SS-1.1.3; pg 2-38/39, Objective PP-SS-1.3, Action PP-SS-1.3.5.), wildland fire management², livestock grazing (PRMP/FEIS, pgs 2-68/69, Objective PP-LG-1.2, Actions PP-LG-1.2.2 through Action PP-LG-1.2.5.), minerals and energy³, and recreation⁴ to address and mitigate threats to greater sage-grouse habitat.

Restrictions/Best Management Practices

With regards to fluid mineral energy development (i.e., oil and gas, and geothermal) the FRN addresses factors such as no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulations, a 0.25-mi radius buffer, and existing agency regulatory mechanisms, that are ineffective in conserving and protecting sage grouse habitat (FRN, pgs. 13946, 13978, 13982).

Fluid minerals management direction (PRMP/FEIS, pgs 2-79/80, Actions PP-ME-2.4.1, 2.4.3, 2.4.4, 2.4.5, and 2.4.9) and special status species management direction (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-38, Action PP-SS-1.3.5) address these concerns with more stringent direction than discussed in the FRN. Some 226,000 acres of BLM-administered public lands including 44,000 acres of greater sage-grouse habitat in the Bear Lake Plateau/Sheep Creek Hills area requires the application of a NSO stipulation⁵. This stipulation restricts fluid mineral leasing (e.g., development and production) on BLM-administered public lands but not on adjacent private, state or other federal lands. In the Curlew Sage Grouse Planning Area (SGPA), approximately 258,100 acres of habitat is administratively closed to fluid mineral leasing pending additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. Fluid mineral leasing would be allowed if it can be demonstrated that the objectives⁶ for initially holding the public lands from lease offering can alternatively be met or no longer apply (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-78, Action PP-ME-2.4.3).

The IDT recognized that a 0.25-mi radius buffer would be ineffective and used a 0.6-mi radius buffer for temporary human disturbances around active leks and a 2.0-mi radius buffer for permanent infrastructure projects around occupied leks (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-39, Action SS-1.3.5). These buffers are based upon recommendations and conservation measures in the Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (ISAC 2006). These may be modified further at the site specific level during NEPA analysis as appropriate and in accordance with IB ID 2010-039 (BLM 2010) and current science.

² PRMP/FEIS, pgs 2-54/55, Objective PP-WF-1.3, Action PP-WF-1.3.1, pg 2-49; Objective PP-WF-3.1, Action PP-WF-3.1.2, Action PP-WF-3.1.3, Action PP-WF-3.1.6, Action PP-WF-3.1.7; pg 2-55, Objective PP-WF-3.2, Action PP-WF-3.2.4, Action PP-WF-3.2.5; pg 2-56/57, Objective PP-WF-3.6, Action PP-WF-3.6.1, Action PP-WF-3.6.2, Action PP-WF-3.6.3, Action PP-WF-3.6.4; pg 2-57, Objective PP-WF-3.7, Actions PP-WF-3.7.1 - PP-WF-3.7.4; pg 2-57, Objective PP-WF-3.8, Action PP-WF-3.8.1 through Action PP-WF-3.8.4.

³ PRMP/FEIS, pgs 2-78/80, Objective PP-ME-2.4, Action PP-ME-2.4.1, Action PP-ME-2.4.3, Action PP-ME-2.4.5, Action PP-ME-2.4.7; pg 2-81, Objective PP-ME-2.6 Action PP-ME-2.6.3.

⁴ PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-85, Objective PP-RE-4.1, Action PP-RE-4.1.5; pg 2-86/87, Objective PP-RE-4.2, Action PP-4.2.8; pg 2-88/89 Objective PP-RE-4.3, Action PP-RE-4.3.6.

⁵ Use or occupancy of the land surface for fluid mineral exploration or development is prohibited to protect identified resource values (PRMP/FEIS, pg H-25, Appendix H).

⁶ Objectives are to maintain and protect important resources such as the sagebrush steppe ecosystem; sagebrush obligate species; sensitive species habitat, such as greater sage- and sharp-tailed grouse, and the globally important ferruginous hawk population and habitat.

Additionally, Appendix D – Seasonal Wildlife Restrictions (PRMP/FEIS, Appendix D, pg D-1) identifies seasonal and timing restrictions which are applicable to mineral and energy exploration and development to mitigate impacts to special status species, wildlife, and raptors for specific habitats or during important life activities. Appendix C - Guidelines/Techniques/Practices identifies best management practices for minerals and energy that when applied with other management actions applicable to resources and resource uses would support achieving desired outcomes or conditions. These BMPs are tools available to the authorized officer to reduce adverse environmental effects (PRMP/FEIS, Appendix C, pgs C-1/28).

Wildland Fire Suppression/Fuels Treatment Priorities

Discussion of wildland fire suppression and vegetation fuels treatment priorities is limited in the FRN but suggests that a regulatory mechanism requiring the protection of key greater sage-grouse habitats during fire suppression or fuels treatments could help address the threat of wildfire in some situations (FRN, pg 13979). The PRMP/FEIS provides specific direction through Objectives WF-PP-3.6., WF-PP-3.7, and WF-PP-3.8 and respective management actions (PRMP/FEIS, pgs 2-56/57) that address suppression and fuels treatment priorities and the protection and improvement of the sagebrush steppe and greater sage-grouse habitat. This direction is consistent with the FRN which states in part, targeting the protection of important sage-grouse habitats during fire suppression and fuels treatment activities could help reduce loss of key habitat due to fire (FRN, pg 13977). Action WF-1.1.1 (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-45) recognizes the use of the appropriate management response (AMR) for resources such as special status species (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-45) and vegetation (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-46) which will reduce the threat to greater sage-grouse habitats as well.

Impact Assessment/Evaluation

The analysis of impacts for the three topics discussed above can be found throughout *Chapter 4 – Environmental Consequences* of the PRMP/FEIS. The Special Status Species section (PRMP/FEIS, pgs 4-176 through 4-237) describes the impacts of resources and resource uses management direction on special status species, such as greater sage-grouse.

During the life of the plan it is expected that the acreage of the sagebrush steppe achieving Land Health Condition⁷ Class A (LHC–A) will increase to approximately 359,000 acres from a current level of approximately 295,970 acres (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-230). This improvement in LHC results from a combination of fuels and vegetation treatments and changes in management direction for such resources uses as recreation, minerals and energy development, livestock grazing, and travel management. Improvement in LHC benefits greater sage-grouse habitat by providing:

- 6-25 % sagebrush canopy cover (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-204),
- quality nesting and brood rearing habitat (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-205),
- a quality forage base (i.e., insects) for grouse chicks (PRMP, pgs 4-182/186),
- expansion of habitat through
 - reduction of juniper encroachment (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-185),
 - reduction of fuel loads (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-185),
- reducing the risk of large wildland fires (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-205), and
- improving habitat quality and connectivity (PRMP, pgs 4-182/186)

⁷ The presence or absence of ecological components (e.g., species diversity, vegetative structure, composition and canopy cover, hydrological functions, nutrient cycling) necessary for a healthy ecosystem with the presence or absence of components defined by 1 of 3 classes, A, B or C where Class A is the desired condition.

The implementation of seasonal restrictions, buffers around active and occupied leks, and NSO leasing stipulations mitigate impacts associated with fluid mineral leasing exploration and development. Some 226,000 acres (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-208) of which some 44,000 acres are greater sage-grouse habitat have a fluid mineral leasing NSO stipulation attached which prevents surface occupancy of the public lands for exploration and development. This will reduce fragmentation of habitat and disturbance resulting in the improvement of quality habitat and providing adequate sagebrush canopy cover. Seasonal restrictions (PRMP/FEIS, Appendix D) and buffers of 0.6 and 2.0-mi around leks (PRMP/FEIS, pgs 4-202/208) reduces disturbance during key animal activity periods (e.g., mating, nesting and brood rearing). Some 258,100 acres (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-208) administratively unavailable to fluid mineral leasing in the Curlew Sage-grouse Planning Area provides additional protection to greater sage-grouse habitat by reducing habitat fragmentation, maintaining habitat connectivity, reducing disturbance, resulting in quality habitat and providing necessary sagebrush canopy cover (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-208).

The establishment of wildland fire suppression and treatment priorities in consideration of greater sage-grouse habitat will protect existing key and source habitats and provide for the improvement of adjacent habitats (e.g., restoration I and II) (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-205). This improvement in adjacent habitats will improve the connectivity of habitats and expand key and source habitats that provide important foraging, nesting and lekking areas for greater sage-grouse (PRMP/FEIS, pg 4-205).

Applicability of Information Presented in the FRN, CPID, and the PRMP/FEIS

Information regarding threats to the greater sage-grouse has been thoroughly reviewed by the FWS in the FRN finding of March 23, 2010. Accordingly, the issues to be addressed in this SIR are described in the following manner:

- 1) *Have the threats to greater sage-grouse habitat, presented in the FRN and the CPID been adequately addressed in the PRMP/FEIS and do the conservation measures, stipulations etc. described or referenced in the PRMP provide sufficiently specific actions to ensure that the species and its habitat are protected during permitting and other actions?*
- 2) *If the threats are not adequately addressed, would this trigger the need for a supplement EIS as required by the Council on Environmental Quality, Section 1502.9?*

The habitat threats identified and reviewed in the FRN are summarized and discussed below. Two habitat threats, *Habitat Conversion for Agriculture* and *Urbanization*, do not apply to BLM-administered public lands, but are briefly discussed.

Habitat Conversion for Agriculture

FRN: Approximately 61.5 million acres of the 296 million acres of sagebrush habitat is comprised of agricultural lands (Connelly et al 2004). Agricultural use of sagebrush habitat eliminates greater sage-grouse habitat and fragments additional habitat. Using a 4.3 mile buffer and the given distribution of agricultural activities across the sagebrush range nearly three-quarters of the sagebrush within greater sage-grouse range has been influenced by agricultural activities (Knick et al., in press).

CPID: A goal is to manage existing and future agricultural lands in a manner that minimizes or reduces direct and indirect impacts to greater sage-grouse. The actions/conservation measures identified are to work with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) farm programs to preserve greater sage-grouse habitat, avoid agricultural expansion into key habitat, identify land that could be purchased to restore greater sage-grouse habitat, and provide off-site mitigation.

PRMP/FEIS: The PRMP/FEIS does not address agricultural conversion. There is no agricultural use of BLM-administered public lands in the planning area. Sagebrush habitat on private lands adjacent to public lands may be converted to agricultural use, possibly impacting greater sage-grouse habitat in the planning area. However, the BLM has no jurisdiction over private land.

Urbanization

FRN: Approximately 1% of historic greater-sage-grouse range is covered by urban land (Miller, et. al. in press). The Bear River Valley of Utah, the Snake River Valley of Idaho, the Bonneville Basin southeast of the Great Salt Lake, and the Columbia Basin of Washington are the main areas where greater sage-grouse habitat has been converted to urban settings.

CPID: The CPID identifies working with county and city planners to avoid developments in sagebrush habitat, acquiring easements to preserve habitat, and using off-site mitigation to replace unavoidable habitat losses.

PRMP/FEIS: The PRMP/FEIS does not address urbanization. Urbanization of public lands is not a valid use. Sagebrush habitat on private land adjacent to public lands could be converted allowing for urban uses that impact greater sage-grouse.

Infrastructure in Sagebrush Habitat

FRN: Fragmentation of sagebrush habitats has been cited as a primary cause of the decline of greater sage-grouse populations because the species requires large expanses of contiguous sagebrush. Oil and gas developments affect lek persistence, lek attendance, winter habitat use, recruitment, yearling annual survival rate, and female nest site choice. Power lines facilitate the spread of invasive species/noxious weeds and predators (red fox, raptors, and corvids⁸). Power lines may fragment greater sage-grouse habitat even if raptors are not present as grouse avoid tall structures because raptors are typically associated with them. Interstate highways and paved roads influence 41% of the greater sage-grouse range (Knick et. al. in press), 95% of all greater sage-grouse habitats are within 1.5 miles of a mapped road. Impacts to greater sage-grouse from roads include direct habitat loss, direct mortality, barriers to migration corridors or seasonal habitats, facilitation of predators, spread of noxious weeds, and noise (Forman and Alexander 1998). Communication towers impact greater sage-grouse by direct collisions, avoidance of tall structures, and provide perches for raptors and corvids (Steenhof et al 1993, Connelly et al 2004). High levels of electromagnetic radiation within 500 m (547 yd) of cell towers have been linked to decreased populations and reproductive performance of some bird and amphibian species (Balmori 2005, 2006; Balmori and Hallberg 2007; Everaert and Bauwens 2007 cited in Wisdom et al., in press, p. 19). Approximately 625 miles of fences are constructed annually on BLM-administered public lands in greater sage-grouse habitat (Connelly et al 2004). Fences impact greater sage-grouse by increasing the potential for collisions, creation of predator (raptor and corvid) perch sites, potential creation of predator corridors along fences, incursion of exotic species along fence corridors and habitat fragmentation.

CPID: The goal is to reduce, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to greater sage-grouse populations and habitat through careful planning, design, maintenance and/or modification of infrastructure features. Oil and gas development was not a high priority threat because Idaho has limited potential for oil and gas development. Restricting inspections, maintenance and related work within 0.6 mile of occupied leks from 6:00 PM until 9:00 AM from March 15 until May 15 was recommended to reduce human

⁸ A member of the bird family Corvidae that includes crows, ravens, jays, choughs, and treepies.

disturbance to greater sage-grouse on leks (Connelly et al 2000a). Location of new trails, roads and highways should be designed to avoid key and stronghold habitats. Existing roads and trails should be managed to minimize disturbance of occupied leks. New pipelines should be located at least 2 miles from occupied leks or placed along an existing corridor. New fences should not be placed within 1 km (0.6 miles) of occupied leks. New major power lines should be sited to avoid greater sage-grouse habitat to the extent possible. New, smaller distribution lines should be buried or sited as far as possible, preferably at least 3.2 km (2 miles) from occupied leks and other important seasonal habitats. Wind development is also addressed in the CPID but will be discussed in a separate wind energy section of this SIR.

PRMP/FEIS: The PRMP/FEIS contains direction regarding infrastructure development. In addition to standard stipulations⁹ for fluid mineral leasing, management direction makes approximately 258,100 acres in the Curlew area administratively unavailable for fluid mineral leasing (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-78, Action PP-ME-2.4.3). The boundary used to define the area unavailable for fluid mineral leasing is the Curlew Local Working Groups Sage-grouse Planning Area. The objective for the unavailable area is to maintain and protect important resources such as sagebrush steppe ecosystem, sagebrush obligate species, and sensitive species habitats such a greater sage- and sharp-tailed grouse leks and nesting habitat (PRMP/FEIS, pg Glossary-1).

Identified PRMP/FEIS objectives are to maintain and protect the sagebrush steppe, sagebrush obligate species, and greater sage-grouse (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-78, Action PP-ME-2.4.3). On an additional 226,000 acres of public land, a fluid mineral leasing “no surface occupancy” stipulation would be applied (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-78, Action PP-ME-2.4.4). This “no surface occupancy” stipulation is not limited to a ¼ mile buffer around leks. This stipulation when applied to fluid mineral leases prohibits the occupancy or disturbance of the surface of BLM-administered public lands. It would not prohibit the occupancy or disturbance of the surface of adjacent non-public lands. This “no surface occupancy” stipulation would be applied to the Bear Lake Plateau/Sheep Creek Hills area (44,000 acres of public lands) (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-79, Action PP-ME-2.4.4) which has the highest potential for oil and gas development and the largest known population of greater sage-grouse in the PFO planning area. Power lines, communication towers, and the construction of range improvements (e.g., fences¹⁰) would be subject to seasonal and timing restrictions (Appendix D, pg D-1) and the direction in the transmission corridors section (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.3). The PRMP/FEIS directs the preparation of travel management plans

⁹ Appendix H of the PRMP/FEIS identifies the terms and conditions of the general mineral lease forms for oil and gas (Form 3100-11) and geothermal (Form 3200-24). In addition to the requirements set forth in the terms and conditions sections of these forms, additional special fluid mineral stipulations can be incorporated, as appropriate. Twelve special fluid mineral stipulations are identified. Stipulations, one through five, are applicable to resources and resource uses on BLM-administered public lands. Stipulations six through 12 are conditions set forth when leases involve other federal agency jurisdiction. **Stipulation 4** is applicable to the management of the sagebrush steppe and greater sage-grouse.

Stipulation 4. In order to protect important seasonal wildlife habitat, exploration drilling and other development activity will be restricted during the period from _____ to _____. Appropriate modifications to imposed restrictions will be made for the maintenance and operation of producing wells. Exceptions to this limitation in any year may be specifically authorized in writing by the Authorized Officer of the BLM. This stipulation is applicable for the following animal activity and period of seasonal restriction:

Sage and sharp-tailed grouse leks – 03/01 through 05/31
 Sage and sharp-tailed grouse winter range – 12/15/ through 03/01
 Sage and sharp-tailed grouse nesting and brood rearing areas – 04/30 through 06/30

¹⁰ Fence design would include items such as but not limited to reflectors or stays to improve fence visibility, reducing injuries to greater sage-grouse.

following the signing of the ROD (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-86, Action PP-RE-4.2.5). Until these plans are completed, cross-country travel by motorized vehicles is prohibited and limited to existing roads and trails. During subsequent travel management planning, additional roads could be closed to protect greater sage-grouse habitat (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-88, Action PP-LR-4.3.6).

Wildland Fire

FRN: In nesting and wintering areas, fires cause direct loss of habitat due to reduced cover and forage (Call and Maser 1985). Fire kills big sagebrush and rehabilitation of the sagebrush portion of the habitat takes decades and sometimes centuries. Fire within 54 km of a lek is one of two primary factors in predicting lek extirpation (Knick and Hanser, in press) Fragmentation caused by fire may influence distribution or migratory patterns in sage-grouse (Fischer et al. 1997). Natural fire return intervals on dry sites have been estimated to take 100 – 350 years while wet site intervals range from 50 – 200 years (Baker 2006, Mensing et al 2006, Baker in press, and Miller et al in press). In the Snake River Plain and the Northern Great Basin, there is a significant relationship between an increase in fire occurrence and cheatgrass invasion (Miller et al. in press, p. 39). Since 1980, nearly 27 percent of sagebrush habitat in greater sage-grouse management zones III, IV and V (Baker, in press) has burned. However, the extent and efficacy of restoration efforts is variable and complicated by many factors such as seed availability, invasive species, and a limited seeding window.

CPID: The goal is to reduce the risk, incidence and extent of wildfires within greater sage-grouse planning areas and to ensure that burned areas are rehabilitated, and historically altered sites are restored, where appropriate, in a manner consistent with long-term habitat needs for greater sage-grouse.

The priority for wildland fire suppression activities in greater sage-grouse habitat is:

- 1) stronghold habitats,
- 2) key habitat, and
- 3) restoration habitat.

The CPID also recommends, as appropriate, providing annual training for fire personnel (including rural fire department personnel), public affairs staff, resource advisors, and others to include awareness of issues and potential impacts of suppression activities in greater sage-grouse habitats and other resource issues of management concern, and provides recommended measures for reducing impacts to greater sage-grouse habitats during suppression actions such as minimizing loss of sagebrush during burn-out operations, suppress fires and hotspots in unburned islands, patches if safe to do so. The CPID also recommends staging initial attack resources in high fire incident areas to ensure quicker response times, and placement of green strips/fuel breaks as an aid to controlling wildfire.

After wildland fire suppression, the CPID recommends that greater sage-grouse habitat considerations be incorporated into restoration and burned area rehabilitation plans, particularly in or near stronghold, key and isolated habitats; emphasizing the use of native plant materials to the greatest extent possible, and as appropriate for site conditions. It also is recommended that seed materials be certified as weed free.

PRMP/FEIS: Direction for the fire and fuels program focused on preserving sagebrush habitat, reducing the prevalence of invasive species/noxious weeds, and rehabilitating burned sites (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-49, Action PP-WF-1.3.1). Greater sage-grouse Key and Source habitats would be maintained and enhanced within the Low- and Mid-Elevation Shrub types. Treatments would be limited in habitats supporting live sagebrush communities. Treatments to enhance and restore habitat would be focused in areas where the sagebrush component is lost or dead and the understory degraded. In Low-Elevation Shrub sites, wildland fires would be suppressed to protect existing sagebrush communities (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-54, Action PP-WF-3.1.1). Maintaining, protecting and expanding Source and Key habitats are an important

objective of the PRMP/FEIS (pg 2-57, Objective PP-WF-3.7). Seeding of sagebrush on appropriate ecological sites to facilitate the maintenance or improvement of the sagebrush steppe is recommended following wildland fires or other restoration activities (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-55, Action WF-3.1.6). When multiple wildland fires start, protecting sagebrush habitat is a priority (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-56, Action PP-WF-3.6.1).

Invasive Species/Noxious Weeds

FRN: Invasive species/noxious weeds do not provide quality greater sage-grouse habitat. In greater sage-grouse habitat the major invasive herbaceous plant is cheatgrass. It does not provide suitable nesting or adequate brood rearing habitat. When sites are dominated by cheatgrass the fire return interval is reduced to 3-5 years and sagebrush will not recover (Whisenant 1990). Pinyon and juniper trees, while unlike cheatgrass, are native species and have expanded 10-fold in the Intermountain West since European settlement, causing the loss of sagebrush/bunchgrass habitat (Miller and Taush 2001). Mountain big sagebrush communities are most at risk of pinyon/juniper invasion (Connelly et al 2004). When juniper increases in these communities, shrub cover declines and the season of available succulent forbs is shortened due to soil moisture depletion (Crawford et al. 2004, p. 8).

CPID: With respect to annual grasslands, the goal is to restore areas dominated or strongly influenced by annual grasses to a diverse mix of perennial grass, forbs, and shrubs where feasible. The priority for greater sage-grouse restoration projects should be:

- 1) sites adjacent or surrounded by stronghold habitats,
- 2) sites within two miles of key habitat, and
- 3) sites beyond two miles of key habitat. Sites should be restored using native perennial grasses, forbs, and sagebrush.

As cheatgrass spread is linked to wildland fires the CPID identifies priorities in suppressing wildland fires. In habitat strongholds suppress fires in low-elevation Wyoming big sagebrush first, followed by mountain big sagebrush, then other types of sagebrush habitats. The second priority is suppressing fires in key habitats, once again protecting first Wyoming big sagebrush, then mountain big sagebrush, then other types of sagebrush habitats. The third priority is restoration habitats.

With respect to conifer (e.g. pinyon, juniper, Douglas-fir) encroachment, the goal is to reduce the influence of conifer encroachment on greater sage-grouse and their habitat. Local Working Groups, land management agencies, IDFG and other partners should work closely together to identify and prioritize conifer encroachment areas for further management action; identify leks where conifer encroachment may be affecting lek attendance or nearby habitat quality; remove conifers within at least 100 m (330 ft) of occupied leks; where conifers have encroached upon sagebrush communities at larger scales, employ prescribed fire, chemical, mechanical or other suitable methods to reduce or eliminate conifers; plan wildfire suppression strategies to support the goal of reducing conifer encroachment.

PRMP/FEIS: The PRMP/FEIS also links restoration of cheatgrass sites with wildland fire use and identifies that fuels and restoration projects be conducted in areas that are invaded by or at risk of being invaded by cheatgrass (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-54, Action PP-WF-3.1.2). Revegetation projects would be designed to stabilize sites and prevent the dominance of invasive annual vegetation (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-54, Action PP-WF-3.1.3). The use of native plant material would be emphasized on restoration projects with the seeding of sagebrush on appropriate ecological sites to facilitate the maintenance or improvement of the sagebrush steppe (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-55, Action PP-WF-3.1.6). Direction for juniper management

includes removing encroaching juniper in the Mid-Elevation Shrub vegetation type by use of chemical, mechanical and prescribed fire treatments (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-55, Action PP-WF-3.2.5).

Livestock Grazing

FRN: Livestock grazing is the most widespread type of land use across the sagebrush biome (Connelly et al 2004). The reduction of grass heights due to livestock grazing in greater sage-grouse nesting and brood habitats negatively affect nesting success when cover is reduced below the 7 inches needed for predator avoidance (Gregg et al 1994). Livestock also may compete directly with greater sage-grouse for forbs and sagebrush (Valentine, 1990) and may flush hens from nests (Coates 2007, p. 28). Fence construction can have impacts on greater sage-grouse as discussed in the *Infrastructure in Sagebrush Habitat* section above. Water developments can reduce the extent of riparian and wet meadow habitats used by greater sage-grouse and artificially concentrate domestic and wild ungulates in important greater sage-grouse habitats, leading to excessive grazing or trampling. Many authors have noted that native vegetation communities within the sagebrush ecosystem evolved in the absence of significant grazing presence (Mack and Thompson 1982). Improper livestock grazing can lead to long term changes in plant communities that are detrimental to greater sage-grouse.

CPID: The goal is to manage livestock grazing to maintain soil conditions and ecological processes necessary to protect and maintain properly functioning sagebrush communities that meet the long-term needs of greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush associated species.

Identified conservation measures include designing management systems that maintain or enhance herbaceous understory cover, height, and species diversity that occurs during the spring nesting season and to minimize grazing effects on the cover and height of primary forage species in occupied greater sage-grouse habitat during the nesting season, (generally defined as April 1 – June 15 in much of Idaho). Also, due to domestic sheep preference for forbs, manage sheep grazing to promote and maintain a diversity of desirable forbs. Riparian area grazing should promote vegetation structure and composition appropriate for the site. New spring developments in greater sage-grouse habitat should be designed to maintain or enhance the free flowing characteristics of springs and wet meadows. Avoid placing water developments (e.g. troughs) into higher quality native breeding/early brood habitats that have not had significant prior grazing use. Place salt and mineral supplements in existing disturbed sites, areas with reduced sagebrush cover, seedings or cheatgrass sites; use salts or mineral supplements to improve management of livestock for the benefit of greater sage-grouse habitat. Ensure sheep operators and herders are aware of the location of occupied leks and work with sheep operators/herders to eliminate or reduce disturbance to leks by sheep camps, bed grounds, herding or related activities, or avoid such activities within the lesser of 0.5 mile or direct line of sight of leks during the lekking period.

PRMP/FEIS: Livestock grazing in the PRMP/FEIS is to be managed to meet or make significant progress towards meeting Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM 1997) (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-68, Action PP-LG-1.2.3). Standard 8 (Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals) ensures that habitats are suitable to maintain viable populations of threatened and endangered, sensitive and other special status species. BLM Idaho has designated greater sage-grouse as a sensitive species. Additional direction for Special Status Species is provided in (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-29, Action PP-SS-1.1.3) which states, “On a case by case basis, appropriate actions (e.g., timing and spatial closures, habitat avoidance/restrictions, and agency specific guidance), conservation measures and guidelines that contribute to the continued presence and conservation of special status species would be considered to minimize the potential for the listing of species. Appropriate actions, conservation measures and guidelines that may be considered include, but are not limited to: Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (ISAC, 2006).” Special Status Species

management direction (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-39, Action PP-SS-1.3.5) which states, “To the extent possible and to promote conservation, greater sage-grouse would be managed consistent with the intent of the *Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho* (ISAC 2006) or any future revisions/amendments and or current BLM guidance.” would also pertain to livestock grazing in greater sage-grouse habitat.

Wind Energy Development

FRN: Greater sage-grouse populations are impacted by direct loss of habitat such as from turbine and access road construction, habitat fragmentation from roads, associated power lines, noise and increased human presence and indirectly by loss of habitat due to avoidance of tall structures by greater sage-grouse. Low frequency noise and shadow flicker may also cause avoidance. Greater sage-grouse may also collide with structures, guy wires or other features.

CPID: Energy development, except for wind, was included in the *Infrastructure in Sagebrush Habitat* section (discussed above). The goal for infrastructure (including wind energy development projects) is to reduce, minimize or mitigate adverse impacts to greater sage-grouse populations and habitat through careful planning, design, maintenance and/or modification of infrastructure features. Wind energy project design and approval should focus on avoiding, minimizing, or restoring habitat degradation (on-site mitigation). If turbines must be sited within breeding habitat, avoid placing turbines within five miles of occupied leks. Avoid locating turbines and related infrastructure in known greater sage-grouse migration corridors and areas where they are highly concentrated. Avoid fragmenting large tracts of sagebrush habitat, focus wind energy developments on lands already altered or cultivated.

PRMP/FEIS: Rights-of-way direction assigns areas as open, avoidance, or closed areas (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.6). Open areas could have seasonal restrictions associated with them. Avoidances areas would generally be avoided but may be available with special stipulations. Greater sage-grouse habitat is one of the resource values to be avoided. Closed areas would not allow energy development (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.6). Other direction for wind energy includes routing linear rights-of-way so impacts would be least disturbing (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.3). The route would depend on the origin/destination of the project, the purpose, and the resource values present in the route. To the extent possible applicants would be encouraged to use existing corridors to avoid habitat fragmentation (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.5).

Mining

FRN: Impacts to greater sage-grouse include direct habitat losses from mining itself, for overburden storage areas, staging areas, roads, railroad tracks, and power lines. Indirect impacts include increases in human presence, change in land use practices, ground shock, noise, dust, reduced air quality, degradation of water quality and quantity, change in vegetation and topography (Moore and Mills 1977, Brown and Clayton 2004). An increase in human presence associated with mining may also lead to increased collision risk of greater sage-grouse with vehicles, exposure to pathogens. Mining and associated activities also create an opportunity for invasion of exotic and noxious weeds species. Phosphate mining which takes place in the PFO was one of the types of mining documented in the FRN that may impact greater sage-grouse habitat.

CPID: The goal is to design and operate mines, landfills, and gravel pits in a manner that minimizes or reduces habitat loss or disturbance to greater sage-grouse. Conservation measures include discouraging, where possible, new mines, landfills, or gravel pits within greater sage-grouse breeding or winter habitat, avoiding occupied leks by at least 2 miles, ensuring measures are taken to control invasive plant species,

ensuring reclamation plans restore habitat characteristics, and off-site mitigation should be used to offset unavoidable alteration or loss of habitat.

PRMP/FEIS: Direction for phosphate mining is identified in Action PP-ME-1.2.3 (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-72). Within lease areas, soils and native vegetation would be retained undisturbed when disturbance of the site is not necessary for minerals development or safety (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-73, Action PP-ME-2.2.2). Selection of plant species for reclamation would reflect the surrounding ecosystem and post-development land use. Plant materials selected for reclamation use would be adapted to the climate of the site (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.3). Consideration and preference would be given to promoting natural succession, native plant species, and structural diversity (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.3). In reclaimed areas, vegetation would include species that meet wildlife habitat needs (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.3). Phosphate mine site plans would be designed to meet the following goals as identified in the *Interagency Area Wide Investigation of Phosphate Mine Contamination and Final Risk Management Plan* (IDEQ 2004) (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-76, Action PP-ME-2.3.7).

- Protect southeast Idaho's surface water resources.
- Protect wildlife habitat and ecological resources in southeast Idaho.
- Maintain and protect multiple beneficial uses of the southeast Idaho phosphate mining resource area.
- Protect southeast Idaho's ground water resources.

Transmission Corridors

FRN: Greater sage-grouse can be impacted through direct loss of habitat, human activity, (especially during construction periods, as well as during maintenance), increased predation (e.g. perches for corvids and raptors), habitat deterioration through the introduction of nonnative invasive plant species, and fragmentation of habitat including avoidance by greater sage-grouse.

CPID: Transmission corridors were included in the *Infrastructure in Sagebrush Habitat* section discussed above.

PRMP/FEIS: Direction for transmission corridors includes routing linear rights-of-way so impacts would be least disturbing to greater sage-grouse (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.3). The route would depend on the origin/destination of the project, the purpose, and the resource values present in the route. To the extent possible applicants would be encourage to use existing corridors to avoid habitat fragmentation (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-66, Action PP-LR-6.1.5). Additional direction from the PRMP/FEIS contained in the Wind Energy Development section would apply to Transmission Corridors.

Climate Change

FRN: Under projected future temperature conditions the cover of sagebrush within the distribution of greater sage-grouse is anticipated to be reduced (Neilson et al 2005) and adversely impact greater sage-grouse populations. Based on the best available information, it is expected that the current and predicted atmospheric carbon dioxide levels will increase the threat posed to greater sage-grouse by cheatgrass and from more frequent and expansive sage-grouse habitat degradation (functional fragmentation) and severe wildfires (Smith *et al.* 1987, p. 143; Smith *et al.* 2000, p. 81; Brown *et al.* 2004, p. 384; Neilson *et al.* 2005, pp. 150, 156; Chambers and Pellant 2008, pp. 31-32). Aside from leading to direct loss of sagebrush, this will also reduce the quality of the herbaceous understory required by greater sage-grouse.

Potential climate change may also affect West Nile virus (WNV) outbreaks which appear to be most severe in years with higher summer temperatures and drought (Walker and Naugle *in press*, Epstein and Defilippo 2001). Greater sage-grouse congregate in mesic habitats in the mid-late summer (Connelly *et al.* 2000, p. 971) thereby increasing the risk of exposure to mosquitoes. If WNV outbreaks coincide with drought conditions that aggregate birds in habitat near water sources, the risk of exposure to WNV will be elevated (Walker and Naugle *in press*, p. 11). Therefore, the higher summer temperatures and more frequent or severe drought or both, that are likely under current climate change projections, make more severe WNV outbreaks likely in low-elevation sage-grouse habitats where WNV is already endemic, and also make WNV outbreaks possible in higher elevation sage-grouse habitats that to date have been WNV-free due to relatively cold conditions. This would lead to reduced numbers of greater sage-grouse.

CPID: With respect to climate change, the goal is to maintain resilience of sagebrush steppe vegetation communities as global climate changes increase the environmental stress on the communities' ecological viability. Conservation measures include: inform constituents of the seriousness of global climate change expectations, avoid degradation of current vegetation communities, increase the knowledge, awareness, and control of invasive species, include seed (both herbaceous and sagebrush) from the warmer part of the species range in mixes that are used to restore degraded sites, factor climate change needs and philosophy into current management of arid and semi-arid rangelands, reduce pressure on the resource (e.g. vegetation) in periods of unusual climatic events such as drought, focus management of rangelands on restoration and resiliency of the vegetative resource, manage native plant communities to maintain biotic soil crusts (where appropriate), improve or maintain high vigor of native vegetation, and reduce use during periods when use favors invasive species ecologically, and encourage research to address problems for greater sage-grouse caused by climate change.

PRMP/FEIS: The PRMP/FEIS includes direction in the vegetation section to manage vegetation types for continued presence as part of an ecologically healthy system and prevent the establishment of invasive species (e.g., cheatgrass). Direction in the vegetation section also addresses maintaining or increasing Land Health Class–A (LHC–A) acres so the landscape is composed of a diversity of desirable/native herbaceous and shrub/woody species consisting of at least 15-25% sagebrush canopy cover in greater sage-grouse habitat in the Low- and Mid-Elevation shrub types and at least 25% shrub cover in the Mountain Shrub type. It also provides direction in the Wildland Fire Management section to manage sagebrush steppe to move toward fire regime condition class 1 (FRCC–1) which is defined as a low departure from historic fire regimes. Managing for and making progress towards LHC–A or FRCC–1 would help to reduce the potential adverse effects of climate change.

The PRMP/FEIS also discussed implications due to WNV, described in Chapter 3 – Affected Environment (p. 3-51 & 3-53). The virus was an important new source of mortality in low- and mid-elevation greater sage-grouse populations range-wide from 2003–2007 (Walker and Naugle, *in press*). Individual sage-grouse in populations exposed to the virus during July–August 2003 were 3.3 times more likely to die than birds in uninfected populations (Naugle *et al.* 2004). WNV mortality of sage-grouse has been documented as ranging from 5 to 44 percent with most mortality occurring in July and August (Walker and Naugle *et al.* *in press* and Kaczor, 2008). WNV has been documented in sage-grouse in Idaho, and in 2006, the sage-grouse hunting season was closed in western Owyhee County due to concerns of WNV impacts (Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee, 2008).

WNV transmission is regulated by environmental factors, including temperature, precipitation, and distribution of anthropogenic water sources that support breeding mosquito vectors (Brust 1991, Doherty 2007, Dohm *et al.* 2002, Epstein and Defilippo 2001, Reisen *et al.* 2006a, Shaman *et al.* 2005, Walker *et al.* 2007, Zou *et al.* 2006a,b). The long-term response of different sage-grouse populations to WNV is expected to vary markedly depending on a variety of factors that influence susceptibility. Large, intact,

low- to mid-elevation populations affected annually by WNV, such as those in southeastern Idaho, may absorb impacts of WNV if the quality and extent of available habitat still supports positive population growth (Walker and Naugle *in press*). As described in the PRMP/FEIS management of vegetation types for continued presence as part of an ecologically healthy system would also support the availability of sage-grouse habitat and promote sage-grouse population growth. The PRMP/FEIS includes direction in the vegetation section to manage vegetation types for continued presence as part of an ecologically healthy system and prevent the establishment of invasive species (cheatgrass). Vegetation direction in the PRMP/FEIS (pg 2-21, Objective PP-VE-4.1.) addresses maintaining or increasing LHC – A¹¹ acres so the landscape is composed of a diversity of desirable/native herbaceous and shrub/woody species consisting of at least 15-25% sagebrush canopy cover in greater sage-grouse habitat in the Low- and Mid-Elevation Shrub types and at least 25% total shrub cover (inclusive of species such as such as bitterbrush, chokecherry) in the Mountain Shrub type.

Direction for herbaceous vegetation in sagebrush habitats includes managing herbaceous cover to conceal nests throughout the first incubation period for ground and low shrub-nesting birds (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-42, Action PP-SS-1.3.11). These are generally consistent with currently accepted guidelines for the management of productive greater sage-grouse habitat described in Connelly et al. 2000. The PRMP/FEIS also provides direction in the Wildland Fire Management section (pgs 2-54/55) to manage sagebrush steppe to move toward fire regime condition class 1 (FRCC 1) which is a low departure from historic fire regimes. It also includes direction to use native plants (pg 2-19, Action PP-VE-2.10) for seeding projects and to restore sites degraded by invasive species/noxious weeds (pgs 2-19/20, Objective PP-VE-2.1, Actions PP-2.1 through PP-2.12). These actions would mitigate impacts of climate change in the planning area.

The mosquito (*Culex tarsalis*) most likely to transmit WNV in sagebrush habitats requires water to support breeding and prefers sites with submerged vegetation on which to deposit eggs, and warm standing water that promotes rapid larval development – this includes ephemeral puddles, vegetated pond edges, and water-filled hoof prints (Milby and Meyer 1986, Buth et al. 1990, Doherty 2007). Vegetation provides critical protective cover for mosquito larvae and dense stands of emergent plants physically obstruct access to mosquito larvae and pupae by predators and also serve to hinder mosquito control efforts (Knight et al. 2003). Open water areas provide unsuitable habitats for mosquito larvae and pupae due to increased wave action and increased vulnerability to predation (Laird 1988).

Man-made water sources known to support breeding of *Culex tarsalis* include: overflowing stock tanks, stock ponds, seep and overflow areas below earthen dams, irrigated agricultural fields, and ponds constructed for coal-bed natural gas development (Zou et al. 2006b, Doherty 2007). Also, habitat or range improvement projects that create mesic zones around stock tanks or ponds may inadvertently contribute to the WNV problem, since *Culex tarsalis* readily takes advantage of water-filled hoof prints around tanks and ponds for breeding (Doherty 2007). Managing the production of mosquito vectors from man-made water sources, reducing the distribution of man-made mosquito breeding habitats in sage-grouse habitat, or both, are potential options for reducing impacts of WNV. Doherty 2007 and Knight 2003 describe several suggestions for addressing these concerns, including:

1. Overbuild the size of ponds to accommodate a greater volume of water than is discharged.

¹¹ Indicators of LHC – A include: Appropriate amount and distribution of ground cover, including litter; Native plant communities are maintained or improved to ensure proper functioning of ecological processes; A diversity of native plant species; Minimal soil erosion; Proper functioning riparian areas; and Noxious weeds are absent or not increasing. A diversity of plant species is inclusive of grasses, forbs and shrubs important for greater sage-grouse habitat.

2. Build steep shorelines to reduce shallow water (>60 cm) and aquatic vegetation around the perimeter of impoundments.
3. Maintain the water level below that of rooted vegetation for a muddy shoreline that is unfavorable habitat for mosquito larvae.
4. Construct dams or impoundments that restrict down slope seepage or overflow by digging ponds in flat areas rather than damming natural draws for affluent water storage, or lining constructed ponds in areas where seepage is anticipated.
5. Line the channel where discharge water flows into the pond with crushed rock, or use a horizontal pipe to discharge inflow directly into existing open water.
6. Line the overflow spillway with crushed rock, and construct the spillway with steep sides.
7. Fence pond site to restrict access by livestock and other wild ungulates.
8. Channelize to increase water flow, to steepen banks and provide access to mosquito predators.

These suggestions, along with newer approaches developed as a result of further understanding the science and relationship of the virus to its vectors and life history requirements, are appropriate and would be considered during site-specific management of man-made water sources consistent with other direction provided in the PRMP/FEIS.

Evaluation and Analysis

The FRN delineates threats to greater sage-grouse habitats and populations. The BLM is primarily responsible for the management of greater sage-grouse habitat whereas the State of Idaho is responsible for population management (e.g., hunting seasons, bag limits). While the FRN describes the various threats to greater sage-grouse in considerable detail, it generally does not prescribe actions to alleviate those threats since the purpose of the FRN was to evaluate the status of the species and its habitat. The FRN does, however, discuss the need for agency regulatory mechanisms for various land management activities, to ensure effective conservation of the species. For example, the FRN states, "In many areas existing mechanisms (or their implementation) on BLM lands and BLM-permitted actions do not adequately address the conservation needs of greater sage-grouse, and are exacerbating the effects of threats to the species described under Factor A as present or threatened destruction, modification or curtailment of habitat or range."

The knowledge base for threats to greater sage-grouse habitats differs based on the specific factor involved. For example, for oil and gas development, it is noted that some protective standard stipulations in use (no development within 1/4 miles of leks) are inadequate to conserve habitats and maintain populations. In the wind energy section, actions by management agencies are not definitively labeled as inadequate. This is because, to a large degree, no published research specific to the effects of wind farms on the greater sage-grouse has been completed. These differences are largely a result of industry sponsored research. Impacts to greater sage-grouse habitat caused by oil and gas development have received much more attention by researchers in recent years. Impacts to greater sage-grouse habitats by large scale wind energy projects are just starting to be studied.

Two identified threats, conversion of sagebrush habitat to agricultural use and urbanization, identified in the FRN, are not addressed in the PRMP/FEIS. Neither is a valid use on BLM-administered public lands and the BLM has no management responsibility on private lands. Conversion and urbanization on private land adjacent to public lands could affect greater sage-grouse and habitat on public lands which is outside the scope of the PRMP/FEIS and is not discussed.

The remaining threats identified in the FRN are addressed in the PRMP/FEIS through the identification of management direction in respective sections. For example, sensitive species (which include greater sage-grouse) direction is provided in the following sections: Soil and Water, Special Status Species, Wildland

Fire Management, Minerals and Energy, Lands and Realty, and Livestock Grazing. Direction specific to greater sage-grouse is provided in the Vegetation, Special Status Species, Wildland Fire Management, and Recreation sections. Management direction specific to the sagebrush habitat is also provided in vegetation, fish and wildlife, special status species, wildland fire management, minerals, and administrative designations sections.

The FRN devotes considerable discussion to oil and gas development and notes that agency prescriptions to conserve greater sage-grouse habitat have generally been inadequate. The most often cited restriction was a one-quarter (1/4) mile buffer around greater sage-grouse leks where oil and gas developments were not allowed. PRMP/FEIS direction for fluid minerals includes making approximately 258,100 acres in the Curlew area administratively unavailable for fluid mineral leasing. The identified objectives for this area are to maintain and protect the sagebrush steppe, sagebrush obligate species, and greater sage-grouse. On an additional 226,000 acres a fluid mineral “no surface occupancy” stipulation would be applied in the Bear Lake Plateau/Sheep Creek Hills area which has the highest potential for oil and gas development and the largest known population of greater sage-grouse. This “no surface occupancy” stipulation would provide a higher level of protection for greater sage-grouse habitat.

Highways and roads were identified as a threat due to fragmenting greater sage-grouse habitat and other factors (e.g., noise, collisions). The PRMP/FEIS (pg 2-87, Objective PP-RE-4.2) restricts all motorized travel to existing roads and trails. It also identifies the future development of travel management plans. In these plans, individual routes would be closed or designated for specific types of motorized/non-motorized use. Consideration of greater sage-grouse habitat is included as a criterion to be considered in future travel management plans route designations.

PRMP/FEIS direction for wind energy development and transmission corridors is contained in the Lands and Realty section under linear rights-of way. Due to lack of specific research, the recommendations for placement of wind energy and transmission corridors to reduce impacts to greater sage-grouse are just emerging. The direction in the PRMP/FEIS is to route linear rights-of-way so impacts would be least disturbing and to the extent possible, applicants would be encouraged to use existing corridors. This direction provides the flexibility to use emerging recommendations, the CPID or revisions, or future BLM guidance to reduce impacts of future projects on greater sage-grouse habitat (PRMP/FEIS, pg 2-39, Action PP-SS-1.3.5).

Direction for livestock grazing in the PRMP/FEIS is to meet or make significant progress towards meeting Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines (BLM 1997). Standard 8– Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals (BLM, 1997) ensures that “Habitats are suitable to maintain viable populations of threatened and endangered, sensitive and other special status species.” Management of livestock grazing to maintain or achieve Standard 8 with respect to greater sage-grouse habitat, employs techniques such as adjusting stocking rates, season of use, type of livestock, or develop specific grazing systems.

In the FRN invasive plants and wildland fire were linked as threats to greater sage-grouse. A wildland fire management priority in the PRMP/FEIS (pg 2-56, Action PP-SS-3.6.1.) is to conserve sagebrush and greater sage-grouse habitat by suppressing wildland fires. It is also a priority during the rehabilitation of wildland fires to restore habitat for greater sage-grouse through the planting or seeding of sagebrush and native herbaceous species.

PRMP/FEIS direction calls for fuels and restoration projects to be conducted in areas that are invaded by or at risk of being invaded by cheatgrass and encroaching juniper thus improving greater sage-grouse habitat. It would reduce the area influenced by cheatgrass and reduce the severity of future wildland fires.

Statement of Findings

The BLM has thoroughly reviewed the information presented in the March 23, 2010 FRN and has taken a hard look to determine if the information presented, applicable to the PRMP/FEIS, warrants the need for a supplemental EIS. In addition, this information was compared with information presented in the CPID and used to develop management direction for greater sage-grouse and its associated habitat in the PRMP/FEIS.

Based upon this evaluation and analysis, the information presented in the FRN released prior to the PRMP/FEIS does not represent significant new information relevant to environmental concerns/impacts addressed in the PRMP/FEIS as that term is defined in 40 CFR 1508.27.

The FRN does not identify any new threats or provide new conservation measures that conflict with the CPID or management direction presented in the PRMP/FEIS. This information does not identify any new potentially significant impacts, circumstances, information, or impacts beyond the range and scope already considered and analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS.

Therefore, the BLM concludes that supplementation is not required.

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