
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In March 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published its listing decision for the Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) as “warranted but precluded” (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010). Inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms in land use plans was identified as a major threat in the USFWS’ findings on the petition to list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In response to the USFWS’ findings and pending listing decision, the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (Forest Service) have prepared the Draft Land Use Plan (LUP) Amendments to analyze the addition of Greater Sage-Grouse conservation measures to the existing Resource Management Plans (RMP) for the Wyoming BLM Casper, Kemmerer, Newcastle, Pinedale, Rawlins, and Rock Springs Field Offices and the Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP) for the Forest Service Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF), Medicine Bow National Forest (MBNF), and Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG) Planning Units.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) directs the BLM to develop and periodically revise or amend its RMPs, which guide management of BLM-administered lands. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) directs the Forest Service to develop and periodically revise or amend its Forest Plans, which guide management of National Forest System Lands. These two agencies’ plans, which would be amended by this document, are generically referred to as Land Use Plans (LUP) throughout the remainder of this document. The USFWS has identified conservation measures in land use plans as the principal regulatory mechanism for protecting Greater Sage-Grouse on BLM-administered lands and National Forest System Lands administered by the Forest Service. Based on the identified threats to Greater Sage-Grouse, and the USFWS’s timeline for making a listing decision on this species, the BLM and Forest Service need to incorporate objectives and adequate conservation measures into land use plans to conserve Greater Sage-Grouse to potentially avoid the need for the USFWS to list the species as threatened or endangered under the ESA. The conservation measures include both restrictions on land uses and programs that affect Greater Sage-Grouse and measures to reduce the impacts of BLM/Forest Service programs or authorized uses. In response to the USFWS’ findings, the BLM and Forest Service will evaluate the adequacy of its land use plans and will address, as necessary, amendments throughout the range of Greater Sage-Grouse.

Consistent with national policy, the BLM and Forest Service are preparing several environmental impact statements (EIS), with associated LUP amendments or revisions. These documents will address a range of alternatives focused on specific conservation measures across the range of the Greater Sage-Grouse. The amendments will be coordinated under two administrative planning regions across the entire range of the Greater Sage-Grouse. The Rocky Mountain Region and the Great Basin Region boundaries generally correspond with the threats identified by the USFWS in the 2010 listing decision, along with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Management Zones framework (Stiver et al. 2006).

The Management Zones reflect ecological and biological issues and similarities. In addition, management challenges within Management Zones are comparable, and Greater Sage-Grouse and their habitats are likely responding similarly to environmental factors and management actions. The Rocky Mountain Region consists of land use plans in North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and in portions of Montana and Utah. The Great Basin Region consists of land use plans in California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, and in portions of Utah and Montana.

As identified above, this direction is the result of the March 2010 publication of the USFWS's *12-Month Findings for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-Grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus) as Threatened or Endangered*. In this document, the agency concluded that the Greater Sage-Grouse is warranted for listing as a threatened or endangered species. The USFWS reviewed the status of and threats to Greater Sage-Grouse in relation to the five listing factors provided in Section 4(a)(1) of the ESA. It determined that factor A, "the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the habitat or range of the Greater Sage-Grouse," and factor D, "the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms," both posed "a significant threat to the Greater Sage-Grouse now and in the foreseeable future" (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010). These LUP Amendments address both listing factors A and D and will provide consistency in managing Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. In the BLM's Instruction Memorandum 2012-044, the BLM's National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy provides direction for considering sage-grouse conservation measures in the land use planning process.

These LUP Amendments address Greater Sage-Grouse habitat within eastern, western, and southern Wyoming. Greater Sage-Grouse habitat is comprised of the following three primary habitat types:

- **Core/Priority Habitat:** Areas that have been identified as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable Greater Sage-Grouse populations include breeding, nesting, late brood-rearing, and winter concentration areas.
- **General Habitat:** Areas of seasonal or year-round habitat outside of core/priority habitat.
- **Connectivity Habitat:** Areas that have been identified as broader regions of connectivity important to facilitate the movement of Greater Sage-Grouse and maintain ecological processes.

Nationwide, approximately 52% of sagebrush habitat within Greater Sage-Grouse Management Zones is on BLM-administered land, and nearly 8% is on National Forest System land. As a result, changes in Greater Sage-Grouse habitat management on BLM/Forest Service-administered Lands is anticipated to have a considerable impact on Greater Sage-Grouse populations and could prevent the species from being listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

The planning area for the Greater Sage-Grouse LUP Amendments comprise the Wyoming BLM Casper, Kemmerer, Newcastle, Pinedale, Rawlins and Rock Springs Field Offices, and the Forest Service BTNF, MBNF, and TBNG Planning Units (Map ES-1), and includes all public lands and federal mineral estate managed by the BLM and the Forest Service within these areas. The planning area encompasses approximately 16 million acres of public surface land administered by the BLM and Forest Service, and approximately 23 million acres of federal mineral estate in Albany, Campbell, Carbon, Converse, Crook, Fremont, Goshen, Laramie, Lincoln, Natrona, Niobrara, Platte, Sublette, Sweetwater, Teton, Uinta, and Weston counties in Wyoming. Of the 23 million acres of federal mineral estate, approximately 7 million acres are split estate. Table ES-1 provides a summary of land and mineral ownership and administrative jurisdictions within the planning area. Greater Sage-Grouse habitat within the planning area consists of approximately 10 million acres of core/priority habitat, 17 million acres of general habitat, and 105,000 acres of connectivity habitat.

Table ES-1. Land and Mineral Ownership and Administrative Jurisdictions within the Planning Area

Jurisdiction	Acres¹
Total land surface area in the planning area (all ownership)	38,854,720
Areas the Wyoming Sage-grouse LUP Amendments decisions will cover:	
Federal land/federal minerals ²	15,887,980
Federal land/nonfederal minerals ³	364,590
Nonfederal land/federal minerals ⁴	6,443,760
Total BLM-administered federal land surface and National Forest System Lands to be covered by LUP decisions	16,249,870
Total federal mineral estate to be covered by LUP decisions	22,964,440
Areas the Wyoming Sage-grouse LUP Amendments decisions will <i>not</i> cover:	
Private or state land/private or state minerals ⁵	15,325,770

¹ Because of land surface and mineral ownership overlaps and administrative responsibility overlaps, acreage figures for different jurisdictions do not add up to the total acreage.

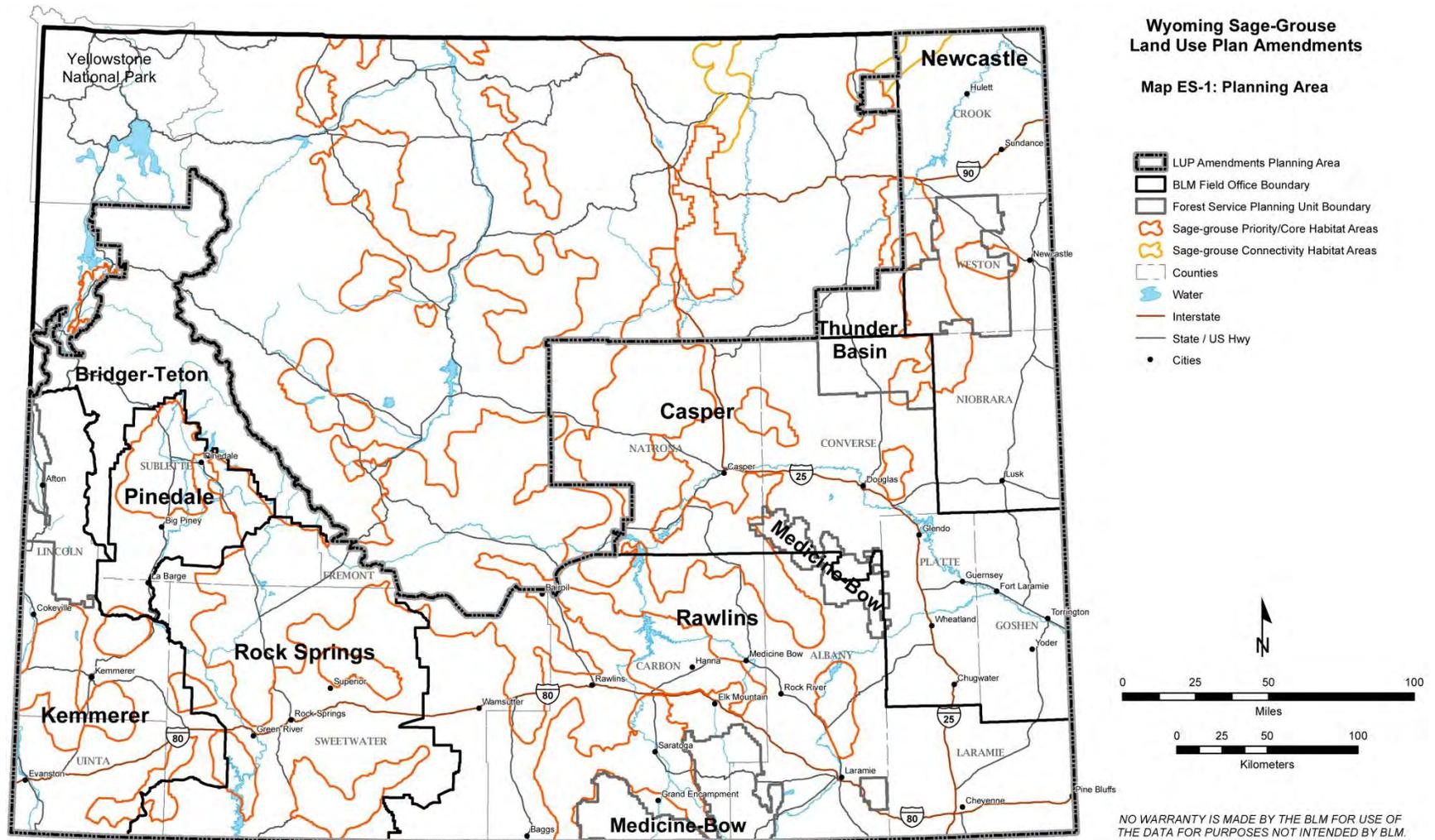
² Where the federal land surface and federal mineral estate are both administered by the BLM or Forest Service, LUP decisions would apply to both the land surface and the mineral estate.

³ Where the federal land surface is administered by the BLM or Forest Service, and the minerals are privately or state owned, LUP decisions would apply only to BLM/Forest Service-administered federal land surface and only to the extent allowed by law. Although surface management decisions may affect the timing and location of development, surface management decisions cannot preclude development of the non-federally owned minerals. The LUP decisions for mineral management would not apply to the non-federal mineral estate. Anticipated surface and mineral management actions and their direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts (cumulative impacts to the extent that they affect resource management decisions) are included/disclosed in the analyses.

⁴ Where the land surface is privately owned or owned by the State of Wyoming, and the minerals are federally owned (i.e., split estate), the RMP decisions would apply to BLM-administered federal mineral estate and, to varying degrees, the surface estate. RMP decisions would only pertain to the state owned and privately owned land surface to the extent allowed by law and to the extent that the impacts were the result of the federal action. BLM would work with the private/state surface owners to honor their wishes to the extent allowed by law. Anticipated surface and mineral management actions and their direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts (cumulative impacts to the extent that they affect resource management decisions) are included/disclosed in the analyses.

⁵ The LUP amendments will not include any management decisions that are applicable to areas where the land surface and minerals are privately owned or owned by the State of Wyoming. However, anticipated impacts that might affect LUP decisions on these lands are included in the cumulative impact analysis.

Map ES-1. Planning Area



PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE LAND USE PLAN AMENDMENTS

The purpose for the LUP amendments is to identify and incorporate appropriate sage-grouse conservation measures into the plan. In compliance with IM 2012-044, the measures to be considered include appropriate conservation measures developed by the National Technical Team (NTT). The BLM will consider such measures in the context of its multiple-use mandate under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and incorporate measures that will help conserve, enhance and/or restore Greater Sage-Grouse habitat by reducing, eliminating or minimizing threats to that habitat.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation in the land use planning process includes a variety of efforts to identify and address public concerns and needs. The public involvement process assists the agencies in broadening the information base for decision-making, informing the public about the LUP amendments and the potential impacts associated with various management decisions, and ensuring that public needs and viewpoints are understood by the agency. Information is provided to the public through meetings, news releases, the project website, and newsletters.

Scoping Process

The public was provided a scoping period to identify potential issues and concerns associated with the LUP amendments. Information obtained by the BLM and Forest Service during public scoping is integrated with issues identified by the agencies to form the scope of the EIS.

Publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register on May 28, 2010, announced the BLM's intention to amend the Casper, Kemmerer, Newcastle, Pinedale, Rawlins and Rock Springs RMPs, and served as a call for input and comments for amending the plans. The publication of a second NOI on December 9, 2011 opened the second public scoping period and announced the addition of the Forest Service to the planning process to amend the LRMPs for the BTNF, MBNF and TBNG Planning Units.

Scoping Notice

The first official 60-day scoping period began when the NOI was published in the Federal Register. The notice invited the public to participate in the scoping process and requested comments on issues and planning criteria related to the BLM RMP amendments. The first scoping period extended from May 28, 2010 through August 30, 2010. The Scoping Notice also included information regarding the six field offices, the reasons for the plan amendments, and how to participate in the scoping process. The publication of a second NOI on December 9, 2011 officially started the second public scoping period for the addition of the National Sage-Grouse planning strategy to the amendment effort and the amendment of the three Forest Service LRMPs. The second public scoping period ended on March 23, 2012.

Scoping Meetings

The initial public scoping meetings for the six BLM RMP amendments were held in Pinedale, Kemmerer, Rock Springs, Newcastle, Casper, and Rawlins, Wyoming, on August 3, 4, 5, 11, 12 and 13, 2010, respectively. During the six scoping meetings, a total of 42 people registered their attendance. The meetings were structured in an open-house format, with various information tables representing issues such as Greater Sage-Grouse, fish and wildlife habitat, mineral development, and other resource areas. Public comments were collected during the scoping meetings and throughout the scoping period through mail, e-mail, and the project website.

Comments were categorized by topic for analysis purposes. Special Status Species and general (process/policy) were the two categories that received the greatest number of comments. The comments in these categories related to incorporation of the Wyoming Sage-grouse Policy or ways to protect sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. Although fewer in number, comments pertaining to livestock grazing, minerals and energy, fish and wildlife habitat, lands and realty, and socioeconomics were also received. A summary of all comments was compiled in the *Scoping Report for the Wyoming Sage-grouse RMP Amendments*, January 2011, which can be viewed on the project website.

The second series of public scoping meetings associated with the National Sage-Grouse Strategy and the addition of the Forest Service planning units were held in Casper, Buffalo, Worland, Rock Springs, Douglas, Newcastle and Gillette, Wyoming on January 30 and 31 and February 1, 2, 7, 9, and 15, respectively. A total of 98 people attended the seven meetings, and the format was similar to the first series of scoping meetings. Public comments were collected during the scoping meetings and throughout the scoping period through mail, e-mail, and the project website.

For the second scoping effort, comments were organized into four planning classifications:

- General comments related to the planning area
- Issues that will be addressed through BLM or Forest Service policy or administrative action (National, Forest Service or BLM policy)
- Issues that are beyond the scope of the planning effort
- Planning issues related to the planning effort.

A summary of all comments was compiled in the National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy Land Use Plan Amendments and Environmental Impact Statements Scoping Summary Report, May 2012, which can be viewed on the project website.

Planning Issues

Planning issues are determined from demands, concerns, conflicts, or problems concerning use or management of public lands and resources. Issues express concerns, opportunities, conflicts, and problems associated with the management of public lands. Issues also reflect new data, new or revised policies, and changes in resources uses affecting the planning area. Management concerns are topics or points of dispute that involve a resource management activity or land use. While some concerns overlap issues, a management concern is generally more important to an individual or group, as opposed to a planning issue which has more widespread point of conflict. These issues are usually expressed in terms of the potential adverse consequences or effects that a particular land or resource use may have on other land or resources used or valued by another or for another purpose.

Initially, the BLM identified the following three planning issues to be considered within the RMP Amendments for the six field offices:

- Consistency of existing Land Use Plan (LUP) decisions with State of Wyoming Executive Order 2011-5.
- Consistency of sage-grouse policy with other LUP resource decisions and the need to revise the RMPs to address inconsistencies.

- What is the amendment process that revises LUP decisions to best protect the sage-grouse, incorporate the new Wyoming sage-grouse policy, while minimizing changes to other resource management decisions?

After the initial scoping for the project, the Forest Service LRMPs were added to the planning effort for a region-wide sage-grouse planning effort, and a second scoping period was opened. Additional preliminary planning issues were identified by the BLM and Forest Service, including the following:

- Lands addressed in the LUP amendments will be public lands (including surface-estate split estate lands) managed by the BLM and Forest Service, respectively, in Greater Sage-Grouse habitats. Any decisions in the LUP amendments will apply only to Federal lands administered by either the BLM or the Forest Service.
- The BLM and Forest Service will consider a range of reasonable alternatives, including appropriate management prescriptions that focus on the relative values of resources while contributing to the conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat.
- The BLM and Forest Service will endeavor to use current scientific information, research, technologies, and results of inventory, monitoring, and coordination to determine appropriate local and regional management strategies that will enhance or restore Greater Sage-Grouse habitats.
- For BLM-administered lands, all activities and uses within Greater Sage-Grouse habitats will conform to existing land health standards. Standards and guidelines (S&G) for livestock grazing and other programs that have developed guidelines will be applicable to all alternatives for BLM lands.
- The BLM and Forest Service will consult with Indian tribes to identify sites, areas, and objects important to their cultural and religious heritage within Greater Sage-Grouse habitats.
- The BLM and Forest Service will coordinate and communicate with state, local, and tribal governments to ensure that the BLM and Forest Service consider provisions of pertinent plans, seek to resolve inconsistencies between state, local, and tribal plans, and provide ample opportunities for state, local, and tribal governments to comment on the development of amendments or revisions.
- The BLM and Forest Service will develop vegetation management objectives, including objectives for managing noxious weeds and invasive species (including identification of desired future condition for specific areas), within Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.
- The LUP amendments will be based on the principles of Adaptive Management.
- Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenarios and planning for Fluid Minerals will follow the BLM Handbook H-1624-1 and current fluid minerals manual guidance for fluid mineral (oil and gas and coalbed methane) and geothermal resources. For National Forest System Lands, the Forest Service will use applicable and relevant policy and procedures.
- The RMP and LRMP amendments will be developed using an interdisciplinary approach to prepare reasonable foreseeable development scenarios, identify alternatives, and analyze resource impacts, including cumulative impacts to natural and cultural resources and the social and economic environment.

Additional planning issues were identified during the two public scoping periods and from information gathered in analyzing the existing management situation in the planning area. Based on the input of the public, other government agencies, and the BLM and its cooperators, issues were identified for the following resource areas:

Air Quality

Impacts from climate change should be included in the analysis of the RMP and LRMP amendments.

General (Process/Policy)

The BLM should consider all instruction memorandums (IM) related to Greater Sage-Grouse in the development of the RMP amendments, such as Wyoming IM 2010-022 (addresses fences and wind energy structures), IM 2010-071 (addresses sage-grouse management considerations for energy development), WO IM 2012-044 (BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy), and WY IM 2012-019 (Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Policy on Wyoming BLM Lands). Use the best available science and specific documents in the development of the LUP amendments, such as BLM/Forest Service policy documents, other state and federal environmental policies, and scientific journal articles. Include terminology definitions, such as “disruptive activity” and “suitable habitat.” Consider a range of management approaches for sage-grouse habitat protection. Follow the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) regulations and BLM/Forest Service policy in developing the LUP amendments and how the Wyoming planning effort will be incorporated at the regional level.

Lands and Realty

Consider how the Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse management would impact management or construction of rights-of-way (ROW) including corridors, and how power lines and corridors could impact sage-grouse.

Livestock Grazing

Consider both the continuation and elimination of livestock grazing practices. Include the impacts of livestock grazing on sage-grouse habitat, such as the spread of weeds, soil loss, and range deterioration. Coordinate with livestock grazing permittees in the LUP amendment process and incorporate livestock grazing management as an important part of the LUP amendments. In addition, water, riparian, and wetland comments associated with livestock grazing were submitted.

Minerals and Energy

Minerals and energy issues include considering the benefits and detriments to sage-grouse from wind and conventional energy development on BLM-administered lands and National Forest System Lands. Analyze impacts from mineral development on sage-grouse and their habitat, such as lek and nest abandonment, habitat fragmentation, and overall habitat loss, wind energy development in Wyoming and the efforts operators are making to support sage-grouse and associated habitat. Consider the effects the Wyoming sage-grouse policy could have on mineral development, such as allowing for valid existing rights for lease development, buffer distances, reclamation requirements, well density, and regulations on development in non-core areas. Additional issues were about management on split estate lands, cumulative impacts of development on sage-grouse habitat, particularly for oil and gas, and impacts of wind development, as well as specific implementation-level recommendations. There were concerns with how the BLM and Forest Service will manage unique energy production techniques including, but not limited to, oil shale extraction and wind development in sage-grouse habitat. Development in the Powder River and Hoback Basins were of particular concern.

Recreation

Consider the level of recreation that could be allowed to reduce or prevent impacts to sage-grouse habitat. Managing recreation use is not a major component of the new Wyoming sage-grouse management policy. Through the regulation of recreation special use permits, and the implementation of transportation management plans, some recreation uses may be more regulated in sage-grouse habitats than previous management prescriptions. However, this will not account for potential disturbances to breeding or nesting birds, since most recreation activities are not restricted by timing limitations.

Socioeconomic

Consider the adverse economic impacts from the Wyoming sage-grouse management policy and the need for socioeconomic analysis of the impacts from the policy.

Special Management Area Designations

Core areas could be considered for protection through designations of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and the RMP amendments should consider ACECs to protect sage-grouse, specifically within the Pinedale Field Office.

Special Status Species (Including Greater Sage-Grouse)

Issues regarding special status species primarily addressed sage-grouse and sage-grouse core areas. Focusing sage-grouse management on only core habitat areas could lessen protections in general habitat, which could be detrimental to the species. Management should address all threats to sage-grouse, including predation by other species. Use valid sage-grouse data and ensure that sufficient data has been collected to make management decisions within the LUP Amendments. Try to find a balance of managing sage-grouse populations effectively while much of BLM-administered lands and National Forest System Lands are already leased for mineral development.

Greater buffer distances, additional seasonal stipulations, and expansion or reduction of core areas are management actions that should be considered in the LUP amendments. Reasons for sage-grouse population declines and threats to the species, including intensive resource uses and development, human disturbance, predation, habitat fragmentation, and habitat loss are issues to be included in the document. Consideration of specific sage-grouse habitat requirements, such as migration corridors and lek, nesting, winter, and brood-rearing habitat, were described and addressed in the comments.

Other concerns included management recommendations for particular components of habitat as well as discussion of specific potential habitat areas. Areas include: Thunder Basin National Grassland; Upper Snake River Basin; Greys River Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest; Upper Green River core population and the Gros Ventre River Valley; Bacon Ridge/Breakneck Flats sage-grouse winter use areas; Upper Green River Core population and the Hoback Basin; connectivity of sagebrush habitats along the Wyoming-Idaho State line near Crow, Stump, and Spring Creeks; and habitat connectivity with occupied habitat in Star Valley and Southeast Idaho.

Travel and Access Management

Consider vehicle use and roads within core habitat, as well as potential for reduced access to BLM and Forest Service lands from the new management for sage-grouse.

Vegetation

Consider vegetation treatments and the benefits of those treatments on sagebrush habitat, and the threat of cheatgrass and other invasive species on sagebrush habitat.

Wildland Fire Management

Wildland Fire (planned and unplanned) may be considered for use in enhancing sagebrush habitat.

Wildlife and Fisheries

Consider the health and management of sagebrush habitat, restoration of sagebrush and opportunities to restore degraded sage-grouse habitat as potential mitigation measures for project proponents, and current and future effectiveness of the restoration of sagebrush habitat due to low precipitation, cheatgrass invasion, and wildland fire. Consider the current conditions of sagebrush habitat and threats to the health of the habitat, such as fragmentation from mineral development and other uses, livestock grazing, and the proliferation of invasive species. Address the management of the entire sagebrush ecosystem, as other sagebrush obligate species' populations are also in decline. Recommendations included specific design features to protect sage-grouse from predators. In addition, comments were received on potential conflicts between prairie dog and Greater Sage-Grouse management.

The full range of issues raised during the public scoping period can be viewed in the Wyoming Sage-grouse RMP Amendments Scoping Report and the National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy Land Use Plan Amendments and Environmental Impact Statements Scoping Summary Report.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

The BLM Wyoming State Office extended cooperating agency status to government entities and agencies throughout the 17-county planning area. The following is a list of the cooperating agencies that have actively attended the cooperators meetings leading to the development of the draft LUP amendments and EIS.

- City of Laramie
- City of Rawlins
- City of Rock Springs
- Coalition of Local Governments
- Crook County
- Fremont County
- The Governor's Office
- Lincoln County
- Little Snake River Conservation District
- Medicine Bow Conservation District
- Representative Lummis' Office
- Rock Springs Grazing Association
- Saratoga Encampment Rawlins Conservation District
- Senator Barrasso's Office
- Senator Enzi's Office
- South Goshen Conservation District
- Sublette County Commissioners
- Sublette County Conservation District
- Sweetwater County
- Sweetwater County Conservation District
- Uinta County
- Uinta County Conservation District
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of Agriculture: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

- Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality
- Wyoming Department of Agriculture
- Wyoming Game and Fish Department
- Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office

The cooperating agencies were formally invited to participate in developing the alternatives and to provide data and other information relative to their disciplines. The BLM held meetings with the cooperating agencies on July 19 and July 20, 2010, and October 6, 2010, concerning the approach to the planning process and development of alternatives. The cooperating agencies were invited to work with the BLM interdisciplinary team in developing the alternatives during the weeks of October 25–28, 2010, November 30–December 2, 2010, and March 31, 2011; and again to develop and finalize the preferred alternative on September 27, 2011.

The draft alternatives were revised in 2012 due to the release of the BLM National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy. The cooperating agencies were invited to work with BLM and Forest Service in additional alternative development meetings on June 14, 2012 and January 16, 2013. Cooperating agencies met with the BLM and Forest Service on June 3–4, 2013 to formulate the preferred alternative for the draft LUP amendments.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives Development Process

The BLM and Forest Service complied with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) implementing regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §1500 in the development of alternatives for this draft EIS, including seeking public input and analyzing a reasonable range of alternatives. In developing alternatives, the BLM and Forest Service also took into consideration management options for planning decisions in the RMPs and LRMPs for the planning area.

The existing BLM RMPs and Forest Service LRMPs served as the foundation for the No Action Alternative. In some cases, the decisions in the existing RMPs and LRMPs were found to be sufficient for Greater Sage-Grouse protection; in these instances, there was limited need to develop alternative management prescriptions. For a few of the actions, management prescriptions are the same across all action alternatives or may reflect only a decision to implement or not implement an action. Where these actions are the same across all of the action alternatives, they have been included in the alternative tables to provide a complete picture of the management prescriptions for the planning area.

Public input received during the scoping process was considered to ensure that all issues and concerns were addressed, as appropriate, in developing the management alternatives. The scoping process and opportunities for future public and agency involvement are summarized in Chapter 5.

Development of the alternatives began with BLM Wyoming's Instruction Memorandum (IM) 2010-012, IM 2012-019, and BLM WO IM 2012-044 for Wyoming statewide and national management of Greater Sage-Grouse. A "Citizens Proposed Conservation" alternative was submitted during the second scoping period which was incorporated as a unique management alternative. The BLM, Forest Service, and Cooperating Agencies participated in drafting Alternatives A, D and E. Alternative B is based on the National Technical Team Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures (IM 2012-044) and Alternative C, the Citizens Proposed Conservation alternative, is based upon comments received as a result of the December 2011 NOI. The Cooperating agencies reviewed and provided input into the development of the draft alternatives prior to development and selection of the Preferred Alternative. Among all the alternatives, Alternative E, the Preferred Alternative, was developed last. The BLM's NEPA handbook (H

1790-1) requires the BLM to identify a preferred alternative in the Draft RMP/EIS. Identification of the preferred alternative is not a final agency decision but instead an indication of the agency's preliminary preference that reflects the best combination of decisions to achieve BLM goals and policies, meets the purpose and need, addresses the key planning issues, and considers the recommendations of cooperating agencies and BLM specialists.

Many of the decisions from the existing RMPs and LRMPs have been implemented. In some cases, implementation of these decisions established valid existing rights or other obligations that are important considerations in preparing the LUP amendments. For example, many of the oil and gas resources in the planning area are leased. The presence of these valid existing rights influences, and sometimes limits, management choices. Specific to the fluid minerals program, the alternatives in this draft EIS address the availability and allocation of lands for future oil and gas leasing, potential lease stipulations, and additional mitigation to be considered and applied during the Application for Permit to Drill (APD) process.

Summary Description of the Management Alternatives

Alternative A (No Action Alternative—Continuation of Existing Management)

Alternative A (No Action Alternative) is defined as a continuation of the present course of management for sage-grouse within each of the BLM and Forest Service offices. Ongoing programs initiated under existing legislation, regulations and the existing LUPs would continue, even as new plans are developed or new planning efforts are being conducted with the planning area. Alternative A describes a subset of the current resource and land use management direction in the planning area that is proposed to be revised or supplemented by some or all of the action alternatives. This management may differ between BLM and Forest Service offices. Alternative A and its impact analysis represent the baseline to which the other management alternatives and their associated analyses are compared. Alternative A uses the terms "Greater Sage-Grouse core habitat" or "core areas" as described in WY EO 2011-5 and defined in this document's Glossary as habitat that is most important for Greater Sage-Grouse. Management actions proposed under the Alternative A are presented in Table 2-1 below.

Alternative B

Alternative B is based on the conservation measures developed by the NTT planning effort in IM-2012-044. As directed in the IM, the conservation measures developed by the NTT must be considered and analyzed, as appropriate, through the land use planning process and NEPA by all BLM state and field offices that contain occupied Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. Under this alternative, a surface disturbance cap of 3% per 640 acres is considered within sage-grouse priority habitat. In areas where the disturbance cap has been met by the project proponent, the BLM/Forest Service should consider opportunities for reclamation or removal of surface disturbing features that are no longer in use in order to reduce the current disturbance before further projects are permitted. This alternative considers incorporating a light grazing strategy, utilizing a 20-30% forage allocation for livestock allotments not meeting standards due to livestock grazing in sage-grouse priority habitat. Alternative B uses the term "Greater Sage-Grouse priority habitat" as described in IM 2012-044 and defined in this document's Glossary. Priority habitat is the same as core habitat and the terms are used interchangeably among the alternatives, depending on the source of the Alternatives. Management actions proposed under Alternative B are presented in Table 2-1 below. Alternative B is not strictly based on the conservation measures developed by the NTT planning effort. In the *Western Watersheds Project v. U.S. Department of Interior*, the Court remanded the Pinedale RMP decision to the BLM, without vacating the RMP, to allow the BLM to remedy the FLPMA and NEPA defects identified by the Court with respect to the Pinedale RMP and EIS. These remedies can be found in Alternative B.

Alternative C

Alternative C is based on the citizen groups recommended alternative. This alternative emphasizes improvement and protection of habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse and is applied to all occupied Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. Alternative C would limit commodity development in areas of occupied Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, and would close or designate portions of the planning area to some land uses. Under this alternative, a surface disturbance cap of 3% per 640 acres is considered within sage-grouse priority habitat. This alternative considers closing priority sage-grouse habitat to livestock grazing. Alternative C uses the term “Greater Sage-Grouse priority habitat” as described in IM 2012-044 and defined in this document’s Glossary. Priority habitat is the same as core habitat and the terms are used interchangeably among the alternatives, depending on the source of the Alternatives. Management actions proposed under Alternative C are presented in Table 2-1.

Alternative D

Alternative D provides opportunities to use and develop the planning area while providing protection of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat based on scoping comments and input from the Cooperating Agencies involved in the alternatives development process. This alternative increases the potential for development and resource use, with reduced Greater Sage-Grouse habitat protections. Protective measure would be applied to Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. Under this alternative, a surface disturbance cap of 9% per 640 acres is considered within sage-grouse core habitat. Alternative D uses the terms “Greater Sage-Grouse core habitat” or “core areas” as described in WY EO 2011-5 and defined in this document’s Glossary. Management actions proposed under Alternative D are presented in Table 2-1.

Alternative E (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative E incorporates the guidance from BLM IM WY-2010-012, the Wyoming Governor’s Executive Order (WY EO 2011-05) and additional management based on the NTT recommendations. This alternative emphasizes management of sage-grouse seasonal habitats and maintaining habitat connectivity to support population objectives set by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). This guidance is consistent with guidelines provided in the Governor’s Sage-Grouse Implementation Team’s Core Population Area strategy and the WY EO 2011-05. Under this alternative, a surface disturbance cap of 5% per 640 acres is considered within sage-grouse core habitat. Alternative E uses the terms “Greater Sage-Grouse core habitat” or “core areas” as well as “priority habitat” if the action is the same as Alternatives B or C. Management actions proposed under Alternative E are presented in Table 2-1.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The purpose of the analysis of environmental consequences is to determine the potential for significant impact of the “federal action” on the “human environment.” The CEQ regulations for implementing the NEPA states that the “human environment” shall be interpreted comprehensively to include the natural and physical environment, and the relationship of people with that environment (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §1508.14). The “federal action” is the BLM’s or the U.S. Forest Service’s (Forest Service) selection of a RMP, and a land and resource management plan (LRMP) amendment on which future land use actions will be based.

The environmental consequences that could result from implementation of the management actions included in the five management alternatives are described in Chapter 4 and are summarized and compared in Table 2-6, Comparative Summary of Impacts. These potential environmental consequences are discussed for each resource program, providing a comprehensive analysis of environmental effects. The analysis identifies impacts that may enhance or improve a resource as a result of management

actions, as well as those impacts that have the potential to impair a resource. The analysis of the alternatives is focused on identifying the types of impacts anticipated to occur and estimating their potential intensity. The analysis is organized by resource program and discloses the potential impacts on each resource program from implementing each of the proposed alternatives. The analysis also includes an assessment of cumulative effects, which are defined as the impacts that result from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions.