

APPENDIX J— GREATER SAGE-GROUSE WILDFIRE AND INVASIVE SPECIES HABITAT ASSESSMENT

J.1 GREATER SAGE-GROUSE WILDLAND FIRE AND INVASIVE SPECIES ASSESSMENT

The process that is identified here is a suggestion for a consistent approach in conducting an assessment of the Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and wildfire threat at the local planning unit level. Variations to this approach may be made based on interdisciplinary team input and other priorities identified in this plan.

This collaborative analysis is intended to ensure that actions will be beneficial for long-term enhancement and protection of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

This four step process will influence the determination of appropriateness and resulting character of projects to protect, maintain, and enhance Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. This process will also identify “priority,” or “focus,” areas which spatially define priorities within the planning area for purposes of wildland fire and invasive species. Subsequent program planning and resource management planning should be developed with and incorporate the results of this analysis in coordination with other priorities identified in this plan. Initiation and/or completion of project level National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) for actions stemming from this assessment will increase certainty of implementation and effectiveness.

This same type of process should be developed at the regional level by both the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that would focus on a prioritized process to: 1) ensure completion and assessment updates of the local unit level Wildland Fire and Invasive Species Assessments prior to December 2014; and 2) outline a process in which funding is prioritized and allocated by need.

Step 1: Characterization of Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

Relationship to the Larger Scale Setting

- How does the planning unit lie within the context of the Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?

Location

- Describe the relationship of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat with the planning unit.

Analysis Area Setting and Spatial Boundary

- Brief description of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, specifically in terms of acreage and the selection of the analysis area.
- Analysis area should be large enough to provide buffers around Greater Sage-Grouse habitat to effectively address fire hazard, risk to the habitat, and restoration opportunities.

Step 2: Issues and Key Questions

Fire and Fuels Issue

- In coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), identify where fire is a major threat to Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and where fire may help enhance the habitat in the local planning area. In a brief paragraph, summarize the issues related to wildland fire.

Key Questions

Fire Management

1. Where are the priority fire management areas (spatially defined polygons) having the highest need for preparedness and suppression action?
2. Where is the greatest wildfire risk, considering trends in fire occurrence, fuel conditions, and highly valued Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?
3. Where will fire suppression resources be most successful to mitigate the risk and protect Greater Sage-Grouse habitats?
4. Where do opportunities exist that could enhance or improve suppression capability in important Greater Sage-Grouse habitats?
 - a. For example, increased water availability through installation of heli wells or stock tanks.
 - b. Decreased response time through pre-positioned resources or remote stations.
5. Where should wildfire be managed to achieve land use plan (LUP) objectives for improving or restoring Greater Sage-Grouse habitat (old decadent sagebrush/juniper encroachment)?
6. How can fire management be coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries to reduce risk or to improve Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?

Fuels Management

1. Where are the priority fuel management areas (spatially defined treatment opportunity areas which consider fire risk, fuels conditions, and highly valued Greater Sage-Grouse habitat)?
2. Based on fire risk to important Greater Sage-Grouse habitats, what types of fuels treatments should be implemented that will reduce the risk? Where should fuels treatments be prioritized, and what is the amount of treatment acres needed for long-term enhancement and protection of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?
3. Based on opportunities for fire to improve/restore Greater Sage-Grouse habitats, what types of fuels treatments should be implemented that will increase ability to allow fire? Where should fuels treatments be prioritized, and what amount of treatment is needed for long-term enhancement and protection of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?
4. Are there opportunities to utilize a coordinated approach across jurisdictional boundaries?
 - a. Fuel reduction techniques include, but are not limited to: grazing, prescribed fire, chemical, biological and mechanical treatments.
5. Are there areas where fuel treatments help restore Greater Sage-Grouse habitat as well as reduce risk?

Restoration

1. Are there opportunities for restoration treatments to protect, enhance or maintain Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?

2. Where will post-fire restoration be most successful?

Step 3: Current Conditions

The purpose of this step is to develop information relevant to the issues and key questions identified in Step 2.

Biological Features

Fire and Fuels

- Has fire played a role in shaping the vegetation?
- Description should include dominant cover types, plant associations, and seral stages to identify the condition of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.
- What has been the impact of fire exclusion (increased conifer encroachment)?
- What is the current extent of annual grasses, their effect on fire frequency/severity/size, and implications for fire suppression?
- What are the trends related to plant succession and fire regimes?

Fuels Management

- Describe current fuels management within the planning area.

Fire Management

- Describe fire occurrence trends.
- Describe suppression capabilities.

Restoration

- Describe the spatial depiction of invasive species occurrence.

Methodology

- What are the analysis methods to be utilized and analysis assumptions?

Use of best available Science

- Describe data sets used, such as the Large Fire Simulator (FSIM) layer, local data, etc.
- What are the elements of science used?

Fire Risk

Step 4: Interpretation and Recommendations

In this section, consider the analysis in Section 3. Interpret, refine and recommend temporal, spatial, and quantifiable outcomes that are prioritized based on need (This can also be correlated to the Vegetation Dynamics Development Tool [VDDT] modeling as a comparison and refine the results.). Include broad statements related to each question, including how you got to the results.

- There is a need for XXXX amount of restoration treatments.
- There is a need for XXXX amount of fuel treatments.
- There is a need to prioritize XXXX Greater Sage-Grouse habitats for aggressive initial attack that were identified at highest risk from losing key habitat components.

- To enhance initial attack capabilities, there is a need to install XXXX or staff XXXX remote station during XXXX timeframe or XXXX conditions.

Fire Management

1. Identify priority areas for fire suppression resources to protect Greater Sage-Grouse habitats that are at greatest risk.
 - Include spatially defined priority areas, tables, maps, or appropriate information.
2. Identify opportunities to enhance or improve suppression capability.
 - Include tables, maps, or appropriate information.
3. Identify areas where wildfires can be managed to achieve LUP objectives.
 - Include tables, maps, or appropriate information.

Fuels Management

1. Identify, based on fire risk, fuel conditions and burn probability, fuels treatment priority areas and the level of treatment (acres) needed for long-term enhancement and protection of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.
 - Include spatially defined priority areas, tables, maps, or appropriate information.
 - Proposed fuels treatments should be delineated by type, such as:
 - i. Linear fuel breaks along roads
 - ii. Other linear fuel breaks to create anchor points
 - iii. Prescribed burning
 - iv. Mechanical conifer removal
 - v. Other mechanical, biological or chemical treatment
2. Identify where fuel treatments would increase the ability to use fire to improve/enhance Greater Sage-Grouse habitat?
 - Include tables, maps, or appropriate information.
3. Identify coordination between XXXX and XXXX to facilitate the planning and implementation for fuels treatments.
 - Include tables, maps, or appropriate information.

Restoration

1. Identify restoration treatments needed to protect, enhance or maintain Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.
 - Include tables, maps, or appropriate information.
2. Identify locations where post-fire restoration treatments should be focused.
 - Include tables, maps, or appropriate information.

Annual Treatment Needs

1. Based on the information above and within the planning area, what are the annual needs based on the key questions and summary statements?

Annual Treatment Abilities

1. Putting Greater Sage-Grouse habitat protection and enhancement into perspective with other high valued resources and important land management goals, how does the annual need relate to capabilities?
2. What are the realistic annual expectations in fire management, fuels management, and restoration for the next five years?