DECISION RECORD
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-ID-B020-2009-0005-EA
Bruneau Fuel Breaks Project
Bureau of Land Management - Bruneau Field Office (BFO)

Introduction: The southern portion of the Bruneau Field Office was identified, by the Oregon/Idaho/Nevada Cooperative Shrub-Steppe Restoration Partnership and BLM's Healthy Land Initiative Conservation Policy Team (USDI 2010[1]), as being in a high risk category for large-scale wildfire. The project area is on the northern edge of the stronghold for sage-grouse and provides habitat for many wildlife species, including sagebrush obligates. Depending on weather, fuel conditions, availability of firefighting resources, and other fire starts in relation to public safety and property protection, wildfires can affect hundreds of thousands of acres in a single fire season. The importance of the project area habitat, the area's remoteness, and the potential for few available resources and long firefighter response times necessitate that strategic measures be undertaken before wildfires occur.

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would develop a network of fuel breaks to restore and maintain sage-grouse habitat and enhance firefighting capability. A total of approximately 185 roadside miles, within the 420,391 acre project area (PA), was evaluated based on vegetation community and plant growth characteristics, and suitability of a road for firefighting and heavy equipment access. Of those road miles, 128 were identified for development or maintenance of fuel breaks. Fuel breaks would be created and maintained using a combination of treatments, including mowing roadside shrubs, application of BLM-approved herbicides, and rangeland seeding (Table 1). This action is far less detrimental to sage-grouse compared to the long-term habitat loss from fire and impacts from suppression actions.

The annual treatment target would be 50 to 75 miles of roadsides. The proposed action may take up to five years to implement. Maintenance of mowed fuel breaks would be required 7-10 years after initial treatment. Maintenance needs of greenstrips would be identified through monitoring.

Table 1 - Proposed action: Miles of roadsides to be treated and the number of acres impacted.

Treatment Type	**Proposed Action**
Mowing	75 Miles/909 Acres
Greenstrip Maintenance	42 Miles/1,527 Acres
New Greenstrip	11 Miles/400 Acres
Total Miles/Acres	128 Miles/2,836 Acres

[1] USDI BLM. 2010. Gunnison and Greater Sage-grouse Management Considerations for Energy Development (Supplement to *National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy*). Instruction Memorandum IM 2010-071, Washington Office BLM, Washington, D.C.

Decision: Having considered a full range of alternatives and associated impacts, it is my final decision to implement the activities and actions as described in Alternative B (Proposed Action) of DOI-BLM-ID-B020-2009-0005-EA (Identified as ID-120-2009-EA-8 during scoping) for 128 miles of fuel breaks within the BFO.

Rationale and Authority: Implementing the proposed action effectively addresses the purpose and need identified in this EA, which is to protect and maintain Greater sage-grouse habitat and enhance firefighter safety and capability. Effects of the project on sage-grouse and other wildlife in the PA would be negligible and do not represent any significant impacts to the human environment (BLM FONSI, 04/29/2013).

The proposed action implements the intent of the 1983 Bruneau Management Framework Plan (MFP); Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (ISAC 2006); BLM Instruction Memorandum (IM) 2011-138, Sage-Grouse Conservation Related to Wildfire and Fuels Management (2010); BLM IM 2012-043, Greater Sage-Grouse Interim Management Policies and Procedures (2011); Owyhee County Sage-grouse Local Working Group's Plan (LWG 2004); the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended and Executive Order 13186; National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979; and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, as amended; American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1979 (AIRFA); Executive Order 13007-Indian Sacred Sites; and Southwestern Idaho BLM Fire Management Plan (2011). Direction contained in these documents relevant to the proposed action includes the following:

1) Federally recognized tribal governments and Native American individuals, whose traditional uses of public land might be affected by a proposed action, have been consulted and given sufficient opportunity to contribute to the decision (BLM Manual Handbook H-8120-1).
2) The decision maker has given tribal concerns proper consideration (BLM Manual Handbook H-8120-1).
3) Manage sensitive species habitats to maintain existing or potential populations (MFP 1983, WL-2).
4) Reduce the risk, incidence, and extent of wildfires within Sage-grouse Planning Areas (ISAC 2006, 4-15).
5) Strategically place pretreated strips/areas (e.g., mowing, herbicide application, strictly managed grazing strip, etc.) to aid in controlling wildfire should wildfire occur near critical habitats (ISAC 2006, 4-18).
6) Strategically place and maintain pretreated strips/areas (e.g., mowing, herbicide, and strictly managed grazed strips) to aid in controlling wildfire should wildfire occur near key habitat or important restoration areas (such as where investments in restoration have already been made) (IM 2011-138).
7) Where applicable, design fuels treatment objectives to protect existing sagebrush ecosystems, modify fire behavior, restore native plants, and create landscape patterns which most benefit sage-grouse habitat (BLM IM 2011-138).
8) Design vegetation treatments in areas of high fire frequency to facilitate firefighter safety, reduce the risk of extreme fire behavior, and reduce the risk and rate of fire spread to key and restoration habitats (BLM IM 2011-138).
9) Where appropriate, ensure that treatments (strips) are configured in a manner that promotes use by sage-grouse (BLM IM 2011-138).

10) Where applicable, incorporate roads and natural fuel breaks into fuel break designs (BLM IM 2011-138).
11) Emphasize the use of native plant species, recognizing that non-native species may be necessary depending on the availability of native seed and prevailing site conditions (BLM IM 2011-138).
12) Ensure proposed sagebrush treatments are planned with interdisciplinary input from BLM and/or state wildlife agency biologists, and that treatment acreage is conservative in the context of surrounding sage-grouse seasonal habitats and landscape (BLM IM 2011-138).
13) Threatened, endangered, and sensitive species (including sage-grouse) and associated habitats will continue to be a high natural resource priority for National and Geographic Multi-Agency Coordination Groups, whose purpose is to manage and prioritize wildland fire operations on a national and geographic area scope when fire management resource shortages are probable (BLM IM 2012-043).
14) Greater Sage-Grouse protection and habitat enhancement is a high priority for the fire management program. A full range of fire management activities and options will be utilized to sustain healthy ecosystems (including Greater Sage-Grouse habitats) within acceptable risk levels. Local agency administrators and resource advisors will convey protection priorities to incident commanders (BLM IM 2012-043).
15) Comply with the policies established in WO-IM-2011-138 (Sage-Grouse Conservation Related to Wildland Fire and Fuels Management) or successor guidance, regarding suppression operations and fuels management activities (BLM IM 2012-043).
16) Develop greenstrips (strips of fire-resistant vegetation planted to slow wildfires) and other fuel breaks (LWG 2004).
17) The project area is a high priority for wildfire suppression and emergency stabilization/restoration efforts and moderate priority for hazardous fuels treatments (Southwestern Idaho BLM Fire Management Plan 2011b).
18) Avoiding or minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse impacts on migratory bird resources when conducting agency actions (Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended and Executive Order 13186).
19) Restore and enhance the habitat of migratory birds, as practicable (Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended and Executive Order 13186).
20) Prevent or abate the pollution or detrimental alteration of the environment for the benefit of migratory birds, as practicable (Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended and Executive Order 13186).
21) Ensure that environmental analyses of Federal actions required by the NEPA or other established environmental review processes evaluate the effects of actions and agency plans on migratory birds, with emphasis on species of concern (Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended and Executive Order 13186).

Public Involvement: A scoping package was sent to all interested parties on November 5, 2008. The package provided a general description of the proposed action, design criteria, and map showing the project area's outline. Comments were received from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), Western Watersheds Project (WWP), and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. A field tour was conducted to discuss resource issues "on the ground" on May 9, 2009; attendees were IDFG and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. A separate field tour was attended by BLM personnel and a representative from WWP on June 26, 2009. Potential relevant issues from comments received include:

- Mowing along roads could cause palatable vegetation growth that would attract livestock and pose a hazard to motorists.
- Fuel break development and maintenance could result in:
    - Expansion of cheatgrass and noxious weeds

- Impacts to sagebrush-obligate species from altered habitat
- Impacts to sage-grouse including habitat fragmentation, lek disturbance, and habitat loss

Appeal: Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the authorized officer at the Bureau of Land Management Bruneau Field Office, 3948 Development Avenue, Boise, Idaho 83705. The appeal shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St. Suite 300, Arlington, Virginia 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the authorized officer.

To file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), it must accompany your notice of appeal and must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

(1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,

(2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,

(3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and

(4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the authorized officer.

A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons, and all pertinent documents must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the *Office of the Solicitor, Field Solicitor-U.S. Department of the Interior, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Avenue, Suite 400, Boise, Idaho 83706*, upon filing the document with the authorized officer and/or IBLA.

If you have any questions regarding this decision, or your appeal rights, please contact me at (208) 384-3331.

__/s/ *Arnold L. Pike*_____ __4/29/2013_____

Arnold L. Pike Date
Bruneau Field Office Manager