

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

**Decision Record
DOI-BLM-UT-W010-2016-0004-DNA
May 2016**

**Government Creek Greater Sage-Grouse
Habitat Improvement Project**

Location: Tooele County, Utah; Township 8 and 9 South,
Range 7 and 8 West, various sections, Salt Lake Meridian.

Applicant/Address: Not Applicable.

Salt Lake Field Office
2370 South Decker Lake Blvd
West Valley City, Utah 84119
Phone: (801) 977-4300
Fax: (801) 977-4397



DECISION RECORD

Government Creek Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Project Determination of NEPA Adequacy

Description of Selected Action

It is my decision to implement the Government Creek Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Project (#RA43) as identified in the Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) Worksheet DOI-BLM-UT-W010-2016-0004-DNA. This decision authorizes vegetation treatments that will reduce key threats to greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) habitat for the Sheeprock population. Key threats to greater sage-grouse include conifer expansion, invasive species, and fire. Since 2004, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has done extensive juniper thinning treatments throughout the Government Creek area to reduce fire threat and restore ecosystem resiliency. Although these treatments have been successful, the benefit to greater sage-grouse has been indirect. The proposed action is designed to build upon previous treatments and provide direct benefit to greater sage-grouse by creating and expanding useable habitat that could be immediately occupied following treatment. To accomplish this, juniper trees left from previous bullhog treatments will either be masticated or lopped and scattered, depending on density and size. The proposed action will be implemented with the protective measures/considerations as identified below.

The entire treatment (footprint) is approximately 6,180 acres with implementation scheduled to begin in the summer of 2016. Some maintenance activities will be necessary over time to ensure that project objectives are sustained for the long term. The scheduled implementation will be subject to change due to weather, funding, and/or equipment related issues.

Approximately 5,800 acres of juniper encroached sagebrush were previously treated (mechanically shredded) and have been identified for re-entry (Enclosure 1). Original thinning specifications were based on tree canopy spacing which left a substantial amount of trees within sagebrush habitat. The proposed action will remove up to 95 percent of juniper trees within previously treated areas. However, some small pockets (approximately 1 to 15 acres in size) of trees and trees along drainages will be left intact. Additionally, approximately 380 acres of early-phase juniper encroachment will be lopped and scattered using hand crews.

Treated lands in need of seed will be planted with a diverse seed mixture (Enclosure 2) during the fall using rangeland drills or broadcast aerially. Where seed is applied aerially, mechanical seedbed preparation or cover treatment may be required. This may include the use of a chain-harrow or other similar implement.

The goals of this project are to: reduce fuel loading; improve, protect and expand habitat for greater sage-grouse; limit the expansion or dominance of juniper; and maintain or improve soil site stability, hydrologic function, biological integrity and ecosystem resiliency.

The objectives of the project include: 1) removing up to 100 percent of juniper encroaching into selected sagebrush habitats, and 2) increasing perennial native plant cover and diversity.

The proposed action is a collaborative effort between the BLM, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and private landowners to protect and enhance sagebrush habitat near the Government Creek greater sage-grouse lek. Approximately 6,180 acres have been identified for treatment on BLM-managed public lands.

Wildfire and loss of sagebrush habitat due to juniper encroachment is identified as a major threat to the greater sage-grouse in the Utah State Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan. Thus, proactively managing juniper to reduce fire threat and prevent loss of sagebrush is recommended as a conservation measure to meet sage-grouse habitat objectives. The entire project area occurs within the Sheeprocks Sage-Grouse Management Area as identified by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and classified by the BLM as a Priority Habitat Management Area. The Sheeprock population of greater sage-grouse is in jeopardy. Declining population trends over the past 8 years have left managers with little choice but to augment the Sheeprock greater sage-grouse population with translocated birds. Part of the process of stabilizing the population would be aggressive predator control and vegetation treatments to improve habitat. This project would contribute to the overall recovery and long term sustainability of the Sheeprock greater sage-grouse population.

Protective Measures/Considerations

Access

- Any new routes created during project work, by equipment and support vehicles, will be rehabilitated to prevent further use by off-highway vehicle users. Some areas may require the installation of signs stating 'closed to motorized vehicles' to prevent off-highway vehicle use until the evidence of the tracked or rubber tired pathways are obscured by vegetation cover.

Air Quality

- If project work is causing localized dust that is impeding vehicular traffic or visibility in the area, a water tender will be used to spray the road surface with water to improve visibility.

Cultural and Paleontological Resources

- Project layout and design will avoid cultural resources that are eligible for inclusion in the National Historic Register of Places. If undiscovered or previously unrecorded sites area found all activity will cease immediately and the authorized officer will be contacted.
- If paleontological resources are found, all project activity will cease and the authorized officer will be contacted immediately.

Fire and Fuels

- Follow all applicable Fuels Management Required Design Features from the Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment.
- A BLM wildlife biologist will provide training to fuels treatment personnel, including contractors, on the general biology of greater sage-grouse, habitat requirements, and how to identify local areas utilized by greater stage-grouse.
- Power-wash all vehicles and equipment involved in fuels management activities, prior to entering the area, to minimize the introduction of undesirable and/or invasive plant species.

Greater Sage-Grouse/Raptors/Migratory Birds

- The following seasonal restrictions and buffers apply for greater sage-grouse:
 - Avoid activities in winter habitat between November 15 and March 15.
 - Avoid activities in breeding (leks), nesting, and early brood-rearing habitat between February 15 and June 15.
 - Avoid activities in brood-rearing habitat between April 15 and August 15.
- Apply 0.5 mile buffer (no treatment) around sage-grouse strutting grounds (leks) between March 15 and June 15.

- Apply a 0.5 mile buffer (no treatment) to active raptor nest sites between March 1 and July 15 each year.
- Avoid activities during the migratory bird breeding season, typically between April 15 and July 15. However, dates may vary depending upon the species and current environmental conditions.

Livestock Grazing

- Rangelands that have been burned, reseeded or otherwise treated to alter vegetation composition will be closed to livestock grazing as follows; (1) burned rangelands, whether by wildfire or prescribed burning, will be ungrazed for a minimum of one complete growing season following the burn; (2) rangelands that have been reseeded or otherwise chemically or mechanically treated will be ungrazed for a minimum of two complete growing seasons. Rangelands that meet the criteria discussed above will be protected from grazing by avoidance, fencing, or a combination of the two. Any fencing installed will comply with the wildlife guidelines set forth in the Fencing BLM Manual Handbook H-1741-1 Dec. 1989 and be fitted with bird deflectors.
- A grazing program decision will be issued or letter of agreement will be entered into with the permittee to implement grazing deferral.

Noxious/Invasive Weeds

- Treated areas will be monitored for 5 years to detect noxious or invasive weeds that may be promoted due to the proposed activity.
- All equipment used on the project will be cleaned and free of any dirt and debris that could harbor weed seeds and be introduced into the project area. Likewise, all equipment will be checked and cleaned once again prior to leaving the project area.
- Project staging areas will be weed free and travel through weed infested areas will be avoided or minimized.
- To prevent conditions favoring weed establishment, reestablish vegetation on bare ground caused by project disturbance as soon as possible using either natural recovery or artificial techniques;

Special Status Species

- Apply a 100 meter buffer around active pygmy rabbit burrow complexes.

Wetlands/Riparian Zones

- Utah riparian policy states no new surface disturbing activities within 100 meters of riparian unless there are no alternatives, the disturbance can be mitigated, or will benefit and enhance riparian areas. If riparian vegetation is present within treatment areas, the Utah riparian policy will be followed to ensure the resource is not negatively impacted.

Wildlife

- Buffers will be placed around wildlife corridors and drainages.
- Include untreated areas for thermal cover usage by wildlife.

Public Involvement

The proposed action posted to the Bureau of Land Management's NEPA/Land Use Plan Register on January 25, 2016. Utah's Public Lands Policy Coordination Office was notified on January 25, 2016 and certified consultation letters were sent to the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, Skull Valley Band of the Goshute Tribe, Jemez Pueblo, Paiute Indian Tribe and the Ute Indian Tribe on March 18, 2016.

This project was developed and reviewed by the West Desert Area Resource Management group which represents stakeholders of both private and public lands in Utah's West Desert. This project is part of a larger proposal presented to the Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative Central Region team in January of 2015 and was prioritized as a high-priority project for funding and implementation.

Authorities

This project is authorized under Title I, Section 102 (8) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of October 21, 1976 (90 Stat. 2776 43 U.S.C. 1761).

Compliance and Monitoring

This project will be monitored internally by the BLM West Desert District Fuels and Salt Lake Field Office Wildlife programs. Multiple vegetation monitoring plots will be established and read within the project area. Plant cover, frequency, species richness and abundance will be recorded. Photos will be taken and a qualitative site condition assessment completed. Greater sage-grouse occupancy will also be assessed within the plots. Data will be collected prior to treatment and 1, 3, and 5 years post-treatment.

Plan Conformance and Consistency

The proposed action was determined to be in conformance with the Record of Decision for the Pony Express Resource Management Plan (1990), as amended by the Decision Record for the Salt Lake District Office Fire Management Plan (1998) Alternative 2-Proposed Action/Integrated Fire/Resource Management Plan page seven and eight. The Salt Lake District Office Fire Management Plan specifically mentions the action (treatment methods), and is consistent with the objectives identified above to emphasize greater use of vegetation management to meet resource management objectives. Furthermore, the proposed action conforms to Pony Express Resource Management Plan Wildlife Decision 12, which states "BLM will improve crucial habitat of present wildlife populations where conditions and trend indicate a decline of desirable plant communities."

Additionally, the proposed action was determined to be in conformance with the Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Great Basin Region, Including the Greater Sage-Grouse Sub-Regions of Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah (September 2015) and the Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (September 2015). See Attachment D in the Determination of NEPA Adequacy Worksheet for further information.

Alternatives Considered

The proposed methods and impacts have been analyzed under the 2006 Rockwell Hazardous Fuels Treatment Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-UT-020-2006-0030-EA) and the Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (DOI-BLM-UT-9100-2013-0002-EIS). The ecological sites, geographic, and resource conditions are sufficiently similar that comparable results post-treatment are expected. The alternative analyzed for the proposed action is based on the best available information. This action addressed environmental concerns, interests, and resource values. As stated in the DNA Worksheet at Section D.2, the alternatives identified in these documents remain appropriate for this proposed action. No other alternatives were considered or brought forward by the public.

Protest/Appeal Language

The decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. Public notification of this decision will be considered to have occurred on the date signed below. Within 30 days of this decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the authorized officer at the Bureau of Land Management, Salt Lake Field Office, 2370 South Decker Lake Boulevard, West Valley City, UT 84119. 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, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy Street, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the authorized officer. Instructions for filing an appeal are contained on the enclosed Form 1842-1 (Enclosure 3).

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

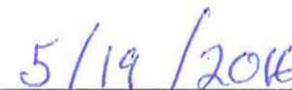
1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
3. The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the 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 adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the Office of the Regional Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 6201 Federal Building, 125 South State Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84138-1180, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the Authorized Officer and/or IBLA.



Salt Lake Field Office Manager

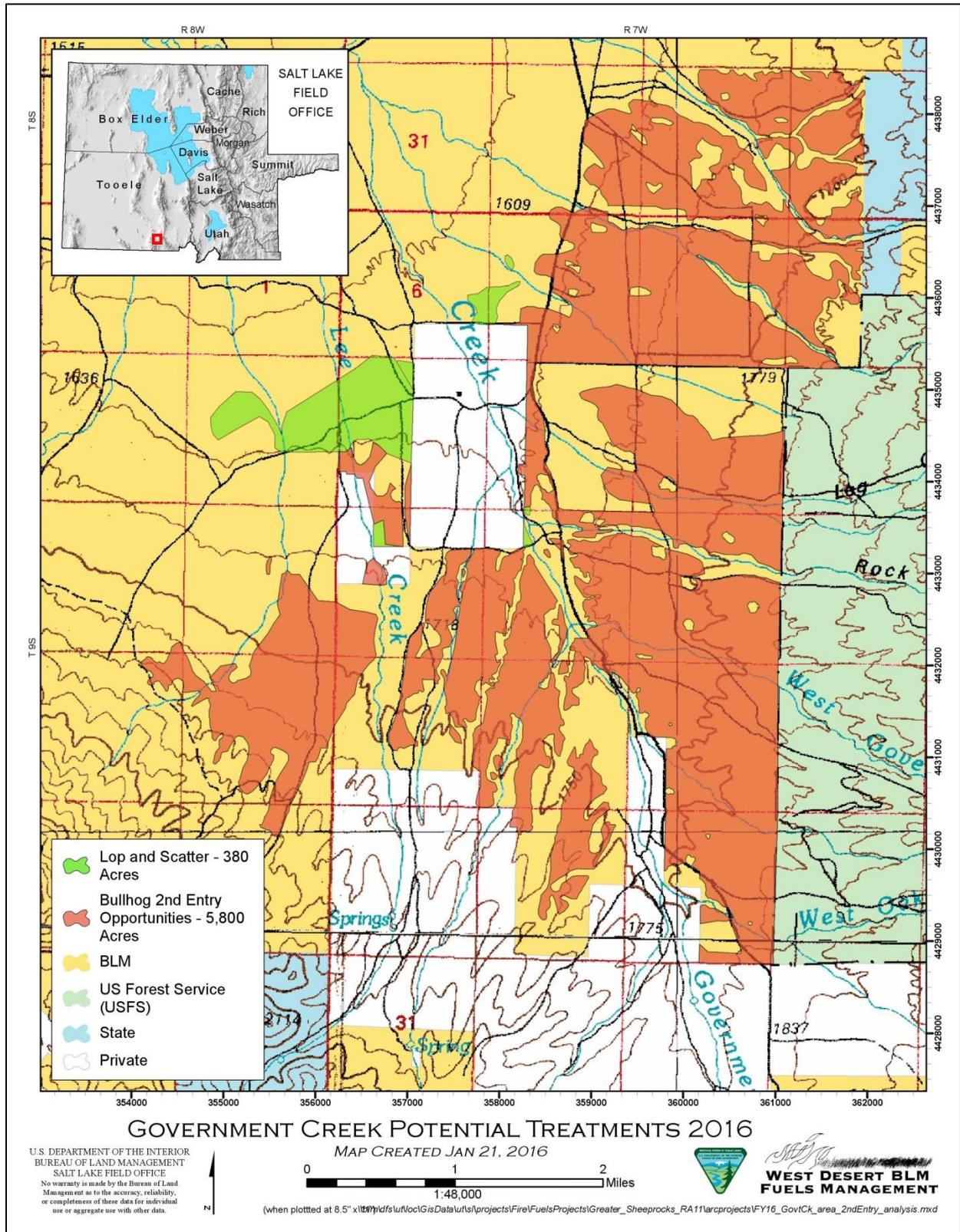


Date

Enclosures:

1. Map
2. Seed Mix Table
3. Appeal Form 1842-1

Enclosure 1, Map



Enclosure 2, Seed Mix Table

BLM Managed Lands Mastication Seed Mix

Growth Form	Origin	Common Name	Scientific Name
Forb	Native	Blue Flax	<i>Linum perenne</i>
Forb	Native	Munroe's globemallow	<i>Sphaeralcea munroana</i>
Forb	Native	Western Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Forb	Introduced	Sainfoin	<i>Onobrychis viciifolia</i>
Forb	Introduced	Small Burnet	<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>
Forb	Introduced	Alfalfa	<i>Medicago sativa</i>
Grass	Native	Canby Bluegrass	<i>Poa canbyi</i>
Grass	Native	Western wheatgrass	<i>Agropyron smithii</i>
Grass	Introduced	Russian Wildrye	<i>Elymus junceus</i>
Grass	Introduced	Siberian Wheatgrass	<i>Agropyron fragile</i>
Grass	Native	Bluebunch wheatgrass	<i>Agropyron spicatum</i>
Grass	Native	Snake River Wheatgrass	<i>Elymus wawawaiensis</i>
Grass	Native	Indian Ricegrass	<i>Oryzopsis hymenoides</i>
Grass	Native	Thickspike Wheatgrass	<i>Agropyron dasystachyum</i>
Grass	Native	Squirreltail	<i>Elymus elymoides</i>
Grass	Native	Great Basin Wildrye	<i>Leymus cinereus</i>

Seed mixes could be adjusted based on funding and availability.

Enclosure 3, Appeal Form