

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Hixon Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat ACEC Land Acquisition Four Rivers Field Office

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to acquire lands or interest in lands from willing sellers to augment the Hixon Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in accordance with the 1988 Cascade Resource Management Plan (RMP). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion in May 2016. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Need for and Purpose of Action

In western Idaho, sharp-tailed grouse are limited to a 75,000 acre area in the upper Weiser River drainage. Although the 12,000 acre ACEC has successfully protected a core area for the species, the bird's viability depends on maintaining suitable habitat, especially adjacent in areas to the ACEC. Habitat loss, caused by conversion of native habitats to crop production or housing, is one of the primary threats to long-term viability. Sharp-tailed grouse are a BLM Type 2 sensitive species; therefore, the BLM is required to take actions to ensure their survival. The 1988 Cascade RMP directs the BLM to "pursue acquisition of key habitat areas on State and private lands."

The objective is to increase BLM-managed sharp-tailed grouse habitat by acquiring key habitat in and around the ACEC.

Existing Condition

The ACEC and adjacent private lands are characterized by intact sagebrush and mountain shrub communities interspersed with perennial streams and meadows. These areas provide critical nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering areas for sharp-tailed grouse. Throughout the bird's western Idaho range, only nine active leks (mating activity areas) were identified in 2015. Five leks occur on or near private lands adjacent to the ACEC.

Since the ACEC was established, three methods have been used to protect adjacent sharp-tailed grouse habitat. A conservation easement was used to protect one parcel that remains in private ownership (535 acres); two parcels were purchased by the BLM (520 acres); and other lands were acquired by the BLM through an exchange with the State of Idaho. The area provides habitat for a variety of other species including greater sage-grouse (BLM Type 2 sensitive species); non-game birds, mammals, and reptiles; and big game. The ACEC includes portions of seven

livestock grazing allotments. Public lands in the ACEC provide hunting, camping, hiking, wildlife viewing, and other recreational opportunities.

Proposed Action

The BLM proposes working with willing landowners to acquire additional lands, either through fee title or conservation easement, to provide habitat for sharp-tailed grouse (see attached map) and ensure public access to the area. The terms of the landowner agreements would determine subsequent ownership and appropriate activities that could occur.

Preliminary Issues

Potential issues with the proposal include, but are not limited to the following:

- How would acquisitions or easements affect multiple use (e.g., grazing, mineral development)?
- How will BLM address fire danger?
- How would public ownership or easements affect local and county economies?

Decision to be Made

Upon completion of the EA, BLM's authorized officer would exercise their delegated authority to authorize or reject acquisitions or easements.

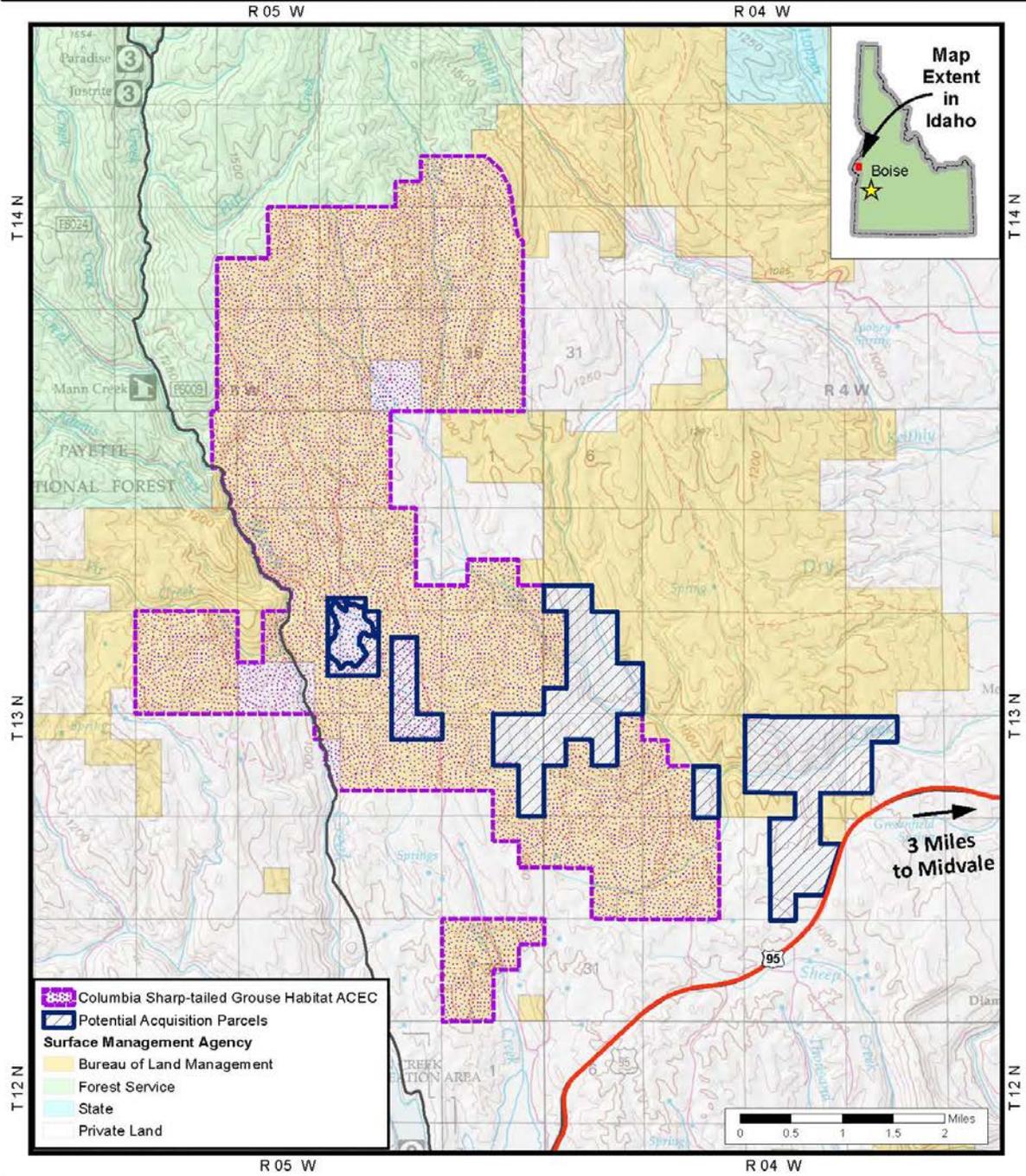
Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by April 18, 2016 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment - including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Jeremy Bluma, Realty Specialist, 3948 Development Avenue, Boise, ID 83705-5339, (208) 384-3348. Comments sent electronically should be sent to jbluma@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line.

**Potential Acquisition or Easement Parcels Adjacent to the
Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Area of Critical Environmental Concern**







U.S. Department of the Interior
 Bureau of Land Management, Idaho
 Boise District, Four Rivers Field Office
 Map date: April 01, 2016

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management. The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed. This map cannot be made Section 508 compliant. For help with its data or information, please contact the BLM Idaho State Office webmaster at (208) 373-4000.

R:\volgis\Projects_GISuser\FourRiversFO\ Lands\Hixon_ACEC\Sharp_tailed_Grouse_ACEC_Acquisitions.mxd