



February 3, 2022

From: Jesse Kolar
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To:
Pat Deibert
Acting National Sage-grouse Conservation Coordinator, BLM

In 2015, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released an Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment outlining management strategies for greater sage-grouse. The BLM manages 32,900 surface acres in the Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA) and an additional 167,291 acres in federal mineral estate. Management actions by the BLM have a significant impact on sagebrush habitat in southwestern North Dakota.

The sage-grouse population in North Dakota has declined since 2015, despite a combination of management efforts: current surface restrictions, a 4-year sage-grouse translocation effort, and habitat improvement projects (such as Sage-grouse SAFE, CREP, and others). In surveys during spring, 2021 a total of 22 sage-grouse males were observed at only 5 leks (compared to 63 males on 12 active leks in 2011). The sage-grouse population and range have declined steadily since 2007, even after implementation of the 2015 amendment to the RMP. The sage-grouse population outlook in North Dakota is not favorable, and will depend on contributions from the greater sage-grouse sub-population across South Dakota and Montana borders (also declining over the past decade).

We support adherence to the safeguards in the 2015 Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment that was developed along with NDGF cooperation. We ask to be involved with development of any changes or updates to the amendment.

In addition, because much of our historical range and remnant sagebrush habitat is currently unoccupied, we recommend that the 2015 PHMA maps, which include buffers of now-extirpated sage-grouse leks, be left as-is to potentially allow the recovery of sage-grouse into formerly occupied areas.

Governor
Doug Burgum

Director
Jeb Williams

Deputy Director
Scott A. Peterson

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input and ask that we be involved as a cooperating agency in the National Environmental Policy Act process during the upcoming preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement concerning the plan amendments.



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