

Common Questions and Answers Related to the Greater Sage-Grouse Scoping Report

What is the status of planning for management of Greater Sage-Grouse?

To manage for the long-term health of Greater Sage-Grouse habitats, to address findings in new science, and to address continued declines in Greater Sage-Grouse populations, the BLM has begun a process to review and consider updates range-wide to manage for Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in BLM resource management plans that were amended in 2015 and 2019 efforts. More than 70 RMPs include management for habitat conservation and restoration on 67 million acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat that the BLM manages in 10 western states. Managing for healthy and resilient sagebrush habitat is essential to the long-term health of Greater Sage-Grouse populations, as well as more than 350 other species that continue to experience pressure from development and a variety of factors, including invasive grasses, wildfire, and drought exacerbated by climate change. As a first formal step, the BLM asked for comments on the scope of these efforts.

What does the Scoping Report do?

The BLM has prepared the Scoping Report to summarize the results of public scoping on updates to the BLM's land use plans addressing conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse. As part of litigation challenging the previous plan amendments completed in 2019 (which a judge subsequently enjoined, so the BLM is managing under the 2015 amendments), the BLM committed to starting a process to update these plans in November 2021. To formally initiate the process to consider updates to the plans, the BLM published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register on November 22, 2021. The NOI sought public comments on the management of Greater Sage-Grouse and sagebrush habitat on BLM-administered lands in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. The comment period lasted 76 days and ended on February 8, 2022.

The Scoping Report documents the results of public scoping. It summarizes the principal issues discussed, comments made, and meeting attendees. The Scoping Report is a concise summary and does not restate comments in detail. It identifies the topics raised in comments and identifies topics outside the scope of the process (here, that includes mineral withdrawal, funding/budget and agency resources in general), but does not provide detail on the alternatives the BLM will be considering, which will be informed by the scoping comments and have yet to be drafted. Scoping Reports fulfill the requirement under the National Environmental Policy Act for the BLM to provide "all comments (or summaries thereof where the response has been exceptionally voluminous) received during the scoping process that identified alternatives, information, and analyses for the agency's consideration" (40 CFR 1502.19(d)).

What are the next steps in the planning process and their general timing?

As indicated in the scoping notice, as the next step BLM will evaluate these comments and continue evaluating current data and science to prepare the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for public comment. We anticipate issuing that document in the coming months, late this year or early next.

The BLM is examining the new science on Greater Sage-Grouse that has been published since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2015 not warranted determination. New science includes spatial information on populations and habitats, population trends, genetics, adaptive management triggers and causal factor analyses, and wildfire occurrence and resulting habitat conditions, as well as the potential impacts of

climate change. The BLM is evaluating data provided by state wildlife agencies. This new information will guide development of the new amendments, informing potential changes in habitat management area designations (i.e., Priority Habitat Management Areas [PHMA], General Habitat Management Areas [GHMA], etc.), and plan level decisions to ensure conservation of the species while considering our multiple use mandate.

BLM Staff have been reviewing the new science at range-wide scales and verifying their application at local levels. A critical next step is to engage our cooperators and other partners to further these reviews at multiple scales, including outreach and formal consultation with Tribes.

Individual BLM state offices may be on different schedules, but the intent is to complete our collective efforts so that we can finish Draft Environmental Impact Statements by late this calendar year.

The environmental review of mineral entry withdrawal for Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFA) (as directed by the courts) is a separate but parallel process. Consideration of the new science and potential impacts of climate change are occurring concurrently with the planning effort. The BLM has funded USGS to update the 2017 Mineral Potential report to include critical minerals. The combination of information will help us assess the continued conservation value of SFAs for Greater Sage-Grouse. Once those evaluations are complete, we will continue preparation of the supplemental draft environmental impact statement for consideration of the SFA withdrawal.

Is the BLM working with the states again?

The Greater Sage-Grouse planning process has consistently been a collaboration with the states, based on science, and it will continue to be. Working with our state and local partners is essential to helping us apply their expertise and provides valuable input to our planning efforts and development of any new plan level decisions or habitat management area designations.

Will this be one range-wide planning effort, or one for each state?

The BLM will be preparing an EIS to consider potential changes in GRSG management contained in BLM land use plans throughout GRSG range and expects to issue Records of Decision for each state/region. Our goal in this planning process is to build from the 2015 and 2019 GRSG amendments and account for information that has become available since those efforts to provide the BLM with locally relevant actions that support range-wide GRSG conservation goals. The 2015 and 2019 efforts provide a foundation for GRSG conservation. Whether they were state-wide land use plan amendments or field office plan revisions, each was a component of the larger planning effort to consider changes to BLM land use plans to provide for GRSG conservation. This EIS provides an opportunity to focus on biological needs