

WELCOME

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE

Resource Management Plan Amendment/ Environmental Impact Statement

Public Scoping Meetings
July 2022



Meeting Purpose

1 Understand the Scoping Process

- Introduce the public to the purpose and need, and the process that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will be using for its decision
- Clarify questions about the proposed project and process
- Provide the public an opportunity to comment on the alternatives, scope of analysis, and other feedback to help shape the Plan
- Solicit comments on coordination needs with other agencies, issues already identified by the BLM, and new issues and alternatives

2 Learn about the Planning Criteria and Preliminary Issues

- Review the Planning Criteria developed by the BLM
- Identify new and clarify existing information and issues
- To ensure that the BLM considers a full range of reasonable alternatives

3 Learn how to make effective comments

- Written comments accepted through the project website (ePlanning) or mail
- How to provide clear, specific, and actionable scoping comments

Species Background

Gunnison Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*)

- Current range limited to eight isolated populations in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah
- Sagebrush is essential for food and cover
- BLM Manages ~40% of Gunnison sage-grouse habitat across ten Colorado and two Utah Counties

The Gunnison Basin supports the largest sage-grouse population

85% Breeding birds

65% Occupied habitat

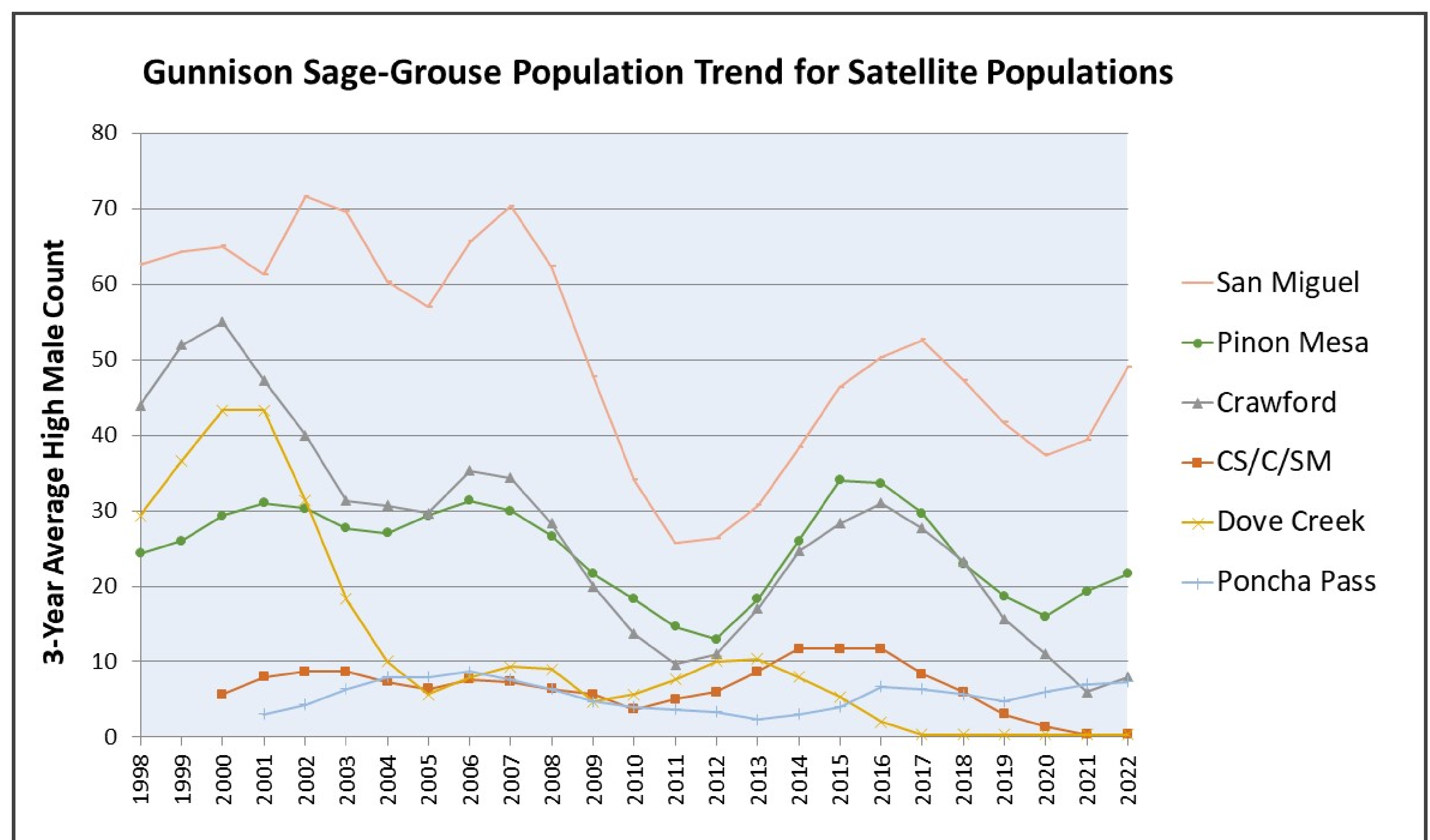
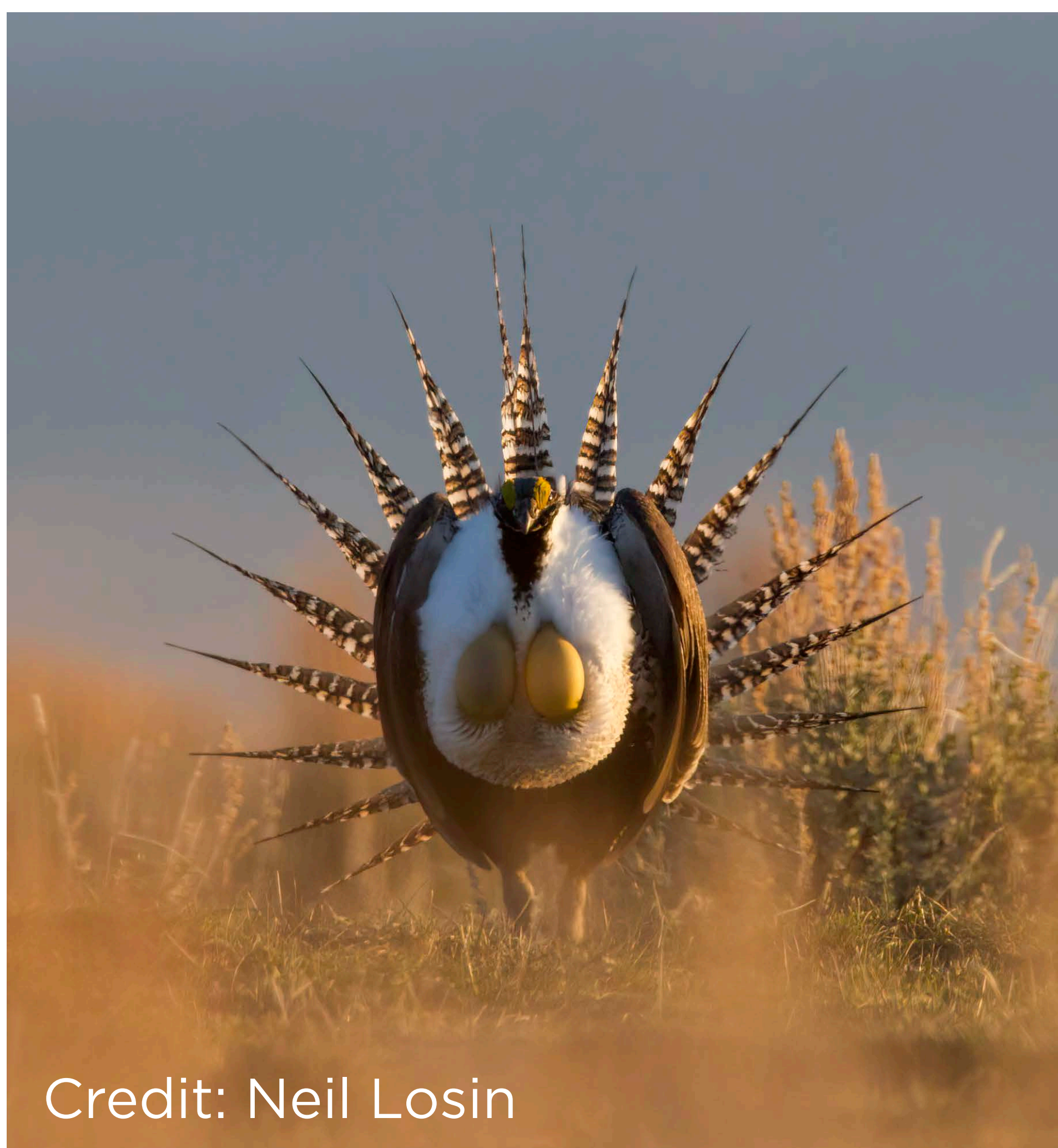
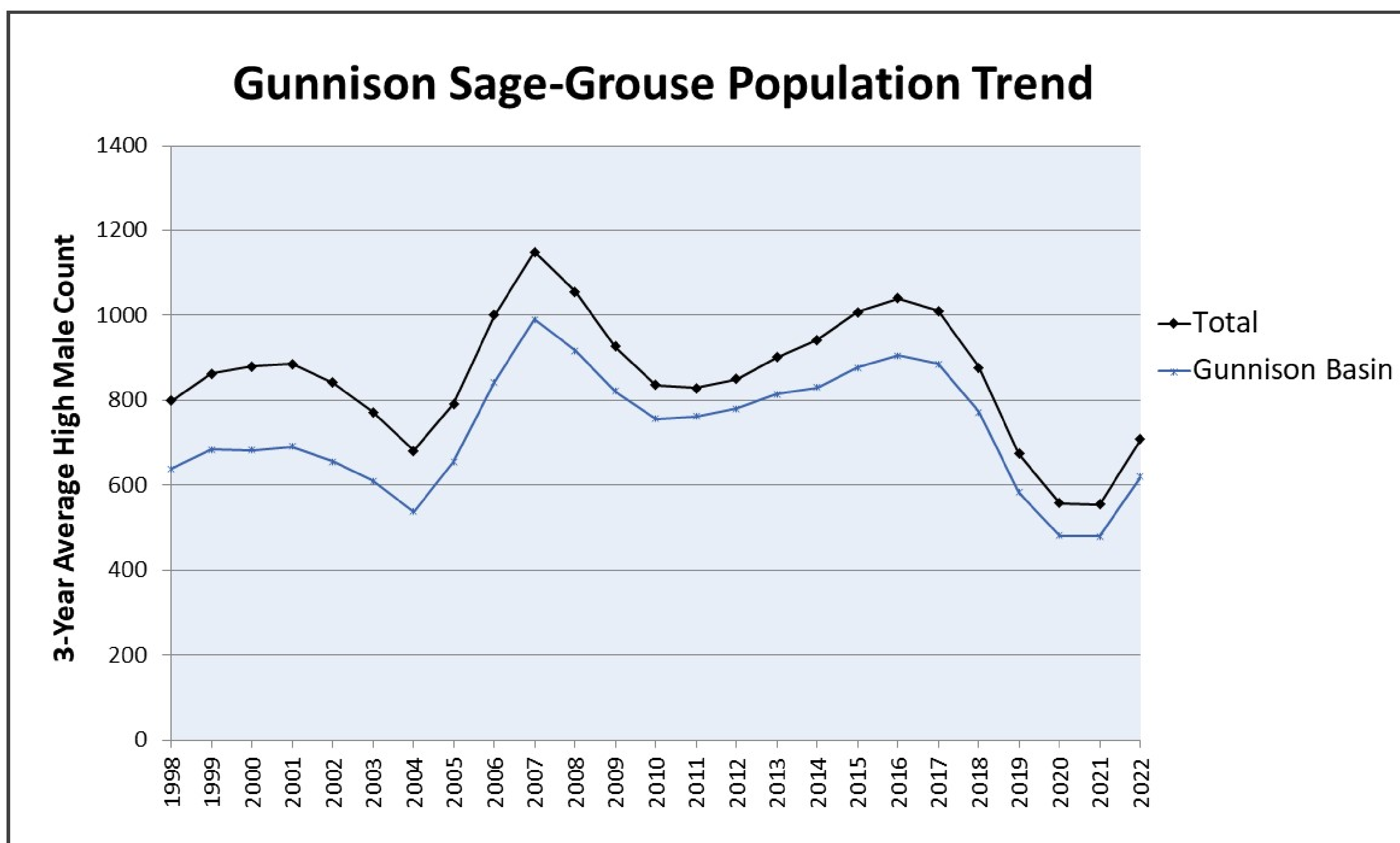


Credit: Neil Losin

Population Trends

Gunnison Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*)

- Current Colorado population estimate is approximately 4,300
- 3-year average (2020-2022) high male count is 28% higher than previous 3-year average (2019-2021)
- 3-year average is 19% below the long-term average (1996-2021) indicating a long-term downward trend

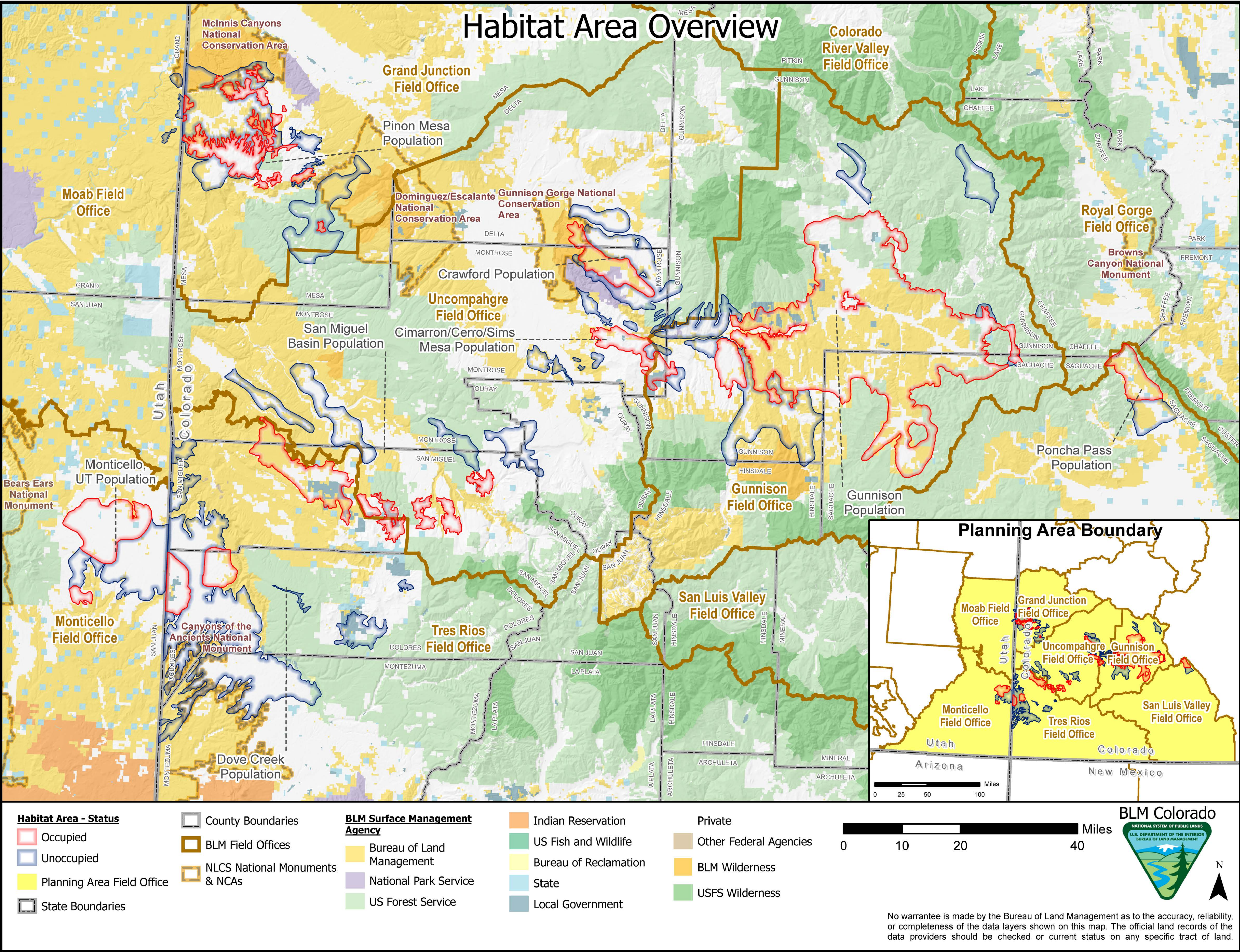


Data provided by Colorado Parks and Wildlife



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What is a Resource Management Plan (RMP)?

- Guides BLM's management of public lands and federal minerals to ensure that public lands are managed according to the intent of Congress, as stated in the Federal Land Policy Management Act, under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.
- Identifies a set of plan components (goals, objectives, designations, allocations for allowable resource use, and management direction) that set the sideboards to guide future implementation actions.
- Establishes the types of uses or actions that would be allowed or restricted in various places on public land.
- BLM evaluates and amends or revises its land use plans in response to changing conditions and demands on public lands. Plan amendments modify one or more parts of an existing RMP.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

- A detailed statement prepared by the responsible official in which a major federal action that significantly affects the quality of the human environment is described, alternatives to the proposed action are provided, and effects are analyzed.

Previous Planning & Relevant Documents

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed Gunnison sage-grouse as Threatened
2014

BLM released Draft RMP Amendment/EIS
August 2016
Effort paused
2018

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released Final Recovery Plan and Implementation Strategy
October 2020

Schedule

Scoping & Draft Plan

Notice of Intent
July 6, 2022

Scoping Period and Meetings
(45 days)
July 6- August 22, 2022

Develop Draft RMP Amendment/EIS and Public Comment Period
(90 days)
Late Spring 2023



We are here

Proposed Plan

Issue Proposed RMP Amendment/Final EIS Notice of Availability
Late Winter 2024

Public Protest Period (30 days)/Governors' Consistency Review
(60 days)
Late Winter 2024

Approved RMP Amendment and Record of Decision
June 2024

PURPOSE

- Promote recovery of Gunnison sage-grouse (threatened species) by maintaining and enhancing habitat
- Ensure management actions on BLM lands and sub-surface mineral estate support conservation goals for Gunnison sage-grouse
- Develop BLM management practices considering current science and data, relevant Federal, State, and local decisions

NEED

- Address the rangewide downward population trend of the Gunnison sage-grouse and issues related to land management that may affect habitat
- Fulfill the Endangered Species Act to conserve federally listed species and the ecosystems
- Respond to changed ecological and climate conditions affecting BLM-managed lands (including drought, invasive plants, habitat loss and fragmentation, impaired riparian areas, frequent wildland fires)



Public Scoping Comments

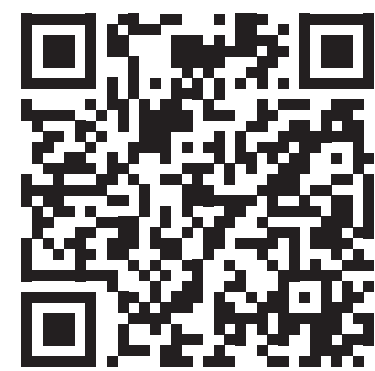
There are multiple ways to provide written comments. Visit the project website (ePlanning) for more information:



Online Comments:

<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2019031/510>

*Scan me to visit
ePlanning*



Mail:

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Resource
Management Plan Amendment
BLM Grand Junction Field Office
2815 H Rd
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Public comments must be received by August 22, 2022

How to provide substantive comments

Comments that provide relevant information with sufficient detail are most useful.

Consider the following:

- Raise issues the BLM has not identified
- Provide information to aid in the development of a reasonable range of alternatives
- Provide information to consider for impacts of the alternatives
- Recommend specific changes to management
- Highlight information and data the BLM might use
- Attach documents and other materials that you reference in your comment

Comments that are not substantive include:

- Comments in favor of or against an action without any reasoning (such as “I don’t like ____” without providing any rationale)
- Comments that only agree or disagree with BLM policy
- Comments without justification or supporting data
- Comments that do not pertain to the planning area or the scope of the EIS
- Comments that take the form of vague, open-ended questions or opinion



Planning Criteria (Summarized)

Planning criteria are the standards developed to guide development of the management alternatives and the Environmental Impact Statement. Criteria are based on applicable law, Director guidance, coordination with other agencies and public participation (43 CFR §1610.4-2(c)).

- The planning effort limited to land use planning decisions specific to conservation of the Gunnison sage- grouse and its habitat
- The RMP Amendment and associated EIS process will comply with Federal statutes, regulations, executive orders, and management policies
- The BLM will recognize valid existing rights
- The BLM will adhere to adaptive management principles
- The BLM will give priority to designating and protecting Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns
- The BLM will evaluate any special management attention needed for the recognized relevant and important values of those areas nominated for Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns designation
- The BLM will consider land use allocations and/or prescriptive standards to conserve Gunnison sage- grouse habitat, as well as objectives and management actions to restore, enhance, and improve Gunnison sage-grouse habitat
- The BLM will consider a range of reasonable alternatives
- The BLM will consider the socioeconomic impacts of alternatives
- The BLM will use current scientific information, research, technologies, inventory, monitoring, and coordination results, and approved BLM spatial data
- The BLM will ensure that activities on BLM-administered lands within Gunnison sage-grouse habitat do not negatively impact land health standards
- The BLM will coordinate and communicate with State, local, and Tribal governments
- The BLM will confer with the US Fish and Wildlife Service as the primary management agency for Endangered Species Act-listed species and will consider conservation measures outlined in the Final Recovery Plan (2020) and the Recovery Implementation Strategy (2020)
- The BLM recognizes the important role of State wildlife agencies
- The BLM will consider habitat requirements and best management practices outlined by the interagency Rangewide Steering Committee in the Gunnison Sage-grouse Rangewide Conservation Plan (2005) and other applicable resources
- The BLM will consider the draft analysis and direction in the BLM Gunnison Sage-Grouse Rangewide Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS (2016)

Minerals and Energy, Rangeland Management, Soil Resources, Lands and Realty

Analytical Questions:

- How should the BLM apply mitigation, including compensatory mitigation, to address impacts to Gunnison sage-grouse populations and their habitat, ensure that additional disturbance will not contribute to population decline or habitat loss, and support the conservation and restoration of resilient habitat?
- How can the BLM most effectively minimize disturbance to Gunnison sage-grouse populations and habitat—including through disturbance and/or density caps and buffers around important habitat types (e.g., leks)—and ensure appropriate protection for the species, while concurrently fulfilling other areas of agency responsibility?
- How should the BLM prioritize and manage the leasing and development of mineral resources in Gunnison sage-grouse habitat and consider the use of waivers, exceptions, and modifications related to the development of these resources?
- Which areas in Gunnison sage-grouse habitat would be appropriate as right-of-way avoidance areas or exclusion areas?
- How should the BLM prioritize and manage the leasing and development of renewable energy resources and associated transmission mechanisms in Gunnison sage-grouse habitat to counter the effects of climate change through both habitat conservation and the expansion of renewable energy?

Climate Change

Analytical Questions:

- What habitat objectives should the BLM prioritize given the diverse condition of public lands across the range of the Gunnison sage-grouse, including the effects of climate change?
- How should the BLM apply adaptive management strategies for livestock grazing during drought conditions and on grazing allotments not meeting standards for Gunnison sage-grouse habitat due to grazing activities?

Invasive Plants

Analytical Question:

- In response to the recent devastation to vast tracts of public land from wildland fires and invasive species, how should the BLM proactively manage for these threats in Gunnison sage-grouse habitat?

Livestock Grazing

Analytical Question:

- How should the BLM manage livestock grazing activities in Gunnison sage-grouse habitat areas?

Rangeland Management, Wildland Fire Ecology and Management, Vegetation Management

Analytical Question:

- What are the most appropriate strategies for restoring Gunnison sage-grouse habitat while avoiding unintended consequences to habitat for other wildlife species (e.g., Pinon Jay)?

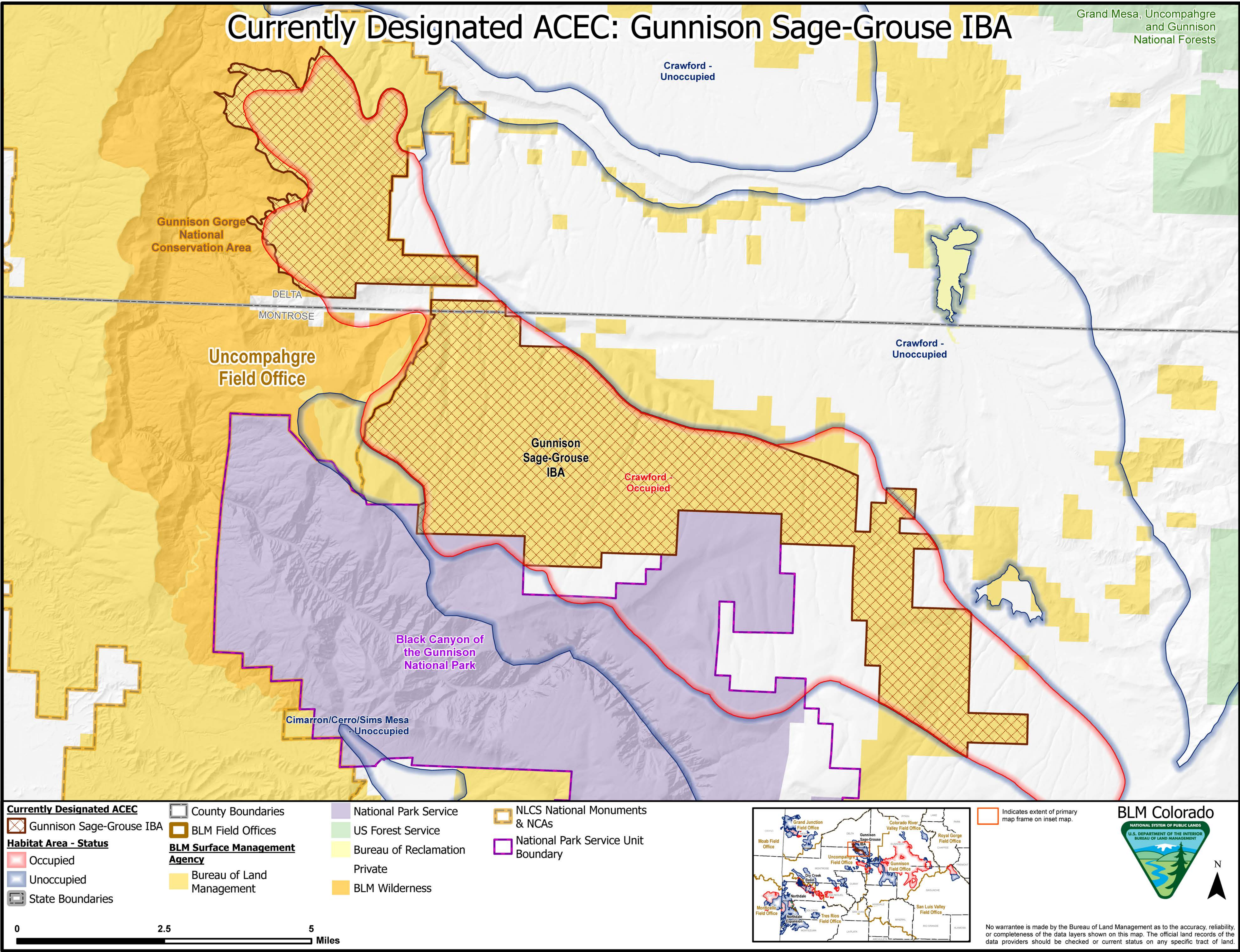
Rangeland Management, Special Status Species, Lands and Reality, Recreation

Analytical Questions:

- What conservation measures and/or design features be applied to prevent the spread of disease?
- What measures can BLM prescribe on management activities to reduce the threat of predation to Gunnison sage-grouse?

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)/Important Bird Area (IBA) is currently designated across 22,000 acres



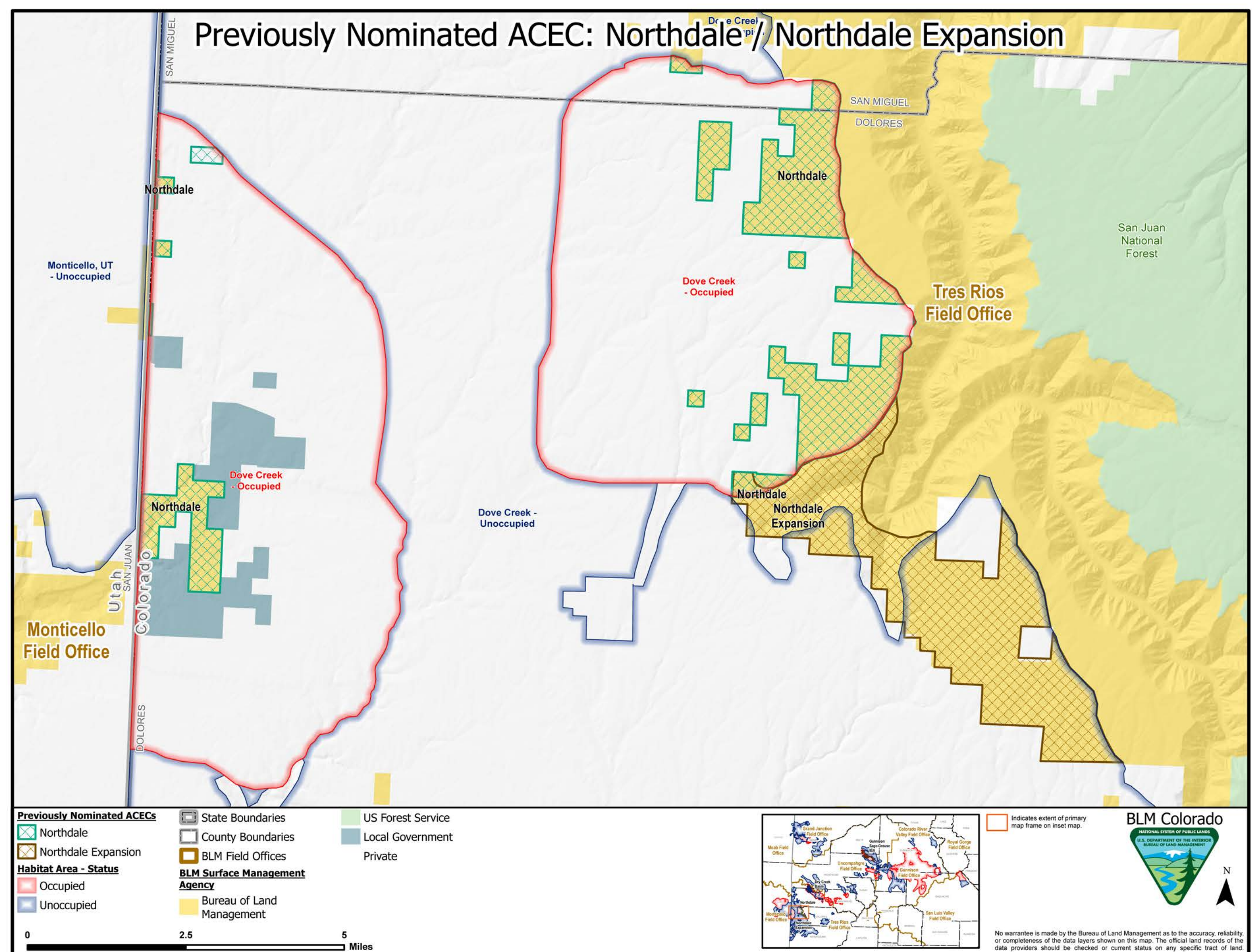
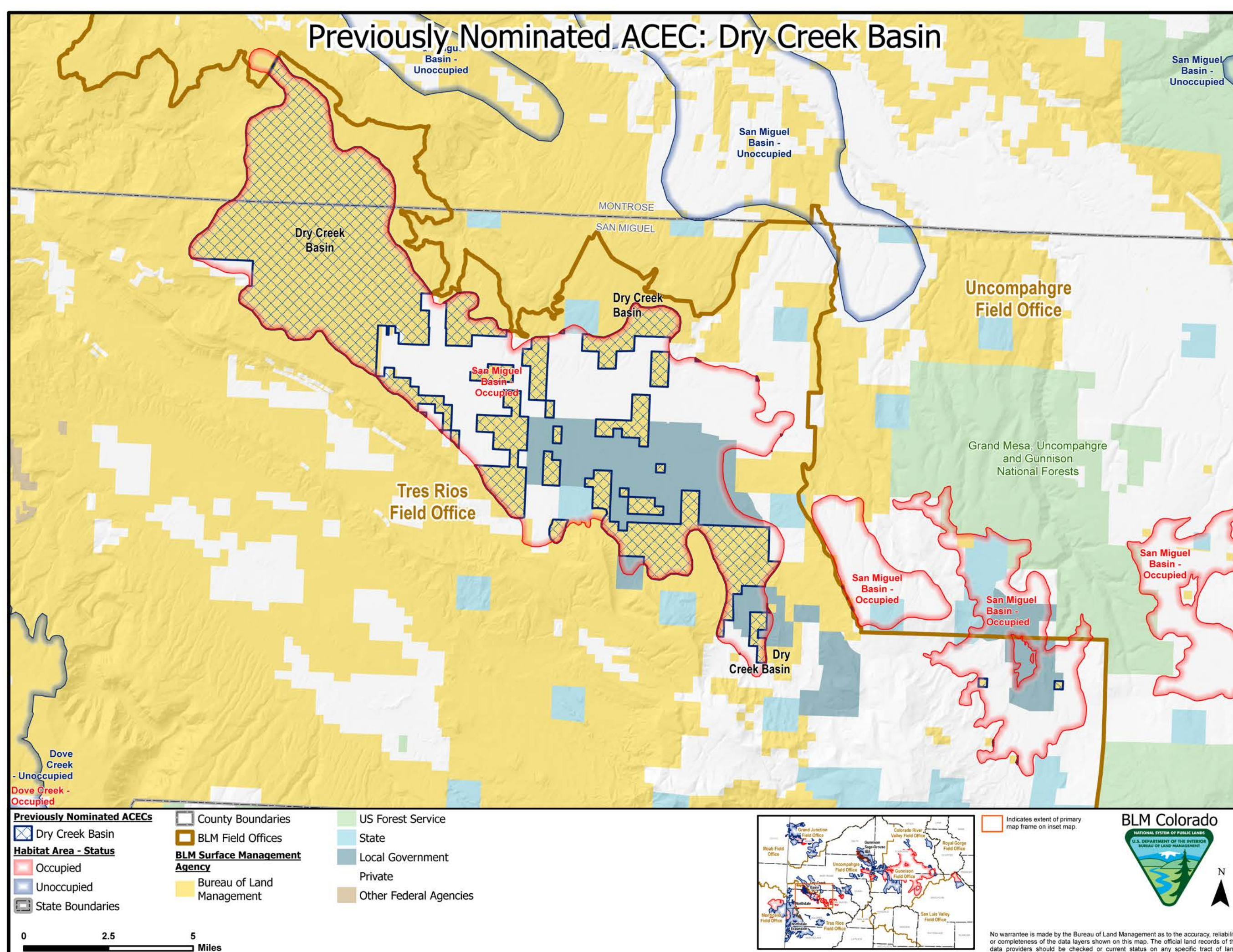
Gunnison sage-grouse and its habitat is emphasized for protection as an important and relevant value in the designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern within the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA).



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Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

The BLM will also evaluate these previously nominated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for consideration in the draft environmental impact statement:



Dry Creek Basin
(approximately 34,785 acres)

Previously nominated and deferred in
the Tres Rios Field Office ACEC
Resource Management Plan Amendment
(2020)

Northdale/Northdale Expansion
(5,239 acres originally nominated;
6,936 additional acres nominated)

Previously nominated and deferred in
the Tres Rios Field Office ACEC
Resource Management Plan Amendment
(2020)

The public may nominate potential new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for consideration. Nominations will be evaluated during this planning process by the BLM.

