



Wyoming BLM Sage-Grouse Guidelines

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The Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wyoming State Office recently issued two Instructional Memoranda (IM) regarding sage-grouse. The first, WY-2010-12 addresses Greater Sage-Grouse habitat management policy guidelines for most programs and activities on federal lands in Wyoming, while the second, WY-2010-13, offers a leasing screen for oil and gas leasing within Greater Sage-Grouse Core Areas (Core Areas) as defined by the Wyoming Governor's Sage-Grouse Implementation Team. These two IMs and the Wyoming BLM's sage-grouse policy will apply to future oil and gas leasing and development. The policy recommendations, however, do not apply to livestock grazing management within the range management program, nondiscretionary activities managed under 43 CFR § 3809 for locatable minerals, and discretionary activities approved under 43 CFR § 3400 including Coal Management, and 43 CFR § 3500 including Non-energy Leasables (i.e., trona operations).

IM No. WY-2010-12: Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Policy.

BLM IM No. WY-2010-12 contains ten policy statements addressing key facets of sage-grouse habitat on lands within Wyoming:

1. For the planning of proposed activities, "Habitat Mapping" addresses development of regional models for nesting, early brood-rearing and winter habitats (finalized in 2011).
2. "Timing, Distance and Density Restrictions" requires BLM to consider seasonal restrictions in on-going land use planning decisions and for all proposed projects within and outside Core areas, including restrictions on activity within 0.6 miles of leks inside Core Areas and within 0.25 miles of leks outside Core Areas from March 15 to May 15, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.; restrictions on activities in nesting or early brood rearing habitat inside and outside Core Areas, and in suitable habitat or within 2 miles of any occupied or undetermined lek, from March 15 to June

30; and restrictions on activities in mapped or modeled sage-grouse winter habitats or concentration areas that support Core Area populations, from November 15 to March 14. In certain situations where prior existing rights exist, Field Offices may analyze each case using the site-specific or project-level National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation, after which exceptions may be granted where appropriate, limited to one disturbance location per 640 acres within the State's Core Areas (to coincide with the Governor's Executive Order 2008-2 pertaining to Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area protection).

3. As activities develop, "Conservation Measures and Mitigation" ensures that site-specific, measurable conservation objectives are included in project planning documents within sage-grouse habitats. New measures may be developed and implemented, and all recommendations, mitigation, and conservation measures will be analyzed in site-specific NEPA documents.
4. "Project Locations and Analyses" involves the coordinated efforts of BLM and project proponents to ensure that consolidation of infrastructure, reduction of habitat fragmentation and effective conservation of habitats are included in project proposals. Effects analysis should extend 4 miles for small projects and 11 miles for large-scale projects.
5. Through development phases, "Resource Management Plans" (RMPs) recommends following Section 1.3.1 and, where applicable, Section 1.4.1 of BLM's National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (USDI BLM 2004a) for ongoing and future revisions to RMPs. The statement offers Alternatives for protection of sage-grouse range as well as suggestions for the development of monitoring plans and landscape scale conservation strategies in conjunction with Best Management Practices ("BMPs") for sage grouse habitat conservation.
6. "Lek Data" addresses data compilation, recommending that BLM and WGFD meet annually to coordinate sage grouse data gathered using agreed-to techniques and standards of accuracy.
7. "West Nile Virus" recommends a number of alternate means to manage produced water or impounded water having West Nile Virus vector creating potential.
8. "Use of Dogs" recommends Field Office use dogs for clearances of winter concentration areas only in conjunction with simultaneous verification of bird presence through visual observation.
9. As projects continue to completion, "Monitoring Effectiveness" emphasizes the importance of monitoring all IM directives to ensure their implementation achieves the desired results.

10. "Variances" intends to provide the most consistent sage-grouse habitat management possible given the diversity of lands in Wyoming and allows for appropriate deviations from stated policies if supported by comprehensive, objective NEPA analysis of a proposed action which justifies the variance.

These policy guidelines will supplement existing BLM RMPs and BMPs, with the goal of coordinating BLM's sage-grouse habitat conservation efforts with those of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and with input from the Local Sage-Grouse Working Groups and other partners and stakeholders.

IM WY-2010-13: Oil and Gas Leasing Screen

The oil and gas leasing screen is intended to assist Field Offices in their oil and gas leasing recommendations for Core Areas, with the goal of conserving sage grouse habitat in conjunction with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's sage grouse population enhancement objectives. The screen operates as a flow-chart of yes/no inquiries, locating the proposed development parcel within or outside a Core Area, determining whether the parcel would be suitable for sage-grouse habitat, determining whether the parcel is a part of at least eleven square miles of contiguous, manageable, unleased Federal minerals, and identifying any potential drainage issues associated with the parcel. Through this screen parcels found unacceptable for leasing will be recommended for deferral. Acceptable parcels may still be recommended for deferral for sage-grouse habitat conservation. The screen will be periodically reviewed for effectiveness and revised as necessary.

Both the leasing screen and the comprehensive habitat recommendations are effective immediately. The IMs may be viewed in their entirety at <http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/programs/Wildlife.html>.