



Fire Management and Greater Sage-grouse Conservation

Fire represents one of the most immediate threats to greater sage-grouse (GRSG) habitat. Annual invasive grasses are prone to frequent, recurring wildland fire, which further exacerbates the conversion of habitat to annual invasive grasses.

Recognizing the nature and extent of this threat, the land management plan amendments include specific guidance to fight the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive species, position wildland fire management resources for more effective rangeland fire response, and accelerate the restoration of fire-impacted landscapes to native grasses and sagebrush.



Photo courtesy of Austin Catlin/USFWS

Fire Management Direction and Guidance - Land Management Plan Amendments

Priority habitat management areas (PHMAs), general habitat management areas (GHMAs), and sagebrush focal areas (SFAs) have been identified as some of the highest natural resource values to be protected (behind protection of public safety and property). By increasing the priority emphasis on fires in GRSG habitat, fire managers and agency administrators will be able to shift fire resources to these areas during ongoing fire incidents and periods of high fire danger when the threat of new lightning or human caused fires is high which should reduce the potential size of future range land fires.

Fuels treatments will continue to be an important part of our efforts to reduce the potential for large and uncharacteristic wild fires. In PHMAs, GHMAs, and SFAs, treatments will be designed to maintain, restore, or enhance greater sage-grouse habitat.

- The use of prescribed fire as a tool for restoration and fuels reduction projects will be modified or restricted on approximately 1.2 million acres of the wildland urban interface (adjacent to private structures) in the Intermountain Region.
- Prescribed fire will not be a tool that will be available for use in 12" or less precipitation zones unless it is for pile burning or to facilitate restoration of GRSG habitat. It appears the east central mountain





islands of National Forest System land in Nevada would be most affected by this guidance. Protection of GRSG habitat will be a priority for fuels treatment, which will likely change the location, size, and shape of treatment areas in GRSG habitat.

- Fuel treatment planning will consider the land management plan amendment direction and guidance, which will likely increase the complexity and time needed for projects. It is possible that some needed fuels treatments will not be feasible.

Fire suppression activities can have an adverse impact on GRSG habitat. The direction and guidance in the land management plan amendments is designed to decrease the adverse effects of fire suppression with the goal of striking a balance between doing enough to stop the fire and not too much, which would likely result in excessive damage to GRSG habitat. Specific direction and guidance in the land management plan amendment focuses on:

- Temporary fire facilities (fire camps, spike camps, helibases)
- Cross-country vehicle travel
- Clean vehicles to reduce the spread of invasive plant species
- Use of retardant and mechanized equipment only if it will minimize the impact to habitat
- Protect unburned islands of habitat
- Utilize strategies and tactics that minimize the loss of habitat

Fire and Invasives Assessment Team (FIAT)

FIAT is an interagency approach developed by managers and scientists to identify, protect, and restore sagebrush communities. It includes a step-wise process by which habitat conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation is applied to specific areas deemed important to these populations.

Strategies to prevent, suppress, and restore fire-impacted landscapes will be identified by the Fire and Invasives Assessments for all GRSG management habitat areas in the Great Basin region. The Assessments will provide a list of findings, recommendations, and considerations to protect, maintain, and enhance GRSG habitat. The Assessments will also include a spatially consistent, repeatable landscape prioritization process to capture resistance to invasive annual grasses and resilience to disturbance principles. The Assessments will compare the importance of GRSG habitat relative to the level or magnitude of the threat for fire operations, fuels management, invasive species, conifer encroachment, and restoration and Burned Areas Emergency Rehabilitation. FIAT assessments will be completed on 11 National Forest System units in the Intermountain Region.

