



U.S. Forest Service

Sage-Grouse Bulletin #17

February 2021

Summary: Sage-Grouse Bulletin #17 provides an update on the status of finalizing Forest Service (FS) plan amendments for the conservation of greater sage-grouse.

Finalizing Plan Amendments with Records of Decision – Next Steps.

- On August 20th, 2020, Reviewing Officer, Allen Rowley (Associate Deputy Chief for National Forests Systems from the Washington Office), provided written guidance to the Responsible Officials (the Regional Foresters in Regions 2 and 4) with changes to make to the greater sage-grouse plans based on what was learned during the objection process.
- The Forest Service is making the necessary post-objections modifications to the plans, including compiling an errata to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and creating the Final Records of Decision.
- The errata will include additional information and rationale explaining why changes were made between 2019 and the proposed plans. This includes clarification on several topics, such as:
 - Plans were science based and developed to work in concert with state and BLM plans
 - Plans are intended to provide for overall consistency, but with flexibility to adapt to local ecological conditions
 - Clarified the importance/limitations of FS lands, which manages only 5% of habitat
 - Simplified maps: Sagebrush Focal Areas retain protections as Priority Areas
 - Simplified maps by removing disjointed and slivered acres of General Areas in Utah
 - Simplified maps by retaining protections for Anthro Mountain (UT) as Priority Areas
 - Updated maps for accuracy and congruence with state plans and new science
 - Clarified Net Conservation Gain as No Net Habitat Loss (except in NV)
 - Emphasizing proper grazing: vegetation is examined holistically vs. focusing on only one grass height measurement
 - Clarified FS authority and inability to defer granting exceptions to external panels
 - Updated details, when needed, for consistency with States, BLM, and Minerals policy
- The Final Records of Decision are expected to be very similar to the drafts created in August 2019. More of the plan components stayed the same than changed, with efforts focused on increasing the precision, clarity, and efficiency of the plans to benefit greater sage-grouse conservation on the landscape scale.
- Because the plans impact numerous units in 2 regions in 5 states, they will be given considerable review by the Chief of the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture before they are finalized.
- No immediate tangible actions occur when the Records of Decision are signed, but all future decisions are to be in accordance with the restrictions on activities and other content of the plans.