



File Code: 1570
Route To:

Date: August 25, 2020

Subject: Objection Response for the Greater Sage-Grouse Plan Amendments

To: Acting Regional Forester, Region 2 and Acting Regional Forester, Region 4

This is my response on the objections filed to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Greater Sage-Grouse Land Management Proposed Plan Amendments, and Draft Records of Decision for Greater Sage-Grouse for the Intermountain and Rocky Mountain Regions. The Final EIS identifies and addresses potential impacts upon the environment of 19 National Forest System planning units on 5.4 million acres of potential greater sage-grouse habitat. All objections are consolidated into one set of issues and covered in this response. The issues were sufficiently similar to allow consolidation as described in 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219.57(b)(1).

The process of reviewing the objections and assessing opportunities for resolution has taken longer than anticipated. The inherently comprehensive and complex nature of land management planning combined with the parallel effort of U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management contributed to the overall time needed for the review and the need to exercise my discretion to extend the time to issue my final response (36 CFR 219.56(g)).

The objection process followed the 36 CFR 219 regulatory requirements for forest plan amendments, which includes an objection filing period, interested person filing period, and resolution meetings. Draft Records of Decision were issued on July 21, 2019. The objection-filing period ended October 1, 2019. We received 25 eligible objections and 10 requests for interested person status. Objections were from a variety of sources and included seven individuals, two energy companies, four individual counties and two local government associations, one local environmental group and four environmental coalitions. The interested person filing period began October 10, 2019. The review team assessing the objection issues began on October 28, 2019.

A resolution meeting was held December 10-11, 2019, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Participants included representatives from the States of Utah, Idaho, Wyoming and Nevada, county commissioners, county associations and representatives, and environmental organizations including Western Watersheds Project and the National Audubon Society as lead objectors for a consortium of groups.

Following the meeting, I offered the opportunity for any additional resolution input. The State of Wyoming, Custer County, Idaho, and a joint effort between the State of Utah and the National Audubon Society submitted input. The State of Wyoming suggested additional language and



clarification regarding management approaches. Custer County, Idaho added additional language regarding animal predation. A joint submission was received from the State of Utah and the National Audubon Society offering language clarifying stipulations and exemptions. An additional resolution meeting was held by a conference call on June 24, 2020, to discuss the post-resolution meeting submittals.

I would like to thank the greater sage-grouse core team and staff from the Regions, whose expertise was evident in the quality of the final EIS and Draft Record of Decisions. I would also like to thank the objectors, interested persons, and members of the public who participated throughout the entire process for their dedication in working to ensure the greater sage-grouse is not listed under the Endangered Species Act and thrives into the future.

Enclosed with this letter is the outcome of the deliberative review of concerns raised by objectors involving complex regulatory and management issues. My response reflects my findings from the review of the written submitted objections, statutory and regulatory requirements, the discussions I had with objectors and interested persons at the meetings, and follow-up discussions with the Regional Foresters. My response contains instructions to implement before signing the final Records of Decision and is the final determination of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on these objections.

By copy of this letter and notification of availability on the Web, I am notifying all parties to this objection.

X



Signed by: ALLEN ROWLEY

ALLEN ROWLEY

Reviewing Officer for the Chief

Enclosure

cc: Objectors and Interested Persons
John Shivik – Greater Sage Grouse Coordinator
Jody Sutton – Objection Coordinator