

FACT SHEET: Proposed Withdrawal from Mineral Entry in Sagebrush Focal Areas

Background: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) identified habitat disturbance and fragmentation caused by certain hardrock mining operations as a threat to sage-grouse habitat. As a result, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land use plans recommend that the Secretary of the Interior exercise her authority under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to safeguard the most important landscapes identified by the FWS within Priority Habitat Management Areas – identified as Sagebrush Focal Areas – by withdrawing them from the operation of the hardrock mining law.

With the finalization of the BLM-USFS plans, the Secretary is taking prompt action to consider the recommendations. Through a public, transparent process, the Interior Department will seek to ensure that the Sagebrush Focal Areas that anchor the range-wide conservation strategy for the greater sage-grouse are protected from the threat of hardrock mining, subject to valid existing rights.

The elements of the proposed mineral withdrawal include:

Temporary segregation: Subject to valid existing rights, the Interior Department will propose to withdraw approximately 10 million acres of public and National Forest System lands located in the states of Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming from location and entry under the United States mining laws. This segregation, which lasts up to two years until the Secretary decides whether to make the withdrawal, prohibits the location and entry of new mining claims in the designated areas.

The notice of proposed withdrawal will publish in the *Federal Register* on September 24, 2015. The notice begins the segregation period and opens a 90-day public review period for the proposed withdrawal.

Analyses: During the segregation period, studies and environmental analyses will be conducted to determine if the lands should be withdrawn to protect sage-grouse habitat from location and entry of new mining claims. This process will invite participation by the public, tribes, environmental groups, industry, state and local government, as well as other stakeholders. These efforts will be undertaken under the leadership of the BLM in cooperation with the USFS and in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Public process: During the segregation period, the Interior Department will hold a public process to consider information provided by the states, stakeholders and others on mineral potential, including rare earths, as well as the importance of these areas as sagebrush habitat. At the end of the process, a decision on the proposed withdrawal may be made.

Valid, pre-existing claims: Neither the segregation for up to two years, nor any subsequent withdrawal, would prohibit ongoing or future mining exploration or extraction operations on valid pre-existing claims. Neither the segregation nor the proposed withdrawal would prohibit any other authorized uses on these lands. Under FLPMA, the Secretary can withdraw these lands for a maximum of 20 years, and may extend the period in the future.