



U.S. Forest Service - Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG) Plan Amendment Bulletin #2 July 2019

Summary. This Bulletin is the second in a series of updates that summarizes the status of the current planning effort to amend the Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG) Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan). This bulletin provides an update on the planning efforts following the public scoping period as well as an updated project timeline.

Scoping and Issue Identification. The Forest Service published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement for this project on April 18, 2019. The NOI initiated a 30-day scoping and public comment period that ended on May 20, 2019. Approximately 500 comment letters were received, with about 40 unique and substantive comments. The Interdisciplinary Team summarized those comments and has identified several topics that will be addressed in the environmental impact statement, including (but not limited to): the viability of sensitive species and potential species of conservation concern, recovery of black-footed ferrets, impacts on forage for permitted livestock and associated economic concerns, health and safety concerns, use of rodenticides, boundary zones to limit encroachment onto private lands, overlap with sage-grouse habitat, and consistency with federal and state laws, regulations, and policies.

Alternatives. Based on a review of public comments and concerns, the interdisciplinary team has developed three action alternatives as well as a no action alternative that will be analyzed in detail in the environmental impact statement. The action alternatives include a **modified version of the proposed action** with the addition of seasonal shooting restrictions and the addition of plan components related to drought and density management; a **Grassland-wide Alternative** in which all prairie dog acres on the grassland count toward a desired range for prairie dog colony acres; and a **Prairie Dog Emphasis Alternative** that would retain much of the management described in the current grassland plan and prairie dog management strategy, but would allow more flexibility in management, especially with regard to boundary management.

Informal public comments about the plan amendment process are always welcome; the next formal comment period will follow release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) this fall.

Estimated Planning Timelines. The Interdisciplinary Team continues to work through its analysis of the proposed action and alternatives, which will be incorporated into the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS is scheduled to be released in early October for a 90-day formal comment period. Additional public meetings will coincide with the release of the Draft EIS. The final Record of Decision (ROD) is planned for completion by the end of Fiscal Year 2020.

A summary document that includes a detailed description of the issues to be analyzed in the EIS and a brief comparison of the alternatives to be analyzed in detail is available on the project web site at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=55479. Other project documents including the proposed action document, project reference materials, and maps are also posted in this location. Current information related to restoration work and prairie dog colony management efforts on the Thunder Basin National Grassland is posted at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/MBRTB/PrairieDogs>.