

Meeting Date: November 19, 2015

Agenda Item No. 13

Agenda Item: Sage-grouse Update

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

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Background:

Recent Agency Actions: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a “not-warranted” listing determination for greater sage-grouse, meaning the greater sage-grouse will not be listed under the Endangered Species Act (September 23, 2015). The US Fish and Wildlife Service will review the bird’s status again in 2020.

Concurrent with that decision, following 4 years of planning, the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service published Records of Decisions (RODs) that incorporated greater sage-grouse conservation measures into federal land use plans across 173 million acres of sage grouse habitat.

On September 25, Governor Otter and the Idaho Legislature filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., that alleged the land management agencies violated the law by failing to complete the federal planning process in an open and transparent manner, or to complete a necessary analysis of the newly ordered land-use restrictions. The litigation focuses on the additional land-use restrictions addressing secondary threats that were added late in the planning process without proper vetting by the states or the public.

While the lawsuit is pending, the State will continue to work with federal agencies (BLM, USFS, and NRCS) to implement sage-grouse conservation measures such as fire prevention and suppression, habitat restoration, weed control, and juniper removal that are consistent with the Governor’s Alternative. Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell recently adopted a national fire strategy that emphasizes the protection of sagebrush habitat. This will bring greater resources to bear and greater flexibility to prevent and suppress rangeland fires impacting sagebrush habitat. Furthermore, IDFG will continue to monitor sage grouse populations, provide financial and technical assistance to implement conservation measures such as rangeland improvements, and work with a committee involved in the development of a mitigation program for sagebrush habitat (pursuant to the Governor’s Alternative).

Raven Control Update: In 2013, the Idaho Legislature directed the Department to spend up to \$100,000 on work to evaluate control of ravens as a tool to benefit sage grouse populations. The Department received a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to control ravens in three areas of Idaho where recent sage grouse declines had been documented (Upper Snake, Curlew, West Central).

The Department intended for USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services (WS) to conduct the raven control work using DRC-1339, an avicide used for ravens. However, WS was unable to update their Environmental Assessment for predator control in Idaho in time to assist IDFG. Therefore in 2014, the Department used shooting and nest removal as the primary control methods. In 2015, the Department received permission to administer DRC-1339 through a Special Local Need Label from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. IDFG staff focused work on state and private lands in the Greater Curlew Valley and West Central Idaho near Midvale during the sage grouse breeding and nesting period (March-May).

All lands near sage-grouse lek routes were surveyed for ravens and structures that may support ravens (roost and nest sites). The Department works with landowners and land

management agencies to modify or remove structures (e.g. Russian Olives) that are supporting ravens. Raven information collected during sage grouse counts is also used to determine raven densities along sage grouse lek routes across southern Idaho.

In 2016, we will evaluate the potential benefits to sage grouse by comparing sage grouse lek trends in the treatment and non-treatment areas in the 2 study areas. Statewide raven surveys will be repeated to evaluate the potential change in raven densities across the state.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

Executive Order 2012-02 established the Governor's Sage-grouse Task Force (Task Force) to collaboratively develop science-based recommendations for inclusion in Idaho's sage-grouse conservation plans.

Executive Order 2015-04 directs all executive state agencies to adopt the Governor's Alternative and supporting documentation, known as "Idaho's Sage-grouse Management Plan."

State management of sage grouse will be guided by Idaho's Sage-grouse Management Plan and the 2006 Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho (Commission approved species plan).

Ravens are a federally protected species under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The take of ravens, nests, and eggs is authorized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service through a permit process.

Public Involvement Process:

N/A (informational only)

Justification:

Implementation of state policy

Staff Recommendation:

N/A (informational only)

Action Requested:

N/A (informational only)