

Fuels Management Best Management Practices for Sage-Grouse Conservation

1. Where applicable, design fuels treatment objectives to protect existing sagebrush ecosystems, modify fire behavior, restore native plants and create landscape patterns which most benefit sage-grouse habitat.
2. Provide training to fuels treatment personnel on sage-grouse biology, habitat requirements and identification of areas utilized locally.
3. Use fire prescriptions that minimize undesirable effects on vegetation or soils (e.g., minimize mortality of desirable perennial plant species and reduce risk of hydrophobicity).
4. Ensure proposed sagebrush treatments are planned with interdisciplinary input from BLM and/or state wildlife agency biologists and that treatment acreage is conservative in the context of surrounding sage-grouse seasonal habitats and landscape.
5. Where appropriate, ensure that treatments are configured in a manner (e.g., strips) that promotes use by sage-grouse (See Connelly et al., 2000*).
6. Where applicable, incorporate roads and natural fuel breaks into fuel break design.
7. Power-wash all vehicles and equipment involved in fuels management activities prior to entering the area to minimize the introduction of undesirable and/or invasive plant species.
8. Design vegetation treatments in areas of high fire frequency to facilitate firefighter safety, reduce the risk of extreme fire behavior; and to reduce the risk and rate of fire spread to key and restoration habitats.
9. Give priority for implementing specific sage-grouse habitat restoration projects in annual grasslands first to sites which are adjacent to or surrounded by sage-grouse key habitats. Annual grasslands are a second priority for restoration when the sites not adjacent to key habitat, but within two miles of key habitat. The third priority for annual grassland habitat restoration projects are sites beyond two miles of key habitat. The intent is to focus restoration outward from existing, intact habitat.
10. As funding and logistics permit, restore annual grasslands to a species composition characterized by perennial grasses, forbs and shrubs.
11. Emphasize the use of native plant species, recognizing that non-native species may be necessary depending on the availability of native seed and prevailing site conditions.
12. Remove standing and encroaching trees within at least 100 meters of occupied sage-grouse leks and other habitats (e.g., nesting, wintering and brood rearing) to reduce the availability of perch sites for avian predators as appropriate, and resources permit.
13. Protect wildland areas from wildfire originating on private lands, infrastructure corridors and recreational areas.
14. Reduce the risk of vehicle or human-caused wildfires and the spread of invasive species by planting perennial vegetation (e.g. green-strips) paralleling road rights-of-way.
15. Strategically place and maintain pre-treated strips/areas (e.g., mowing, herbicide application and strictly managed grazed strips) to aid in controlling wildfire should wildfire occur near key habitat or important restoration areas (such as where investments in restoration have already been made).

* Connelly, J.W., M.A Schroeder, A.R. Sands, and C.E. Braun 2000. Guidelines to Manage Sage-grouse Populations and Their Habitats. Wildlife Society Bulletin 28:967-985.