

News Release

U.S. Department of the Interior / Bureau of Land Management
Idaho Falls District / 1405 Hollipark Drive / Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401
Twin Falls District / 2536 Kimberly Road / Twin Falls, Idaho 83301

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Contact: Joanna Wilson (208) 524-7550

BLM approves plan to improve sagebrush ecosystems

IDAHO FALLS/TWIN FALLS – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Idaho State Director has signed the Record of Decision for the Fire, Fuels and Related Vegetation Management Plan Amendment Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS analyzed five alternatives regarding fire management on 5 million acres of BLM-administered public lands in south central and southeastern Idaho. The plan amendment establishes a fire management program aimed at reducing fuel loadings that are prone to catastrophic wildfires, preserving important sagebrush habitat for sage grouse and returning fire to a more natural role in the ecosystem.

The Record of Decision amends 12 land use plans that were written between 1975 and 1988. This new guidance is consistent with the National Fire Plan (2001) and the BLM and Forest Service Cohesive Fuels Treatment Strategy that addresses how to properly manage wildland fires or hazardous fuels. The BLM believes implementation of this management direction will improve the health of the land, conserve wildlife habitat and protect rural communities from wildfire.

The study involves public lands managed by the Upper Snake, Pocatello, Burley and Shoshone Field Offices, which are part of the BLM's Idaho Falls and Twin Falls Districts. The FEIS examined hazardous fuels treatments in forested vegetation types, including juniper, aspen and conifer stands. It addressed the need to reduce stands of invasive annual grasses, cheatgrass and medusahead rye that are responsible for large, fast-moving wildfires in recent years.

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The plan amendment recommends that the BLM increase hazardous fuels treatments from a current average of about 25,000 acres to an average 154,000 acres each year for the next ten years. Some of these treatments would be in the wildland-urban interface to protect property. Some treatments would be in forested stands to reduce the buildup of hazardous fuels. All treatments strive to enhance and/or preserve critical habitat for dependent species while also addressing fuels and fire objectives.

The recommended treatments are designed to help meet the goals of the National Fire Plan, which was developed by the BLM, U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies after the severe wildfire season of 2000. The National Fire Plan is a nationally coordinated effort to protect communities and natural resources from the harmful effects of increasing wildland fire in the United States.

The ROD and the /Plan Amendment is available online at:
http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/prog/planning/fire_fuels_and_related.html. For a copy of the ROD or more information, contact your local BLM office or call Terry Lee Smith, BLM in Pocatello, at (208) 478-6340.