United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Intermountain
Region

Humboldt-Toiyabe
National Forest

December 2012

Scoping Notice

Greater Sage-Grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

Alpine and Mono Counties, California
Douglas, Lyon, and Mineral Counties, Nevada

Bi-State Sage-Grouse

(*Photo Courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*)

COMMENTS WELCOME

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on Greater Sage-Grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This proposal would amend the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to incorporate management direction for conservation, enhancement, and restoration of habitat critical to the greater sage-grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment (Bi-State sage-grouse) found on the Carson and Bridgeport Ranger Districts (see project area map). While the Humboldt-Toiyabe is the lead agency for preparing the EIS, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as a cooperating agency is also proposing to amend the Tonopah Resource Management Plan and Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan. Through this cooperative effort, management direction for the Bi-State sage-grouse will be consistent across federal land management boundaries.

BACKGROUND / PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

In March of 2010 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) published a "warranted, but precluded" Endangered Species Act listing petition decision for the Bi-State sage-grouse. The FWS concluded that existing regulatory mechanisms to protect sage grouse and their habitats in the Bi-State area "… afford sufficient discretion to the decision makers as to render them inadequate to ameliorate the threats to the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment". The major threat in regards to actions authorized on National Forest System and BLM public lands is habitat modification (Factor A). Habitat modification on federal lands includes threats from infrastructure (fences, power lines, and roads), recreation, mining, energy development, grazing, fire, invasive species, noxious weeds, pinyon-juniper encroachment, and climate change.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the project is to conserve, enhance, and/or restore sagebrush and associated habitats to provide for the long-term viability of the Bi-State sage-grouse. The need for action is to address the recent "warranted, but precluded" Endangered Species Act decision from the FWS

by addressing needed changes in the management and conservation of Bi-State sage-grouse habitats within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and BLM Carson City and Battle Mountain Districts to support sage grouse population management objectives within the states of Nevada and California.

The Proposed Action

The Forest Service (FS) is proposing to amend the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and the BLM is proposing to amend the Tonopah Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Carson City Field Office Consolidated RMP by adding to or changing some of the regulatory mechanisms that would reduce, eliminate, or minimize threats to the Bi-State sage-grouse habitat on federal lands administered under those plans.

The purpose of the public scoping process is to determine relevant issues relating to the implementation of regulatory mechanisms (management direction) to conserve the Bi-State sage-grouse and its habitat. These relevant issues will influence the scope of the environmental analysis, including alternatives, and guide the process for developing the EIS. Based on issues identified in the FWS decision on the petition for listing for the Bi-State sage-grouse, the proposed regulatory mechanisms would address the following resource areas and resource uses on lands administered by the FS and the BLM:

- Recreation Management
- Fire and Fuels Management
- Rangeland Management
- Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Management
- Rights of Way Management
- Specials Uses
- Transportation System and Facilities Management
- Minerals Management
    - Locatable
    - Fluid
    - Saleable

- Habitat Restoration/Vegetation Management
- Renewable Energy Development

The proposed regulatory mechanisms for these resource areas and resource uses are identified in the attached proposed action table and are organized the same as in the Forest Plan with the exception of the addition of Habitat Restoration/Vegetation Management and Renewable Energy Developments.

The Forest Plan and RMP amendments will recognize valid existing rights. Any management direction identified in the Forest Plan and RMP amendments would apply only to federal lands (including surface-estate split estate lands) administered by either the FS or the BLM.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

On March 15, 2012, the Bi-State Executive Oversight Committee for the Conservation of Greater Sage Grouse published the Bi-State Action Plan: Past, Present and Future Actions for the Conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment. This action plan recognized that conservation efforts were already underway and documented the ongoing conservation actions. The document also identified the primary threats to the Bi-State sage-grouse. These include, but are not limited to urbanization, roads and fences, livestock and wild horse grazing, pinyon and juniper encroachment, wildfire, and isolation of small populations. Permitted activities, such as recreation events, mineral exploration, development and production, and vegetation treatments can also result in threats to the Bi-State sage-grouse populations and habitats. These threats were used to identify the need for and elements of the proposed action.

SCOPING PROCESS

It would be most helpful if your scoping comments are submitted no later than January 30, 2013. You may submit comments by letter, telephone, facsimile, electronically (in Word or .rtf format) or office visit (during the hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., M-F).

Please direct comments on the proposed action pertaining to either National Forest System or BLM lands to:

James Winfrey
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
1200 Franklin Way
Sparks, NV 89431
Telephone: (775) 355-5308
Facsimile: (775) 355-5399
E-mail: comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe@fs.fed.us

Comments received in response to this scoping letter, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, will be available for public inspection, and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

Substantive formal comments must be written comments submitted to, or oral comments recorded by, the responsible official or his designee during an opportunity for public participation and attributed to the individual or entity providing them (36 CFR 219.62). For this proposal, the opportunities for public participation are the scoping comment period announced by this scoping document and the 90 day comment period that begins when the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Notice of Availability of the draft EIS in the Federal Register.

Additional information on the proposed action may be obtained by contacting James Winfrey at 1200 Franklin Way, Sparks NV, 89431 or by telephone, (775) 355-5308 or e-mail jwinfrey@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Stephanie Phillips (for)

WILLIAM A. DUNKELBERGER
Forest Supervisor