

## **Executive Summary**

**February 5, 2014**

In response to the BLM RMPA (Resource Management Area Plan Amendments) we have prepared a “Rural Community Alternative” (hereafter RCA). This alternative was prepared because we believe the preferred BLM alternative did not fully harness the power of the existing framework for maintaining and improving sage-grouse habitat resources in Oregon. Given the existing policies and procedures regulating management activities, our focus throughout the Rural Community Alternative is to empower adaptive conservation at local scales to meet complex ecosystem management challenges. We also used state-and-transition modeling to better understand the linkages between different threats (e.g. wildfire and annual grasses). *When submitting comments to BLM, please consider how the proposed alternatives will impact your personal interests and livelihood and present your opinions in your own words.*

### **Fragmentation**

The RCA does not recommend a disturbance cap. The Community Alternative suggests no net loss of sage-grouse habitat on public lands, with baseline habitat condition mapped at the allotment scale determined by State and transition models. This is consistent with the Harney County CCAA. Development would still be allowed under the RCA but mitigation would occur on a scale consistent with development impacts on sage-grouse.

### **Livestock Grazing**

Under the RCA livestock grazing decisions would not be based on administrative land designation. Existing policies largely address effects of livestock grazing that could threaten sage-grouse habitat. The RCA emphasizes use of trend monitoring (as opposed to point-in-time assessment) to account for year to year variability and site potential. The RCA stresses use of existing vegetation monitoring procedures to maximize incorporation of decades of existing trend monitoring data. Detailed sage-grouse habitat measurements would only be implemented for allotments not meeting existing Rangeland Health Standards due to livestock grazing. Permit renewal in RCA is based on achieving the desired trend relative to Rangeland Health Standards. Vegetation monitoring methodology would be left to the individual Districts as long as the selected methodology is conducted consistently and measures trend (change) in appropriate indicators of habitat conditions.

### **Wildland Fire Management**

Wildfire and invasives are the top two threats for sage-grouse in Oregon; if these threats are not analyzed the RMPA does not meet its purpose and need. The RCA addresses these threats by suggesting a process to thoroughly review wildfire risk, associated consequences, and operational barriers and recommends localized decision-making related to fuels management and fire suppression regardless of administrative land designations. Communication with Rangeland Fire Associations is encouraged. RMPA should direct BLM to conduct a wildfire/invasive risk analysis incorporating vegetation models already being used on private lands (Harney County CCAA) to promote consistency of approach.

## **Wild Horse and Burro**

Community alternative differs from BLM preferred alternative in that sage-grouse habitat indicators are incorporated into existing Rangeland Health Standards as opposed to being a standalone tool. Detailed sage-grouse habitat measurements would only be implemented in HMAs not meeting existing Rangeland Health Standards.

## **Invasive Plant Species**

The RCA includes many of the characteristics of the BLM preferred alternative and puts a strong emphasis on managing invasive species. The Community Alternative more broadly defines management strategies and suggests grazing as a potential management tool. It includes an emphasis on management of encroaching juniper. BLM is directed to complete an analysis of wildfire and invasives/juniper encroachment in the RMPA. This analysis needs to be linked to the wildfire risk assessment.

## **Travel Management**

Seasonal closure of off road use in PPMA (March 1 – June 30) for breeding and nesting protection and closure of some roads to general public 0.6 miles from major leks during breeding season. This would not encompass authorized activities (i.e. emergency activities, BLM vegetation management and required permittee livestock management). Other exceptions would need agency approval.

## **Lands and Realty Right of Way**

BLM preferred alternative proposes a 3% disturbance cap on human-caused disturbance. RCA proposes no net loss in sage-grouse habitat (as measured in acres) beyond the baseline conditions described in this RMPA. Development would still be allowed under the RCA but mitigation would occur on a scale consistent with development impacts on sage-grouse.

## **Predation**

RCA suggests additional focus on determining the extent of predation impacts on sage-grouse populations, including pilot predator-removal projects in conjunction with ODFW. Both lethal and non-lethal methods of deterrence are suggested along with habitat modifications to reduce predator impacts.

## **Selected Acronyms**

RMPA = Resource Management Area Plan Amendments

RCA = Rural Community Alternative

PPMA = Preliminary Priority Management Area (think “pretty perfect” vs. PGMA, which is “pretty good”)

CCAA = Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (for private lands only)

HMA = Herd Management Area

*Prepared by the RCA development team*