

Bjornsen, Alan

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Sent: Wednesday, May 26, 2010 11:43 PM
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Subject: Fwd: suitable.habitat, disturbed habitat
Attachments: suitablehabitatMay20edits.docx

This is the DRAFT of suitable habitat definition

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>>> John Emmerich 5/21/2010 11:14 AM >>>

Bob attached is the collective wisdom of DEQ and WGFD. Make a quick review and let me know your thoughts. I think this will be a good starting point for discussion. We could make the sage brush establishment requirement longer than 5 years for permanent rollover on prescribed sagebrush acres but 5 years matches LQD's bond schedule at which time bonds are released and some companies loose interest in reclamation. It needs to be clear that the sagebrush establishment goals ARE NOT tied to bond release but are tied to only to rollover acres.

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Suitable Sage-Grouse Habitat Description
Draft for SGIT
May 20, 2010

Sage-grouse require somewhat different seasonal habitats distributed over large areas to complete their life cycle. All of these habitats consist of, are associated with, or are immediately adjacent to, sagebrush. If sage-grouse seasonal habitat use maps do not exist for the project site the following description should be used to designate suitable sage-grouse habitat. An abbreviated description of a complex system cannot incorporate all aspects of, or exceptions to, what habitats a local sage-grouse population may or may not utilize. The references provided below will assist where more detailed site evaluations are required.

Suitable sage-grouse habitat (nesting, breeding, brood-rearing, or winter) is within the mapped occupied range of sage-grouse, and:

- 1) has 5% or greater sagebrush canopy cover as measured by the line intercept technique (Connelly et al. 2003). "Sagebrush" includes all species and sub-species of the genus *Artemisia* except the mat-forming sub-shrub species: *frigida* (fringed) and *pedatifida* (birdfoot)."; or
- 2) is riparian, wet meadow (native or introduced) or alfalfa areas within 300 yards (Soehn et al. 2001) of 10% or greater sagebrush canopy cover, or
- 3) is a burned or treated sagebrush site being managed to return to its site potential via succession that will eventually allow it to meet a minimum 5% canopy cover as described in criterion #1 above, or
- 4) for purposes of releasing reclaimed areas from the rolling disturbance cap, is a reclaimed site characterized by stable soils and established native grasses and forbs¹ suitable to the ecological site and bona fide efforts are underway to establish prescribed predisturbance sagebrush acreage.

On those acres where sagebrush establishment² is prescribed, a temporary rollover release can be achieved based on grass and forb establishment but to achieve permanent credit on prescribed sagebrush reclamation acres, sagebrush establishment must be achieved within 5 years of initial disturbance. If sagebrush establishment is not achieved

¹ Operators will be required to seed at least 2 native bunchgrasses and at least 2 forb species.

² Establishment is described as reaching 70% of the predevelopment canopy cover for grasses and forbs and sagebrush canopy cover as prescribed in the individual mine sage grouse conservation plan.

within 5 years on the acres prescribed, the sagebrush acre credit will be revoked until sagebrush is established.

Unsuitable habitat does not meet the above criteria.

References:

Connelly, J. W., K. P. Reese and M. A. Schroeder. 2003. Monitoring of greater sage-grouse habitats and populations. Station Bulletin 80. University of Idaho College of Natural Resources Experiment Station, Moscow, ID. 50 pp.

Soehn, G. and 11 others. 2001. A framework to assist in making greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) habitat assessments for BLM-administered public lands in Wyoming. U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. Cheyenne, WY. 53 pp.

Suitable Habitat Disturbance Definition

To evaluate the average 5% disturbance per 640 acre or PIAA suitable habitat cap, suitable habitat is considered disturbed when:

- It is either permanently or temporarily removed and unavailable for immediate sage-grouse use. Permanent removal occurs when habitat is physically removed through activities that replace suitable habitat with long term occupancy of nonsuitable habitat such as a road, well pad or active mine. Temporary removal occurs when vegetation is removed in small areas, but restored to suitable habitat within a few years of disturbance, such as a successfully reclaimed pipeline, or successfully reclaimed drill hole or pit.
- It is affected from two directions by anthropogenic disturbances like uranium or bentonite mines (does not include single point disturbances such as individual well pads) or from three or more directions from all types of anthropogenic disturbances (vehicle, noise, etc), less than 1.2 miles apart.