

**From:** [Romin, Laura](#)  
**To:** [Matt Kales](#)  
**Cc:** [Pat Deibert](#); [Larry Crist](#); [Betsy Herrmann](#); [Jay Martini](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Review draft: vulnerability/DC concept  
**Date:** Monday, March 31, 2014 9:48:32 AM  
**Attachments:** [vulnerability and disturbance draft \(3\) for FMT\\_LR.docx](#)

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Hi Matt,

Attached are comments from UTES.

Thanks.

Laura.

Laura Romin, Deputy Field Supervisor  
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On Fri, Mar 28, 2014 at 2:08 PM, Matt Kales <[matt\\_kales@fws.gov](mailto:matt_kales@fws.gov)> wrote:

Folks,

Thanks again for your time this morning and, per that conversation, please see attached the subject document, along with some supplemental information Pat provided. As discussed, **please send Pat and me any/all comments by 1100 MST on Monday, 3/31**. To limit the amount of comments we'll need to reconcile, we ask you please focus your review on the most substantive items in the document.

We've got a placeholder on the calendar for a follow-up call as necessary on Monday at 1100 MST on Monday (3/31) to discuss as necessary any outstanding concerns. We'll determine here – based on the nature and volume of comments – whether we need to hold that call. **If you don't hear from us, assume the call is on.** Call information is below.

Lastly, for efficiency, this distribution includes those folks who took the call this morning (not the entire FMT). If someone else in your shop needs to be looped or will actually conduct the review, please feel free to share this and provide context; otherwise, please don't distribute this further at this time.

Thanks in advance, and please Pat or me know if you have any immediate questions. Have a good weekend.

Matt

**FWS SG FMT Call, Monday, March 31, 2014, 1100 MST; 877-901-6917, passcode 4401420#**

Matt Kales

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**Discussion Draft:**  
**Greater sage-grouse Population Vulnerability**  
**and Disturbance Limits**

By the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service

March 31, 2014

As you know, we have been discussing the disturbance caps that the Service recommends be included in the current BLM and Forest Service planning effort to conserve the Greater sage-grouse. One of our recommendations has been that BLM/FS set the disturbance cap at a maximum of 3% anthropogenic disturbance, while also setting the cap at a lower level in more vulnerable populations. You recently asked us to identify specific populations that we believe are highly vulnerable to extirpation and should be protected by a more conservative disturbance cap. These populations are listed below, based on narrative included in Appendix A of the COT report. We have also taken this opportunity to provide our current thinking on disturbance limits as applied to other populations and Priority Areas for Conservation (PACs), as set out below.

Highly Vulnerable Populations

The specific populations discussed below are defined by Garton et al. 2011, with the exception of Utah which delineated management areas using local population data. These populations were also among those addressed in the COT report. We have not considered the four populations in Washington State in this effort as they have not been included in your immediate planning process. Similarly, we have not addressed the four populations within the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment due to their current proposed status.

Using information collected for completion of our 2013 Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report, we examined population vulnerability considering severity, scope, and immediacy of threats facing each individual population, and the risk of extinction as modeled by Garton et al. (2011). Based on that review we have identified the following 12 populations that are highly vulnerable to extirpation:

- Belt Mountains (*MT*)
- Dakotas (*ND, SD*)
- Laramie (*WY, CO*)
- Eagle-South Routt (*CO*)
- Parachute- Piceance-Roan Basin (*CO*)
- Meeker-White River (*CO*)
- Sheeprock (*UT*, aka *Toole-Juab Counties*)
- Northwest Interior (*NV*)
- Quinn Canyon Range (*NV*)

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- East Central (*ID*)
- Sawtooth (*ID*)
- Klamath (*OR, CA*)

For these 12 populations we recommend no further disturbance be permitted beyond what is necessary to address valid existing rights. Supporting information for these vulnerability assessments are presented in Appendix A of the 2013 COT report, which is attached. These assessments were provided by individual States and are subject to revision pending new information.

**Comment [LR1]:** Seems we should recommend that BLM/FS still apply conservation measures to protect GRSG pops where there are valid existing rights – e.g., lek buffers, noise strips, seasonal strips, use of directional drilling.

#### Disturbance Caps in Remaining Populations

Although this document provides recommendations on disturbance caps based on population vulnerability, we again urge the FS and BLM to minimize impacts to all habitats as our 2010 listing determination found the species warranted for listing based on habitat loss and fragmentation. Given the difficulty of restoring habitats once disturbed, in addition to the recommendations regarding highly vulnerable populations, we continue to encourage the FS and BLM to avoid further impacts to large intact areas that may not have high vulnerability, but have high conservation value.

The BLM/FS planning effort to date has identified a disparate array of allocation decisions and management actions intended to address habitat loss and fragmentation and to otherwise conserve sage-grouse across its range. While there are undoubtedly many ways to effectively address threats to the species, the diversity of approaches under consideration by the land management agencies to date present a very significant challenge to the Service in determining whether these conservation efforts will be effective in reducing these threats. Accordingly, to provide greater certainty that conservation objectives will be achieved, the Service recommends that BLM and the Forest Service adopt the simpler approach outlined below.

For the remaining populations, ~~(that is~~ those not identified as highly vulnerable in the previous section), we recommend no more than a three percent total disturbance cap to minimize habitat fragmentation and loss. As to PACs within these and all other populations, however, we recommend no additional disturbance be permitted except what is necessary to address valid existing rights. This recommendation is consistent with the COT report, which identifies PACs as key to the long-term conservation of the species.

**Comment [LR2]:** Will we also be recommending other conservation measures in these areas? e.g., lek buffers, noise strips, seasonal strips.

We recognize that there may be particular populations or PACs where conservation objectives can be achieved while allowing some exceptions to these general precepts. While we would be happy to discuss these possibilities with you, we would like to reiterate our recommendation that these discussions accept the simple disturbance principles we have outlined, and seek to implement those principles across the species' range, rather than continuing with the current diverse approaches to conservation of the species.

**Comment [LR3]:** For Utah, we have the Anthro and W. Tavaputs populations for which we have been recommending protection as PPMA. These areas were not identified as PACs in the COT report but are important for population and habitat connectivity. Would we recommend management of these areas as other "remaining populations" (e.g., 3 percent disturbance) or as PACs (no additional disturbance)?

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In addition, we recognize that we have previously supported different disturbance cap thresholds identified by the Wyoming Governor's Core Area Strategy, within the state of Wyoming. We continue to support this strategy based on the following:

1. The core area strategy has been implemented via a sequential series of Executive Orders (most recently E.O. 2011-5, as amended). The Executive Order requires that all state agencies, and the activities they oversee, comply with the strategy. Because the Executive Order is mandatory for state agencies, and these agencies have regulatory authority, it follows that the core area strategy is a regulatory mechanism.
2. Almost all economically viable commercial activities in Wyoming require a permit from the Wyoming Industrial Siting Commission. The Commission must ensure that these activities are developed in accordance with E.O. 2011-5 prior to issuing a permit for project development. This permit requirement applies to all land surfaces.
3. The core area strategy outlines very specific parameters which must be met by all state agencies and their associated authorities. This includes disturbing no more than a cumulative 5% of sagebrush habitats, measured at the 1 meter resolution (vs. the 90 meter resolution for the remainder of the range) within core areas and meeting a limited activity density requirement of an average of one development/640 acres. These parameters are based on ecological requirements of the species and its habitats in Wyoming and therefore provide for the conservation of the species.
- 4.5. Wind energy development is prohibited within the designated sage-grouse core areas, unless they can demonstrate that development will not have a negative effect on local sage-grouse populations (which they have not).
- 5.6. The State of Wyoming has developed supportive tools to ensure proper implementation of their strategy, such as a GIS/computer based tool that measures existing disturbance and densities. The State has enforced the disturbance and density limits within the core areas, thereby conserving sage-grouse habitats in these important areas and creating a record of implementation of the regulatory authority of Executive Order 2011-5.
- 6.7. The Bureau of Land Management has re-drafted their Resource Management Plans in Wyoming to incorporate the State of Wyoming's core area strategy, thereby providing an additional regulatory authority on their surfaces and sub-surfaces within the State.
- 7.8. Wyoming developed their plan in cooperation with the diversity of stakeholders within the State, including industry, and has achieved their support in the implementation of the core area strategy. This group of stakeholders has recently been designated as a statutory entity within the state, thereby ensuring its persistence into the future.
- 8.9. The Wyoming Core Area Strategy has a scientifically supported adaptive management strategy.

**Comment [KT4]:** For the record, suggest adding a point explaining why a 5% cap in Wyoming is at least as protective as the 3% cap recommended elsewhere (assuming you agree with Don Simpson's explanation about why this is the case).

Literature Cited:

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Garton, E.O., J.W. Connelly, J.S. Horne, C.A. Hagen, A. Moser, and M. Schroeder. 2011. Greater sage-grouse population dynamics and probability of persistence. Pp 293-381 in S.T. Knick and J.W. Connelly (editors). Greater Sage-Grouse: ecology and conservation of a landscape species and its habitats. Studies in Avian Biology (vol. 38), University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

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