



Idaho rolls out additional measures to conserve sage grouse

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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(BOISE) - The State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board) and Idaho Oil and Gas Conservation Commission approved a plan this week outlining **additional measures to conserve sage grouse in Idaho, bolstering Idaho's efforts to avoid a listing** of the species under the Endangered Species Act.

The Land Board's plan complements and augments the Governor's statewide plan to conserve the most important habitat for sage grouse in Idaho.

A federal listing of the bird could inhibit revenue-generating activities on more than 600,000 acres of endowment rangelands, lands granted to Idaho at statehood to make money for public schools and other State institutions. It also could constrain development activities that the State regulates on privately owned land.

The Land Board's Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan includes enforceable stipulations in leases, permits, and easements on endowment lands. It also spells out recommended best management practices for activities pertaining to the State's role in supporting fire prevention, suppression, and rehabilitation, and regulating oil and gas development, some mining activities, and abandoned mine reclamation.

Conservation measures recommended for federal lands were not included in the Land Board's plan because they would impose unreasonable constraints on the State's ability and obligation to ensure endowment lands maintain their constitutionally derived purpose of generating maximum long-term financial returns to public schools and other State institutions. Given the constitutional mandate for management of endowment lands and the small percentage of endowment lands located in core and important habitat zones, **it is unnecessary and problematic that the State of Idaho manages its lands in the same way as federal land managers.**

Implementation of the Land Board's plan is contingent upon the federal government's acceptance and incorporation of the Governor's plan in its final decisions on sage grouse in Idaho.

The plan focused on three primary threats to sage grouse for Idaho - wildfire, infrastructure, and invasive species.

[Since February, the Idaho Department of Lands \(IDL\) has been collecting comments on a draft sage grouse plan.](#)

Input came from natural resource industry user groups, environmental organizations, and relevant State and federal agencies to fine-tune the plan.

Sage grouse habitat is located within 11 western states, including Idaho. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is expected to release its final environmental impact statement for sage-grouse habitat on BLM lands in Idaho and southwest Montana in May or June. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to make its decision on whether to list the bird as threatened or endangered under federal law by October this year.

In the coming months IDL will work on additional plans that prepare the State to implement and monitor the conservation measures, to ensure certain activities on State and private lands conform to the approved plan.

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Key Elements of the Land Board's Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan

Fuels Management

IDL will cooperate with lessees, working groups, and other federal, state, county and private partners to:

- Strategically establish fuel breaks to protect habitat
 - Use targeted grazing as a treatment to reduce vegetative fire fuels, reduce annual grass densities, and to protect and enhance habitat
 - Strategically remove juniper near habitat
 - Utilize the BLM/U.S. Forest Service Fire and Invasives Assessment Team (FIAT) plans for identification and prioritization
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Fire Prevention

- IDL will continue to support the formation and ongoing operations of rangeland fire protection associations
 - Authorized lessees and permittees will be required to develop and be prepared to implement a fire prevention and emergency response plan that covers all aspects of operations
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Wildfire Restoration and Rehabilitation

- IDL will form partnerships, agreements, and cooperate with lessees, working groups, and other federal, State, county, and private partners in post-fire restoration treatments of habitat zones on lands damaged by fire
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Buffers

- No surface occupancy is allowed within 0.62 mile of any lek in habitat zones
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Operational Restrictions

- Noise levels from operational activities within habitat zones will be limited during breeding season
- Seasonal restrictions apply to project activities within 0.62 mile of occupied leks

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Land Exchanges

IDL may recommend the Land Board consider a three-year deferral on leasing of endowment minerals if the Department of Interior adopts a streamlined exchange process that enables the State to enter into an expedited exchange process with the BLM to reduce endowment ownership of Key habitat within Core habitat zones and provide the greatest levels of certainty for conservation of sage-grouse habitat.