

Montana and BLM Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy Comparison

	Montana Executive Order (MEO)					BLM Montana RMPs				
	Overall	General Habitat	Core Area	Connectivity Areas	Special Management Areas	Overall RMP	General Habitat Management Area (GHMA)	Priority Habitat Management Area (PHMA)	Restoration Area (RA)	Sagebrush Focal Area (SFA)
Habitat	66% privately owned	70% privately owned	54% privately owned	75% privately owned						980,474 acres
Overall				Subject to general habitat stipulations for now. MSGOT shall study/recommend stipulations necessary to prevent decline in GRSG population.	A petition may be filed to create where planned land uses or activities associated with valid rights can't be implemented after evaluation against this strategy. Core area standards apply until otherwise determined.				Used in Miles City and Billings and Pompeys Pillar RMPs for areas that already have notable disturbance (e.g., Cedar Creek, West Decker, and Carter Areas). Miles City RMP objectives include: developing habitat recovery plans, no net loss of GRSG habitat, restoration of previously disturbed landscapes to increase or improve quality, quantity of habitat.	Manage in Highline and Lewistown RMPs as PHMA with additions: 1) recommend for withdrawal from the Mining Law of 1872, subject to valid, existing rights; 2) no waiver, exception, or modification available to NSO for fluid mineral leasing; 3) prioritized for management and conservation actions, particularly review of grazing leases/permits.
Existing land uses and activities	Existing activities and uses within a defined project boundary in place prior to 9/9/14 will not be managed under MEO. Exemption list provided in Attachment F.		May not result in new surface occupancy within .6 miles of active lek. Existing disturbance will count toward 5% disturbance cap for proposed, new activities.			All decisions subject to existing rights. Existing disturbance will count toward disturbance cap for proposed, new activities.				
Expansion of existing land uses and activities	May necessitate reasonable exception. MEO only applies to projects occurring after the effective date which state agencies already have authority to review, approve, or authorize.					Use specific restrictions on occupancy. See use restrictions in the rest of the table.				
New land uses and activities	Reasonable exceptions for new uses or activities with valid rights may be necessary. MEO only applies to projects occurring after the effective date which state agencies already have authority to review, approve, or authorize.	Avoid, minimize impacts, and reclaim/restore disturbance under more flexible standards than core areas	Avoid when possible; minimize impact to suitable GRSG habitat; reclaim/restore disturbance; mitigate as appropriate. Adherence to Core Area stipulations considered sufficient to demonstrate new activities will not cause declines in GRSG populations.			Use specific restrictions on occupancy. See use restrictions in the rest of the table.				

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Density/ Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT)	Surface disturbance from uses and activities and relevant area evaluated via a Density/Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT). Disturbance includes existing disturbance, including wildfire, authorized but yet to be implemented activities, and proposed activities under consideration by reviewing or permitting agency.					Intent to use same DDCT as Montana program when Montana fully operational.				
Surface disturbance		No specific limits, but should be minimized by co-locating structures. Structures and associated infrastructure that is no longer needed or used will be removed and reclaimed.	Cap at 5% of suitable GRSG habitat averaged across affected project area. Identify unsuitable habitat outside no surface occupancy buffer around leks to incentivize location of projects there.					<u>Within Biologically Significant Unit</u> = 3% anthropogenic disturbance cap on all lands within PHMAs regardless of ownership; <u>Within project analysis area</u> = 3% anthropogenic disturbance cap or up to 5% total disturbance cap when include agricultural conversion activities and/or fire. <u>Future</u> = convert to 5% cap when Montana program fully operational	Surface disturbing and disruptive activities allowed with required design features to minimize disturbance to GRSG habitat.	
Surface occupancy		No surface occupancy (NSO) within .25 miles of active lek perimeter.	No surface disturbance (NSO) for new activities, including roads, within .6 miles of active lek perimeter.			Use specific restrictions on occupancy. See use restrictions in the rest of the table.				
Agricultural activities	See existing land uses and activities					Only allowable on case by case basis and would have to meet RMP goals and objectives if proposed in GRSG habitat. Would only be used as part of a habitat restoration plan.				

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Communication tower		Locate outside of general habitat when possible. Use topographic screening.	Should be sited to minimize impacts. When placement unavoidable: locate minimum of 4 miles from active leks if economically feasible; if not economically feasible, consolidate or co-locate with existing ROWs at least .6 miles from perimeter of active lek; if co-location not possible, locate as far as economically feasible from active leks and outside .6 mile active lek buffer. Install anti-collision measures and perch preventers within .6 miles of lek perimeter and winter range. Follow USFWS BMP.			Processed as ROW.	Avoidance area for major ROWs. Open to minor ROWs.	Avoidance area for major and minor ROWs.	Same as PHMA.	
Conifer expansion			Government agencies should adopt "no net conifer expansion" policies with criteria for waivers. Conduct conifer removal manually unless other methods show no significant impact to sagebrush. Remove conifers within at least .6 miles of lek.			Not specifically addressed as a Land Use Plan decision, but will be conducted where needed.				
Cropland conversion	Proposed prohibition on state trust lands with criteria for waivers and contingent on similar action for federal lands.					Only allowable on case by case basis and would have to meet RMP goals and objectives if proposed in GRSG habitat. Would only be used as part of a habitat restoration plan.				
Disease management (West Nile)	Recommendations for voluntary management practices on private land in MEO Attachment G.					New water pits and impoundments designed to reduce or eliminate augmenting threats from West Nile. Additional measures may be used but are not specified in the Land Use Plan.				
Fencing						Fencing identified as barrier to wildlife movement be modified or removed, unless specifically to keep ungulates out. Place, mark, modify to reduce wildlife collisions, entanglement.				
Fire prevention	Broaden firefighting agency awareness of GRSG. Prioritize eradication of cheat grass and Japanese brome and/or address management practices. Reduce risk of human caused fires.					Fire plans updated to recognize GRSG habitat.				

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Fire suppression	Improve coordination between agencies and MACO. Request federal partners mirror DNRC initial attack. Prioritize outreach to private operators re: initial attack in sagebrush. Consider use of backfires. Identify, establish defensible fire lines. Avoid vegetative stripping in healthy, unfragmented habitats.	Secondary suppression priority	Immediate suppression priority	Secondary suppression priority		Prioritize suppression in PHMAs. (Suppression facilities located to extent possible in areas that minimize disturbance to high quality habitat.)		High priority for suppression.		
Fire rehabilitation	Prevent reestablishment of cheat grass and Japanese brome. Ensure most successful restoration strategies for native habitat. Identify funding options. Use locally available seeds. Explore establishing state seed bank. Ensure post-fire monitoring.		Prioritize rehabilitation in core areas over other areas. Verify all seeding certified by independent contractor as weed-free. Recommend landowners implement management plan consistent with Attachment C after wildfire.			Emphasis on restoration for burned areas as appropriate. (If heavy equipment used, begin immediately on fire lines after containment.)				
Fire, prescribed burns		Prescribed burns should be prohibited unless demonstrate no loss of or benefit to habitat.	Program should be consulted prior to prescribed broadcast burns. These should be prohibited unless demonstrated will result in no loss of habitat or beneficial to GRSG habitat. Could be used to meet specific fuels objectives that protect GRSG habitat. Prescribed burning in winter habitat designed to reduce wildfire risk.			Subject to disturbance cap. If used, must be neutral or beneficial for GRSG and meet specific requirements in NEPA analysis. (In winter habitat, design to reduce risk and protect habitat quality. Heavy equipment prohibited for fire line construction in crucial winter range with exceptions for human safety, resource, and property protection.)		Could be used to meet specific fuels objectives to protect habitat. Only use treatments that conserve, enhance, restore habitat.	Only use treatments that conserve, enhance, restore habitat.	

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Fluid minerals (oil, gas, and geothermal)						Priority to leasing and development, including geothermal, outside of PHMA and GHMA. See also, "Oil and gas".	Surface occupancy and use for oil and gas exploration and development prohibited within .6 miles of lek. May be restricted or prohibited up to 2 miles from lek. Mitigation required. Geophysical exploration allowed on existing roads/trails with surface use prohibited March 1 to June 15 within 3 miles of lek.	Open to fluid mineral leasing and development, including exploration. No surface occupancy (NSO). No waivers or modifications to lease NSO stipulation, unless no direct, indirect, cumulative effect on GRSG or its habitat or is proposed as alternative to similar action on nearby parcel and would provide clear, enduring conservation gain to GRSG in PHMA of mixed ownership where federal minerals underlie <50% of surface. Average density of 1 energy and mining facility per square mile unless co-located in existing disturbed area.	<u>Billings and Pompeys Pillar RMP</u> : Surface occupancy and use for oil and gas exploration and development prohibited within .6 miles of lek. Surface use prohibited March 1 - June 15 within 3 miles of lek. Subject to surface disturbance density and mitigation plan. Geophysical exploration allowed on existing roads/trails with surface use prohibited March 1 to June 15 within 4 miles of lek. <u>Miles City RMP</u> : 1) Cedar Creek Area - leasing open, surface occupancy and use subject to design features to minimize disturbance; 2) West Decker and South Carter Area - leasing open but no surface occupancy and use (NSO)	No surface occupancy (NSO). No waiver, exception, or modification available.
Grazing	Recommended use of best practices in Attachment G.					If monitoring shows livestock use is adversely affecting GRSG or changes are needed to meet rangeland health standards, permits and leases may be modified prior to renewal. When permittee or lessee voluntarily relinquishes permit or lease, consider whether remain available for grazing or used for other objective.		All allotments considered for retirement where base property owner relinquishes preferences. Allotments in PHMA and those with riparian areas prioritized for field check. Site specific GRSG habitat and management objectives developed for all allotments. Hot season (summer) grazing on riparian and meadow complexes reduced.		Allotments in SFA and those with riparian areas prioritized for field check.
Hunting	FWP's Management Plan and Conservation Strategy for Sage Grouse guides hunting management approved through the Fish and Wildlife Commission process.					Not within BLM authority.				

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Mining		Encourage development in incremental stages to stagger disturbance, use strategies to localize disturbance and recovery within established zones or over staggered timeframe. Remove facilities and infrastructure when use complete, including exploration activities. Surface occupancy stipulations waived to implement underground practices for protection of human health, welfare, safety. Mining permits will include mitigation.	For development drilling or ore body delineation drilling on tight centers (~50'x50'), disturbance area delineated by external limits of development area. For widely-spaced disturbance pattern (> than 50'x50'), the actual disturbance footprint will be considered the disturbance area. Number of active mining development areas not to exceed average of 1/square mile. Surface disturbance and occupancy stipulations apply, but may be waived to implement underground practices for protection of human health, welfare, safety. Mining permits will include mitigation.					Average density of 1 energy and mining facility per square mile unless co-located in existing disturbed area.		Propose segregation from locatable mineral entry.
Mining, Coal		Generally governed by MSUMRA/SMCRA. Conservation measures developed on case-by-case basis under those permits. This strategy should not preclude federal leasing.	Coal mining will continue under permits issued under MSUMRA/SMCRA. New operations and expansions require permitting under MSUMRA/SMCRA. This strategy shall not preclude federal leasing.					Only allowed via sub-surface methods and if all related facilities outside of PHMA. Average density of 1 energy and mining facility per square mile unless co-located in existing disturbed area.	Only allowed via sub-surface methods and if all related facilities outside of PHMA.	
Noise	New project noise levels, individual or cumulative, not exceed 10 dBA above baseline noise at perimeter of active lek from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. March 1 to July 15.									

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Oil and gas		Encourage development in incremental stages to stagger disturbance, use strategies to localize disturbance and recovery within established zones or over staggered timeframe. Remove facilities and infrastructure when use complete, including exploration activities.	Well pad densities may not exceed average of 1/square mile and suitable habitat disturbed not to exceed 5%.			BLM may recommend modifications to exploration and development proposals and require modifications to or disapprove proposed activity likely to jeopardize continued existence of GRSG. Surface occupancy and use is prohibited within winter range from December 1 through March 31.	Surface occupancy and use for oil and gas exploration and development prohibited within .6 miles of lek. May be restricted or prohibited up to 2 miles from lek. Mitigation required. Geophysical exploration allowed on existing roads/trails with surface use prohibited March 1 to June 15 within 3 miles of lek.	Open to fluid mineral leasing and development, including exploration. No surface occupancy (NSO). No waivers or modifications to lease NSO stipulation, unless no direct, indirect, cumulative effect on GRSG or its habitat or is proposed as alternative to similar action on nearby parcel and would provide clear, enduring conservation gain to GRSG in PHMA of mixed ownership where federal minerals underlie <50% of surface. Average density of 1 energy and mining facility per square mile unless co-located in existing disturbed area.	<u>Billings and Pompeys Pillar RMP</u> : Surface occupancy and use for oil and gas exploration and development prohibited within .6 miles of lek. Surface use prohibited March 1 - June 15 within 3 miles of lek. Subject to surface disturbance density and mitigation plan. Geophysical exploration allowed on existing roads/trails with surface use prohibited March 1 to June 15 within 4 miles of lek. <u>Miles City RMP</u> : 1) Cedar Creek Area - leasing open, surface occupancy and use subject to design features to minimize disturbance; 2) West Decker and South Carter Area - leasing open but no surface occupancy and use (NSO)	No surface occupancy (NSO). No waiver, exception or modification available.
Pipelines			Co-locate with roads, transmission lines, other linear features when possible. Bury and restore disturbance w/ seed mix that includes at least 2 native forbs, 2 native grasses, at least 1 bunchgrass, and native shrubs. Consult landowners on desired mix. Control weeds.			Processed as ROW.	Avoidance area for major ROWs. Open to minor ROWs. Utilities and similar facilities located adjacent to other facilities where practical and only when habitat maintained.	Avoidance area for major and minor ROWs. Only allowed where habitat functionality maintained.	Same as PHMA.	

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Power lines, overhead		Locate outside of general habitat when possible. Use topographic screening. If within 2 miles of important breeding, brood-rearing, and winter habitat, follow Avian Power Line Interaction Committee guide to minimize collision potential and raptor perch sites or bury portion of line. Site new lines in existing corridors when practicable.	Should be sited to minimize impacts. When placement unavoidable: bury within 4 miles of active lek or locate minimum of 4 miles from active lek if economically feasible; if not economically feasible, consolidate or co-locate with existing ROWs at least .6 miles from perimeter of active lek; if co-location not possible, locate as far as economically feasible from active leks and outside .6 mile active lek buffer. Follow Avian Power Line Interaction Committee recommendations if sited within 2 miles of important breeding, brood-rearing, and winter habitat. Install anti-collision measures and perch preventers within .6 miles of lek perimeter and winter range. Bury existing lines contributing to GRSG declines for mitigation.			Processed as ROW.	Avoidance area for major ROWs. Open to minor ROWs. Utilities and similar facilities located adjacent to other facilities where practical and only when habitat maintained.	Avoidance area for major and minor ROWs. Only allowed where habitat functionality maintained.	Same as PHMA.	

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Predators	Eliminate, minimize external food sources for ravens, small mammals. Remove harboring structures. Up to 4 mile buffer from leks for new tall structures. Bury power lines when economically feasible. Remove abandoned tall structures. Develop strategies for specific, selective, and, if-needed, assertive short-term controls. Request localized control around permanent anthropogenic features when documented cause of GRSG loss and no other options. Explore public-private field research opportunities. Encourage local government predator control assistance.									
Rangeland	Recommendations for voluntary management practices on private land in MEO Attachment G.	When possible, rangeland on state trust lands should be managed consistent with MEO Attachment G, taking into consideration existing lessee practices on surrounding non-state land.	Same as general habitat.			Manage consistent with Standards for Rangeland Health (Standards 1 and 5) and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management. Convert targeted 8% of crested wheatgrass acres to native sagebrush/grassland. Priority treatment in GHMA, PHMA, RA.	Land treatments used to achieve and maintain fire regimes and watershed, grazing management, and wildlife objectives.	Use only treatments that conserve, enhance, restore GRSG habitat. Maintain minimum of 70% of lands capable of producing sagebrush with 10-30% sagebrush canopy cover.		Same as PHMA.
Reclamation		Should reestablish native grasses, forbs, shrubs. Consult landowners on desired mix. Control weeds.	Same as general habitat plus use seed mix that includes at least 2 native forbs, 2 native grasses, at least 1 bunchgrass, and native shrubs.							
Recreation							Low to moderate priority for future route specific travel management planning.	Do not construct new recreation facilities unless net conservation gain to GRSG habitat or required for visitor health and safety or resource protection. Special recreation use permits only issued if consistent with habitat/species goals/objectives. High priority for future route specific travel management planning.		

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Renewables						See Wind and Solar.	Avoidance area subject to special stipulations and mitigation.	Exclusion area for renewable energy exploration and facility development.	<u>Billings and Pompeys Pillar RMP</u> : Avoidance area subject to special stipulations and mitigation. <u>Miles City RMP</u> : Renewable energy ROWs excluded.	
ROWs							Avoidance area for major ROWs. Open to minor ROWs. Utilities and similar facilities located adjacent to other facilities where practical and only when habitat maintained.	Avoidance area for major and minor ROWs. Only allowed where habitat functionality maintained.	Same as PHMA.	
Sagebrush eradication on native range	Proposed prohibition on state trust lands with criteria for waivers and contingent on similar action for federal lands.									
Sagebrush eradication and treatments		Treatments will be evaluated based upon existing habitat quality and the functional level post-treatment.	Contributes to 5% disturbance cap, unless otherwise approved. Treatments that maintain sagebrush canopy cover at or > 30% of total exempted.							
Seasonal use		Activities (except production and maintenance) prohibited from March 15 - July 15 within 2 miles of active lek where breeding, nesting, and early brood-rearing habitat present. Discretionary maintenance and production activity prohibited 4-8 a.m. and 7-10 p.m. March 15- July 15. In winter concentration areas, exploration and development activity prohibited December 1 - March 15. Case-by-case exemptions may be made.	Activities prohibited March 15 to July 15 outside NSO perimeter of active lek in breeding, nesting, and early brood-rearing habitat. Discretionary			No general restrictions, but seasonal use restrictions for specific projects would be part of mitigation process based on potential impacts identified during NEPA process.				
Solar Energy						Processed as ROW.	Avoidance area subject to special stipulations and mitigation.	Exclusion area for solar energy exploration and facility development.	Avoidance or exclusion area depending on RA.	
Solid Minerals						Locatable minerals subject to 1872 Mining Law.		Leasable minerals: closed. Saleable minerals (e.g., gravel): closed to commercial, open to free use.		
State lands			State agencies prioritize eradication of cheat grass and Japanese brome.			Not applicable.				

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State trust lands	Board of Land Commissioners decides application of MEO on state trust lands.		DNRC work with lessees to maintain healthy sagebrush shrub, native grass, and forb communities on grazing land.	DNRC work with lessees to maintain healthy sagebrush shrub, native grass, and forb communities on grazing land.		Not applicable.				
Trails or travel management						Site specific travel management planning within 5 years of ROD if none exists.				
Transportation			Locate main roads for production or waste transport 2 miles from active lek. Locate other access and maintenance roads > .6 miles from perimeter of active lek. Construct to minimum road design standards for production activities.			Site specific travel management planning within 5 years of ROD if none exists.				
Vegetation		Limit removal to minimum required by project.	Limit removal to minimum required by project. In suitable habitat within 4 miles of active lek, conduct between July 16 - March 14. Other disturbance may be approved case-by-case.							
Weeds						Noxious and invasive weed control wouldn't occur within .5 miles of nesting and brood rearing areas during nesting and brood rearing seasons.				
Wind energy development		New development not recommended within 4 miles of perimeter of active lek unless demonstrate can't reasonably meet this setback and won't cause GRSG population decline. Adhere to USFWS Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines.	Exclusion area. Exception may be made if can demonstrate won't cause GRSG population decline.			Processed as ROW.	Avoidance area subject to special stipulations and mitigation.	Exclusion area for renewable energy exploration and facility development.	Avoidance area subject to special stipulations and mitigation.	
Reevaluate	Effectiveness of strategy reevaluated annually; Core Areas not to be altered for at least 5 years, absent substantial and compelling information.					As needed, but official timeline for effectiveness evaluation is every 5 years.				