

Wyoming News



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BLM to consider sage grouse research in Powder River Basin energy development

The Bureau of Land Management has advised Powder River Basin oil & gas operators and other affected parties with activities in high quality sage grouse habitat that decisions on new development in those areas will take into account recent peer-reviewed findings on the impacts of energy development on sage grouse.

“Coalbed natural gas development in the Powder River Basin is authorized by the 2003 Powder River Basin EIS, among other documents. The 2003 decision included adaptive management, allowing the BLM the flexibility to incorporate new information into decision making to help find the right balance between development and impacts to other natural resources,” State Director Bob Bennett said. “Our goal is to maintain viable sage grouse populations in Wyoming while continuing to allow oil and natural gas development on public lands and the public mineral estate.”

The BLM is a participant in Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal’s Sage Grouse Committee, appointed after the Governor’s June Sage Grouse summit in Casper.

“We want to ensure that we meet our obligations as federal land managers, and not preclude any of the innovative ideas or plans that may come out of the Governor’s working group,” Bennett added.

In cooperation with researchers, industry and other state and federal agencies, the BLM has identified “high quality sage grouse habitat areas,” planning areas that contain relatively intact sage grouse habitat. The changes will affect 13 oil and gas operators and one electrical power provider. Approximately 346,155 acres are affected in Wyoming. In the Powder River Basin, only 11 percent of the surface is managed by the BLM, and 97 percent of the public mineral estate has been leased (approximately 64 percent of the Powder River Basin mineral estate is owned by the public and managed by the BLM). The sage grouse habitat areas identified amount to slightly more than 7 percent of the Powder River Basin.

The BLM's approach in the Powder River Basin for these sage grouse habitat areas will include:

1. Decisions on Applications for Permit to Drill, Plans of Development and Rights-of-Way within identified high quality sage grouse habitat will include NEPA analysis that incorporates the findings of the recent peer reviewed research. Operators may amend their current applications to exclude high quality sage grouse habitat.
2. The Buffalo Field Office will give a priority to processing APD/POD/ROW applications that are outside of these identified high quality sage grouse habitats in lieu of previously submitted applications, to help ensure that development may continue and lessen impacts to industry and workers.
3. The Buffalo Field Office will consider applications with innovative ideas on a case-by-case basis in identified, high-quality sage grouse habitat.

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