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BLM now accepting public comment on effort to streamline projects in sagebrush habitats

SILT, Colo. – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is accepting comment on a plan to streamline the approval process for habitat improvement projects to benefit wildlife and grazing in northwestern Colorado.

As part of its multiple-use mission, the BLM manages the land that wildlife and livestock depend upon. The Northwest District is taking a broad look at possible projects in sagebrush and pinyon-juniper habitats on BLM-administered lands in northwest Colorado.

The draft programmatic environmental assessment (EA) the BLM released for public review focuses on projects that address pinyon and juniper trees gradually moving into sagebrush communities – a common problem in the West.

“We are planning a number of projects to restore sagebrush habitat throughout northwestern Colorado in the coming years,” said Northwest District Manager Andrew Archuleta. “Rather than do a number of separate, redundant EAs, we can do one larger, programmatic assessment that would streamline the approval for most projects.”

The programmatic EA analyzes techniques to improve sagebrush habitat and battle encroaching pinyon-juniper, including hand-thinning, mechanical treatments such as mowing or roller-chopping, prescribed fire, seeding and erosion control.

These treatments stimulate plant growth that increases forage for a variety of wildlife, including deer and elk, as well as livestock. Sagebrush-dependent wildlife species such as Greater Sage-Grouse would also benefit.

“As stewards, the BLM manages public lands for the benefit of current and future generations, supporting conservation as we pursue our multiple-use mission. We believe partnerships and inclusion are vital to managing sustainable, working public lands,” said Archuleta. “We rely on partnerships with wildlife groups and ranchers to complete these types of projects.”

This broad evaluation provides a comprehensive document for individual projects to reference, which eliminates the need for a separate analysis for each project. Site-specific surveys and clearances for

special status wildlife, plants, and cultural resources would be required for each project plan area prior to implementing treatments.

The programmatic EA covers the Northwest District and the Southwest District's Grand Junction Field Office.

Comments will be most helpful if received by July 9, 2017. Information about the proposal and how to comment on it are available on-line: <http://bit.ly/2qTB7Yy>.

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