

Northwest Colorado BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Environmental Impact Statement

BLM
Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy

Northwest Colorado RAC Meeting
June 4, 2015



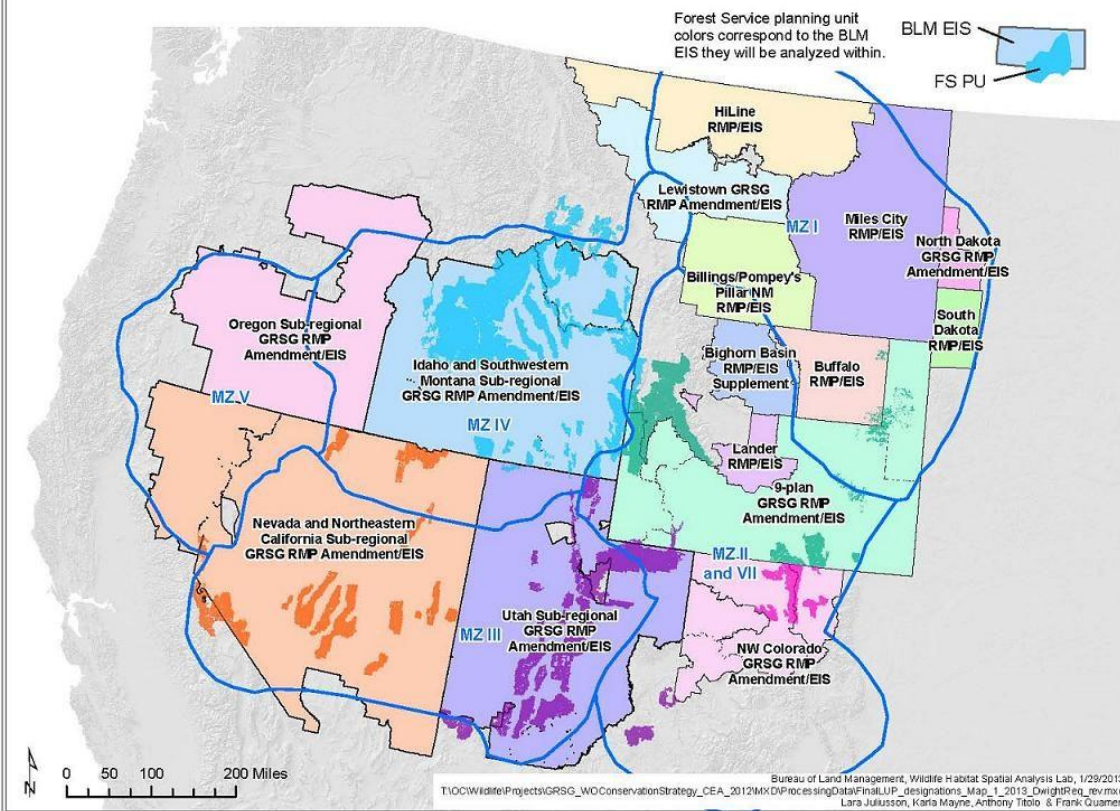
Why now?

- In April 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined that the Greater Sage-Grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- One of the primary threats identified in the FWS decision was a lack of regulatory mechanisms for protection of GRSG in BLM Resource Management Plans.
- The NWCO GRSG Proposed Plan is part of a national effort to include GRSG conservation measures/regulatory mechanisms into RMPs.
- FWS has until 2015 to make a final determination on listing the Greater Sage-Grouse under the ESA.



How does NW Colorado fit into the bigger picture?

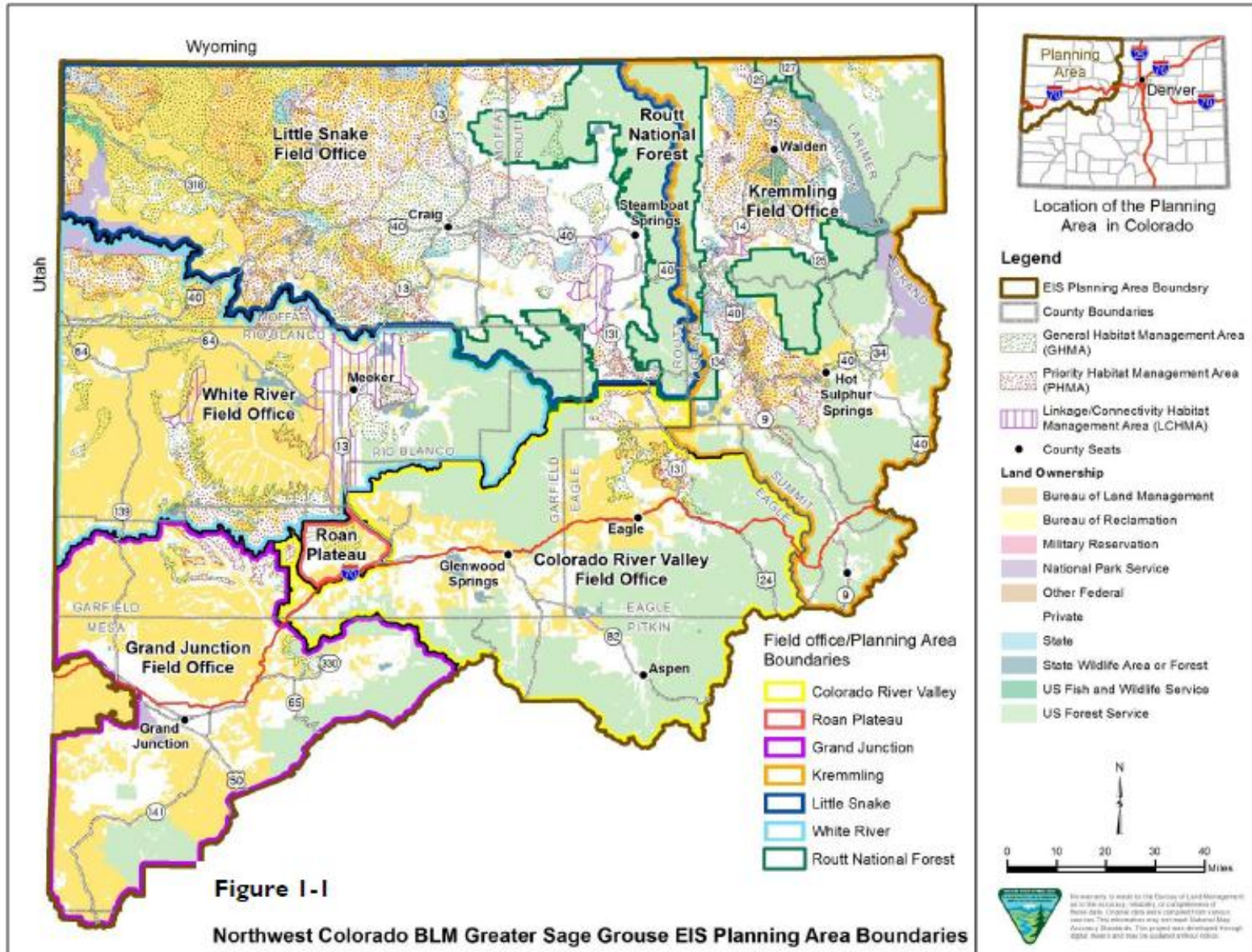
BLM USFS GRSG Planning Strategy Sub-region/EIS Boundaries



- NW Colorado contains about 4% of all of the GRSG habitat nationwide (regardless of ownership)
- Of the GRSG habitat in NW Colorado, the BLM manages approximately 50% and the FS manages less than 1%



Priority Habitat Management Areas, General Habitat Management Areas, and Linkage/Connectivity Habitat Management Areas



Colorado Issues

- Colorado population defines the South-East range of the species
- All Designated Habitat (regardless of ownership) = About 4.1 million acres
- Decision Area (BLM/FS surface) = About 1.7 million acres (USFS = About 20,000 acres)
- Decision Area (Federal Mineral Estate) = About 2.9 million acres
- Major Threats/Concerns
 - Habitat Fragmentation
 - Fluid Minerals Management
 - Rights-of-way; including transmission
 - Livestock grazing
 - Locatable and Salable Minerals
 - Fire Management
 - Invasive Species



History of the Planning Effort

- Published Notice of Intent in the Federal Register kicking off the planning process and initiating the scoping period on December 9, 2011.
- Held public scoping meetings in early 2012

Table 6.2
Scoping Open House Information

Venue	Location (Colorado)	Date	Number of Attendees
The Wattenburg Center	Walden	January 31, 2012	36
Sheraton Denver West	Lakewood	February 1, 2012	17
Colorado River Valley Field Office	Silt	February 2, 2012	12
Little Snake Field Office	Craig	February 3, 2012	24
		Total	89

Note: All meetings were held from 4:00 to 7:00 pm.



History of the Planning Effort

- Published Draft EIS on August 16, 2013, initiating the public comment period.
- Held public meetings on the Draft EIS during October of 2013.
- Public comment period was extended and ended on December 2, 2013.



Public Comment Period on Draft EIS

Location	Date	Venue	Number of Attendees
Walden	October 22, 2013	Wattenburg Center	13
Lakewood	October 23, 2013	Lakewood Heritage Center	30
Silt	October 28, 2013	BLM Colorado River Valley Field Office	24
Craig	October 29, 2013	Craig Hospital	33
TOTAL			100

Number of Public Comments Received – Approximately 6,000

Form Letters Received From - Wild Earth Guardians

American Bird Conservancy

Conservation Colorado

National Wildlife Federation

Sierra Club

Number of Unique Submissions - 329

Number of Unique Comments Identified - 506



Major Comment Categories

- NEPA
 - Range of Alternatives (81)
 - Best Available Information (30)
 - Cooperating Agency Relationships (14)
- Sage Grouse
 - Best Available Information (56)
 - NTT Report Findings (39)
 - Mitigation Measures (16)
 - Impact Analysis (15)
 - Range of Alternatives (14)
- Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice
 - Impact Analysis (33)
 - Best Available Information (6)

(See **Appendix P** of the Proposed Plan for responses to public comments)



Proposed Plan/Final EIS Overview



UNLEASED FLUID MINERALS

Proposed Plan Language*:

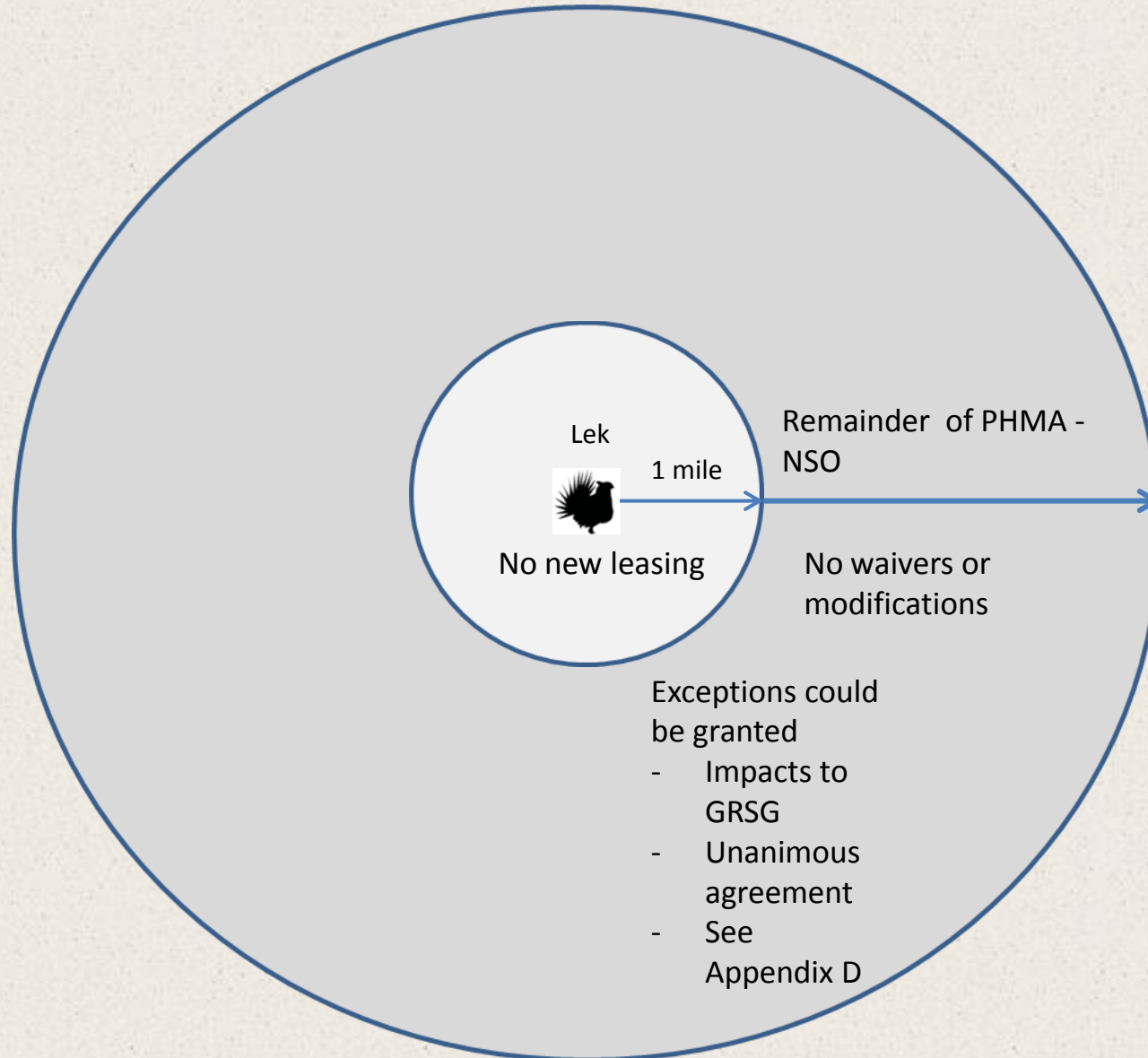
- No new leasing 1 mile from active leks in all designated habitat (Blickley et al. 2012; Harju 2012).
- No Surface Occupancy (NSO) without waiver or modification in PHMA.
- In General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA), any new leases would include appropriate Timing Limitation (TL) stipulations to protect GRSG and its habitat.
- In addition, in GHMA, NSO with waivers, exceptions, and modification within 2 miles of active leks.

*See Chapter 2, Table 2.2, Description of BLM Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment

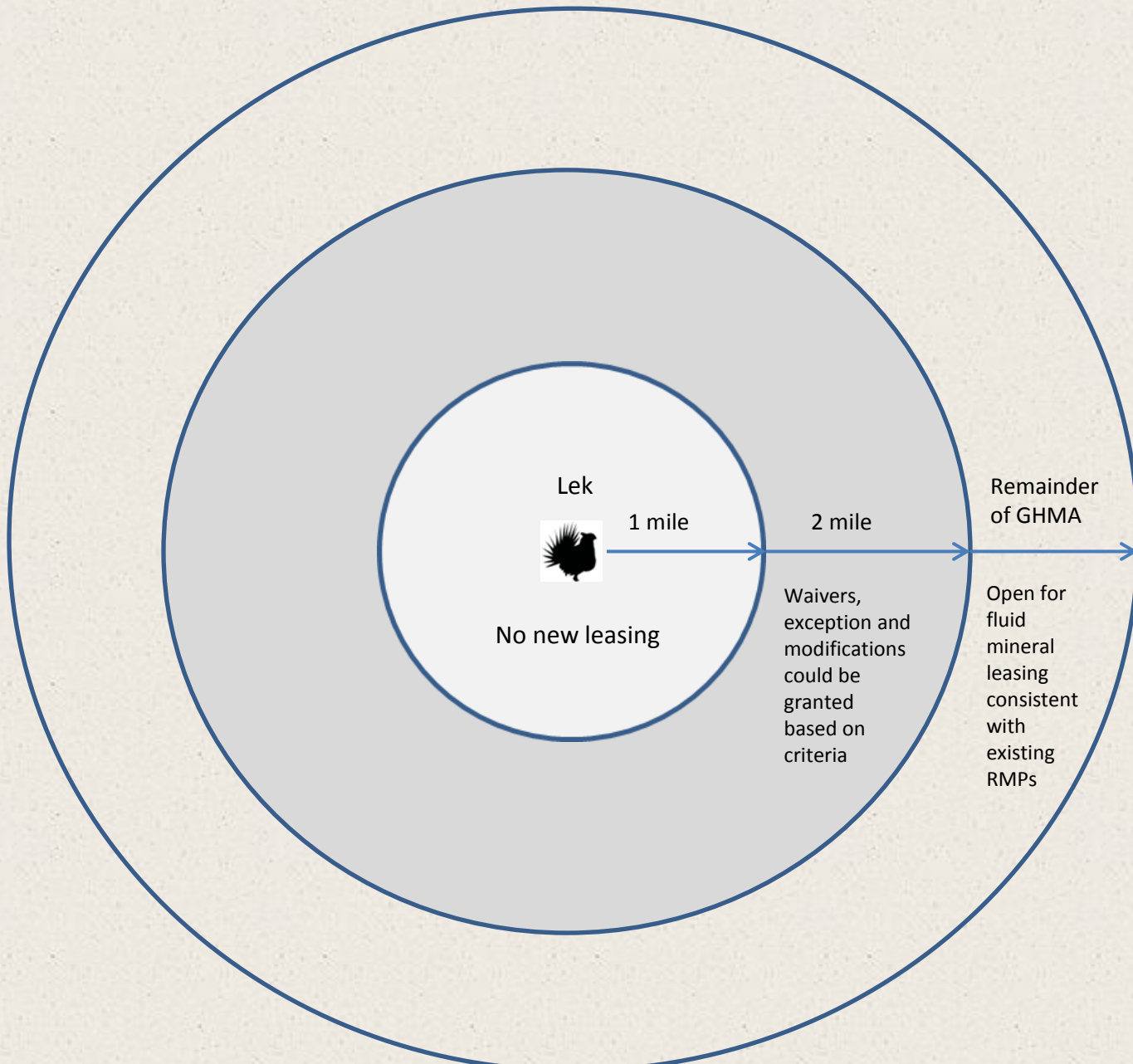


No Surface Occupancy

Priority Habitat Management Areas



No Surface Occupancy – NWCO Proposed Plan General Habitat Management Areas



LANDS AND REALTY

Proposed Plan Language*:

- Manage areas within PHMA as avoidance areas for BLM Right of Way (ROW) permits or Forest Service Special Use Authorization (SUA) permits.
- Manage areas within GHMA as avoidance areas for major (transmission lines greater than 100 kilovolts and pipelines greater than 24 inches) and minor BLM ROW permits or Forest Service SUA permits.
- No new roads or above-ground structures would be authorized within 1 mile of an active lek.

*See Chapter 2, Table 2.2, Description of BLM Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment

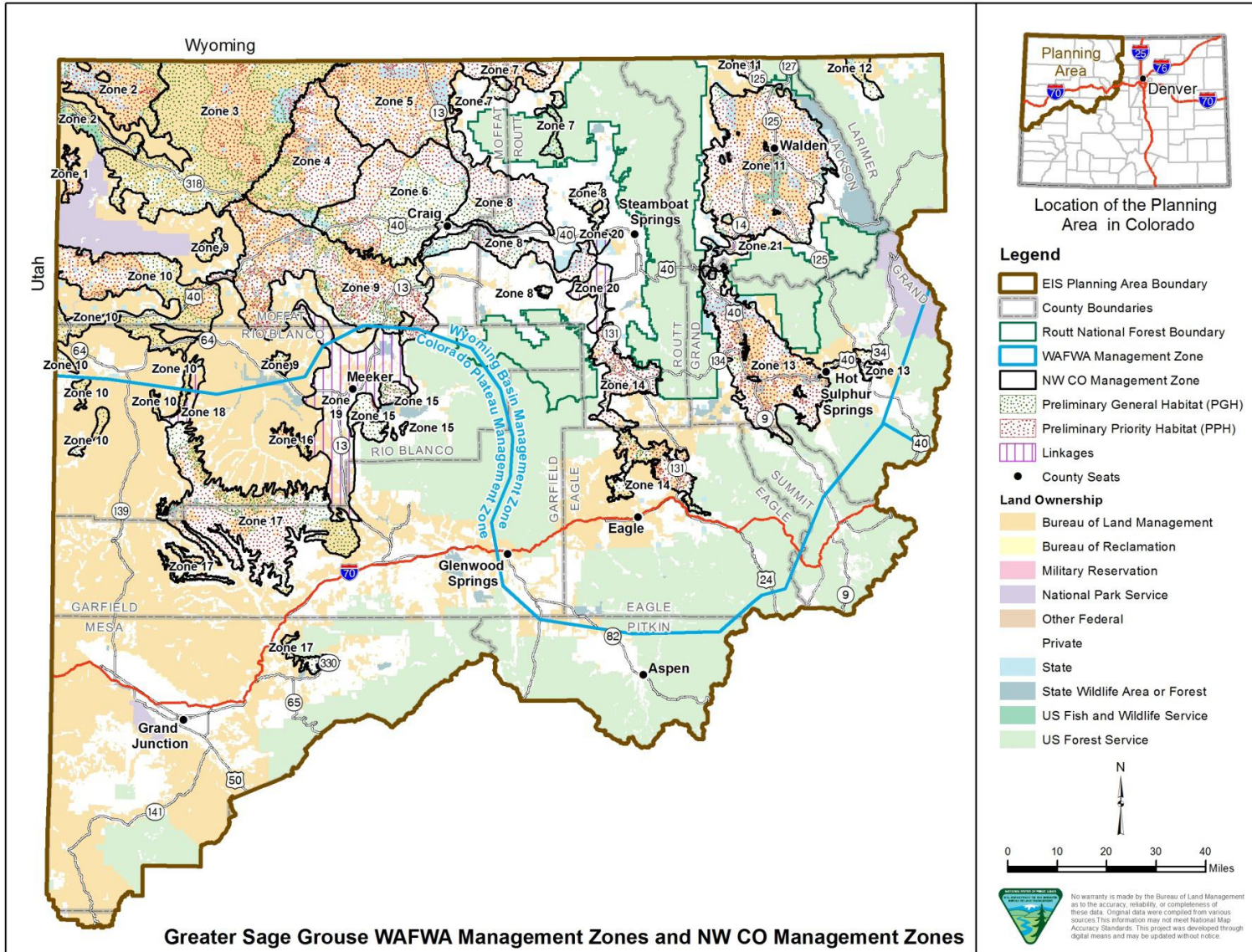


Range Management

- The plan acknowledges that well-managed livestock operations and Greater Sage-Grouse are compatible. Forage availability for livestock and hiding cover for GRSG are both dependent on healthy plant communities.
- Agreements with partners that promote sustainable GRSG populations concurrent with sustainable ranch operations will be pursued.
- Incorporate GRSG habitat objectives (Appendix H) into Allotment Management Plans or permit renewals, and prioritize processing of grazing permits/leases in PHMAs.
- Design new range improvement projects to enhance livestock distribution and to control the timing and intensity of utilization.
- Evaluate existing range improvements to determine if modifications are necessary to maintain GRSG populations or reverse a downward population trend caused by habitat loss.
- If a permittee/leasee voluntarily relinquishes a grazing permit or lease, the BLM would evaluate whether the area would continue to be available for grazing



21 Colorado Management Zones



Disturbance Cap

- 3% disturbance cap in PHMAs
- Would be measured by CO Management Zone
- Anthropogenic disturbances only
- See **Appendix E** for a detailed methodology for calculating disturbance caps.



TransWest Power Line Disturbance Cap Calculations

The TransWest Power line Agency Preferred Route would traverse four GrSG CO Management Zones:

- Zone 3 – Moffat County
- Zone 4 – Moffat County
- Zone 9 – Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties
- Zone 10 – Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties

Should the TransWest Agency Preferred Route be approved, it would add the following disturbance acreages to the disturbance cap:

- Zone 3 – 87 acres – Added disturbance - .05%
- Zone 4 – 33 acres – Added disturbance - .02%
- Zone 9 – 274 acres – Added disturbance - .10%
- Zone 10 – 243 acres – Added disturbance - .23%

Total disturbance by CO Management Zone, including existing disturbance, should the TransWest Agency Preferred Route be approved:

- Zone 3 – 1.06% + .05% = **1.11%**
- Zone 4 – 1.08% + .02% = **1.10%**
- Zone 9 – 1.59% + .10% = **1.69%**
- Zone 10 – 1.64% + .23% = **1.87%**



Next Steps

- Published Proposed Plan – May 29, 2015
- Began 30-day Protest Period – May 29, 2015
- 30-day Protest Period Ends – June 29, 2015
- Began 60-day Governor’s Consistency Review – May 29, 2015
- Governor’s Consistency Review Ends – July 29, 2015
- Sign RODs – July 31, 2015



Questions?



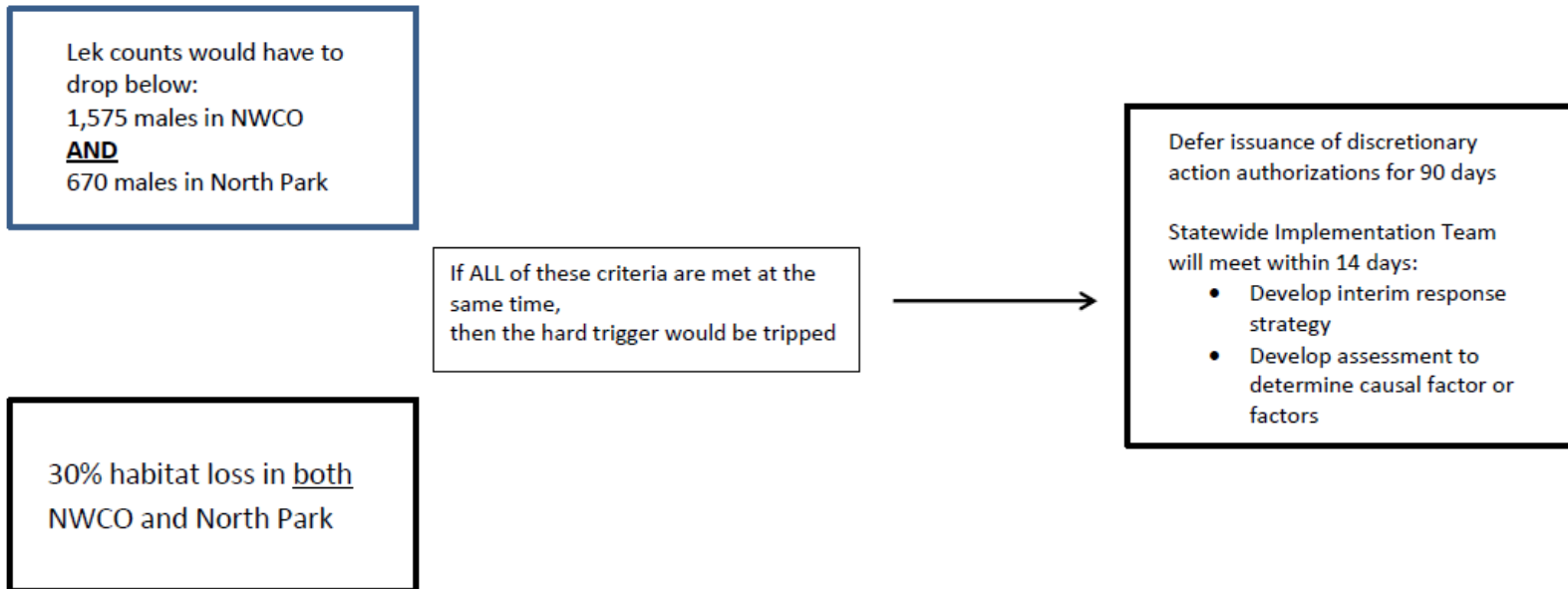
Adaptive Management Hard Triggers

- Based on two metrics
 - GRSG lek (high male) count
 - 1,575 males in NWCO population
 - 670 males in North Park population

AND

- Habitat loss (Anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic disturbances)

*Habitat loss calculation for the hard trigger is separate from calculation for disturbance cap (only anthropogenic).

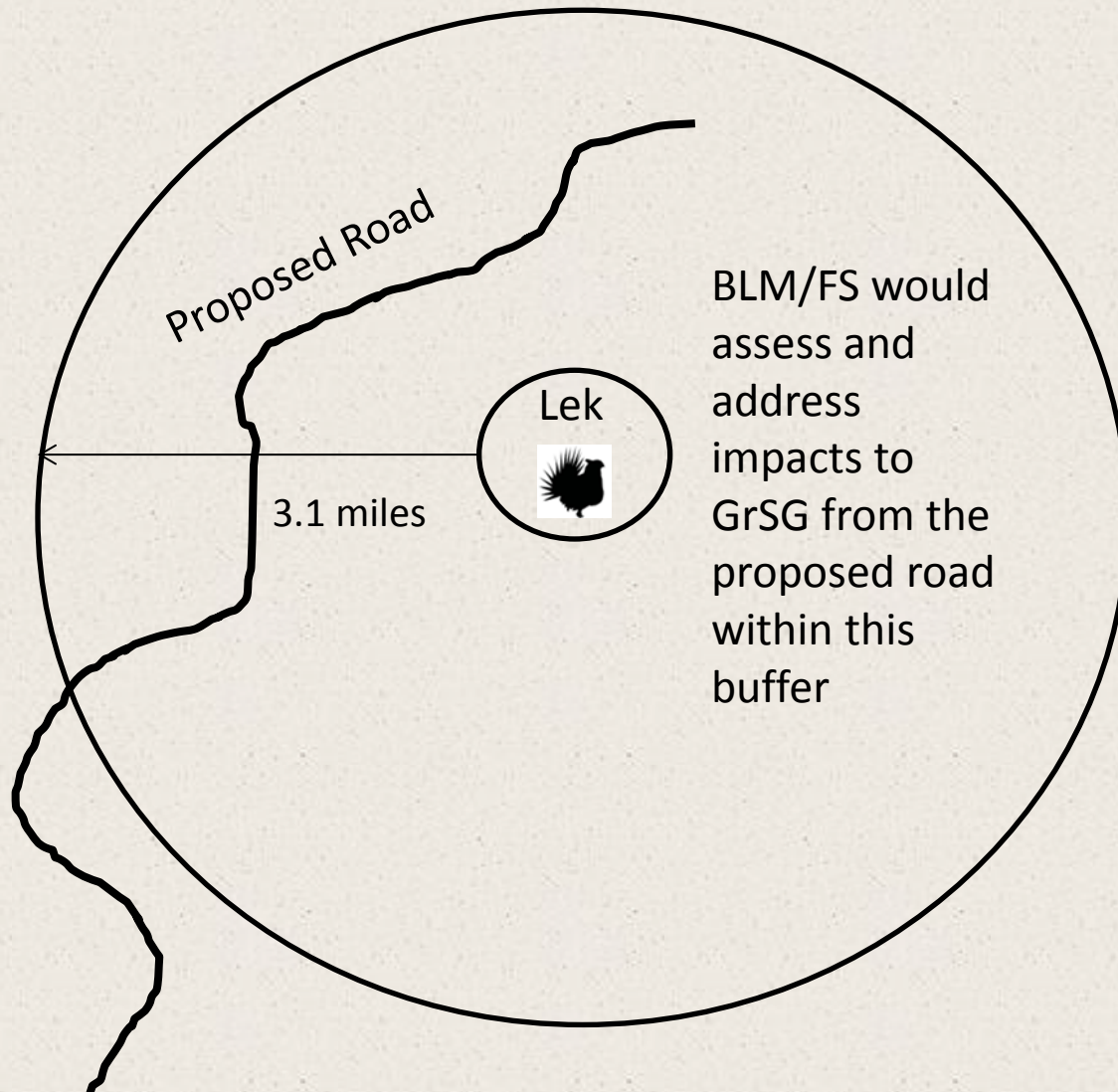


Lek Buffers

- The purpose of **Appendix B** (Lek Buffers) is to outline instructions on how to evaluate impacts on leks from actions requiring NEPA analysis.
- The lek buffer distances identified in Appendix B are not allocation decisions. The buffer distances would be used to assess impacts to GRSB during site-specific NEPA analyses.
- The BLM/FS will assess and address impacts from proposed activities using the guidance provided in Appendix B.



Lek Buffer Example



Changes between Draft and Proposed Plan

Draft EIS Preferred Alternative	Proposed Plan
NSO in PHMA	<p>No new leasing 1 mile from active leks</p> <p>NSO without waiver or modification in PHMA</p> <p>NSO in GHMA within 2 miles of active leks – waiver, exception or modification would be based on criteria</p>
<p>PHMA would be avoidance areas for new ROWs</p> <p>PHMA would be exclusion areas for large transmission lines</p> <p>Manage 68,000 acres as avoidance areas for large transmission lines</p>	<p>PHMA and GHMA would be avoidance areas</p> <p>No new roads or above-ground structures within 1 mile of active leks.</p> <p>PHMA and GHMA would be avoidance areas for high voltage transmission lines</p> <p>TransWest and Gateway South transmission line exceptions.</p>



Changes between Draft and Proposed Plan

Draft EIS Preferred Alternative	Proposed Plan
5% disturbance cap in ecological sites that support sagebrush – calculated by CO Management Zone.	3% disturbance cap in PHMA – calculated by CO Management Zone.
Anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic disturbances included.	Anthropogenic disturbances included.
No similar action.	<p>Make PHMAs exclusion areas for wind energy development.</p> <p>Make GHMAs avoidance areas wind energy development.</p>
No similar action.	<p>Make PHMAs exclusion areas for solar energy development.</p> <p>Make GHMAs avoidance areas for solar energy development.</p>

