

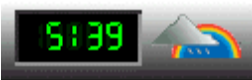
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Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Wood River Journal

Feds want more comments on sage grouse

Measures aimed at preventing endangered listing

By **KATHERINE WUTZ**
Express Staff Writer

Public comment over a sage grouse conservation plan for 10 Western states has been extended until late next month.

National Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Abbey may have kicked off the frenzy earlier this month when he joined Twitter, the social network and microblogging site, on Feb. 10. Using the handle @BLMDirector, Abbey immediately tweeted about the agency's sage-grouse conservation plan, which is up for public comment.

The comment period on the plan's environmental impact study was originally set to end Feb. 29, but has been expanded through March 23 due to public interest, according to a Forest Service news release.

The plan would impact public lands throughout southern Idaho, including the Sawtooth and Salmon-Challis national forests, as well as forests and

grasslands in nine other states.

The new plan would place conservation measures meant to preserve sage grouse populations into BLM and Forest Service land management plans. The plans evaluate the land's resources and establish how best to use the land—

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The BLM and Forest Service would take into account sage grouse threats and conservation measures to mitigate them as listed in the Idaho's Sage Grouse Advisory Committee's 2006 report. Threats identified by the committee include wildfire, livestock grazing, habitat fragmentation and some commercial activities; mitigations for 19 individual threats are suggested in the plan and expected to be carried out on public land.

The entire plan can be viewed at

<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/wildlife/sageGrouse/conservPlan.pdf>

Agencies decided to study implementing sage grouse measures after an April 2010 decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that stated that the greater sage grouse was in need of federal protection. Protection was denied, however, as the agency ruled that other species had a higher priority.

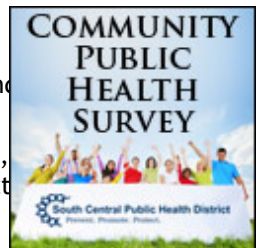
As a result, the Forest Service and BLM worked to introduce conservation measures into their land-use plans, in order to prevent a potential listing. Once the scoping period has finished, the BLM and Forest Service will complete the conservation measures by September 2014—before the Fish and Wildlife Service's decision deadline on sage grouse protection in 2015.

Interested members of the public can send comments to sagewest@blm.gov, fax comments to 775-861-6747 or send by mail to Great Basin Region Project Manager, BLM Nevada State Office, 1340 Financial Boulevard, Reno, NV 89502.

Katherine Wutz: kwutz@mtexpress.com

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