BLM Fire and Aviation
Sagebrush Steppe and Wildfire
Talking Points
June 2016

• The deteriorating health of western sagebrush landscapes has sparked an unprecedented and proactive partnership to conserve the uniquely American habitat that supports the Greater Sage-Grouse and other iconic wildlife, outdoor recreation, ranching and other traditional land uses.

* The BLM and USFS land use plans were key elements in the FWS’s determination that the Greater Sage-Grouse does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act.

• Signed in 2015, Secretarial Order 3336 recognized that Western rangelands and the sage-steppe ecosystem were at a critical tipping point, and immediate and determined action was needed.

• Fire management, before, during and after the incidence of fire represents roughly half of the equation leading to the current condition of our rangelands. The other half of the equation is the persistent spread of invasive species, most notably cheatgrass, which follows fire.

• There are other resource management and climate-change factors that contribute to this current situation, but the repeating and unbroken fire-invasives-fire cycle is the primary cause.

• The rapid and dominant spread of cheatgrass after fire, combined with its flammability, has drastically shortened natural fire intervals, made rehabilitation and restorative actions difficult, and converted large areas from diverse vegetative communities to a state of being at or near unhealthy monocultures.

• Of equal or greater importance are the risks to local, rural community economies that depend on healthy lands and multiple uses, from recreation to grazing.

• What this shift means is we will necessarily see a greater percentage of funds and resources focused on the most critical areas. But operational fire response and best-management practices alone cannot meet the challenges on the land. This shift will also require an integration of fire and resource management, including the best available science, in ways and at levels not seen before.

• The BLM, which manages the majority of sage-steppe ecosystem and sage-grouse habitat, is continuing to work in a heightened collaborative environment with partners, tribes, stakeholders and others to address and improve conditions on the land.

• While safety will continue as the overall top priority, the sage-steppe ecosystem and sage-grouse habitat will continue to be the top natural resource priority. As such, we will continue our focus on hazardous fuels management, positioning of fire crews and equipment, and a full integration of emerging science of ecological resilience into the design of habitat management, fuels management, and restoration projects.

• Any change or refinement of focus, however, does not mean we will waver from our commitment to firefighter and public safety as absolute top priorities. No area will be left unprotected, and no one, public or firefighter, will be put at unnecessary risk in order to implement change.