

Feds release plan to reduce wildfires in the West

■ Proposal from Bureau of Land Management focuses on mainly sagebrush habitat in multiple states, including Oregon

By Keith Ridler

Associated Press

BOISE — U.S. officials on Friday, Nov. 27, released an overarching plan for removing or changing vegetation over a huge swath of the U.S. West to stop devastating wildfires on land used for cattle ranching, recreation and habitat for imperiled sage grouse.

The plan released by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management aims to limit wildfires in a 350,000-square-mile area of mainly sagebrush habitat that includes parts of Idaho, Oregon, Washington, California, Nevada and Utah.

The plan, which cost about \$2 million, originated during the Obama administration as officials sought to avoid listing sage grouse as protected under the Endangered Species Act, which could have severely limited mining, ranching and recreation.

Giant rangeland wildfires in recent decades have destroyed vast areas of sagebrush steppe ecosystems that support some 350 species of wildlife. Experts say the blazes have mainly been



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald File Photo, 2014

A single-engine tanker drops fire-retardant ahead of a blaze in sagebrush country east of Baker City in July 2014.

driven by cheatgrass, an invasive species that relies on fire to spread to new areas while killing native plants, including sagebrush on which sage grouse depend.

Sage grouse were never listed but remain imperiled. The Trump administration, while lifting restrictions on mining and other extractive

industries, moved ahead with efforts to control the giant blazes that typically also destroy rangeland needed by cattle ranchers.

“Restoring sagebrush communities improves the sustainability of working rangelands and can reduce the expansion of invasive annual grasses,” Deputy

Director for Policy and Programs William Perry Pendley said in a statement. “People in the Great Basin depend on these landscapes for their livelihoods and recreation, and wildlife rely on them for habitat.”

The plan released Nov. 27 does not authorize any specific projects. Instead,

its analysis can be used to OK treatments for projects involving prescribed fires, fuel breaks and other measures to prevent or limit massive blazes that have worsened in recent decades.

U.S. land managers typically analyze proposed projects by writing environmental impact statements to avoid inadvertently harming some aspect of the environment.

The plan is called a programmatic environmental impact statement. Its analysis can be used to help OK “project-level” environmental impact statements without having to duplicate previous studies, saving time and money, officials said.

Specifically, the agency said the document can be used to help local land managers comply with an environmental law, the National Environmental Policy Act, when land managers seek approval for specific projects.

Erik Molvar, executive director of Western Watersheds

Project, blasted the document as essentially a way to manage land to benefit ranchers while harming wildlife.

“With this project, the BLM is clearly trying to write itself a blank check to do large and damaging vegetation removal without any further input or detailed analysis,” he said. “This is an agency whose track record of vegetation manipulation has overwhelmingly resulted in habitat destruction.”

In a related matter, the bureau last summer approved a plan to limit wildfires in sagebrush habitat in Idaho, Oregon, California and Nevada by building some 11,000 miles of fuel breaks on strips of land up to 165 yards wide.

Ecologists have offered mixed responses on that plan, noting it will fragment habitat and likely harm some wildlife, including sage grouse. However, they note, the massive and at times unstoppable wildfires can destroy huge chunks of habitat.

Gift ideas for outdoors enthusiasts

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) offers a list of suggested holiday gifts for hunters, anglers, wildlife viewers and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Licenses, tags, wildlife area parking permits and conservation stamps for 2021 are available online at <https://odfw.huntfishoregon.com/login> or at license sale agents.

The cost of licenses and tags is the same as it in 2020. For residents, an annual fishing license is \$44, an annual hunting license is \$34.50 and a combination hunting and fishing license is \$73.

Youth licenses (for ages 12-17) re-

main \$10 for a combo license (angling, hunting, plus shellfish and Columbia River Endorsement) for both residents and nonresidents and \$55 for a Youth SportsPac (residents only).

Other gift ideas:

- Big game raffle ticket (prices start at \$4.50 per ticket):

Raffle tickets are a chance to win a four-month long season in an expanded hunt area for deer, elk, bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain goat, pronghorn or the Combo Deer/Elk tag. Ticket prices vary from \$4.50 to \$11.50 per ticket, with discounts for buying multiple tickets. Buy online via ODFW's licensing system.

- Wildlife area parking permit (\$30 annually; included with hunting license) The permit allows parking at all of ODFW's more than 20 wildlife areas.
- Habitat conservation stamp or art print (\$20 to \$35)

Money raised supports conservation of fish and wildlife and habitat. Collector stamps can be purchased for \$20 through ODFW's licensing page (under General Category). Most signed art prints are \$35; purchase art prints by mailing or faxing this form: https://www.odfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/con-test/docs/2020_ORDER_FORM_Habitat_Conservation_Stamp.pdf

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CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

1 Reporter's question

4 Boor

9 Night flyer

12 Sense organ

13 Prudential rival

14 Sinbad's transport

15 Harvests wool

17 Having an awning

19 Megastar

21 Avail oneself of

22 South African money

25 Dear companion

27 Food holder

30 Word of parting

32 Pasta choice

34 Kiri — Kanawa

35 Bagel partner

36 Heads opposite

38 Everybody

39 16 oz.

40 Valuable figurine

41 Piano part

43 Sasquatch cousin

45 9-digit ID

47 D'Urberville girl

48 Kind

50 Popular fish

52 Drink of the gods

55 Soup pot

59 Acorn producer

60 Crafty moves

62 Physicist's study

63 Commuter vehicle

64 Advances

65 "Mystery!" channel

DOWN

1 Movie director — Craven

2 Nasty laugh

Answer to Previous Puzzle

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3 Source of metal

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8 Waikiki site

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11 Arith. term

16 Nurse's helper

18 — spumante

20 Idlest

22 Come from behind

23 Taos dwelling

24 Turn down

26 Dogpatch's — Abner

28 Book of maps

29 Cheers

31 Ms. Hagen

33 Sugar amt.

37 Magazine fillers

38 Lemon cooler

40 Forsake a lover

42 Ohio, to Yves

44 Woods insects

46 Microwaved

49 A Marx

51 Monster's loch

52 Cribbage card

53 Paris thirst-quencher

54 Regret

56 Iceberg part

57 Tennis stroke

58 Printer's measures

61 Tin, in formulas

TEXT AND

JUST DON'T TEXT

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