

**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
ELKO FIELD OFFICE  
BURNED AREA EMERGENCY REHABILITATION TEAM**

**ELKO 13 FIRE COMPLEX**

**WILDLIFE ASSESSMENT**

**I. ISSUES**

- **Critical big game winter range and sage grouse habitat loss from fires.**
- **The threat of exotic annual plant species revegetating burned areas and increasing fire frequency.**
- **Critical loss of limited wildlife habitat (deciduous woodland habitat) as a result of fires.**

**II. OBSERVATIONS**

The purpose of this Wildlife Assessment is to document the effects of the fire, suppression activities, and proposed rehabilitation work to all Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, Sensitive (TECS) or otherwise significant mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, invertebrates and their habitat, which may be found within or downstream from the fire areas. After research of the appropriate literature, contact with local experts, and after a species list was obtained, the number of TECS Species to be addressed in this assessment was reduced to two.

Species and issues identified by the BLM staff at the Elko Field office to be addressed include loss of crucial big game winter range, sage grouse habitat and limited deciduous woodland areas that provide habitat for numerous wildlife species .

**A Wildlife Background**

The 2000 Elko fires associated with the Elko Field Office burned approximately 64,693 acres between the middle of June and August 6, 2000. Because of strong winds and fuel types, these fires burned quickly through these areas and consumed large acreages in a short period of time. Vegetation resources were impacted by varying degrees as burn intensities were relatively uniform across the landscape. However there were blocks of unburned vegetation and varying amounts of mosaic in these burn patterns. Elevation ranges within the fires areas are from approximately 4,300 to 8,500 feet.

Plant communities within the fire areas include large blocks of cheat grass and other grass species, sagebrush, mountain shrub communities, juniper, aspen, and riparian habitats with willow and other riparian species. Many of the ridges are vegetated by the pinon-juniper forest vegetation, reflecting shallow rocky soil types. The climate in the area is arid, with precipitation primarily occurring during winter months with a variety of wildlife habitats present within the fire area. Wildlife species found in these habitats vary in abundance and diversity depending on the type and condition of the vegetation. Approximately 300 species of wildlife including mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish are seasonal or yearlong residents within these fire areas.

**B. Reconnaissance Methodology and Results**

Wildlife information for this assessment was based upon a review of relevant literature,

consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), personal communications with BLM, Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW), and other resource professionals. Reconnaissance included field reviews and aerial flights from 07/20 through 08/06.

**Species Of Concern:**

Sage grouse: It is widely known that sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) are a growing concern across the West. At a sage grouse workshop in Billings, Montana in July, 1998, representatives of every western state presented data depicting long-term population decline. In Nevada, sage grouse populations in certain areas continue to decline according to most trend indices (Saake and Stiver 1999). Sage grouse have been designated by the Nevada Bureau of Land Management State Director as a BLM Sensitive Species and therefore afforded by BLM policy (BLM 1988, 1998) the same level of protection as candidate species, this is, "BLM shall carry out management, consistent with principles of multiple use, for the conservation of candidate species and their habitats and shall ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out do not contribute to the need to list any of these species as threatened or endangered".

Although the suspected causes of sage grouse decline are numerous, loss of habitat ranks at the top of the list (Braun 1998). The primary concern of local experts with respect to range fires is the loss of sage grouse habitat. Rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat, and the prevention of invasion by fire prone annual weeds is a wildlife management priority of both NDOW and BLM and is reflected in the treatment specifications of this plan.

The Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentillis*), is another species of concern (State of Nevada Listed Species) for some of the fires covered in this plan. Goshawk nesting habitat, typically aspen groves containing streams, was impacted by some of the fires addressed in this plan. Protection and monitoring of aspen will be necessary in order to ensure regeneration and survival. Aspen regeneration from seed under present climatic conditions is not very successful, therefore protection from grazing is necessary to ensure that resprouting aspen suckers from the fire are protected.

Other species listed on the Nevada State and BLM sensitive species lists not requested by BLM or NDOW personnel to discuss here, is located in Appendix III.

The following listed species were identified by BLM or FWS as potentially existing within or adjacent to the fire area. Through field work and consultation with various experts, it was determined that these species were unaffected by the fire (no habitat within the fire area, inventories prior to the fire determined absence, or are migrants and are not in the area at this time):

<b>Bald eagle, <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i></b>	<b>T</b>
<b>Spotted frog, <i>Rana luteiventris</i></b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Mountain Plover, <i>Charadrius montanus</i></b>	<b>P</b>

**KEY TO LISTING STATUS:**

**T = THREATENED**  
**C = CANDIDATE**  
**P = PROPOSED**

**III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**A. Management: (Specifications related)**

The following activities can be accomplished by using EFR funds as outlined in the stipulations section of this plan.

**a. N-3a BLM 98-148 III. E Ecological Stabilization - Planting/Seeding**

Aerially seed crucial big game winter range and sage grouse habitat to reestablish shrub species important for cover, nesting, and forage.

**b. N-3b BLM 98-148 III. Q Ecological Stabilization - Planting/Seeding**

Fires within the Elko 13 Fire Complex have negatively impacted mid to late seral plant communities and increased the potential for erosion, loss of ecological integrity through the invasion of non-native species, and the spread of known populations of noxious weeds. Range sites within the 13 fires covered under this plan have been analyzed and prioritized for treatment to prevent site degradation, maintain ecological stability, and prevent spread of non-native, invasive weeds along roads by reseeded using species adapted to the sites.

**B. Monitoring (specification related):** .....

The following rehabilitation-related monitoring may be accomplished through the use of EFR funds.

**a. M-2a BLM 98-148 III. Q1, V Monitoring and Evaluation of Emergency Treatments**

Monitor vegetation for rehab seeding success in crucial big game winter ranges. Measure utilization on rehab seeding from livestock grazing and wildlife.

**C. Management: (Non-specifications related)**

The following recommendations are made for the purpose of mitigating fire, suppression activity and subsequent long term rehabilitation effects to all wildlife species found within the fire area.

1. Complete management actions necessary to protect affected deciduous trees and shrubs including, but not limited to, quaking aspen and cottonwood stands and chokecherry from grazing as necessary to ensure that resprouting stems from the fire are protected. This would include said vegetation that was affected by the fire that was or was not initially identified during summer 2000 after post-fire reconnaissance surveys.
2. Monitor critical bitterbrush and other mountain shrub areas for post fire resprouting and utilization, and address possibilities or need for planting or resource protection in the future if dictated from monitoring.

3. Ensure flexibility in the wildlife seed operation based on seed availability and priority areas. In case of seed shortages, the identified areas could be strip-seeded. For example, if only 50% of the seed is available, the same identified areas would be seeded, but only every other swath would be seeded.
4. Evaluate the need to apply strips of excelsior mulch to limited areas along the stream channel. (Preliminary investigations indicate application of this treatment is not necessary).
5. Evaluate the opportunities to minimize sediment loading from road widening activities adjacent to the stream channel.
6. Rather than reconstruct enclosures, evaluate opportunities for construction of a watershed based riparian pasture.

#### **VI. SOURCES OF INFORMATION FROM WHICH THIS REPORT WAS DERIVED:**

Personal Communication with:

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#### **VII. REFERENCES:**

- \*FWS Species list for Elko Field Office 07/26/00 (Ray Lister)  
 FWS, Endangered Species Act of 1973 as Amended through the 100th Congress, 1988.  
 FWS, Endangered Species Consultation Handbook, Chapter 7 - Emergency Consultation, received 8/4/95.  
 Bureau of Land Management. 1988. 6840 Manuel. Special Status Species Management, Washington D.C.  
 Bureau of Land Management 1998. Instruction Memorandum No. NV-98-013. Nevada Special Status Species List. Nevada State Office. Reno.  
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 Saake, Norm and San Stiver. 1999. Nevada upland game, furbearer and waterfowl: status and hunting seasons recommendations. Nevada Division of Wildlife. Reno  
 Coffin, Patrick and William Cowan. 1995. Lahontan cutthroat trout recovery plan. Region 1, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland Oregon.  
 Dunham, Jason. 1999. Preliminary thermal monitoring data for Dixie presented at the Interagency LCT meeting held in Reno, NV in January of 1999.  
 Elliott, John. 1999. Draft Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Species Management Plan for the Upper Humboldt River Drainage Basin. Nev. Div. Wildlife, Elko, NV.

**\*Filed with 2000 Elko Fire Complex BAER report.**

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