



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

JAN 16 2015

Dear Tribal Leader:

Secretary Jewell recently issued the attached Secretarial Order on Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management and Restoration. Recognizing the important role of tribes on this issue, the Order provides for tribal consultation and for the Department of the Interior (Department) to work cooperatively with Federal, state, and tribal governments to improve protection, conservation, and restoration of greater sage-grouse habitat in the Great Basin region of Idaho, Nevada, Eastern Oregon, and parts of Utah and California. I am writing to invite you or your designee to participate in tribal consultations on this matter in the coming weeks.

Rangeland fires in the Great Basin of the Western United States have increased in size and intensity in recent years. The accelerated invasion of non-native annual grasses, in particular cheatgrass and medusahead rye, and the spread of pinyon-juniper across the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, along with drought and climate change, have led to an increased threat of rangeland fires to the sagebrush landscape. Preventing and suppressing rangeland fire and restoring sagebrush landscapes impacted by fire across the West is essential for conserving habitat associated with the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in the Great Basin region, which is home to the greater sage-grouse and approximately 350 other species.

The attached Order provides that protecting, conserving, and restoring the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in the Great Basin is a critical fire management priority for the Department. The Order also establishes a Rangeland Fire Task Force to work with state, tribal, and local governments to develop strategies to reduce the threat of large-scale rangeland fire to habitat for the greater sage-grouse and the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem. The Task Force will develop an initial report by March 1, 2015, that will outline actions that can be accomplished prior to the 2015 Western fire season. The Task Force will present a final report by May 1, 2015, on activities that can be implemented prior to the 2016 Western fire season and identify additional long-term actions to implement the Order. Additional information and materials are available at www.forestsandrangelands.gov/rangeland/.

I want to assure you that our trust obligations to tribes, their communities, and tribal trust resources are unchanged. We remain committed to maintaining our sacred trust responsibility to tribes, their communities, and tribal trust resources. Public and firefighter safety will also remain the top critical fire management priority for the Department.

We know that tribes may have important strategic suggestions, valuable traditional ecological knowledge, or simply questions or guidance. The Department has scheduled the following tribal listening and consultation sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
<u>Listening Session</u>		
Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2015	2:00-5:00 p.m. (EST)	By teleconference 1-888-790-1743 Passcode: 5301205
<u>Consultations</u>		
Thursday, Feb. 19, 2015	9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (PST)	Federal Building East 911 NE 11 th Avenue Portland, Oregon 97232
Tuesday, April 7, 2015	9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (PST)	Reno-Sparks Tribal Health Center 1715 Kuenzli Street Reno, Nevada 89502

Representatives of the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary – Land and Minerals Management, Office of the Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management and Budget (PMB), including the Office of Wildland Fire, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Affairs will be present at the consultations.

Written comments may be submitted to rangelandfire@ios.doi.gov until February 23, 2015, for the March 1 report, and April 21, 2015, for the May report.

Should you have any question regarding the process, please contact Mr. Jerry Gidner, PMB Tribal Liaison Officer, at Jerold_Gidner@ios.doi.gov or (202) 302-9731.

Sincerely,



Michael L. Connor
Deputy Secretary of the Interior

Enclosure



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

ORDER NO. 3336

Subject: Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management and Restoration

Sec. 1 Purpose. This Order sets forth enhanced policies and strategies for preventing and suppressing rangeland fire and for restoring sagebrush landscapes impacted by fire across the West. These actions are essential for conserving habitat for the greater sage-grouse as well as other wildlife species and economic activity, such as ranching and recreation, associated with the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in the Great Basin region. This effort will build upon the experience and success of addressing rangeland fire, and broader wildland fire prevention, suppression and restoration efforts to date, including the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and ensure improved coordination with local, state, tribal, and regional efforts to address the threat of rangeland fire at a landscape-level.

Sec. 2 Background. The Department of the Interior is entrusted with overseeing the management of Federal lands for the benefit of current and future generations as well as the protection and recovery of imperiled species of flora and fauna and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Rangeland fires in the Great Basin of the Western United States have increased in size and intensity in recent years. The accelerated invasion of non-native annual grasses, in particular cheatgrass and medusahead rye, and the spread of pinyon-juniper across the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, along with drought and the effects of climate change, have created conditions that have led to the increased threat of rangeland fires to the sagebrush landscape and the more than 350 species of plants and animals, such as mule deer and pronghorn antelope, that rely on this critically important ecosystem. As a result, the increasing frequency and intensity of rangeland fire also poses a significant threat to ranchers, livestock managers, sportsmen, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts who use the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, and puts at risk their associated economic contributions across this landscape that support and maintain the American way of life in the West.

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) found that the invasion of annual grasses and the loss of habitat from fire in the Great Basin is a significant threat to the greater sage-grouse in that portion of its remaining range. The USFWS is now considering whether protections under the Endangered Species Act are warranted. In response to this finding, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service are currently undertaking land use plan revisions and amendments to incorporate appropriate conservation measures to conserve, enhance, and restore greater sage-grouse habitat by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing threats to that habitat. More targeted actions to reduce the likelihood and severity of fire, to stem the spread of invasive species, and to restore the health and resilience of the landscape are necessary to preserve, protect, and restore greater sage-grouse habitat in the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem, and address important public safety, economic, cultural, and social concerns. This includes enhanced coordination and collaboration with partners and stakeholders, including rangeland fire protection associations.

Sec. 3 Authorities. This Order is issued under the authority of Section 2 of Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1950 (64 Stat.1262), as amended. Other statutory authorities related to this Order include

and are not limited to the following:

- a. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*
- b. The Endangered Species Act (ESA), 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*
- c. The Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 715 *et seq.*
- d. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Establishment Act, 16 U.S.C. 3701 *et seq.*
- e. The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 U.S.C. 661 *et seq.*
- f. The Federal Land and Policy Management Act (FLPMA), 43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*
- g. The Federal Land Assistance Management and Enhancement Act of 2009, Title V of Division A of P.L. 111-88.

Sec. 4 Policy. Protecting, conserving, and restoring the health of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem and, in particular, greater sage-grouse habitat, while maintaining safe and efficient operations, is a critical fire management priority for the Department. Allocation of fire management resources and assets before, during, and after wildland fire incidents will reflect this priority, as will investments related to restoration activities.

Sec. 5 Developing an Enhanced Fire Prevention, Suppression, and Restoration Strategy. To accomplish protection, conservation, and restoration of greater sage-grouse habitat the Department, through the Rangeland Fire Task Force established in accordance with Section 6, will:

a. Work cooperatively and collaboratively with other Federal agencies, states, tribes, local stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations on fire management and habitat restoration activities, including: (i) Enhancing the capability and capacity of state, tribal, and local government, as well as non-governmental, fire management organizations, including rangeland fire protection associations and volunteer fire departments, through improved and expanded education and training; and (ii) Improving coordination among all partners involved in rangeland fire management to further improve safety and effectiveness.

b. Utilize risk-based, landscape-scale approaches to identify and facilitate investments in fuels treatments, fire suppression capabilities, and post-fire stabilization, rehabilitation, and restoration in the Great Basin.

c. Seek to reduce the likelihood, size, and severity of rangeland fires by addressing the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive, non-native species.

d. Commit wildland fire management resources and assets to prepare for and respond to rangeland fires.

e. Advance the development and utilization of technologies for identifying areas of high ecological and habitat value in sagebrush-steppe ecosystems to enhance fire prevention and sage-grouse habitat protection efforts.

f. Apply science and research to improve the identification and protection of resistant and resilient sagebrush-steppe landscapes and the development of biocontrols and other tools for cheatgrass control to improve capability for long-term restoration of sagebrush-steppe ecosystems.

g. To the extent practicable, utilize locally-adapted seeds and native plant materials appropriate to the location, conditions, and management objectives for vegetation management and restoration activities, including strategic sourcing for acquiring, storing, and utilizing genetically-appropriate seeds and other plant materials native to the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem.

h. Encourage efforts to expedite processes, streamline procedures, and promote innovations that can improve overall rangeland fire prevention, suppression and restoration efficiency and effectiveness.

i. Explore opportunities to pilot new strategies to reduce the threat of invasive, non-native plant species and rangeland fire to sagebrush-steppe ecosystems and greater sage-grouse conservation, including enhanced use of veteran fire crews and youth conservation teams, and efforts to further public-private partnerships to expand capacity for improved fire management.

j. Establish protocols for monitoring the effectiveness of fuels management, post-fire, and long-term restoration treatments and a strategy for adaptive management to modify management practices or improve land treatments when necessary.

Sec. 6 Rangeland Fire Task Force. A Rangeland Fire Task Force (Task Force) is hereby established and is chaired by the Deputy Secretary. Members of the Task Force shall include: Assistant Secretary – Policy, Management and Budget, Assistant Secretary – Land and Minerals Management, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Assistant Secretary – Water and Science, and Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs. The Task Force will do the following:

a. Develop a science-based strategy to reduce the threat of large-scale rangeland fire to habitat for the greater sage-grouse and the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem through effective rangeland management (including the appropriate use of livestock), fire prevention, fire suppression, and post-fire restoration efforts at a landscape scale.

b. Conduct a comprehensive review of the existing programs, policies, and practices associated with current efforts to prevent, suppress, and restore rangeland fire-impacted sagebrush-steppe, including the outcomes of the recent rangeland fire conference *The Next Steppe: Sage-grouse and Rangeland Fire in the Great Basin*, and utilize the experience of the conference participants; and the expertise of the practitioners and senior policy groups in this effort.

c. Seek input from the U.S. Geological Survey and individual Bureau Fire Directors in the Department; the U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the

Department of Agriculture; various state wildland fire agencies and programs; the offices of the governors in the states most threatened by rangeland fire, including California, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and Idaho, as well as the Western Governors' Association; affected American Indian tribes; scientists; and local, community-based fire organizations such as the rangeland fire protection associations, weed collaboratives, native seed production organizations, soil and water conservation districts, and various stakeholder groups with interest and expertise in rangeland fire prevention, suppression, and rangeland restoration.

Sec. 7 Implementation Plan, Deliverables and Report.

a. No later than February 1, 2015, the Task Force will provide a detailed plan for implementing this Order that includes a process for tribal consultation.

b. The Task Force will provide to the Secretary two reports that outline actions that can be accomplished prior to the onset of the 2015 Western fire season, actions that can be accomplished prior to the onset of the 2016 Western fire season, and actions that will require a longer period for implementation. At a minimum, these actions are to include the following:

- (i) Design and implement comprehensive, integrated fire response plans for the Fire and Invasives Assessment Tool evaluation areas in the Great Basin subject to fire and invasive species;
- (ii) Provide clear direction on the prioritization and allocation of fire management resources and assets;
- (iii) Expand the focus on fuels reduction opportunities and implementation;
- (iv) Fully integrate the emerging science of ecological resilience into design of habitat management, fuels management, and restoration projects;
- (v) Review and update emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation policies and programs to integrate with long-term restoration activities;
- (vi) Commit to multi-year investments for the restoration of sagebrush-steppe ecosystems, including consistent long-term monitoring protocols and adaptive management for restored areas;
- (vii) Implement large-scale experimental activities to remove cheatgrass and other invasive annual grasses through various tools;
- (viii) Commit to multi-year investments in science and research; and
- (ix) Develop a comprehensive strategy for acquisition, storage, and distribution of seeds and other plant materials.

c. No later than March 1, 2015, the Task Force will present its initial report on actions that will be implemented prior to the 2015 Western fire season. Individual bureaus are also encouraged to take immediate action to implement improvements within their respective areas of responsibility before the initial report is issued.

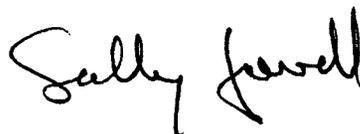
d. No later than May 1, 2015, the Task Force will present its final report on activities that will be implemented prior to the 2016 Western fire season, and longer term actions to implement the policy and strategy set forth in this Order, including to ensure continued implementation of approved actions associated with the strategy.

Sec. 8 Implementation. The Deputy Secretary is responsible for implementing all aspects of this Order. This responsibility may be delegated as appropriate. This Order does not alter or affect any existing duty or authority of individual Assistant Secretaries or bureaus.

Sec. 9 Effect of the Order. This Order is intended to improve the internal management of the

Department. This Order and any resulting report or recommendations are not intended to, and do not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person. To the extent there is any inconsistency between the provisions of this Order and any Federal laws or regulations, the laws or regulations will control.

Sec. 10 Expiration Date. This Order is effective immediately. It will remain in effect until its provisions are converted to the Departmental Manual, or until it is amended, superseded or revoked, whichever occurs first.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Jewell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Secretary of the Interior

Date: **JAN 5** 2015