

NWX-DOI-BUR OF IND AFFAIRS

Moderator: Jerry Gidner
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1:00 pm CT

Coordinator: Welcome everyone and thank you for standing by. At this time all participants have been placed in a listen-only mode until the question and answer portion of today's conference. At that time if you would like to ask question please press Star 1 on your touchtone phone. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. I would now like to turn the conference over to your host, Mr. Jerry Gidner. Thank you and you may begin.

Jerry Gidner: Good afternoon everybody and good morning for those farther west than DC. My name is Jerry Gidner and I'm the Tribal Liaison Officer for the Office of Policy Management and Budget with the Department of the Interior. I'd like to welcome everybody today to this listening session. Today's topic is Secretarial Order 3336 regarding rangeland fire prevention, management and restoration, which was signed January 5 by Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell.

As the operator said everybody is in listening mode at the moment, but the purpose of this is really for us to hear your comments and questions. So we're going to make a brief presentation, but then we'll open the line for that as soon as we're done with the presentation.

The call is being recorded. It's also being transcribed and a transcription will be up and available on a Web site I can give you in just a bit.

I'd like to say that we're honored to be joined today by quite a number of DOI's leadership and I'm going to run through the names and if I leave anybody out I apologize for that, but we have a large cast of people here today to talk about this. So I'll start with Jim Lyons who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals. Kim Thorsen, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Safety, Resource Protection and Emergency Services.

We have Lauren Bogard who is an Advisor in the office of Assistant Secretary Land and Minerals; Jim Douglas, the Director of Office of Wildland Fire; Ron Dunton, the acting BLM Assistant Director for Fire and Aviation; Rodina Cave, Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs; Kelly Hanley, also Senior Advisor in the Office of Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs; Jerry Cordova, the Tribal Liaison Officer for the Bureau of Land Management; Helen Riggs, the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for tribal services.

Faline Haven, the Associate Deputy Director for BIA for Trust Services; Terry Rabot, the Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services for the Fish and Wildlife Service Pacific Region; Before - and there's others that I haven't mentioned. We have a lot of staff that's on today as well.

Under the Secretarial Order we produced an implementation plan within the Department of Interior. It is available on a Web site that has been set up for information about the Secretarial Order. I'll give the information at the end as well, but I'll just read it right now. It's

<http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/rangeland>. Forests and rangelands is all one word and "forests" and "rangelands" are both plural.

To submit questions and comments to us through the whole process involving the Secretarial Order we have an email account setup. It is rangelandfire@ios.doi.gov. And we also have a fax number 202-478-5091. I'm now going to turn it over to Jim Lyons, Deputy Assistant Secretary for

Land and Minerals to talk a little bit about the Secretarial Order and then Jim Douglas, the Director of Wild land Fire will talk about our implementation of the order, and then we'll open it up for your questions and comments. Jim?

Jim Lyons: Thank you very much, Jerry. Again, my name is Jim Lyons. I'm the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals here in the Department of the Interior. Good afternoon to all of you and good morning to those of you on the west coast.

So my purpose here today, other than answering questions, is to try to give you a context for the Secretarial Order and what led to that order. I think many of you know who live in the west that Western Sage steppe lands - sagebrush landscapes are at increasing threat to rangeland fire. And that threatens not only the lives and livelihoods of many people who reside in the west, it effects over 350 species of birds, plants and animals and also poses a significant threat to tribes, ranchers, hunters and our future generations who live, work and value these lands to sustain their way of life.

As a result of concern for that threat and in particular as a result of concern for the impact of rangeland fire of greater sage grouse species that the US Fish and Wildlife Service identified as warranted for listing as a threatened or endangered species in 2010 for which they have to determine by this fall whether or not listing under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. As a result of those threats the Department elected to pull together a wide range of individuals - experts with expertise in fire and sagebrush management and in landscape restoration this past fall in Boise to discuss ways in which we could better address the deteriorating health of western sagebrush landscapes. The conference, which was entitled Next Steppe: Sagebrush and Rangeland Fire really was a unique opportunity to have a discussion about ways in which we could work more efficiently and effectively to protect these important ecosystems.

One of the outcomes of that conference was a clear understanding that it was essential that we now come together to determine ways to best address the threats to sagebrush habitat. And we couldn't afford to put off a strategy to address these issues because of the imminent threat to these resources.

That conference and that realization led to the creation of Secretarial Order 3336, which really sets in motion mechanisms to enhance the conservation and restoration of healthy sagebrush steppe ecosystems and, of course, address the important public safety, economic, cultural and social concerns associated with the threat of rangeland fire in these areas.

That threat is growing, as I alluded to earlier, in part due to the accelerated invasion of non-native annual grasses - like cheat grass and because of increasing drought and the impacts of climate change. We think that the threat of rangeland fire in particular as it affects greater sage grouse needs to be addressed in the near term because it's the Fish and Wildlife Service's responsibility to make judgment with regard to whether or not the species needs to be listed this fall.

The Secretarial Order describes a strategy for developing enhanced policies for preventing and suppressing rangeland fire and controlling cheat grass and other invasive grasses and for restoring sagebrush landscapes impacted by fires across the west. Efforts are outlined in the order that are built on that work and the successes of addressing rangeland fire in the past.

For broader experiences in dealing with wild land fires across the United States and in our efforts to try and prevent additional fire and restore those landscapes that are impacted by fire, including guidance included in the National Cohesive Wild land Management strategy. So the Secretarial Order creates a framework and a mechanism to focus more intently on the threat of

rangeland fire and to devise strategies to address that threat in the near and short term. The Order calls for three reports in essence.

The first, Jerry already eluded to, which is posted on our Web site - is an implementation plan which essentially described the elements that we'll focus on in developing our rangeland fire strategy. By March 1 to produce an initial plan that frames in particular those activities and strategies that we believe we can implement for the 2015 fire season and then finally by May 1 a more detailed longer term strategy to address the threats associated with rangeland fire in 2016 and beyond.

Now I'm going to turn the conversation over to Jim Douglas to explain in greater detail what is incorporated in the addressed implementation plan. Jim?

Jim Douglas: Thank you Jim. Again, Jim Douglas. I'm the Director of the Office of Wildland Fire for the department. As Jim just mentioned there are three deliverables in the Secretarial Order and Implementation Plan and then two plans due on March 1st and one on May 1st. The implementation plan, which was due on February 1st was approved by the Deputy Secretary and is posted at the Web site that Jerry Gidner told you about at the top of the call.

I hope everybody will take a few minutes to read through that to get a sense of how we're going to proceed, what we're going to do, who's going to do it, etc. Let me just give you a few highlights of what everybody could expect over the next two to three months.

First of all, there's going to be a number of outreach efforts, particularly through the tribal consultation process that we're kicking off today. There are a couple of upcoming consultation sessions. One on February 19 in Portland and one on April 7 in Reno and those are detailed elsewhere and in a letter that was sent to tribal leaders at the time that the order came out. So number

one step in our implantation - outreach is to go through that consultation process.

We'll also be reaching out to a whole variety of partners, stakeholders and interested publics, states, counties, NGOs, other federal agencies, ranching interests, other business interests and so on. So there is an opportunity for people to look at our work, engage us in the comment process and help us as we move through.

As Jim also mentioned the overall direction in the order - and it's found in section five of the order - is to develop a science-based strategy to reduce the threat of larger scale rangeland fire on the habitat. Section 7b of the order then gives us a direction from the secretary to address at least nine specific topics. Some of them are fairly specific and some of them are fairly broad and I'm not going to read word for word each of the nine.

You can read the order and read the implementation plan to get the details, but they range from things that we need to do this fire season this year, specifically fire preparedness and fire response, to longer term issues of better science investment, better understanding of the role of science in supporting all of our activities and moving into investments in related areas like reducing the threat of cheat grass and improving our capability to acquire, store and distribute seeds and other plant materials - so nine very specific things.

They are organized around these two reports. The first one on March 1st is very much going to be focused on a strategy for this fire season. So we will be addressing issues of what we can do to take existing resources that are in our bureau programs through the department and best align them and distribute them in preparation for the fire season. We're also going to be addressing how we can insure that we have prioritization and allocation mechanisms setup to bring additional resources to the highly threatened areas in the case of large fires and extensive fires in the Great Basin area and Sage-Grouse habitat.

A couple of other things we're going to work on for this fire season is begin to update and revise our post-fire policies and programs so that we're having better integration continuity between the emergency stabilization and rehab programs that are long-term restoration investments and launching the seed strategy, which has been in the works for a while and will be implemented over a period of time.

So our first report March 1 will focus on those actions we're taking immediately this fire season. Prior to the consultation on February 19 we'll be posting some initial thoughts about what will be in that March 1 report so everyone will have an opportunity to get a sense of our thinking and the direction we're headed. And be able to provide us with substantive comments at the consultation session or at the comment due date a few days later.

The second report due on May 1st will focus then on what we can do towards the larger, broader and longer-term strategy of reducing the threat of rangeland fire to Sage-Grouse habitat. And that will begin to pick up some of these other issues, which is longer term investments and firefighting resources, continuing to improve our emergency stabilization and rehab programs, longer term multi-year investments in restoration and science and activities to limit or remove cheat grass from critical locations.

And that should set a pattern - a path forward for multi-year actions to address the problem. Again, prior to the April 7 face-to-face tribal consultation we will post our initial ideas about what will be in that May 1 report so that people that participate in that consultation session will have something to review and comment on at the consultation or shortly thereafter.

We anticipate meeting all those deadlines, providing the reports to the Secretary and then obviously there's a lot of implementation activities that will take place past May 1 and as we begin to see what the recommendations and management direction is coming out of this effort. We'll have an idea over the rest of this year and into future years what the nature of those implementation actions are.

So that in a quick nutshell is how we're going to proceed to implement the provisions of the order in the next handful of weeks. We look forward to your questions today and your comments on our draft documents as we produce them in the next coming weeks. Then, Jerry, back to you.

Jerry Gidner: Thank you Jim. So that was our brief presentation. We now want to open it up to questions and comments from the participants. So as the operator, David said at the beginning of the call if you want to get in the queue please press Star 1, if I have that right. And we will take the calls and answer as best as we can. Thank you.

Coordinator: As a reminder, please press Star 1 if you'd like to ask a question.

Jerry Gidner: Okay, we have our first question. If you could open his line, David, we would appreciate that.

Coordinator: And Jim Erikson your line is now open.

Jim Erikson: All right. One thing I find perplexing of the proposal is that as we deal with these fire ecosystems the strategy seems to repeat what's led to the situation, which is prevention and suppression of fires where fires are normally burning and that they will eventually over time burn.

And so that concerns me that if we're not coming up with a strategy that mimics nature, but something that goes against nature and because of the last 100 years of suppression we have fuel loadings that are unnatural. We have

invasion of juniper and pinion pine and now we've got the other invasives that I know are complicating the strategy as we go forward, but what's the logic behind excluding fire from these fire ecosystems?

Jim Lyons: Jim, this is Jim Lyons and I appreciate that comment and I couldn't agree with you more. And all of this is exacerbated by a long history of trying to prevent fire in systems that are - in which fire is a normal part of the ecological process. Our challenge here though is to try and target our efforts to reduce and minimize fire and to restore those landscapes impacted by fire to try to protect those species that are so dependent on those areas as well as to try to protect those communities that are impacted by rangeland fire.

So specifically the Fish and Wildlife Service and their assessment of the threats to the Greater Sage-Grouse made clear that in the Great Basin the number one threat was rangeland fire. And the accelerated pace with which we're seeing acres burn as the result of the factors that we discussed earlier - drought, invasive species, and climate change overall makes this a particularly significant challenge.

So what we're trying to do is find ways in which we can protect those important places, those key habitats, to provide a means to maintain connectivity in the areas while recognizing that some places will burn and that's a natural part of the process of change across those sagebrush steps.

I think we all acknowledge that our greatest challenge really is to figure out how we can effectively limit habitat loss in those key areas and restore areas that are going to be essential for those key species while recognizing and allowing those areas of perhaps less consequence from the standpoint of those objectives to burn, but burn in a way that would reflect what would happen naturally if fire had continued to operate in those systems over time with less intensity and with less damage across wider landscapes.

Jim Erikson: So what role might prescribed fire play in the strategy to restore those ecosystems?

Jim Lyons: Well that's a good question. Obviously prescribed fire can play an important role and, as you know, given your work; it's been a very important tool in addressing wild land fire. Again, the challenge with regard to prescribe fire in these rangeland - these sagebrush ecosystems across these wide expanses of rangeland is how to manage prescribed fire in a way so that it doesn't do more harm than good. One of the problems with sagebrush steppe is the decades it takes to restore those systems.

So prescribed fire is a tool which can be used in certain areas, not unlike wild land fire, but, you know, with care in recognizing that where sagebrush is established and where habitats are in relatively good shape we want to minimize the likelihood of damage there. We want to use less prescribed fire and other tools to minimize impacts. Because another factor that comes into play is building firebreaks in those landscapes.

Those can be achieved probably more effectively by, you know, using grass banks or in some cases planting *Kochia scoparia* and other species that are more fire resistant particularly along roadsides and existing infrastructure. So as to, again, contain and minimize the amount of the landscape that is burned when we have a significant fire event.

Jim Erikson: Did I understand you mention *Kochia scoparia*? Isn't that another non-native species and that's one of the issues that's invasive?

Jim Lyons: It is a non-native species and one of the things that's being done now is pilot efforts to determine whether or not planting *Kochia scoparia*, particularly along roadsides, can serve as a way to minimize the spread of fire. We placed emphasis in the Secretarial Order more on restoration using native grasses and

seeds, but as you probably know, there's a shortage of those resources and in fact in light of that the Department is going to participate in a big seed conference that's going to be held down in New Mexico later this spring and we're looking at ways, spelled out in the Secretarial Order, to try to enhance our ability to produce and store and better distribute native seeds across these landscapes, but we're basically looking at what tools we can find to help deal with this and *Kochia scoparia*, at least according to some of the research, may be an effective tool, but certainly it is not one that I would anticipate we'd use widespread across the landscape.

Jim Erikson: So by having a Secretarial Order, does this give preference for rangeland ecosystems over other ecosystems that have probably an equal or maybe even greater issue that they're being faced right now? Particularly woodlands and forests?

Jim Lyons: Well I'm going to read to you what section 4 of the Secretarial Order says and then we can talk about that. So section 4 spells out the policy and I encourage you to go to the Web site and read the order. It says, protecting, conserving and restoring the health of 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 wild land fire incidents will reflect this priority as will investments related to restoration activities.

So I think what's important to recognize there is the acknowledgement that it is a critical fire management priority and, as you know because you've been in the fire business a while, rangeland fire in the past has not gotten as much attention as perhaps it should have. So I don't see this as necessarily saying that rangelands are a priority over wild lands or other ecosystems, but rather

we're going to give more attention to this as a critical priority for all the reasons that we've discussed from the beginning of this call.

Jim Erikson: All right, thank you.

Jim Lyons: You're welcome.

Jerry Gidner: Are there any other questions on the line?

Coordinator: As a reminder you may press Star 1 if you would like to ask a question at this time.

Jerry Gidner: All right, we have another question coming in here. If you could open his line, David. Thank you.

Coordinator: And Clayton, your line is now open.

Jerry Gidner: Hello Clayton, how are you today? Your line should be open.

Clayton: Hello?

Jerry Gidner: Oh there you go.

Clayton: Can you hear me? I had it on mute, sorry.

Jerry Gidner: Oh, that's okay.

Clayton: Okay, I just wanted to know how many acres of tribal lands are being effected by, you know, the Secretarial Order. We're from Arizona - I'm from Arizona - Northeastern Arizona, but I don't think we have Sage Grouse out here, but I

guess for other tribes, you know, how much tribal lands are being effected by this Secretarial Order?

Jerry Gidner: Does anybody from BIA or the Wild land Fire Office know that off the top of your head?

Ron Dunton: This is Ron Dunton. My map for the high priority areas show about 376,000 acres of BIA responsible land. So that would be the tribal lands within the most critical areas of the Great Basin.

Clayton: What portions are those?

Ron Dunton: Nevada and Idaho.

Clayton: Okay.

Ron Dunton: And that's out of about 38 million acres that is in our critical area.

Clayton: And the other question I have is, I guess the funding issue - are you taking money away from the forests and putting it to this project or what?

Jim Douglas: So - this is Jim Douglas in the Office of Land and Fire. Let me build off of Jim Lyons questions - or answers back to Jim Erikson. You know, I think it's two-fold. We have our 2015 budget already and it's largely been distributed out to the four bureaus in the department. So each of those bureaus are going to have to use their funds as they deem appropriate to meet the priorities that are laid out in the order and as Jim Lyons pointed out the Secretary calls out rangeland fire as a critical priority. So we'll ask each of the bureaus to take that into consideration as they do their planning.

As we look forward to our future budgets we'll also be building in rangeland fire and Sage Grouse habitat as one of those factors as we look at our priorities. And, again, the words in section 4 are very important. It's a priority and we will acknowledge that priority as we do our funding decisions. So I think it's a little early to tell where money may or may not move around, but it's something that we want to pay close attention to as we do our budget development and as we do our distributions and each bureau implements it's program to make sure that rangeland fire is given its due as an important priority for the department.

Clayton: Okay, I guess that answers my questions. Thank you.

Jim Douglas: Sure.

Jerry Gidner: Thank you. Would any of the other listeners like to ask a question?

Coordinator: Please press Star 1 if you'd like to ask a question at this time.

Jerry Gidner: All right, Jim Erikson. If you could open his line.

Jim Erikson: All right, am I open?

Jerry Gidner: Yes, your line is open. Go ahead Jim.

Jim Erikson: Yes, I - curiosity I have on the process of tribal consultation is that it seems to come after a lot of decisions are made and I'm not sure if that's - it doesn't exactly my interpretation of the DOI's policy on consultations, but whatever.

The Secretarial Order was decided and, you know, I asked personally to participate in that workshop in November and was told I was not welcome and

then I had no - or the tribes or nobody that I know of had any input into this Secretarial Order or into the implementation plan and now it's respond to things after decisions seems to be made. In looking at the timeframe where future consultations are going to happen just right before deadlines and so I think a lot of the work will be done and then we're going to get tribes' comments at the end. I don't really need an explanation necessarily, unless somebody really has one, but I think that's something to beware of.

Working in Indian country they would like to be part of the solution, not respond to everybody else's management direction and guidance. And so I don't know if that's possible in the future, but, again, things are already decided and tribes are just reacting. So I hear that concern pretty regular and that's just some advice for the future.

Jim Douglas: Sure, hey Jim, it's Jim Douglas. Let me just - I guess I don't think the word decided is the right word. We're making very careful efforts to put out a proposed initial thoughts about the two reports, the March report and then the May report prior to the two face-to-face consultations so that - I would not view those as decisions. I would view those as providing some indication of our thinking so that we can get some feedback from the tribes before the decisions are made.

The decisions on what goes into those two reports are not going to be made until after we hear from the tribes. So that's a very conscious process decision on our part to make sure that we press our folks to lay some cards on the table before the consultation session so that you have something to respond to and comment on prior to each of the two consultation sessions and before any decisions are made.

So we are tightly constrained by the dates that the Secretary gave us in the order and we are very respectful of the consultation process and doing

everything that we can to give you, you know, indications before the consultation sessions about how the thinking is going so that we can make sure that there's input before any decisions are made.

Jim Erikson: All right, thanks Jim.

Jerry Gidner: Okay, we have another caller in the queue. David, if you could open his line please.

Coordinator: And Ron Swaney your line is open.

Jerry Gidner: Welcome.

Ron Swaney: This is Ron Swaney

Jerry Gidner: Yes.

Ron Swaney: Just to follow up a little bit on what Jim Erikson said.

Jerry Gidner: Mr. Swaney, we're having a little trouble hearing you. I don't know if you're on a speakerphone or if you could...

Ron Swaney: Yes, we are. I guess just to follow up a little bit on what Jim Erikson had said. Looking at this Secretarial Order from a tribal perspective it would be, you know, beneficial or more beneficial to us if the focus was more holistic and looking at the entire ecosystem as a whole other than focusing the order more on the suppression of wild fire. Looking at, you know, the return fire integrals and fire ecosystem or maintenance of that fire ecosystem as a whole and looking at the stressors, you know, the stressors to that ecosystem including raising other negative impacts.

I guess, you know, just to sum up it seems like the order is stressing wild fire suppression as a protection other than looking at the holistic or the ecosystem as a whole and moving forward with things like wildfire suppression - or

prescribed fire as part of the solution and focusing more on restoration and rehabilitation of those ecosystems.

Jim Lyons: So Ron this is Jim Lyons and let me just address that quickly. So I want to make sure that I didn't leave the impression that prescribed fire is not a part of the solution because it can be in appropriate places as is true for wild land fire as well. But our focus here is not just on suppression, although that's an important element in reducing the loss of additional habitat for Sage Grouse and those other species associated with sagebrush ecosystems, but if you get a chance to go through the Order and through the implementation plan you'll see there's quite a bit of emphasis on pre-suppression efforts on, you know, some of the clear contributing factors to increased fires such as invasion of cheat grass and medusa head and other non-native grasses.

There is also recognition of the need to understand better the relationship between grazing and fire risk. And that will be part of what we'll look at as we move forward. And there's a great deal of emphasis on restoration. And I think you point to something that's important and Jim brought this up earlier and that is we have a system that is out of balance because of years of manipulation and changes in use that are not consistent with what might - we might look at as an ecologically sound system.

So we're trying to find ways to help put those elements back together to deal with the imbalances such as the extensive invasion of cheat grass, which clearly is a catalyst for more fire and creates this cycle that leads to more invasive grasses.

In trying to find a way to build a healthy system so that the flora and fauna associated with that system can thrive once again and all those who are dependent upon that system - those communities, ranching community, the tribes - can utilize that system in greater balance than what we have today and I think that's, you know, perhaps not spelled out as clearly as it might be in

the Secretarial Order, but it is clearly part of our thinking in trying to look across the landscape to look at ways to prevent fire, suppress as a way to reduce habitat loss, but then begin to restore those landscapes that have been fire impacted so we can bring that system back into balance.

Jerry Gidner: Do you have any other questions? Do any of the callers have other questions? You can still get in the queue, but while we're - oh, go ahead. Mr. Swaney is back on.

Ron Swaney: Yes, this is Ron Swaney. I had a - so I think it's more towards Mr. Douglas. We've submitted a letter - I think it was in January 8 from our tribe related to the risk-based management system that was the Office of Wild land Fire's proposed - and I was just wondering how, one, we haven't heard much back from that letter. And then does this initiative - is that going to affect that process that we were supposed to be commenting on?

And then a second question and a dear tribal leader, January 16, 2015 letter, it states that I want to assure you that our trust obligations to tribes or communities and tribal trust resources are unchanged. And I was just wondering if you could expound on that. How are they going to be unchanged for tribes that don't reside within the 38 million acres of critical sage grass habitat?

Jim Douglas: So this is Jim Douglas. Let me respond to your first question, Ron, and then I'll ask my colleagues from the BIA to talk a little bit more about the second question. So we have gotten a number of comments from tribes as a result of our consultation process on the risk based system that we are planning to develop for budget development and budget allocation. We're in the process of reviewing all those comments and process of updating our approach based on those comments as well as responding back to each of the tribes that provided us comment. So that work is ongoing.

It is interesting that we got the Secretarial Order issued in the middle of that - that consultation process and we're looking at integrating the thinking between the two of them together. I would say that our risk-based approach to overall fire budgeting is much broader than just the rangeland fire issue and broader than the Sage Grouse issue.

It goes, as you know, to the larger question of trying to put our fire dollars to the highest priority areas in the country with the greatest risk and identifying a number of values that we are trying to protect as we do that as well as the likelihood and consequence of fire on those values.

Sage-grouse and the type of habitat that Sage-grouse use is part of the values that are under consideration. So the intersection point between what we're thinking about on a broad basis for overall fire budget and what the Secretary has asked us to do in terms of giving priority to Sage-grouse and Sage-grouse habitat is that as section 4 of the order says, you know, we will give - we will respect that priority of Sage-grouse habitat and acknowledge it as we do our work.

And that's exactly what we're going to do as we continue to build-out the risk-based approach is we're going to acknowledge and incorporate Sage-grouse issues along with a whole bunch of other values of infrastructure and communities and timber and watersheds and so on.

So these will come together. I think I'm comfortable that we can be respectful of the Secretary's direction to us about priority as well as acknowledge that there are many, many values that we manage for in our Wildlife and Fire Management Program. And so as we respond to you and the other tribes that commented to us we'll be taking that - taking notice of that.

Jerry Gidner In terms of the overall trust responsibility I'd like to turn to the BIA to address that question. Is Helen Riggs on the line?

Helen Riggs: Yes, I'm here.

Jerry Gidner: Well, I don't know if you were prepared to answer that question today or if that's something we need to think about moving forward and ask for tribal input on how we can do both of those - meet both of those priorities. If there is anything to add to that from Helen or anybody else on the line please feel free to do that.

Helen Riggs Well let me say that we have been working closely with the Office of Wild land Fire in terms of our trust responsibility. We have reiterated to them several times about our concerns and so we are working with them in terms of the budget for wild land fire and being in the process of that and the allocations and the planning that goes into that. So we do have a voice in that from our Fire Director as well as our division chief from the Forest Management Program as well as the Associate Deputy.

We've all been involved in discussions with the department in the same context with everybody and having a say in, you know, the reallocation. What are we looking at? Keeping in mind we do have a direct service. BIA is different than some of the other departments or bureaus in that we have a direct responsibility to provide services on trust lands. So we keep that in mind. I will ask Faline or Aaron if they have anything else to add?

Faline Haven: Well I will add - this is Faline Haven - that as of right now we are distributing the funds as is. It's very similar to what you see with your allocations last year going through that distribution process. So your funds are rolling out now and we're getting that down into the regions of the self-governance. So we are working closely and we will keep you informed on the changes.

We have Aaron who just recently moved out there as the Fire Director who had been here in DC working very closely with the Office of Wild land Fire and be working through this exercise and will be sending back not only to the tribes nation-wide, but to the Office of Wild land Fire. We're not going to see that much of a change this year or an impact.

So you should receive pretty close to what your historical averages are over the past and then, of course, you go through the process for your restoration, but next year if we do see those changes you will be notified and we will keep you informed like we do always with the tribes through inter-tribal timber council through our national meetings, but also through class and through the regions. Thank you.

Jerry Gidner: Okay, are there any other questions?

Coordinator: Again, you may press Star 1 if you'd like to ask a question.

Jerry Gidner: Well while we're waiting for the questions to come in let me just reiterate a few things we had talked about. The initial report, which is for actions we can take for the 2015 fire season is due by March 1. We are having a consultation February 19 in Portland, Oregon about that. The draft will be out before that consultation - I'll acknowledge right up front that it won't be out very far in front of that consultation just because of the timing and we apologize for that. But I also want to say that that's really for the 2015 fire season. It is not going to be a very lengthy document and something we think that - we'd like your input on. Definitely we don't think that will be a heavy lift for you to provide that input. We understand the short timeframe for that.

The final report is due May 1 and, again, there will be a final draft. Right now we're going to have that out April 3rd. There will be a tribal consultation April 7 and then a couple weeks for comment after that. We understand the

time periods are still tight. They're less tight for that one and we would appreciate all the comments that you can give us on those.

The - I see we've got another question. Just one second. Let me finish this little thought. The February 19 consultation in Portland is at the Federal Building East at 911 Northeast 11th Avenue in Portland. And the April 7th consultation in Reno, Nevada is Reno Sparks Tribal Health Center 1715 Kuenzil Street in Reno and both of them are from 9:00 to 12:00AM Pacific time. And we do have another question and David if you could open his line please.

Coordinator: And Ron your line is open.

Ron Swaney: Hello again. Just wondering, I know there was a mention of a symposium in regards to a Great Basin sage grass habitat. I don't know what the exact title of that was, but if that - is that - are the minutes to that or - is that available? The minutes to that?

Jim Lyons: Ron, it's Jim Lyons. I'm actually going to ask Ron Dunton to answer this because he helped organize this conference. It was in Boise the first week of November and generally it was an effort to bring together a wide range of individuals to begin a discussion about these threats associated with rangeland fire and information is available from that, but Ron, do you want to provide Ron with the details?

Ron Dunton: We don't have any plans for any follow-up symposium if I understood that as part of your question. You have - have you seen our Web site on the symposium, the results of it and some of the information out of that symposium that we held in November?

Ron Swaney: I haven't. Then I guess that was the question. Is there recommendations or findings that came out of that symposium? You know, that we could look at or - in just looking at, you know, one of the main recommendations coming out.

Ron Dunton: Yes, we can get you access to a link that provides, you know, basically all the information we collected and we collected lots and lots of recommendations that we're still sorting through both on the operations restoration side of the house as well as the policy side of the house. So after this call, I'm assuming we have access to your contact information, we can send you a link to our conference Web site essentially.

Ron Swaney: Okay. Yes, and maybe just a closing statement for us is that certainly, you know, support restoration of critical ecosystems, but, you know, it would be more beneficial if we looked at the whole thing as a whole and not focus, again, on suppression and maybe those, you know, some of those answers could - would come out of that findings and recommendations of your symposium.

Ron Dunton: If you look at - yes, if you look at what we did at the conference while we had some focus on suppression we had very significant focus on the science behind restoration, the science behind fuels treatment, the science behind rehabilitation post-fire. Kind of the theme of the conference was activities before fire, activities during fire and then activities after fire. So it was the full spectrum of land management treatment.

Ron Swaney: Okay.

Jim Lyons: And Ron, this is Jim Lyons. I, you know, if you're hearing more emphasis on suppression I want to, again, emphasize as Ron Dunton just did. We looked at the suite of issues and we looked at the science behind this as well as had practitioners from the ground up who could help us understand what was

effective and what we needed to look more closely at with regard to pre-suppression and restoration.

I think the emphasis on suppression comes from a concern that I emphasized earlier and that is, you know, the significant threat of habitat loss in the Great Basin and the ramifications for the need to list the Greater Sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species.

And so given the long timeframes associated with restoring sagebrush systems, you know, there was a clear need to recognize that we needed to be more effective where we engaged in suppression in minimizing the likelihood of extensive habitat loss.

So that came through loud and clear from the Fish and Wildlife Service, but it shouldn't be taken to mean that there isn't additional and important emphasis on avoiding fire and then restoring the areas that have been impacted by the fire so we can begin to bring some of those critically important habitats back.

Jerry Gidner: And this is Jerry Gidner again. We will get the link to that and we can actually, I think, put that link on the webpage that I gave you. I think also if you Google the Next Steppe, S-T-E-P-P-E, you will get linked to that conference webpage that has all the information, but we will get that available. Are there additional questions?

Coordinator: Please press Star 1 if you'd like to ask a question.

Jerry Gidner: All right, we have a question. Can you open his line?

Coordinator: Brad Donahue your line is open.

Brad Donahue: Yes, we have a question from Warm Springs. Is this going to effect suppression resources with management teams going to these rangeland fires and also all the other resources? Last year we almost lost a management team on the Warm Springs reservation because of the sage grass fires and we ended

up losing retardant planes when structures were threatened and we just wanted to know if that's going to be a big time change for us looking at this year's outlook?

Jim Douglas: So Brad, it's Jim Douglas and let me give a couple words and then let me turn it to Ron. So one of the questions we're looking at is how we prioritize our various values and resources that are out there. Again, I'll go back to section 4 of the order that talks about rangeland fire being a critical priority and that we will recognize that in our work.

So in the coming weeks under item two in section 7b of the order one of the requests from the Secretary or directions from the Secretary there is that we look at how our prioritization of firefighting assets and resources takes place. That's going to obviously be an ongoing conversation amongst all of the partners of people that own those resources, including the Department of Interior, the four services states, which are tribes and so on. I don't think it's a black and white answer that one type of fire in one location is always more important than another, but, again, back to the words of Jim Lyons earlier in this phone call that we want to make sure that rangeland fire is dually recognized as an important piece as we're prioritizing. Ron, you're a little bit closer to some of the work being done in the Great Basin itself about resources. So is there anything you want to add about how you see the fire season shaping up in terms of where we put stuff and how we use stuff?

Ron Dunton: Yes, ultimately where an individual air tanker goes or a management team goes is generally at that local level. Either the dispatch center or the geographic area, but what BLM is doing nationally is we're recognizing the importance of the high priority sagebrush habitat, particularly in the Western Great Basin that's been identified by Fish and Wildlife Service and we are positioning our internal resources to try to address that threat.

So as an example, as fire season in the Southwest winds down for BLM we'd be moving the BLM resources from the Southwest into those critical areas within the Great Basin, Nevada, Southern Idaho, Eastern Oregon. The same with Alaska. As Alaska fire season winds down we'll focus those BLM assets at the Great Basin. I made a comment to the Regional Fire Director in Portland this Fall when he asked me would we be pulling resources off going fires to fight sagebrush fires. And my response was I don't see that happening. What I see is us holding our resources closer to our threat areas, not making them available as much as we have in the past.

Jerry Gidner: Thank you Ron. And I just wanted to say I believe the Web site for that conference is www.nifc.gov/fireandsagegrass/ - I can't read the rest of it because it's truncated on my screen, but I think that will get you most of the way there. So it should come up if you do that. Are there any other questions? While we're waiting let me just go over the contact information again. To get information - all the documents, etc. will be up on this Web site. It's <http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/rangeland>. To send us questions or comments there's an email address rangelandfire@ios.doi.gov. A fax number you can use is 202-478-5091. Does anybody else have other comments or questions they'd like to make or ask?

Coordinator: Please press Star 1 if you would like to ask a question.

Jerry Gidner: We have Mr. Donahue again. Would you open his line?

Coordinator: Sir, your line is open.

William Wilson: Okay, this is William Wilson from the Warm Springs Agency also. The question I have is looking at these ecosystems that we're calling Sage-grouse habitats, are these systems evaluated as historic conditions or pre-settlement conditions that existed before or are they evaluated at their current status or their current structure where it's out of its condition class and using that

strategy of protecting these are we not protecting a system that's already setup for catastrophic fire if fire does get into those systems?

That's kind of the question I have because we're looking at a system across the United States that has been under the protection of wildfire because of Smoky Bear's 9:00 or 10:00 process where every fire was suppressed for a long time. And looking at the future of what your processes are - your strategies now it looks like a similar process. The paradox is are we protecting something that's un-protectable? That's the question that I have. In looking at conditions, structures, prior historic conditions and current conditions and how are those matched up. I hope that's making sense.

Jerry Gidner: Jim Douglas or Ron do you want to answer that question?

Jim Douglas: This is Jim. I would defer to the BLM or the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop those answers.

Ron Dunton: The areas that we've identified as critical for protection are those areas where we have intact sagebrush steppe Sage-grouse habitat. So they're kind of the best of the remaining habitats that have not been all that altered. It does not identify or the high priority is not the entire Great Basin. It's specific areas where we have populations of the bird that exist and strong habitat formed.

Jim Lyons: This is Jim Lyons. So maybe just to elaborate on that a little bit. The original mapping of habitat by BLM, the forester, was based on some work that was really done by the states out of something called the conservation objectives team report. And through that mechanism we attempted to identify priority habitats and general habitats that are essential for the conservation of Sage-grouse. It was an initial piece of the puzzle, but to your point about protecting areas that can be protected.

An additional effort was undertaken through the Washington Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to assess the resistance and resilience of particular

areas of habitat due to loss from fire, impacts of climate change and the like. It was an assessment that was referred to as the FIAT Assessment - Fire and Invasive Assessment Team. And so they looked at fire, they looked at climate resilience and mapped the Great Basin to identify those areas that, if you will, are the most resistant to change and have greatest value from a habitat standpoint.

And it's that analysis then that will allow us to focus even further on those areas that we think are both most significant from a Sage-grouse conservation standpoint, benefiting from the work that had been done by the states and from a resistance standpoint benefiting from this additional work that's been done really based on forest service research.

We hope in that way we'll be able to target our efforts on the best of the best if you will and make sure that those critically important areas are protected and restored as we look to try and bring the Sage-grouse steppe ecosystem back into healthy status.

Jerry Gidner: Thank you. The line is still open for questions. Oh, and we have another question. Can you open his line please?

Coordinator: Mr. Swaney your line is open.

Ron Swaney: Okay, we were - this is Ron Swaney - talking about, you know, we've heard Mr. Douglas and some others mention that rangeland fires haven't been getting their due respect. Then having just heard Warm Springs talk about Warm Springs nation having a hard time holding on to a type-1 team because it got rerouted to a rangeland fire and Sage-grouse habitat.

I was just curious where the thought process is or how can you demonstrate that for whatever reason rangeland fires aren't getting the due respect. And then in terms of fuels treatments at least looking at what the bureau of land

management has done, you know, in 2011 over 200,000 acres mowed, seeded, sprayed basically for invasive species seed grass.

And then this article I'm reading written by the Director, Bob Avi I think is his name. The number is expected to rise to 466,000 acres in 2012. Not knowing the numbers before that, but certainly knowing the emphasis put by the BLM to protect the Sage-grouse and the fuels treatments going there, I'm just curious if that approach has been effective and how?

Jerry Gidner: Okay, so who on the DOI team would like to answer those questions?

Ron Dunton: This is Ron Dunton. I'll take a shot at the part in terms of the BLM treatments that are underway, undergoing and that we've done in the past. We are in the process of developing a science-based monitoring strategy to really confirm what we have pretty good anecdotal information on and that our treatments are effective.

When you talk the acres, you know, we have a few hundred thousand acres of treatments, you know, recognizing that just in the FIAT areas, the critical fire and invasive threat area, BLM manages 26 million acres of that. So a few hundred thousand acres, while it's a good start that's really all it is a good a start.

We do have some fairly solid evidence that a number of our types of treatment that we're doing, while they don't necessarily stop a fire they give us an anchor point from which to work on these large rangeland fires. The term we use is trying to prevent the hundred or 200,000-acre fire and maybe just end up with a 10,000 acre fire.

We know we can't stop them all, but we are establishing anchor points out there and as we get a better monitoring program in place I think we'll be able

to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programs. But we are prioritizing within BLM. We're putting heavy priority with our fuels dollars into these areas and not into some of the states that don't have the Sage-grouse habitat.

Jim Douglas: And this is Jim Douglas. Let me just, again, talk about the overall issue over rangeland fire versus other kinds of fire. I really still see we have, you know, a wild land fire management program, both in the department and as an inter-agency effort with the forest service, with the tribes, with our state partners and so on and as many people have pointed out everything is related.

So I particularly look at each and every one of the words that's in section 4 of the Secretary's Order. It talks about not just fire suppression. It talks about conserving and restoring the health of the sage steppe ecosystem. It talks about reflecting this priority, not only with fire investments, but with also restoration activities and it gets - it's designed, it's a policy statement that recognizes it's not just about fire. It's about how we manage those lands before, during and after fire.

It's also - I want to point out that we can do a number of things with the resources that we have. Ron has talked about how the BLM is working taking its existing preparedness resources and thinking about where to better pre-position them. Particularly as fire seasons begin to move around the country during the summer.

We can also, working with our forest service partners, be more thoughtful about how many fire resources we tie up in long siege fires that we all know happen in, you know, the big timber country and how many resources get, you know, requested and assigned to those fires and then the potential consequences that it has for initial attack for response to a lower elevation fires and so on.

So one of the really hard conversations to have with all of the people that have firefighting assets and resources is making smarter risk-based decisions about how we use the resources that we have and is the best place for a crew, the best place for an engine, the best place for an air tanker, you know, in a long duration big timber fire? Is it in initial attack configuration? Is it responding to a rangeland fire? And the point that I believe the Secretary is making to us and to everyone is let's make sure that we look at rangeland fire in the same way that we have looked at a lot of other fires in a lot of other values that we've been trying to protect and assess what's at risk and with the values that we're trying to protect and make sure that we make smart decisions.

So I think that's how I intend to look at it from a national sort of policy and macro-budget perspective. I think that's how Ron and his colleagues at the bureau operating level are going to be looking at it and it's the kind of conversations we're going to have with our partners. Not only this fire season, but in future fire seasons.

Ron Dunton: One of the things that I would like to stress, you know, when we look at the Secretarial Order, I've heard a lot of discussion on this call about the fire suppression side of the house. If you look at section 7b, which is the tasking for the assistant secretary's report to the deputy secretary, out of the nine taskings only one is pure fire suppression tasking. The others look at the broader implications of invasives and fuels treatments and restoration science based approach. So, you know, the Secretarial Order itself is really not heavy on the suppression operation side.

Jerry Gidner: Thank you. Are there any other questions? Any questions at all?

Coordinator: You may press Star 1 if you'd like to ask a question.

Jerry Gidner: If there are no other questions we will end the call here in a couple of minutes. I'll leave it open for a few minutes in case there's any late questions. Please visit the Web site. Please send us any comments. Come to the consultations. Do any of the DOI speakers have any last comments before we end? Thank you very much everybody for calling. We'd love to hear - continue to hear from you. So please use the email and fax number to get in touch with us. Thank you very much.

Coordinator: This does conclude today's conference. All parties may disconnect at this time.

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