**2013 Utah GRP Conservation Planning Guidance**

**GRP Management Plan Requirements**

All GRP easements require a GRP Management Plan. The GRP Management Plan includes a description of the grazing management system, permissible and prohibited activities, any associated restoration plan, if applicable, and a description of USDA’s right of ingress and egress. The GRP management plans will be developed by an NRCS Range Conservationist and an NRCS Biologist in coordination with the landowner. At a minimum, the GRP Management Plan will include Prescribed Grazing (528) and Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) to achieve the function and conservation values for sage grouse. The GRP management plan may also include other practices as necessary to address identified threats to the species and its habitat. All activities identified in the GRP management plan will support, or at minimum not adversely affect sage-grouse in accordance with the July 30, 2010 sage-grouse Conference Report. Following are the permitted and prohibited activities to be addressed in the GRP management plan. The attached Management and Restoration Table provides further details regarding the criteria to be met for certain permitted activities.

**PERMITTED ACTIVITIES**

Note: Some normally permitted activities are considered prohibited or restricted in Utah’s GRP plans because of the potential detrimental impacts on the conservation values (e.g., sage-grouse) for which the lands are being enrolled in GRP. Please refer to the attached Management and Restoration Table.

* Grazing. The program participant reserves the right to graze the land in a manner that is consistent with maintaining the viability of grass, shrub, forb, and wildlife species indigenous to the locality. The District Conservationist or local NRCS representative will provide technical assistance to the participant to develop a prescribed grazing plan that meets the 528 standard and specifications and the attached Management and Restoration Table. GRP management plan shall integrate grazing and forage management practices to protect and enhance grassland and shrubland functions and values. Practices that facilitate the prescribed grazing such as fencing and livestock watering, brush management and prescribed fire are permitted in keeping with the attached Management and Restoration Table.
* Haying, Mowing and Seed Production. Haying, mowing and harvesting of seed will be permitted, except on designated areas during nesting and brood-rearing seasons for birds whose populations are in significant decline, as determined by NRCS State Conservationist with advice from the State Technical Committee. The designated areas to be protected, and the period those areas will be protected, must be identified in the GRP management plan.
* Fire Prevention and Pre-Suppression. Construction and rehabilitation of fire breaks, and the use of prescribed fire to reduce wildfire hazard is permitted, except on designated areas during nesting and brood-rearing seasons for birds with significant declining populations as determined by NRCS State Conservationist with advice from the State Technical Committee. Burning activities and areas must be indentified in the GRP management plan. Prescribed burning may be used to establish or maintain grassland and shrubland functions and values and other management activities necessary to carry out routine grazing operations. See the attached Management and Restoration Table for further considerations on this activity.
* Recreational Uses. The program participant reserves the right to undeveloped recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, bird watching, and the leasing of such rights for economic gain, pursuant to applicable state and federal regulations that may be in effect at the time. This right is granted as long as that usage does not adversely affect the land for the purposes identified by the easement or rental contract, as determined by USDA and as described in the GRP management plan. The participant retains the right to prevent trespass and control access by the public according to state and federal law.
* Subsurface Resources. If a third party owns the oil, gas, geothermal resources, or minerals on a potential GRP easement, NRCS will inquire if there is a lease. The owner(s) of these subsurface rights may waive their rights, allowing the easement acquisition to proceed. If there are other ownerships and it is not possible to waive subsurface rights or any prior reservations or conveyances, a mineral assessment must be conducted. NRCS will consult with a geologist to perform a mineral assessment that identifies any subsurface resources reserved, whether there are any conveyances, potential production techniques, impacts from exploration, development and production. If the mineral assessment finds an extremely low potential for development of minerals on the site, NRCS will proceed with acquisition by completing a Certificate of Use and Consent. If there are subsurface resources that could be developed and NRCS determines that such development would adversely affect the conservation values of the easement, USDA will not enter into an easement on that land. GRP rental contracts are subject to termination or modification if subsurface minerals are developed.
* Renewable Energy. Installation of renewable energy sources for power generation is authorized provided their placement is consistent with the grazing uses and other conservation values of the program. Facilities for on-site generation to primarily power the grazing operation can be reserved. The opportunity to place generating stations on GRP lands is not a guaranteed right. See the Management and Restoration Table attached for further criteria for this activity.

**PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES**

Prohibited activities on enrolled lands have been determined by USDA to be non-compatible with protecting, conserving and enhancing grassland resources. The prohibited activities identified in the GRP easement deed and rental contract include:

* Production of crops, other than hay (as described above). Planting of non-perennial crops, fruit trees, vineyards or other agricultural commodities is inconsistent with maintaining grazing land. Harvesting crops, other than hay, for human or domestic animal consumption or any agricultural commodity is prohibited.
* Development. Expansion of existing residential facilities or the addition of new houses is prohibited. This includes subdivision of lots for resale and future housing development. No portion of the property shall be paved or otherwise covered with impervious material. Development of roads or other transportation systems that fragment the GRP acreage, modify topography, or otherwise diminish the grazing and ecological values of the area is prohibited. Existing roads and existing utilities may be maintained, repaired, removed or replaced at their current location. New roads necessary to conduct common grazing practices or for other allowable agricultural activities may be constructed with prior NRCS concurrence.
* Mining. Extraction of soil, sand, gravel, mineral, oil, gas, or any other surface mining activity, including mining for peat and other organic materials is generally prohibited. Subsurface exploration and extraction may be conducted when NRCS determines that the methods used will result in a temporary disturbance, and the activities are consistent with conserving and maintaining the viability of the grassland conservation values. Prior NRCS concurrence is required.
* Trash Dumping. Dumping, collecting, recycling, or storing of trash, refuse or waste is prohibited, except that animal waste may be applied as fertilizer at rates recommended in the GRP Management plan. Sewage sludge is not allowed.
* Hazardous Waste. Sites containing hazardous materials that have, or potentially will cause contamination that would affect the conservation values of the easement, will not be enrolled in GRP, unless NRCS, in consultation with OGC, determine that landowner can take actions that will allow the acquisition to continue. Hazardous materials include petroleum products, fuel oil, waste oils, explosives, reactive materials, ignitable materials, corrosive materials, hazardous chemicals, hazardous substances, toxic substances, radioactive materials, infectious materials, and any other substance that may pose a hazard to human health or the environment. Disposal of hazardous waste or disposal of oil field/mining by-products on the property is prohibited.
* Other Activities. NRCS may determine additional activities that would adversely affect grassland and shrubland functions and values on the site. Any additional prohibited activities will be described in the GRP Management Plan.

**GRP – Sage Grouse Initiative 2013 Management and Restoration Table**

This table provides further clarification, criteria and considerations for some permitted activities on 2013 GRP Sage Grouse Initiative easements.

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| **Activity** | **Short term** Specific management and restoration planned at time of easement signing | **Long term** General management, maintenance, and restoration in the future |
| **Juniper Treatment** | NRCS will establish baseline acres of juniper cover for all of the offered acres. The baseline data will include ESD maps and descriptions. Up to 10% of the offered acres may have juniper cover of 4% or greater canopy cover. Other lands may also be considered as part of the 10% of incidental lands such as rock outcrops, ponds, drainages.. (DM 9500-012, Chapter 3 # 11.) Within the remaining 90% of the offered acres, if juniper species provide greater than 4% canopy cover they must be removed. (see *Piñon and Juniper Field Guide: Asking the Right Questions to Select Appropriate Management Actions)* | The acres not identified under incidental lands will require occasional follow up for juniper removal to ensure that the functions and values for sage grouse are maintained into the future. As juniper species invade the offered acres the landowner will be required to remove any tree equal to or greater than 3 feet in height. The landowner is encouraged to treat juniper prior to it reaching 3 feet in height.  |
| **Sagebrush/Shrub Cover** | In sage grouse wintering areas, sagebrush will be managed to a minimum of 20% cover (goal 25%). In nesting areas, shrub cover will be managed to a minimum of 15% cover (20% goal). In areas of overlapping winter and nesting habitat, winter goals shall be met. In areas where ESD State and Transition models do not allow for management alone to achieve required shrub cover, active restoration treatment s may be required. These restoration treatments must be planned by a NRCS biologist AND concurred by a UDWR Biologist in conjunction with the landowner. In areas where management may achieve the shrub cover goals, but opportunities exist to expedite the process, active restoration treatments will be allowed. These restoration treatments must be planned by a NRCS biologist AND concurred by a UDWR Biologist in conjunction with the landowner | The short term treatment goals for sagebrush/shrub cover will be maintained, with the exception below (increase grasses and forbs). |
| **Maintain/Increase Grasses and Forbs** | In brood rearing habitat, grasses and forbs shall be managed to maintain and/or increase cover and diversity. Perennial bunchgrass cover should be 10% or greater, and forb cover should be 8% or greater. Management should strive to promote native and locally adapted plant species to the extent practicable. These goals shall be met through management where feasible. In areas where ESD State and Transition models do not allow for management alone to achieve required cover and diversity, active restoration treatments maybe required. These treatments will be planned by an NRCS biologist AND concurred by a DWR sage grouse biologist in conjunction with the landowner.In areas where management may achieve the grass and forb cover goals, but opportunities exist to expedite the process, active restoration will be allowed. | In areas of high (>35%) sagebrush cover, and within sage grouse brood rearing habitat, mosaic sagebrush treatments may be authorized, if necessary, to increase grasses and forbs. Treatments shall treat no more than 20% of the management unit every 5 years and shall not reduce sagebrush cover below 15% in brood rearing and 20% cover in winter habitat. |
| **Structural Practices** (fence, trough, tank, pipe, etc.) | Structural practices may be required to facilitate the NRCS grazing plan and plant cover and diversity requirements. All new fences must meet NRCS requirements for wildlife-friendly fencing. Fence markers will be required and escape ramps will be required (see sage grouse safety practices). Livestock water developments will not be placed within 0.6 mile of known leks. If springs are developed, it shall be done in a manner that protects surrounding wetland vegetation. See the grazing plan for details. | Structural practices that facilitate the GRP prescribed grazing plan will be maintained in perpetuity. As grazing systems, vegetative cover, and sage grouse use change over time, additional structural practices may be needed. All new fences must meet NRCS requirements for wildlife-friendly fencing. Fence markers will be required and escape ramps will be required (see sage grouse safety practices). Livestock water developments will not be placed within 0.6 mile of known leks. If springs are developed, it shall be done in a manner that protects surrounding wetland vegetation. See the grazing plan for details. |
| **Sage Grouse Safety Practices** (fence marking, fence removal, and escape ramps) | Any unnecessary fence within 0.6 miles of a sage grouse lek will be removed. All existing fences within 0.6 miles of leks will be marked. Any other fence in a high collision risk area (as determined by an NRCS and/or DWR biologist) shall be marked. Fences should not be planned within 0.6 miles of a lek. All existing and planned troughs shall have escape ramps installed and maintained.  | All sage grouse safety practices shall be maintained in perpetuity, unless leks become inactive (must be unused for 5 years to be determined inactive). High collision risk areas may change over time as habitat and populations change. Locations of required fences, fence markers may adjust as information changes. Decisions on adjustments will be made by a NRCS biologist. |
| **Weed Control** | All noxious weeds will be controlled following detection. All other invasive species (see NRCS Invasive Species List) shall be treated if infestations threaten the ecological functionality of the easement. Early treatment is recommended. Management will be designed to minimize establishment and spread of invasive species. Active cheatgrass control may be required and Management should be used to minimize cheatgrass persistence and spread. | All noxious weeds will be controlled following detection. All other invasive species (see NRCS Invasive Species List) shall be treated if infestations threaten the ecological functionality of the easement. Early treatment is recommended. Management will be designed to minimize establishment and spread of invasive species. Active cheatgrass control may be required and Management should be used to minimize cheatgrass persistence and spread. Fire prevention and rehabilitation (see below) may be necessary. |
| **Fire Prevention** (fuel breaks, green stripping, etc.) | NRCS and the landowner shall work with other landowners and land managers to develop and implement comprehensive, landscape-level fire prevention strategies to protect the easement. If these strategies call for treatments on the easement, and would maintain the functions and values of the easement in the short and long term, these strategies should be implemented. On-easement fire prevention strategies should only be implemented if landscape level strategies cannot be developed. On-easement fire prevention strategies should maintain the functions and values of the easement in the short and long term. All fire prevention implementation should avoid negative short term effects to sage grouse. | Same as Short Term  |
| **Fire Rehabilitation**(seeding, erosion control, etc.) | n/a | Following wildfire, seeding and erosion control measures, and other fire rehabilitation treatments to restore or stabilize vegetative structure and diversity may be enacted. Seed mixes should meet the range seeding guidance below and should be designed to ultimately meet the criteria for cover and diversity for the sage grouse season of use (see sagebrush/shrub cover and increase grasses and forbs above). All seeded areas will be rested from grazing for a minimum of two years. Erosion control methods may be implemented as long as the plan follows all guidance in this document and the compliance statement below. Bioengineering methods should be used to control bank erosion and channel down cutting if applicable techniques exist. The NRCS and Landowner will work jointly with Partners and thru available programs to accomplish fire restoration efforts.  |
| **Grazing Plan** | All grazing plans will support the functions and values of the easement. Livestock grazing must be managed according to an NRCS-approved grazing management plan that meets the Prescribed Grazing (528) standards and specifications. Structural practices may be required to implement the grazing system and will avoid concentrating livestock and livestock facilities and/or management practices (e.g., salting, waters, etc.) within 0.6 miles of known leks. See grazing of nesting areas below. The Grazing Plan will identify the season of use and duration of grazing to manage the sage grouse habitat and its’ threats. The grazing plan will consider all necessary and approved restoration treatments identified in the restoration plan to ensure sage grouse habitat is maintained and improved.  | Grazing plans will be reviewed and revised as necessary by NRCS staff in coordination with the landowner to ensure that the functions and values for sage grouse are maintained into the future.  |
| **Range Seeding** | Range seeding may be implemented as part of the restoration plan if shrubs, grasses, and/or forbs are lacking in cover or diversity. Native, locally adapted seed must be included to the maximum extent possible. Seed mixes will strive to maximize diversity (see increase grasses and forbs above). Seedbed prep must adhere to all guidance in this document and the compliance statement below. | Native, locally adapted seed must be included to the maximum extent possible. Seed mixes will maximize plant diversity (see increase grasses and forbs above) and strive to achieve a high similarity index with reference conditions. Seedbed prep must adhere to all guidance in this document and the compliance statement below. |
| **Wet Meadow Restoration** | If deemed necessary to support the functions and values of the easement or requested by the landowner, wet meadow restoration may be implemented. Bioengineering methods should be used to control bank erosion and down cutting.  | If down cutting of channels occur in wet meadows, treatments should be implemented early by NRCS staff while the system can be stabilized. Bioengineering methods should be used to control down cutting.  |
| **Grazing of Nesting Areas**  | Grazing plans must rest sage grouse nesting areas at least 20% of the time, and more often if feasible. This can be accomplished by providing complete growing season rest on at least 20% of the unit each year or by resting the entire unit 1 out of every 5 years, when the unit is part of a larger grazing system. Rest should be for a 14.5 month period starting April 1 of Year 1 and continuing until at least June 15 of Year 2. Nesting areas of high importance/occupancy should be rested to the maximum extent possible April 1 to June 15. Great detail and attention will be used to coincide any restoration treatments and the associated required rest to address the required nesting area rest described here.  | Nesting areas may change over time. Grazing plans may be updated to reflect the new locations. |
| **Tall Structures**Wind turbines, poles, windmills, non-native trees, etc. | Artificial tall structures shall be eliminated as feasible. A cultural resources review may be required. | Wind turbines are not compatible with sage grouse habitat and shall not be authorized within sage grouse habitat. Tall structures shall not be established in sage grouse habitat. |

 Green – required criteria, Orange – optional considerations if desired by landowner and approved by NRCS.

**Compliance Statement:** All activities must comply with the SGI Conference Opinion, the GRP SGI deed, the restoration, management, and grazing plan, and all other applicable laws, regulations, executive orders, policy, and bulletins. Activities will follow NRCS practice standards and specifications if applicable.