



Open for business: Sage brush landscapes continue to drive Western economies

Last September, after years of collaboration with states, ranchers, sportsmen, industry representatives, conservationists and other stakeholders, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service finalized new management plans for over 67 million acres of publically-owned habitat for Greater sage-grouse. Due to the strength of those plans, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that sage-grouse did not warrant a listing under the Endangered Species Act. And, since that September announcement, the public lands have – as promised – stayed open for business, just as they did during the preparation of the plans.

This should come as no surprise, however. [As many have pointed out](#), conserving sage-grouse is fully compatible with maintaining robust economic activity and multiple uses on the public lands. That includes oil, gas, wind and solar energy development, as well as outdoor recreation, which [generates over \\$1 billion in economic output](#) every year on sagebrush lands alone.

But critics, including many members of Congress, continue to make false and misleading claims about the impact of the sage-grouse plans in the West, willfully ignoring the fact that the BLM has quietly and dutifully continued to approve and advance hundreds of leases for oil and gas development, hundreds of permits for grazing, drilling and recreation and several large-scale transmission and renewable energy projects. That was the commitment from Secretary Jewell last September – that the BLM would continue to manage the public lands for multiple uses, guided by the conservation framework established in the plans. And the BLM is honoring that commitment by implementing the plans in such a way that westerners and their communities can continue to rely on the public lands for income and enjoyment.

This report identifies several multiple uses – oil and gas development, outdoor recreation, grazing, renewable energy development and energy transmission – that are central to the identity and economic well-being of western communities, and highlights just a few of the many examples where, in the months both following the completion of the sage-grouse plans, the BLM has approved and advanced leases, permits and projects that will drive economic activity on the public lands for years to come.

Oil and Gas Development

At the outset, it's important to note that the oil and gas industry is continuing to sit-on a sizable surplus of old, unused leases and drilling permits from the BLM. As of Oct. 2015, the industry had [32.2 million acres of public lands under lease](#), only 40 percent of which were actually being used. Additionally, the industry had [received over 7,500 drilling permits](#) from

the BLM that it was not using. Thus, the industry – and western communities – can count on years of activity from the BLM leases and permits already in-hand.

Even with this surplus of unused leases and permits, the BLM has continued to hold lease sales and process drilling permits, including in the sagebrush states of Colorado, Montana, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. This is summarized in the following table, which shows that while the BLM is continuing to provide ample opportunities to obtain new leases, the industry is purchasing just a fraction of them:

	Acres of Public Lands Offered for Lease By BLM	Acres of Public Lands Bid On By Industry	Percentage of Acres Offered v. Bid On By Industry	Receipts Collected for Taxpayers
Since Sept. 22, 2015	1,774,792	288,870	16%	\$41,784,915

From the standpoint of development, the BLM has also continued to move proposals forward – approving hundreds of new drilling permits throughout sagebrush states in the West and collaborating with industry to advance drilling projects (with important compromises to protect sage-grouse) in sage-grouse habitat:

STATE	APDs APPROVED SINCE SEPT. 22, 2015
Colorado	30
California	177
Montana	153
Utah	143
Wyoming	398
Total	901

Thus, far from stifling development under the grouse plans, the BLM has continued to authorize and move along numerous leases and drilling permits.

Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation has become a significant contributor to our national economy, [generating \\$646 billion in consumer spending](#) and supporting 6.1 million jobs. This is especially true in the West, where recreation on sagebrush lands alone creates [over \\$1 billion in economic output](#) annually.

Since last September, the BLM has taken steps to support communities that depend on recreation for jobs and tax revenue (as many now do) by approving dozens permits for a wide array of commercial recreation activities, including [mountain bike races](#) in Colorado, [guided](#)

[fly fishing](#) in Montana, [off-highway vehicle events](#) in Nevada, [whitewater rafting](#) in Utah and guided [big game hunting](#) in Wyoming.¹

Grazing

Ranching is embedded in the culture, identity and economy of many western communities. And many ranchers utilize public lands to graze and trail livestock under permits issued by the BLM.

Since September 2015, the BLM has continued to renew and process grazing permits throughout the West, including in the sagebrush states of [Colorado](#), [Idaho](#), [Montana](#), [Nevada](#), [Oregon](#) and [Wyoming](#). These renewals have proceeded steadily, all the way through [August 2016](#). Additionally, the BLM has recently given approval or agreed to evaluate a number of range improvement projects – from [water pipelines](#) to [fencing projects](#) – throughout the West.

Renewable Energy Development

Over the past few years, the BLM has made great strides in [creating a “smart from the start” program for renewable energy development](#) on the public lands – where low conflicts areas are identified up-front and incentives are provided to guide projects to those areas. In the months since finalizing the grouse plans, the BLM has maintained its momentum on the renewables program, [approving the 287-megawatt Soda Mountain Solar Project](#) (enough to power 86,000 homes) in California in April 2016. Also, in November 2015, the BLM [issued the proposed Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan](#) for the California desert, which would support 22,000 additional megawatts of renewable energy.

Energy Transmission

The BLM plays an important role in approving and overseeing the transmission lines that power western economies and communities. These lines often cross many miles of public lands, and require approval from the BLM. Over the past few months, the BLM has taken important steps forward toward approving the next generation of transmission lines in the West, many of which will carry renewable energy generated from public lands to western population centers.

For instance, in March 2016, the BLM issued a new analysis for the [Gateway West Transmission Line](#), which will move power from Wyoming to Idaho. Final approval is expected later this year. Also in March 2016, the BLM issued preliminary final alternatives for the [Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line](#) (Oregon to Idaho), with final approval also expected in a few months. Finally, in May 2016, the BLM released its final environmental analysis for the [Gateway South Transmission Line](#), which will carry energy from renewable and thermal sources in Wyoming to Utah.

Conclusion

Managing our public lands for multiple uses is a difficult and complex challenge. But it is one best confronted through the very sort of collaboration that led to the adoption of the BLM's

¹ Source: BLM https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/lup/lup_register.do

sage-grouse plans. While important work remains on ensuring their successful implementation, the early returns are positive. Key economic activities – from oil and gas development to recreation – are continuing on the public lands, with many more projects advancing steadily through the approval process. [Collaboration is also continuing](#), which will be critical to conserving the sage-grouse, while still managing and providing for other multiples uses.

Far from stifling development, the BLM's sage-grouse plans are providing the path forward for future development on the public lands. But for this to continue, the BLM must ensure that the plans are faithfully implemented and in a timely way, and all parties must renew their commitment to collaboration.