

United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION **LANDS IN WILDERNESS**

STATE: Nevada

COUNTY: Humboldt County

OFFICE: Black Rock Field Office
Winnemucca District
5100 East Winnemucca Blvd.
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

WILDERNESS AREA North Black Rock Wilderness (N74463)
WILDERNESS STUDY AREA Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Instant Study Area (ISA)

PROPOSED ACTION: Summit Lake Paiute Tribe Sage Grouse Research

Background

The North Black Rock Range Wilderness (NBRW) was designated with the passage of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area Act (2000) (Amended 2001). Wilderness values identified include the presence of sage grouse and the outstanding opportunities for nature study.

The Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Instant Study Area (ISA) is a Natural Area established in 1973 to ensure the preservation of Lahontan cutthroat trout, a threatened species of fish. This area is managed as a wilderness study area.

In 2010 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified the greater sage grouse as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and determined the species warrants protection under the ESA. However, listing at this time was precluded by the need to address higher priority species. The greater sage grouse is also a BLM sensitive species protected through BLM policy (BLM Manual 6840). BLM GIS data layers indicate the NBRW and the ISA contain preliminary priority and preliminary general sage-grouse habitat. Within the 5 mile radius of the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe (Tribe) reservation Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW) data shows an active lek and a lek of unknown activity within the wilderness. Two inactive leks are located within the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Instant Study Area. Two active leks and an inactive lek are located on BLM lands outside of wilderness. One active lek, a historic lek, and one of unknown activity are located on the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge.

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Although leks have been identified outside of NBRW and the ISA, the lek located in the wilderness and ISA would need to be included in the study. Based on observations during initial surveys, the lek within the wilderness is more active and more recently used than other leks in the region. It is believed the sage grouse located in the wilderness lek are using the reservation during other phases of their life. A data gap exists in this region regarding the populations of sage grouse using this habitat for various parts of their life history. This data gap affects other state and region-wide conservation and monitoring efforts. The leks inside the wilderness and ISA are an important component for validating the metapopulation dynamics and movement of sage grouse in the region.

With the passage of the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon-Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area Act 2000 (NCA Act) and the Wilderness Act of 1964, Wilderness Areas are to be managed to preserve and protect their wilderness character and to provide for their use and enjoyment by the American people, in such a manner that will leave it unpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and will allow for recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historical use.

Management of WSAs is guided by BLM Manual 6330. It is BLM's policy to manage WSAs in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for preservation as wilderness.

Description of the Proposed Action

The Tribe has submitted a proposal to study sage grouse leks that inhabit the reservation and the areas surrounding the reservation. The goal of the study is to obtain data on sage grouse population networks in order to validate metapopulation dynamics and movement of sage grouse in the region. This data would then be used to guide tribal leaders in habitat management on the reservation to improve sage grouse habitat. Data would be shared with neighboring land managers. The Tribe's proposed study focuses on sage grouse within 5 miles of the reservation. As the reservation shares a border with the NBRW and another border with the ISA, the study area would include a portion of the NBRW and a portion of the ISA. The area of study could be extended up to 20 miles from the reservation.

Targeting known active leks is the most efficient way to find and capture sage grouse and there are no known active leks on the reservation. The Tribe would use NDOW's data collected from aerial surveys to locate leks within five miles of the reservation. Once leks are located, observing teams of two - four would count the number of birds. This would occur one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunrise. Counts of the same lek may be performed on different days. Observing teams would walk to lek locations within the NBRW. Observing teams would stay on existing ways in the ISA if using motorized vehicles to access these leks.

Individual sage grouse would be captured at the lek site by teams led by the tribal biologist, tribal employees and volunteers. Teams would not consist of more than four people per team and no more than three teams would be operating at the same time. The birds would be approached on foot and spotlighted with a hand-held spotlight. Portable audio devices for 'white noise' would be used to mask the sound of approaching humans and to distract the bird. The volume would be at a level sufficient to cover the footsteps of approaching netters and would occur periodically throughout the night while capture is being attempted. Net guns or long-handled game bird catching nets would also be used.

Once the bird is captured, biological data (age, sex, weight, location) would be collected and the bird would be fitted with a radio transmitting collar and metal leg band. Capture efforts would be conducted during the new moon phases from March through May 2014 and 2015. Capture attempts prior to dawn would be avoided. A total of up to 25 sage grouse in the entire study area (NBRW, ISA, BLM and reservation lands) would be fitted with the radio transmitter over the two-year study period.

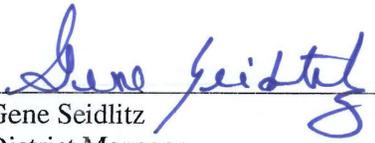
Subsequent monitoring would continue for a period of two years. Monitoring includes tracking of each sage grouse for the life of the radio transmitter (approximately 18 months) or a mortality sensor is detected. If a mortality sensor is detected, the radio transmitter would be retrieved and data would be collected on its

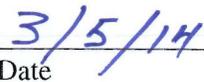
location and suspected cause of death. Sage grouse would be tracked monthly by technicians using radio-receivers. Tracking within the NBRW would be conducted on foot. During the winter when access is limited or when carrying out field methods in inclement weather becomes difficult, fixed-wing aircraft surveillance would be conducted to locate sage grouse. Video cameras mounted on drones may be used in lieu of aircraft surveillance. Flights would take place once per month and for six months per year.

The use of radio transmitters is identified as an installation in BLM Manual 6340. This portion of the proposed action is the only activity that can be classified as a prohibited use under Section 4c of the Wilderness Act. A minimum tool analysis was conducted for the proposed installation of radio transmitters in wilderness. It was determined the action is needed for the administration of the wilderness area. Little is currently known about sage grouse habitat use within this wilderness and surrounding area. Lacking such information restricts BLM's ability to manage important habitat use areas and prioritize areas in need of restoration. The same is true for the Tribe, who are currently seeking ways to improve sage grouse habitat on the reservation which borders the NBRW and ISA. Through the minimum tool analysis, the use of the radio transmitters is considered to be the minimum tool needed to complete the project.

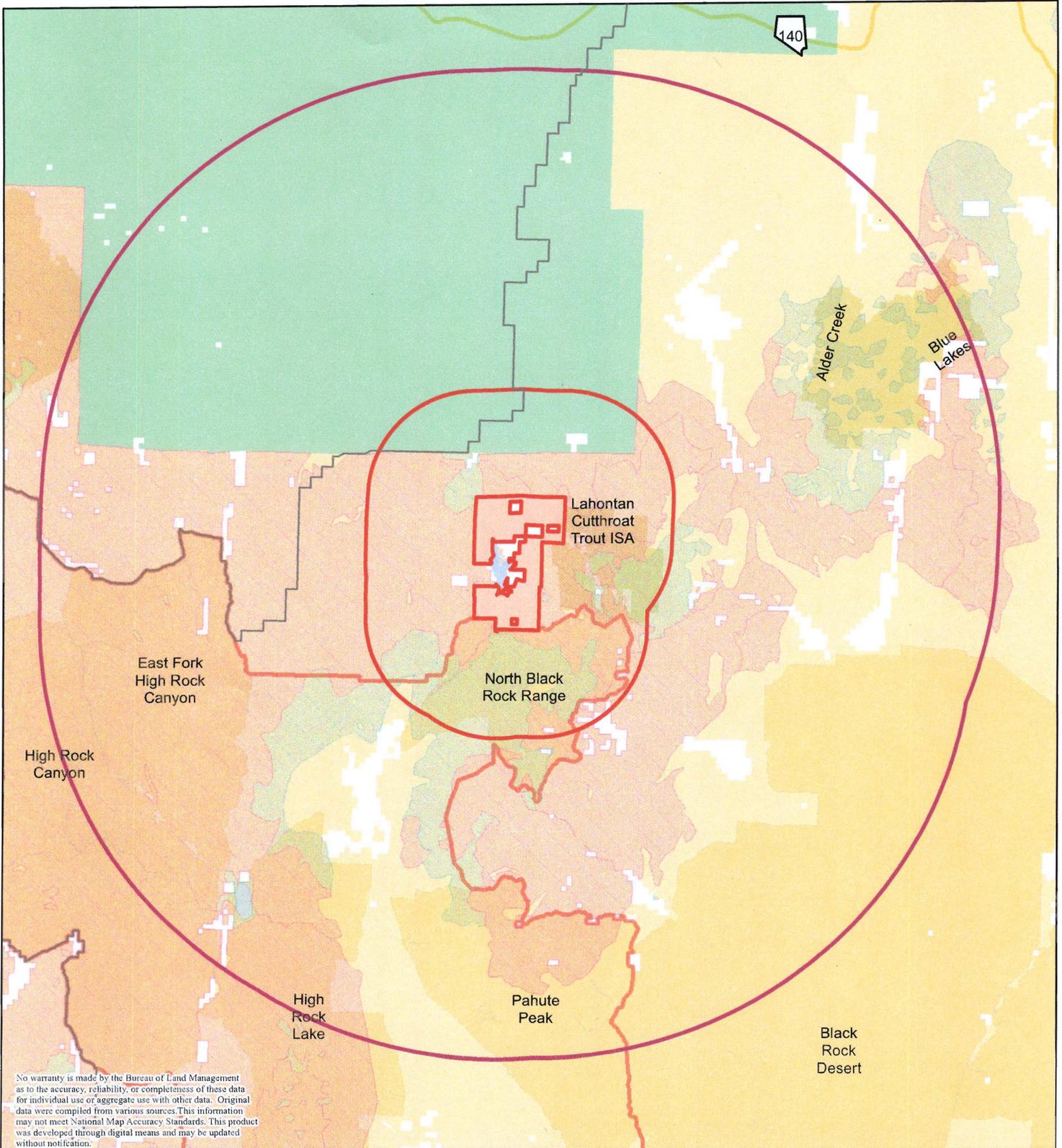
The proposed action in the ISA meets the non-impairment standard. The activities are temporary and non-surface disturbing.

Please send your comments on the proposed activity to Donovan Walker, Black Rock Field Office Manager at the address above by **March 21, 2014**. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.


Gene Seidlitz
District Manager
Winnemucca District


Date

Summit Lake Paiute Tribe Sage Grouse Collaring Proposal



Legend

- District Office Boundary
- 5 Mile Study Area
- 20 Mile Study Area
- Sage Grouse**
- PGH
- PPH

- Land Status**
- Abbreviation
- BIA
- BLM
- FWS
- PVT

- NDOT Roads**
- State Route
- BLM NCA
- BLM Wilderness
- BLM WSA



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 Date: 2/5/2014

