

Sage-Grouse Plan Amendments Require Substantial Opportunities for Public Input

In September 2015, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service finished amending 98 land use plans in sage-grouse habitats that are found on 67 million acres of public lands in 11 western states. These plans are considered one of the most collaborative conservation efforts in U.S. history, involving years of cooperation among a variety of stakeholders in the west, and ample public comment opportunities, representing a scientifically based effort to conserve sage-grouse and to prevent listing of the bird under the Endangered Species Act.

In June 2017, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke released a secretarial order for his staff to conduct a review of the plans in a mere 60-day period. Now, the BLM, under the direction of Secretary Zinke, has been swiftly moving to amend the plans, opening them up to a broad range of changes, leaving little room for public involvement in the process.

	<u>Developing the plans</u>	<u>Dismantling the plans</u>
<u>Time Invested</u>	Over 6 years	6 months
<u>Parties Involved in the Process</u>	Multiple federal agencies, Republican and Democratic Governors from western states, business owners, sportsmen, energy industry leaders, local elected officials, outdoor recreation leaders, scientists, conservationists...	Interior Department and the oil and gas industry
<u>Opportunity for Public Input</u>	During the planning process for the 2015 amendments there were lengthy scoping periods – as much as three months – with scoping hearings held in many communities. When the draft environmental impact statements (EIS) were released, there was a 90-day public comment period, with extensions in some cases.	The October 2017 notice of intent to change the plans started a 45-day comment collection period by the BLM, with several requests from members of Congress to extend this period that were ignored.
<u>Public Meetings</u>	During the EIS comment period, there were public meetings held in many communities, with extensive outreach to tribes and numerous collaborators, including county governments. BLM issued press releases to announce public engagement opportunities, and established websites to provide people more access to the process.	During the 45-day comment period, there were public meetings held in rural locations across the west. At every public meeting, western stakeholders in attendance made it clear to BLM that they did not want to see major changes made to the plans.
<u>Public Comment Collection</u>	Comments submitted to the BLM could be tracked, and were accounted for, providing a transparent process.	Comment discrepancy, as at least 267,000 comments were submitted to the BLM to keep the plans in place, but the agency reports to have only received 45,000.