Sage-grouse Council Preliminary Draft Recommendations Wildfire and Invasive Species

PRE-FIRE - Prevention

- Broaden DNRC, VFD and all fire-fighting unit awareness though mapping of sage-grouse habitat and Montana's conservation plan
- Place sage-grouse habitat maps in every county fire-fighting office
- Oppose prescribed fire in sagebrush habitat
- Prioritize eradication of cheatgrass and/or address management practices, acquire funding for Plateau treatments, explore biological controls
- Examine feasibility of establishing fire breaks outside core habitat if possible
- Prioritize conifer reduction in core areas where appropriate

FIRE – suppression

- Prioritize initial attack with goal of immediate suppression in core areas, including use of fire retardants and other appropriate tools
- DNRC, state of MT, coordinate with MACo on all fire suppression activities
- Federal partners mirror initial attack program of DNRC
- Prioritize outreach from DNRC to private operators regarding initial attack in sagebrush areas;
- Review liability of Good Samaritan role of private operators/private landowners
- Carefully consider the use of backfires within core areas to minimize the potential for escape and further damage to sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats (tactical decision)
- Identify and establish defensible fire lines in areas where: (i) effectiveness is high, (ii) fire risk is likely, and (iii) negative impacts from these efforts (e.g., fragmentation) are minimized. Avoid use of any vegetative stripping in healthy, unfragmented habitats, unless fire conditions and local ecological conditions so warrant

POST-FIRE – Rehabilitation

- Spray for cheatgrass (???)
- Ensure most successful restoration strategies are being implemented; develop handbook of methods for most appropriate restoration strategies
- Identify funding options for restoration implementation
- Use locally available seeds where it is most likely to be effective and to areas of high need
- Prioritize core areas over sagebrush areas outside of core areas for restoration efforts
- Verify that all seeding in core areas have been certified as weed-free by an independent contractor
- Establish seed bank managed by state (viability of seeds???); evaluate use of seed orchards
- Ensure post-fire monitoring for successful reestablishment of sagebrush community

INVASIVE SPECIES

- Retain all remaining large intatct sagebrush patches, particularly at low elevations
- Reduce or eliminate disturbances that promote the spread of these invasive species, such as reducing fires to a "normal range" of fire activity for the local ecosystem... (#2 in COT)
- Restore altered ecosystems such that non-native invasive plants are reduced to levels that do not put the area at risk of conversion if a catastrophic event were to occur.
- Recommend to Dept of Agriculture that Japanese Brome be listed as regulated species (priority #3)
- Spray for cheatgrass ???
- Prioritize conifer reduction in core areas where appropriate (although not a non-native, recognize conifer encroachment is a threat to sage-grouse conservation)