

## **Ecological Site Description Policy and Interagency Adoption**

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### **1. How has the interagency ecological site description policy evolved?**

- a. In 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the USDI Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- b. The MOU established a Federal Interagency Team to develop a standardized method for defining, delineating, and describing terrestrial ecological sites.
- c. The uniform procedures from this cooperative endeavor will result in significant savings of time, money, and effort by each agency.
- d. The interagency ecological site policy manual was released in June 2010.
- e. Although all lands are included in the spatial scope of ecological sites, the initial policy manual is specific to rangeland ecosystems and pertains only to ecological sites on rangelands regardless of their current vegetation or land use.

### **2. Why should we work collectively?**

- a. BLM, FS, NRCS and other conservation agencies and organizations share a commitment to the use of science-based technical processes to sustain and enhance natural resources and the environment.
- b. These three agencies have utilized different methods to stratify rangeland ecosystems into units for planning, analysis, and decision making.
- c. Since private and public lands under these agencies' jurisdictions are intermingled throughout much of the United States, a standardized system to define and describe rangeland ecological sites is more efficient and defensible.
- d. The interagency manual identified three key policies:
  - i. Cooperatively identify and define rangeland ecological sites for use in the inventory, monitoring, evaluation, and management of the Nation's rangelands.
  - ii. Establish an interagency, interdisciplinary workgroup to recommend, develop, and support policy and procedures to review, approve, and provide quality control and assurance and manage rangeland ecological site description data.

- iii. Establish the minimum requirements for the contents of the rangeland ecological site description

### **3. What is the future for interagency ecological site collaboration?**

- a. An interagency handbook has been drafted to implement the policy outlined in the Rangeland Interagency Ecological Site Manual.
- b. The handbook should be released in early 2012 and will provide details for a standardized method to be utilized by the BLM, FS, and NRCS to define, delineate, and describe terrestrial ecological sites on rangelands.
- c. It is anticipated that future versions of this handbook will incorporate other ecosystems including forest, riparian, and culturally managed lands, such as cropland and pastureland. **HOW?**
  - i. An expanded MOU is being considered to include other federal agencies e.g., National Institute of Food and Agriculture and National Park Service.
  - ii. Must go beyond the federal agencies to include state and local agencies and key nongovernmental organizations.
- d. Ecological sites will be a critical part to the next generation of conservation planning tools for:
  - i. Assessing and reporting resource condition and trends.
  - ii. Evaluating land capability and suitability for plant production for grazing animals, wildlife habitat and many other ecosystem services .
  - iii. Developing land management planning for resource use and resource condition.

### **4. How can you help with this interagency ecological site collaboration?**

- a. You are taking the first steps by participating in this workshop.
- b. Identify local natural resource data and human resources that can contribute to this challenge.
- c. Start working on ecological site descriptions with local partners.