

Core Area Boundary Revisions – Northeast LWG Mtg 3/16/2015

At their meeting Monday March 16, 2015 the Northeast Local Sage-Grouse Working Group (LWG) discussed potential core area boundary changes/ideas submitted or proposed by Thunder Basin National Grasslands, a private landowner, Chesapeake Energy, Wild Earth Guardians et al., BLM Buffalo and Casper field staff, Sheridan and Casper Region WGF field staff and Local Working Group members. The full proposals can be viewed in the “Combined Proposals” document. Here is a summary of LWG recommendations regarding these proposals.

LWG members present: Tom Maechtle, Laurel Vicklund, Tim Byer, Dan Thiele, Robert Harshbarger, Tracy Pinter, Robert Brug, Colleen Faber, Tracy Jones, Allison McKenzie, Bill Ostheimer. LWG member absent: Bob Krumm. Apx. 66 others in attendance.

1. Mr. Doug Cooper, a landowner in the North Glenrock Core Area requested all of his private lands be removed from the core area (Figure 1). Mr. Cooper questioned the legal authority for core area designation and the process for establishing and revising core area boundaries. During the discussion on the issue one LWG member made a compromise suggestion that removed the western portions of Mr. Cooper's property, several producing oil/gas wells and one sage-grouse lek (count of 4 males) while retaining the larger leks in the core area and following the “no Swiss cheese” sideboard (Figure 1). A majority of LWG members supported the compromise but full consensus was not achieved with some members supporting Mr. Cooper's proposal.

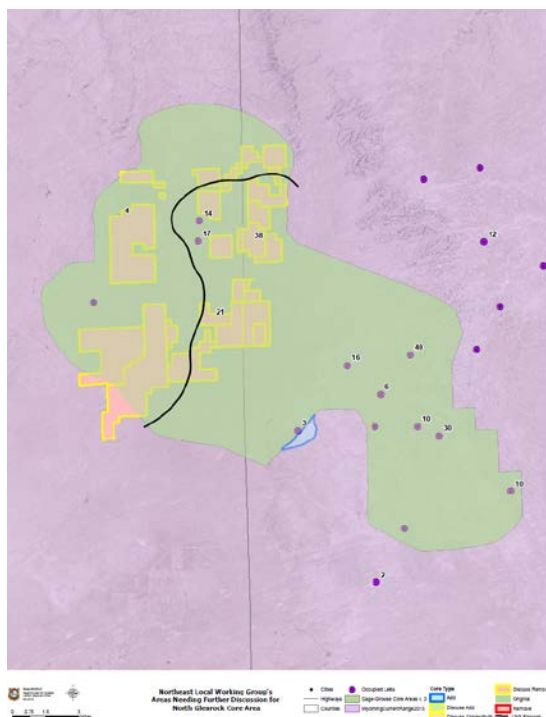


Figure 1. D. Cooper proposal to remove his private lands (yellow) from the North Glenrock Core Area. Compromise proposal is the black line.

2. Local Working Group member, Tracy Jones proposed removing the southern edge of the Newcastle Core Area due to existing disturbance (Figure 2). The LWG was in consensus to remove this area and use a buffer on the north side of Highway 450 as the boundary that is consistent with the rest of the state.

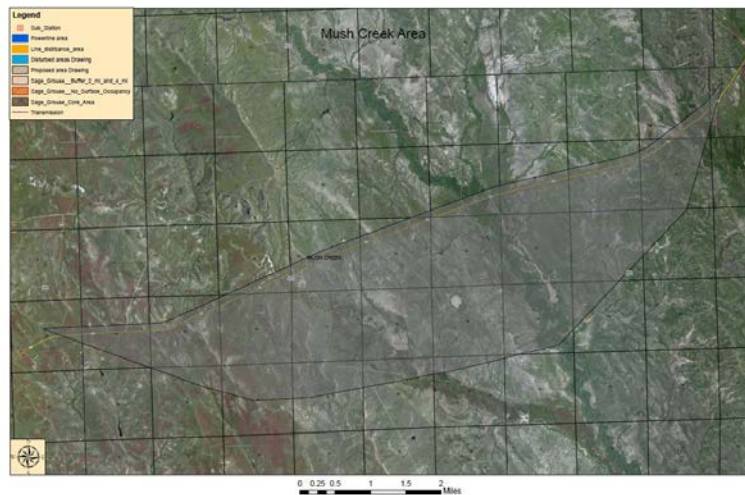


Figure 2. T. Jones proposal to remove southern edge of Newcastle Core Area.

3. Local Working Group member, Tracy Jones proposed two additions (Figure 3 and 4) to the Thunder Basin Core Area based on observed and potential grouse use of the area. Following discussion, the LWG was in consensus not to recommend adding these areas to core.



Figure 3. T. Jones proposal (1) to add to the Thunder Basin Core Area.

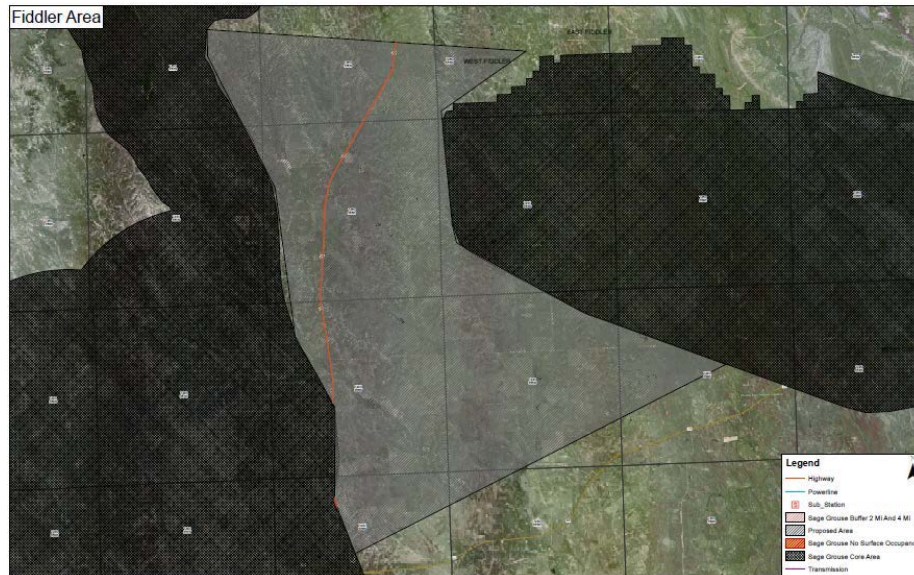


Figure 4. T. Jones proposal (2) to add to the Thunder Basin Core Area.

4. Wyoming Game and Fish biologist, Joe Sandrini, proposed a core area addition linking the Thunder Basin and Newcastle Core Areas (Figure 5). The proposed area has grouse leks as well as summering and wintering birds. Power transmission and a rare earth mine would require further consultation and coordination. The LWG was in consensus to recommend adding the proposed area but removed the oil/gas unit just north of the Newcastle Core Area. A request was also made that the Weston County Commission be advised of potential core area revisions and offered the opportunity to comment.

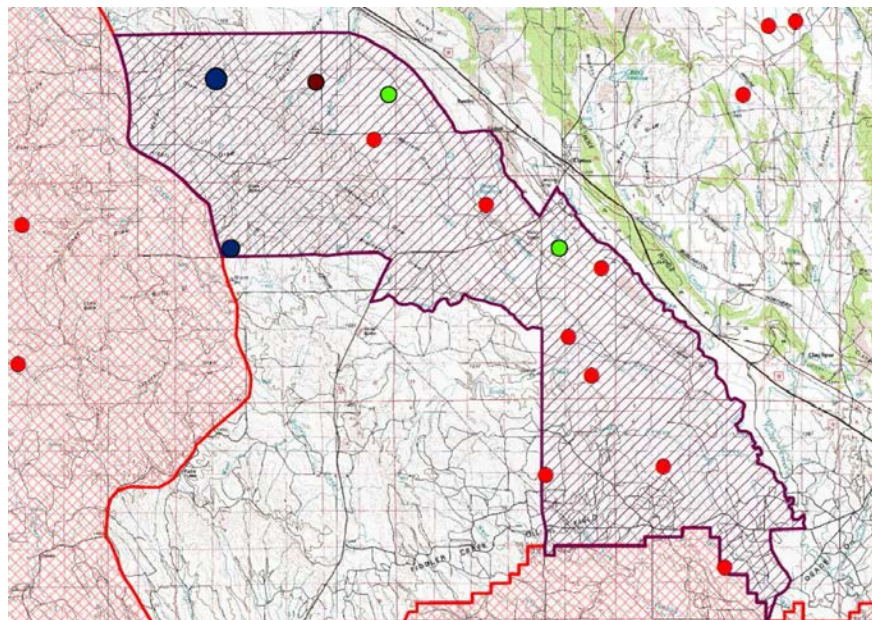


Figure 5. J. Sandrini proposal to link the Thunder Basin and Newcastle Core Areas.

5. Wyoming Game and Fish Biologist, Erika Peckam proposed an addition to the connectivity area between the North Gillette Core Area and Montana Core Areas based on results from Montana radio telemetered birds and their use of the area (Figure 6). The proposed connectivity area boundary adjustment captures most of the outstanding relocation points taking into account suitable habitat and existing disturbances. The LWG modified the boundaries of the proposal by removing the northern area and reducing the southern portion of the southern area. The LWG was in consensus with the proposal as modified (Figure 7).

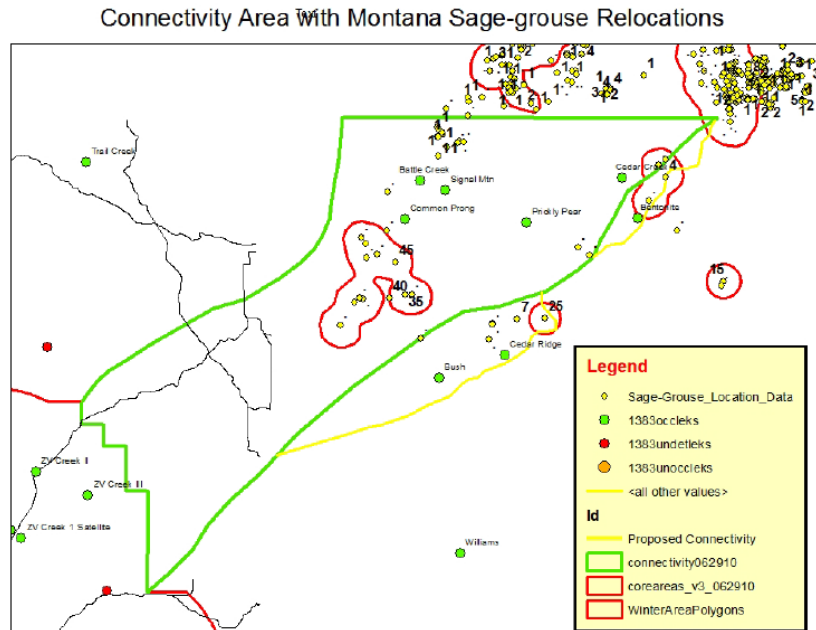


Figure 6. WGFD proposal to add to the North Gillette Connectivity Area.

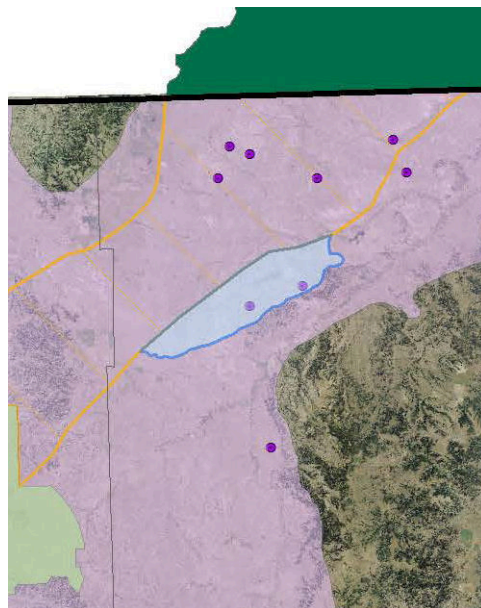


Figure 7. NE LWG modified addition to the North Gillette Connectivity Area.

6. The USFS Thunder Basin National Grasslands proposed adding five areas (Figure 8) as Core based on bird use, habitat and the Forest Service Viability Policy. The LWG members expressed concern for the lack of leks, and therefore birds that could be counted in the evaluation of core areas and the isolated nature of most of the parcels. One of the parcels however is captured within proposal #4 (link between Thunder Basin and Newcastle Core Areas). The LWG did not reach consensus to add the rest of the areas to core.

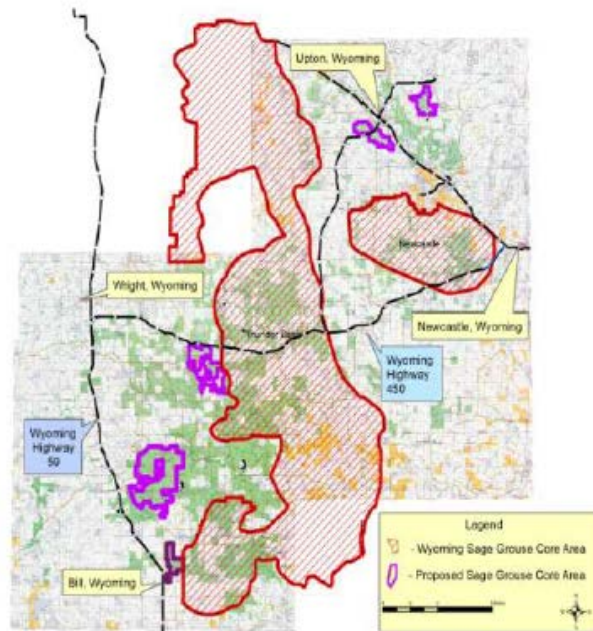


Figure 8. USFS Thunder Basin National Grasslands proposal to add core areas.

7. The USFS Thunder Basin National Grasslands proposed to remove one area (Figure 9) from the Thunder Basin Core Area based on existing habitat fragmentation and habitat suitability. Much of the area is occupied by prairie dogs. The LWG was not in consensus to remove this area from core.

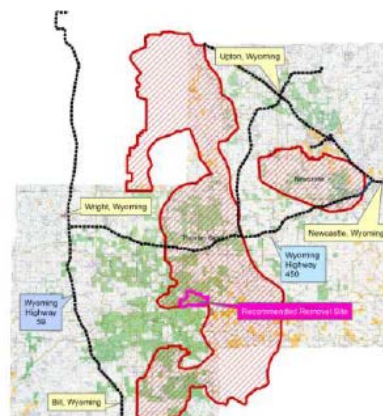


Figure 9. USFS Thunder Basin National Grasslands proposal to remove an area from the Thunder Basin Core Area.

8. Wild Earth Guardians et al. proposed to add to the East Buffalo Core and create a new core area in the central Powder River Basin (Figure 10). Based on the number of producing wells in both areas the LWG was in consensus not to recommend adding these areas as core; however, the BLM has made a similar proposal which would add connectivity status on the east side of the East Buffalo Core Area (see item 9 below).

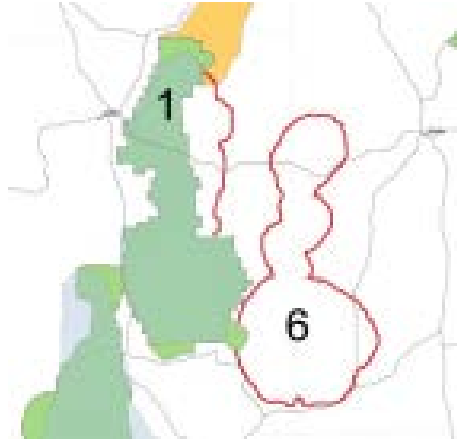


Figure 10. Wild Earth Guardians et al. proposal to add to the East Buffalo Core Area and to create a new core area in the central Powder River Basin.

9. The Buffalo BLM Field Office proposed to add to the connectivity area associated with the East Buffalo Core Area in order to increase the proportion of grouse in Northeast Wyoming receiving core/connectivity protections (Figure 11). BLM Biologist, Bill Ostheimer offered to trim back this proposal (Figure 12) but consensus was not reached due to the level of development that is already in place and permitted through the EIS process.

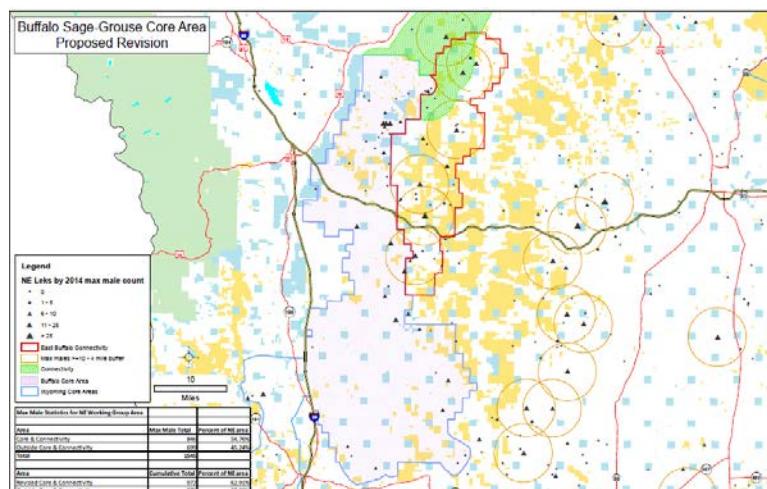


Figure 11. Original BLM proposal to add to the connectivity area associated with the East Buffalo Core Area.

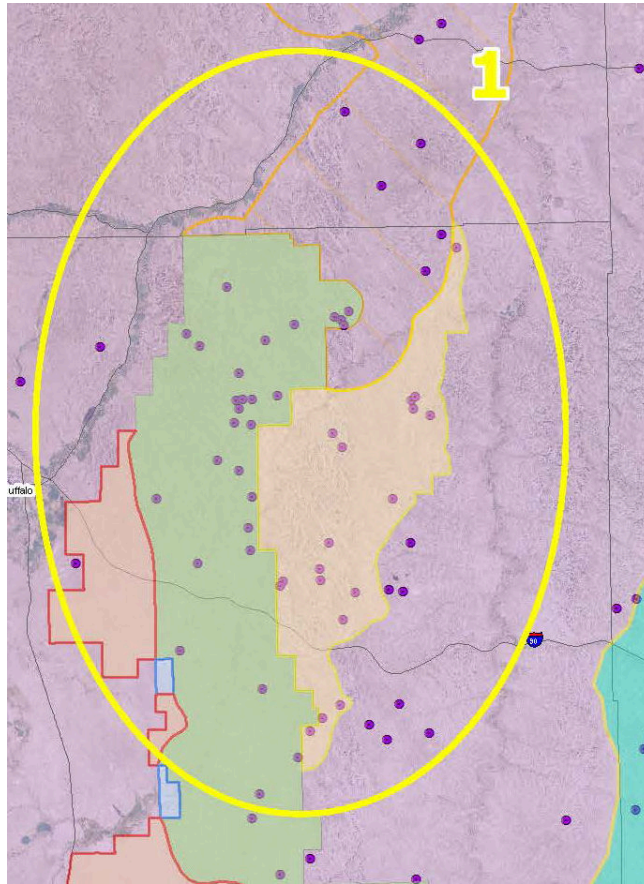


Figure 12. Revised BLM proposal to add to the connectivity area associated with the East Buffalo Core Area.

10. WGF Wildlife Biologist, Dan Thiele proposed to remove large blocks of unsuitable grassland habitat from the East Buffalo and Natrona Core Areas (Figure 13). The LWG consented to this proposal with modifications that retain some of the southern end of the East Buffalo Core where a small number of sage-grouse remain (Figure 14).

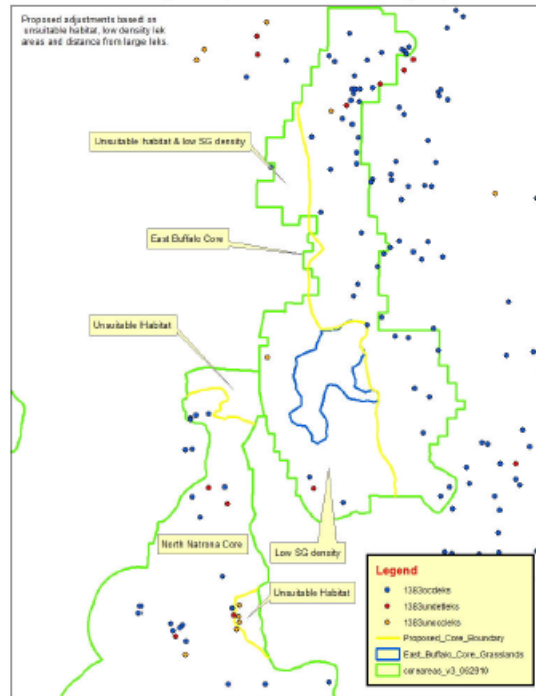


Figure 13. Original WGF proposal to remove unsuitable habitat from the East Buffalo and Natrona Core Areas.

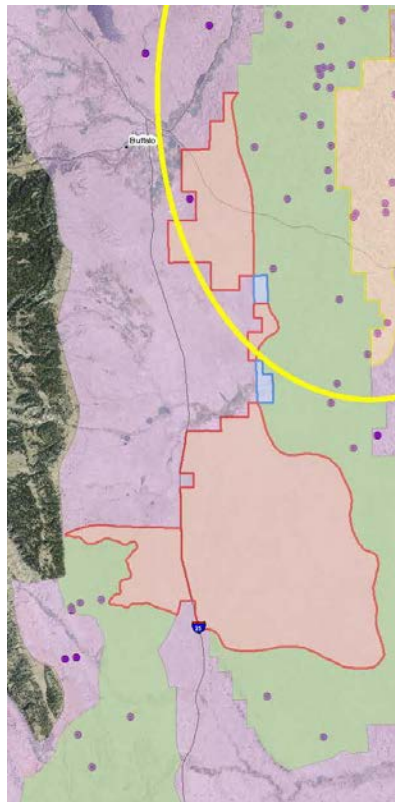
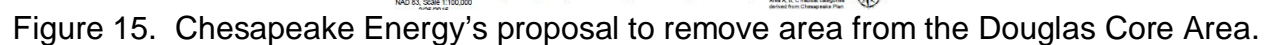


Figure 14. NE LWG modified recommendation for removal of unsuitable habitats from the East Buffalo and Natrona Core Areas.

Figure 15. Chesapeake Energy's proposal to remove area from the Douglas Core Area.



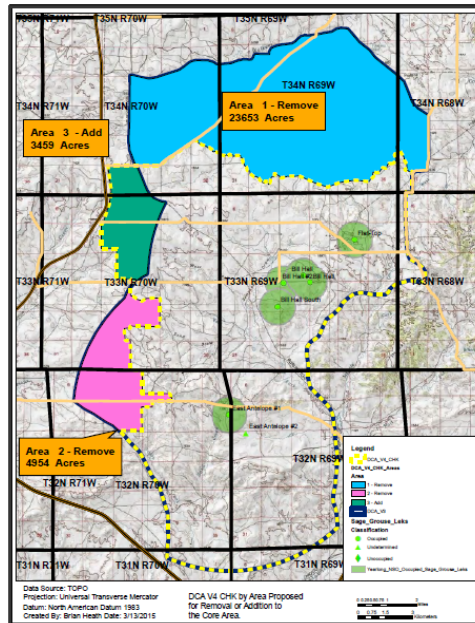


Figure 16. Casper BLM's proposal to remove/add area from/to the Douglas Core Area.

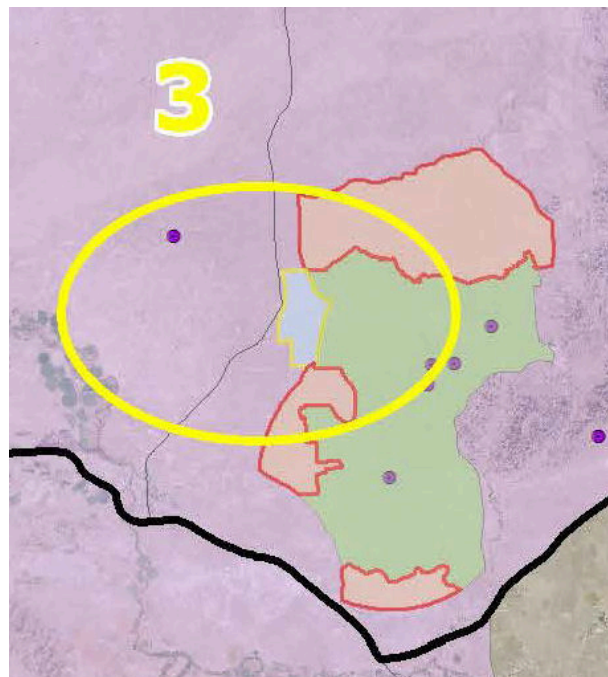


Figure 17. NE LWG modified recommendation for removal from the Douglas Core Area. Consensus was not reached on the BLM proposal to add (blue) to the Core Area.

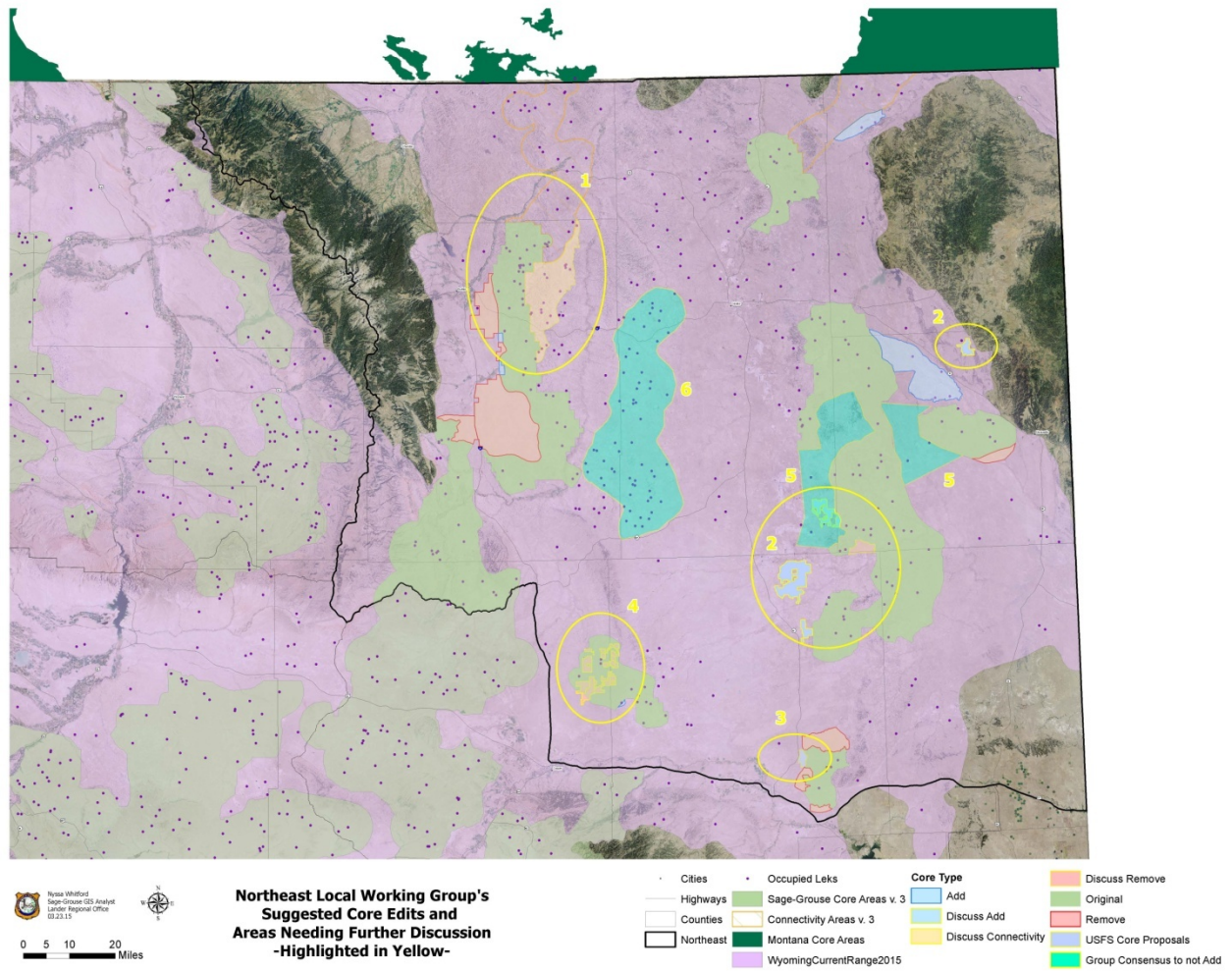


Figure 18. Summary map of all core boundary revisions submitted to the NE LWG.