

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Executive Summary

In the West, we are witnessing an unprecedented conservation effort. Eleven states are working together to protect the Greater Sage Grouse, a bird whose habitat covers most of the Western United States. Given the scope of the area, which stretches from Colorado to California and north from Utah to Montana, this coordinated conservation effort is nothing short of remarkable.

Hundreds of stakeholders representing a cross section of Western interests – ranchers, environmental organizations, industry groups and government agencies – have joined together to form 64 local working groups. These groups are busy collecting new scientific data about the grouse, identifying key conservation priorities and forging partnerships with local landowners for conservation purposes.

To demonstrate the extent of the effort underway in the West, the Western Governors' Association has compiled two reports: *Conserving the Greater Sage Grouse — Examples of Partnerships and Strategies at Work Across the West*; and this document, *Conserving the Greater Sage Grouse — A Compilation of Efforts Underway on State, Tribal, Provincial and Private Lands*. The latter document is a compilation of state and local conservation efforts across the Greater Sage Grouse range comprising portions of 11 Western states and two Canadian provinces.

The voluntary and significant efforts documented in these publications demonstrate a strong, locally driven commitment to conserve the Greater Sage Grouse by all parties involved, from private landowners to federal partners. These efforts are gaining momentum. The Western governors believe the efforts documented in these publications is sufficient and demonstrate the commitment of all parties involved, from the private landowner to the federal partner, to insure the conservation and preservation of the Greater Sage Grouse and the enhancement of its habitat.

Data released by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in its recent report, *Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats*, shows populations in most areas have stabilized or declined only slightly in the last 15 to 20 years. In many areas, numbers actually increased between 1995 and 2003.

Potential threats to the Sage Grouse prompted many of the collaborative efforts by local, state and federal entities to promote land management programs that conserve and restore Sage Grouse populations. Potential threats to the Sage Grouse also have prompted multiple petitions for protecting it under the Endangered Species Act. The Western governors believe that the initiative of the local working groups is vital to the implementation of projects that will protect habitat and address other needs of the Sage Grouse.

Sage Grouse are landscape birds, meaning large expanses of land are required to provide all the habitat components for their annual life-cycle. Sage Grouse populations have very specific requirements for particular habitat types, such as wintering and early brood-rearing areas. If one of the life-cycle habitats is degraded, limited or missing, the entire population in that area may be compromised. Sage Grouse often find essential parts of their habitat needs on state and/or private lands. The private lands in the West are often mixed with public lands in a mosaic pattern. If the critical private land habitat is lost, the

sage-grouse habitat values for large expanses of adjacent public lands may be severely reduced.

Approximately 28 percent of the bird’s habitat is in private ownership and another five percent is under state management, which makes these lands essential to conserving the Sage Grouse. In the state of Washington alone, there are 974,020 acres of habitat currently occupied by Sage Grouse, 44 percent (427,538 acres) of which is private land. Private lands provide key components of the Sage Grouse life-cycle habitats. Water, increased overall production, security and intense stewardship make those acres resource rich and more productive than surrounding public lands. Listing of the Sage Grouse would threaten the cooperation that the private landowners are now willing to provide. In addition, high percentages of streamside lands are typically in private ownership in the Western states. Streamside lands are extremely important as late, brood-rearing habitat for grouse, especially during periods of drought.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s private-lands conservation programs provide many opportunities for accomplishing the goals developed for Sage Grouse conservation. The programs provide incentives for private landowners to develop or set aside lands that can be utilized to create or enhance Sage Grouse habitat.

These programs include the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Farmland Protection Program (FPP).

In the West, CRP lands are locally important to Sage Grouse and sharp-tailed grouse conservation. For example, on one study site in Washington state, over 50 percent of Sage Grouse nests were located within CRP fields and significant Sage Grouse winter use was observed in CRP fields. Loss of the CRP acres could be detrimental to numerous Sage Grouse populations throughout the West. Acres already enrolled in CRP in the Western states are as follows.

Acres enrolled in CRP in Sage Grouse Range*

California	17,079
Colorado	391,352
Idaho	760,207
Montana	3,377,712
N. Dakota	569,735
Nevada	151
Oregon	443,892
S. Dakota	194,818
Utah	197,162
Washington	1,254,327
Wyoming	279,684

***Includes some buffer area near existing populations**

Many states are implementing their own conservation programs for private lands. These programs can play a substantial roll in conserving Sage Grouse populations as they are developed locally using the best management practices identified for that particular part of the Sage Grouse range.

Other important efforts are underway. The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management are cooperatively developing a vital range-wide conservation assessment. The Bureau of Land Management has completed its draft, "Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy," which will be finalized in 2004. The North American Grouse Partnership is developing a conservation plan for all grouse species in North America.

These efforts are critical because they are good for the species. A climate of trust and cooperation, where landowners work in good faith with government agencies is the only sure course toward long-term Greater Sage Grouse conservation. If the health and viability of the Greater Sage Grouse is a primary concern, then we should look first to local, cooperative measures like those detailed in this report to ensure our success.

B. Taxonomy and Description

Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is a member of the family Phasianidae (grouse and ptarmigan) and is one of seven species of grouse found in North America. They are also known as the sagehen, sage chicken or sage cock. Recent DNA work has identified a small population with distinct genetic and behavioral differences that exists in southwest Colorado. The American Ornithologists' Union has recognized the birds from this population as a separate species of grouse, *Centrocercus minimus*, now called the Gunnison Sage Grouse. *Centrocercus urophasianus* is now referred to by the AOU as the Greater Sage Grouse. (In this document, all name references involve the Greater Sage Grouse, but for purposes of simplicity, the document uses the name "Sage Grouse.")

Sage Grouse are the largest of the North American grouse. Males range from 27 to 34 inches in length and weigh five to seven pounds, while females are 18 to 24 inches in length and weigh from two to three pounds. They are a grayish-brown bird with a dark belly, and long and pointed tail feathers. The male is equipped with two air sacs (esophageal pouches), covered with short, stiff, scale-like white feathers, on each side of the lower neck and upper breast. When the pouches are distended, two yellow, pear-shaped patches of bare skin are exposed. A yellow fleshy comb occurs above the eye, and long filoplumes extend from the back of the neck and head. The female has the same general appearance but lacks the air sacs and filoplumes. The feet are feathered to the toes on both sexes.

C. Current and Historical Range

Historically, Sage Grouse were found throughout most of the Western United States, including portions of 16 states, and along the southern border of three Western Canadian provinces. Lewis and Clark provided the first written accounts of this species during their 1805 expedition. Sage Grouse distribution closely paralleled the range of sagebrush (*Artemisia* sp.) from British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan in the north; western Nebraska, and the Dakotas to the east; Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and Oklahoma to the south, and eastern Oregon, Washington, and California to the West.

Sage Grouse currently range from southeastern Alberta and southern Saskatchewan; western North and South Dakota to the east; Colorado, Utah, and Nevada to the south; and western California, eastern Oregon and Washington to the west. The core of Sage Grouse populations has contracted to include land in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Wyoming with remnant populations in other states

(Figure 1). Even within this remaining core area of their range, populations have dramatically declined. Sage Grouse have been extirpated in British Columbia, Nebraska, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

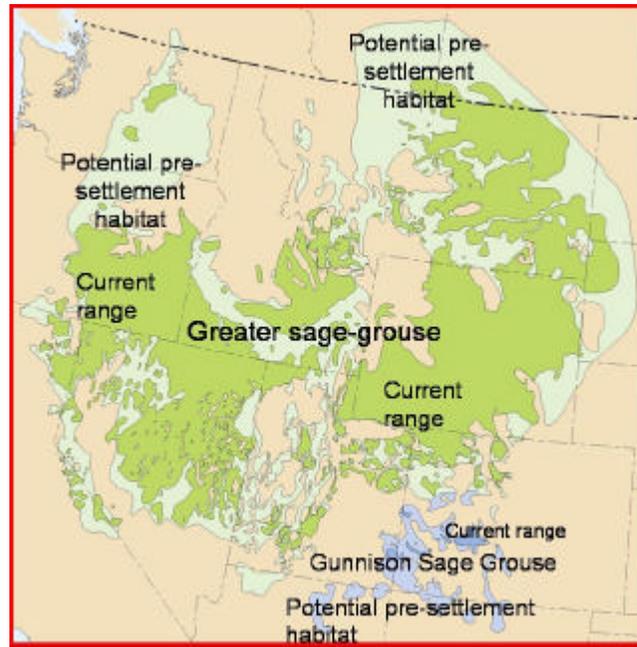


Figure 1: Historical and current Sage Grouse range

D. Life History and Habitat Requirements

Sage Grouse engage in a lek mating system. The males perform a strutting display that includes fanning the tail feathers in an upright fashion that exposes white-tipped under tail feathers, expanding the esophageal pouches that expose the yellow skin patches, and erection of the yellow eye-combs and filoplumes. The expansion of the pouches also produces a series of “plops.” The display is part of an active defense of the breeding territory by each male. Only a few males on a lek or strutting ground do the majority of the mating. Males have no incubation or parental care responsibilities, and do not exhibit territorial behavior away from the leks. Male flocks are commonly encountered during the rest of the year.

Generally, the lek sites are used year after year. Leks are established in open areas, 0.2 to 12 acres in size, surrounded by big sagebrush, which is used for escape and protection from predators. As populations decline, the number of males attending leks may decline, or the use of some leks may be discontinued. Likewise, as populations increase, male attendance on leks increases, new leks may be established, or old leks may be re-occupied.

The lek is considered to be the center of year-round activity for resident Sage Grouse populations. However, habitats that are located long distances from the leks are used by migratory populations of Sage Grouse and are essential to their survival. On the average, most nests are located within 4 miles (6.2 km) of the lek; however, some females or hens may nest more than 12 mi. (20 km) away from the lek.

Nesting and early brood-rearing in Nevada generally occur from April through June. The nest consists of a shallow depression on the ground. Nest lining is sparse, consisting of dry grasses, sagebrush leaves and a few feathers. Heights of shrubs at nesting sites vary, but studies indicate that there is some preference for shrubs that are taller than the average shrub height for the given site.

Nesting habitat is characterized primarily by Wyoming Big Sagebrush communities that have 15 to 38 percent canopy cover and a grass and forb understory. Residual cover of grasses is likely important, for its contribution to vertical cover structure that serves to hide the nest.

Clutch size of Sage Grouse normally ranges from seven to ten eggs. Incubation by the female takes 25-28 days.

Brood Rearing

The area in proximity to the nest is used for several weeks by hens for brood rearing. Chicks are able to fly weakly at approximately 10 days, and are relatively strong fliers by five weeks. At six to eight weeks, chicks acquire full juvenile plumage and resemble adult hens. Sage Grouse hens will usually move the chicks from the early brood habitat/nest area to summer habitat, where the majority of brood rearing occurs, when they are about six weeks of age. This movement occurs about two weeks after males and females without broods have moved to summer range.

The habitats used during the first few weeks after hatching need to provide cover to conceal the chicks, but more importantly, to provide the nutritional requirements of this period of rapid development. Brood-rearing habitats that have a wide variety of plant species tend to provide a variety of insects that are important chick foods.

Summer habitat consists of sagebrush mixed with areas of wet meadows, riparian, or irrigated agricultural fields. As habitat begins to dry up, Sage Grouse broods move to more mesic wet meadows where succulent grasses and insects are still available. This can be especially important in drier years and during long drought periods. Klebenow (1982) found that Sage Grouse would stay on the uplands through late July in years when precipitation was sufficient to maintain forage. During drought years, grouse switched to using meadows earlier in the summer.

Fall and Winter

Sage Grouse form flocks as brood groups break up in early fall. As fall progresses, Sage Grouse move toward their winter ranges. Exact timing of this movement varies depending on the Sage Grouse population, geographic area, overall weather conditions, and snow depth. Sagebrush is essential for survival during the fall, winter, and early spring months.

Seasonal movements are related to severity of winter weather, topography, and vegetative cover. The amount of snow, rather than an affinity for a particular site determines winter use areas. It is crucial that sagebrush be exposed at least 10 to 12 inches above snow level as this provides both food and cover for wintering Sage Grouse found that in Montana less than 10 percent of the range was available when snow depth exceeded 12 inches. If snow covers the sagebrush, the birds will move to areas where sagebrush is exposed.

Food Habits

Sage Grouse adults feed primarily on various species of sagebrush. Chick diets include forbs and invertebrates. Insects, especially ants and beetles, are an important component of early brood-rearing habitat. Forbs increase in the diet after the first week and remain the major food item for juveniles throughout the summer. Some of the forbs found in quantity in the diets of juvenile Sage Grouse include: common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), common salsify (*Tragopogon dubius*), prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), pepperweed (*Lepidium densiflorum*), Harkness gilia (*Linanthus harknessii*), tapertip hawksbeard (*Crepis acuminata*), loco (*Astragalus convallarius*), phlox (*Phlox longifolia*), and common yarrow (*Achillea millifolium*). Sagebrush (*Artemisia* sp.) occurs in only trace amounts until chicks are about five weeks old. Summer food habits of adult grouse are similar to juvenile food habits, with some differences in proportion of foods eaten. As the meadows dry and frost leads to the drying and killing of forbs, Sage Grouse shift their diet primarily to sagebrush leaves, and sagebrush continues to be the major food item until spring.

E. Cultural Importance of Sage Grouse

The Sage Grouse, usually referred to as a sagehen by the Indian tribes, has been held in special reverence by some Indian tribes as a magical bird with healing and restorative powers. Many of the movements in Indian dances resemble the mating dance of the sagehen. They are graceful, yet stunning. Some tribes used the sagehens plumage in their regalia worn for ceremonies. Some believed that by eating the air sack from the sagehen's breast, that the woman would have better and easier births. Indians always prayed for the creature they were to hunt and treated the animal with great respect, even when dead.

Ben Aleck, the Collections Manager at the Tribal Museum, and Ralph Burns, the Paiute Language Instructor, with the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, provided the following information. The Northern Paiute Tribes lived in the Northern Great Basin of Nevada for over 9200 years. Fish nets have been recovered that date back over 4000 years, and are now on display in local museums. These dates were documented using carbon dating on artifacts found in this area. The Paiutes shared the area with the Shoshone and Washoe tribes. All these tribes were hunters and gatherers throughout history. The movement of non-Indians across the area greatly affected the Paiute's way of life. They could no longer live as hunters and gatherers.

A Paiute tribe's name often referred to what its main source of food was. The Kooyoee Tukadu, or Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, were known as Kooyoee eaters. That is because they lived near and used this fish from Pyramid Lake as a major food source. Kooyoee, or Cui Ui the English spelling, is a fish found only in Pyramid Lake. Before the non-Indians came, sagehens were caught using nets or hand captured while on the roost at night. They were not very wild, more like chickens. Later they shot sagehens with bow and arrows.

The cultural importance of the sagehen to a tribe can best be described by the stories told by tribal members. The following are a few of their stories about the sagehen that depicts that importance.

Ralph Burns told the following, "Kooyoee Tukadu tell a story about a conflict that occurred where the sun was injured and tumbled across the earth starting a roaring

fire. After many other animals had tried to put out the fire and failed, the sagehen, that was wearing a sacred necklace, flew over the fire flapping its wings to put out the fire. In doing so, the necklace burned and left a dark ring around its neck. The wafts of smoke left the dark feather coloration on its body.”

Marlin Thompson, the Cultural Contact Person for the Yerington Paiute Tribe, stated that the Numu (the People) sometimes hunted sage hens where they gathered and danced when they mated early in the spring. A hole would be dug and screened with brush before the hunt. The hunter would get in the hole early in the morning before daylight and when the sagehens appeared he shot them with bow and arrows. Sagehens were not trapped. Sometimes sagehens were stalked in a deerskin or antelope skin. The sagehens were not afraid of the deer or antelope, so the hunter could get close to them. He shot one without throwing off his disguise and waited until the sagehens flew back, then he shot as many as his family needed. When hunting the sagehens in February the hunters killed the birds and immediately crossed the bills of the sagehens. The front part of the male birds was removed for eating and the breast was sewn back up. This was part of the ceremony and reverence the People had for the sagehens.

Marlin Thompson told us about the sagehen’s (hoo’zii) cultural importance to several local tribes. He retells three stories that had been passed down through the generations by several elders.

The first, from Steven Powers (1870), tells that once “there was a time when there was nothing in the world but water. But soon an island arose out of the water where Walker Lake Mountain is today (also known as Mount Grant “Kootungwa”). There was fire on this island and the old sagehen “Hoo’zii” hovered over it to keep it alive and keep the waves from beating over it. In this way her breast was burned black and her tail feathers shortened, as they are today. Out of the soil of this island sprang all creatures that are here today, the mountain sheep, antelope, bear, deer, wolf, coyote, badger, squirrels, and all other birds, snakes and bugs that fly through the air or crawl on the ground. There came up also out of the ground men and women, but they were brothers and sisters to the animals.”

The second comes from an elder of the Walker Paiutes (1956). It states, “that when water was all over everyplace, the Sagehen covered some hot coals with his feathers. The waves beat against the Sagehen, leaving high water marks on his tail. You can see the black place on the Sagehen’s breast where he got burned. On top of Mount Grant you can still see where he kept water from putting out the fire. The nest is still there in the rocks.”

The last story comes from a Yerington Paiute Tribal member (1975). It states that a “long time ago when people were animals and could talk Paiute, the Earth was being flooded. The Cottontail Rabbit grabbed a burning piece of wood and ran up Koo’Tungwa (Mount Grant) as fast as he could. On the back of his ears you can see the brown spots where the fire singed his fur because he carried the fire behind his ears. He brought the fire to Old Sagehen “Hoo’zii”. She covered the fire with her breast and kept the water from putting out the fire. Her breast is dark from being burned and her tail feathers are short and worn out from water beating against them.”

II. CONSERVATION EFFORTS

A. Status of Conservation Planning

Of the 11 States and 2 Canadian provinces with Sage Grouse populations, 9 have completed a Sage Grouse conservation plan. Montana has completed their draft plan and it should finalize it by the time this report is completed. Colorado and Oregon are on a fast track to completing their plans, and North and South Dakota will complete their plans sometime in the summer of 2004. Idaho has a completed plan but is in the process of revising it. California has been working with the state of Nevada on a joint plan up to this point, but is developing its own work plan for its population of Sage Grouse.

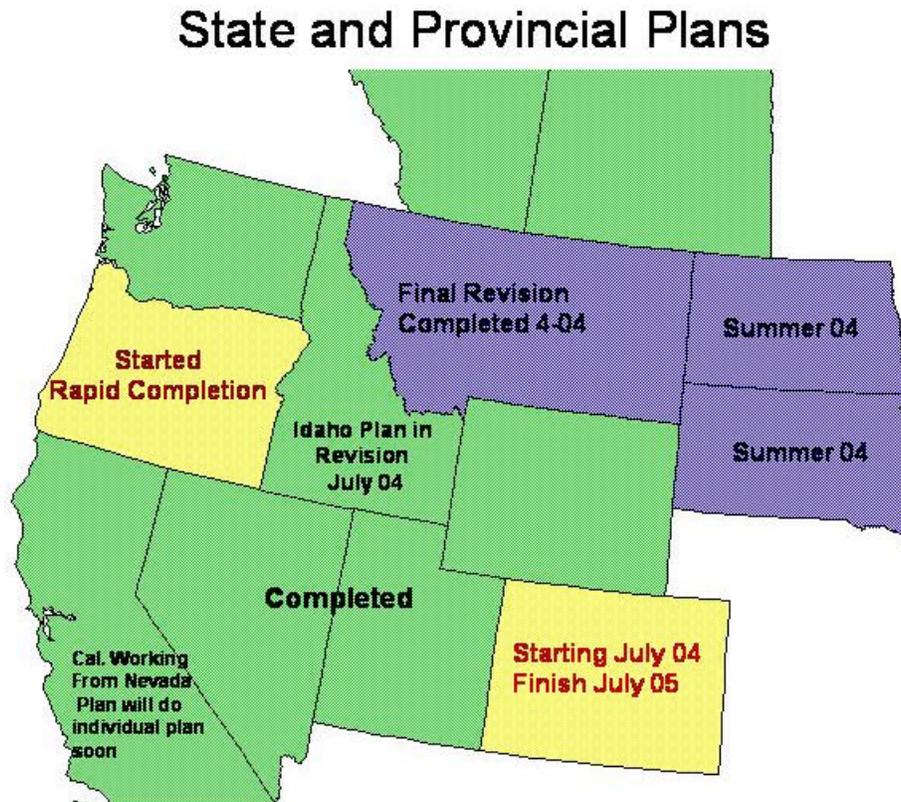


Figure 2: Status of Sage Grouse Conservation Plans as of 4/2004

B. State and Local Conservation Efforts

Colorado

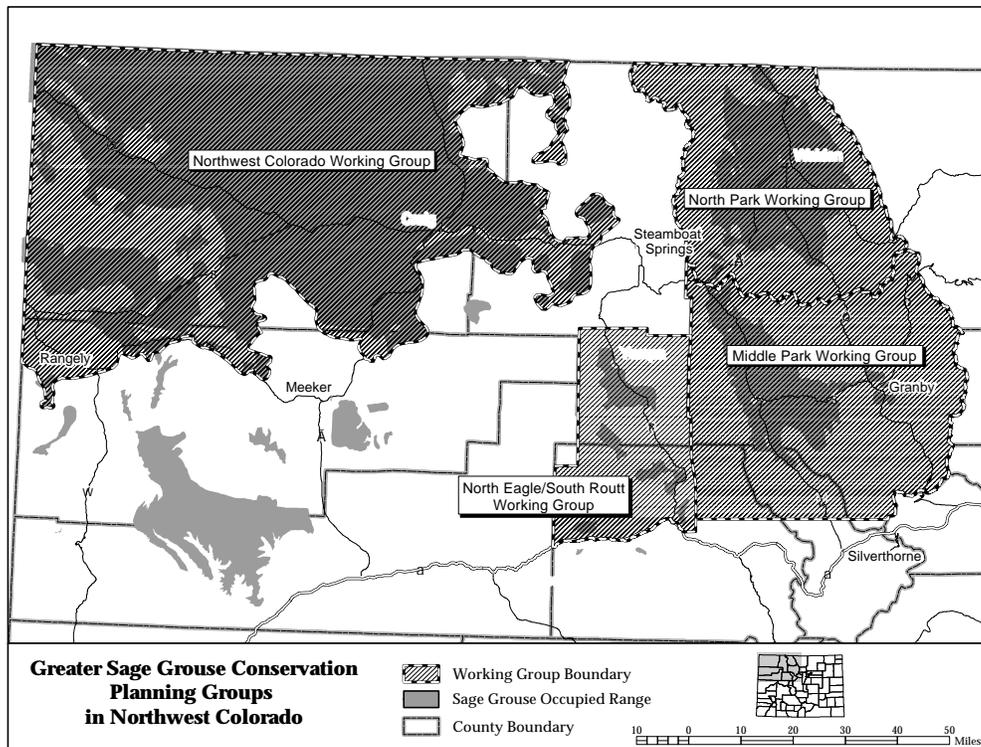
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Colorado's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

Development of the State Conservation Plan is scheduled to begin July, 2004.

Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

There are four working groups in Colorado: Northwest Colorado Sage Grouse Working Group, North Park Working Group, Middle Park Working Group, and Northern Eagle/Southern Routt Working Group. Conservation plans were completed in December 2001 for the North Park Working Group and in January 2001 for the Middle Park Working Group. The Northwest Colorado and the Northern Eagle/Southern Routt Working Groups have plans in progress and scheduled for completion in June 2004. Small populations of Greater Sage Grouse not covered currently by a work group include Meeker-White River, and Piceance Basin/Roan Creek areas. Conservation strategies for these populations will be included in the Statewide Conservation Plan.



Partnerships Established

Multiple partners have come together to work on conservation of Greater Sage Grouse and include countless private landowners, federal agencies (U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service), state agencies (Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado State Land Board, Colorado River Water Conservation District, Colorado State Forest, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Service, Colorado Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center), county and local governments and organizations (Grand County, Jackson County, Moffat County, Routt County, Denver Water Board), sportsmen's groups (Blue Valley Sportsman), ranching groups (Middle Park Ranching Community, Middle Park Stockgrowers Association, North Park Stockgrowers,) local partnerships (local Habitat Partnership Program Committees, Owl Mountain Partnership), local land trusts (Middle Park Land Trust), non-governmental organizations (The Nature Conservancy, North American Grouse Partnership, Quail Unlimited, Sierra Club), power and electric companies (Colorado Rural Electric Association, Yampa Valley Electric Association, Holy Cross Energy, XCEL Energy, Western Area Power Administration), mining companies (Colowyo Coal, Trapper Mine, American Soda), oil and gas companies (EnCana), and others.

Implementation of Projects

Summary of efforts in past 3 years (2000-2002)

- 3,365 acres of habitat improvement projects occurred in North Park, 135 acres improved in Middle Park, 800 acres in the Meeker-White River population area, 1,700 acres in the Piceance/Roan Creek population area, and 1,130 acres treated in Northwest Colorado by BLM, NRCS, and CDOW, and others.
- Cultural clearances conducted on 300 acres in Middle Park for upcoming habitat improvement projects.
- A GIS tracking database for vegetation treatment projects was created in North Park.
- Detailed sagebrush vegetation assessment was completed on several BLM grazing allotments in north-central Moffat County.
- Research project completed that evaluated the long-term response of sagebrush communities to vegetation treatments designed to increase grass and forbs.
- Population estimation research using mark-recapture to accurately estimate number of Sage Grouse in Middle Park was completed. Also tested assumptions behind using lek counts to estimate population size or trends.
- Research project initiated to examine Greater Sage Grouse survival rates, vegetation parameters of successful habitats, and to determine Sage

Grouse movements. Over 200 female grouse were fitted with radio transmitters.

- Established vegetation transects to monitor Sage Grouse habitat conditions.
- Began a 3 year project to better align phone harvest information with field data.
- Management actions developed based on the results of a two year telemetry study completed in 1999 that looked at Sage Grouse movements and habitat use in Piceance Basin. The study provided important information about this poorly understood population.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

- Three prescribed fires on 1200 acres conducted by the BLM to maintain sagebrush parks and remove pinyon-juniper encroachment in northwest Colorado.
- 240 acres of habitat improvement projects in Middle Park, 260 acres in North Park.
- A 5 mile-long water pipeline/distribution system completed in northwest Colorado on private land to enhance livestock distribution and lessen impacts on Sage Grouse.
- Grazing plan developed in North Park under a partnership effort for 64,000 acres of private, BLM, and Colorado State Trust Lands. The goal of this plan is to improve overall grazing management and address problem areas.
- Joint partnership project was established to collect and create foundation seed for northwest Colorado native forbs. Field collection of several Moffat County native forbs was undertaken for this project.
- Permanent transects established in North Park to monitor nesting habitat conditions.
- Research project completed that experimentally evaluated the importance of forbs to chick growth, survival, and development in the first 10 days of life.
- 900 pounds of seed provided to landowners to improve grouse habitat; 2 grass drills purchased.
- Public relation tours and birding guide in Grand County featured Sage Grouse.
- Photo-monitoring of lek sites began in Middle Park.
- Multi-year radio telemetry project began in the Northern Eagle/Southern Routt population to determine seasonal habitat use areas.
- Recommendations were made for reducing impacts to Sage Grouse from a proposed 1,200 well natural gas development in the Piceance/Roan Creek population area.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

- Four important conservation easements for Sage Grouse habitat will be secured on 1,600, 1,800, 3,000, and 4,100 acre separate parcels. Additional interest in easements has been expressed.
- Detailed Sage Grouse habitat assessment completed on a 31,000 acre BLM allotment in southwestern Moffat County.
- 837 acres of Sage Grouse habitat improvement projects to be completed in northwest Colorado by BLM and CDOW.
- Prescribed burn planned by BLM to reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment of a historically used Sage Grouse area.
- Project planning underway for 2005 habitat improvement projects on BLM lands; includes cultural clearance. Goal of projects are to increase sagebrush age structure diversity and increase grass and forb diversity.
- Multi-year research project initiated to study chick fostering, chick survival and dispersal, and natal fidelity.
- Construction of an Interpretive Site will occur to describe benefits of sagebrush and discuss Sage Grouse habitat needs.
- Best Management Practices Guideline for Colorado Sagebrush Communities, by Stephen Monsen, to be completed and distributed.
- A booklet entitled: *Sagebrush of Colorado: Taxonomy, Distribution, Ecology, and Management*, by Dr. Alma Winward, will be completed, printed, and distributed.
- Middle Park 2004 Work Plan finalized and includes several habitat improvement projects deferred in 2003 due to the drought.
- Landowners contacted for interest in Dixie harrow and sagebrush thinning projects.
- Clover interseeding scheduled; an additional 1,000 pounds of seed purchased.
- Another 5 mile long pipeline/water distribution system installed to improve livestock management and increase Sage Grouse habitat condition on private land in northwest Colorado.
- A project will be initiated to quantify and map sagebrush die-off/defoliation areas in Sage Grouse habitat from recent drought.
- Sage Grouse range mapping update project completed; includes identification of potential, vacant, and occupied Sage Grouse habitat areas.
- Native forb seeds collected in 2003 will be planted at the Environmental Plant Center to establish foundation stock. Additional field collections will also be made in 2004.

Measurable results and trends

- Recent lek count data in North Park indicate that male Sage Grouse counts are similar to high counts reached in 1979. This is particularly notable considering the drought that has been ongoing for several years.
- Populations of Sage Grouse are relatively stable in Middle Park; lek numbers in East Grand County continue to show lek numbers equal to or

greater than numbers reported 10 years ago. Overall, lek counts continue to remain above historic averages.

- Sage Grouse male counts in northwest Colorado have exceeded 2100 males per year since 2000 approaching levels not seen since the late 1970's.
- Counts of male Sage Grouse in southern Routt County are holding steady and are consistent with the last 30 years. Numbers of male grouse in northern Eagle County increased in 2003 compared to 2001 and 2002, but are still much lower than in the 1980's and early 1990's.
- The lek count in the Meeker-White River Sage Grouse population was up substantially in 2003 from the previous year.
- The Piceance Basin/Roan Creek population trend has remained relatively steady and activity at some long abandoned lek sites has been noted in 2004. An increased knowledge of bird occurrence, behavior, habitat requirements, and use areas.
- Sage Grouse habitat management is included in habitat management requirements of Ranching for Wildlife (RFW) contracts. These contracts make up 200,000 acres in NW Colorado. RFW is a CDOW/Private Land hunting and habitat management program.
- Transects have been established to measure vegetation response to treatment projects.

Informational Items

- CDOW developed an informational brochure entitled "Yampa Valley Grouse," which describes the 3 species of grouse (Sage Grouse, Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse, and Blue Grouse) in the Yampa Valley and their habitat requirements.
- The Northwest Colorado Sage Grouse Working Group developed an informational poster describing Sage Grouse, their seasonal habitat needs, and opportunities to get involved in Sage Grouse conservation efforts. This same group sponsored production of an informational video presentation featuring Sage Grouse lek behavior and conservation issues.
- Information about Sage Grouse has been included in: kiosks at established viewing areas, a birding guide for west Grand County, and lek viewing tours.
- Sage Grouse issues are being included in land use decisions on a regular basis, such as BLM Management Plans.
- Newspaper articles on efforts of local working groups have appeared in the Steamboat Pilot and Today (September 3, 2003 and March 7, 2004) and the Jackson County Star (March 11, 2004). Following is a copy of one of these articles. Permission to reprint this article has been given by Susan Bacon of Steamboat Pilot and Today.

“Group Works to Save Sage Grouse”

By [Susan Bacon](#), Pilot & Today Staff

Wednesday, September 3, 2003

YAMPA — **WHEN LEWIS AND CLARK JOURNEYED** west across North America, they encountered a chicken-like bird that was black, white and brown and ruled sagebrush areas. The explorers named it the "cock of the plains."

The Greater Sage Grouse is still found in sagebrush across the country, but its numbers are dwindling in some places, including South Routt County.

The birds used to be hunted in the Yampa and Toponas area, but now there are fewer than 100 males, not enough to make hunting legal, said Susan Werner, area manager for the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

"They are a species that's at risk," Werner said. "The risk is that the population will drop too low, and they'll end up becoming either a threatened species or an endangered species. Right now they're not, but we want to keep it that way."

To come up with a plan to support the species, residents, wildlife officials and others have been meeting since March. The group's next meeting is tonight in Yampa.

The plan that the group ultimately designs would be strictly voluntary and would offer guidance for developing and managing land in a way that supports the birds.

For instance, if the county decided to build a new road, the plan would suggest that the road avoid critical breeding or wintering ranges for the birds, Werner said.

Populations of the Greater Sage Grouse have varied over the years, said John Toolen, a DOW habitat biologist who coordinates the group.

In 1958, there were only about 100 male birds in the Yampa and Toponas area, which is about the same number as there are now. But in the 1960s, that number hit about 240, and in the 1980s, it dipped as low as 50, he said.

The instability of the birds' population could be due to several factors, such as a loss of the sagebrush habitat, Werner said.

Other reasons for the population fluctuations include construction of power lines, which provide perching sites for birds of prey that kill the Greater Sage Grouse, as well as disease.

"They're not doing very well," Werner said. "Who knows why? There are just a lot of things we don't know."

The birds are an important part of the area's ecosystem and also provide an attraction for bird watchers across the nation, Werner said.

One of the most popular times to watch the birds is in the spring, when the males put on an elaborate dancing show to attract females to mate.

"The spring dancing is really spectacular," Werner said. "The male puffs up his chest and booms ... and dances with other males in this kind of 'I'm better looking than you' way."

The meeting for Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan for South Routt and North Eagle counties is at 6:30 p.m. today at the Ladies Aid Hall, 83 E. First St., Yampa.

Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

MIDDLE PARK WORKING GROUP GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Status of Working Group

A group of concerned citizens and agencies formed a working partnership in the spring of 1999, known as the Middle Park Sage Grouse Committee (MPSGC). This group developed and completed the Middle Park Sage Grouse Conservation Plan (MPSG) in 2001 and is now involved in undertaking actions to stabilize and maintain a healthy population of Sage Grouse in Middle Park. Each year, representative members of the MPSGC formulate a Work Plan in the spring, and review completion of the Work Plan the following December.

Partnerships Established

There were 15 agencies that originally signed on as cooperators and partners when the MPSG Plan was initially formulated. More recently, the Colorado State Land Board signed on as a cooperator this past year. Thirty-one landowners have likewise signed on as cooperators. Mike Ritschard, a local rancher, has served as a representative to the ranchers and landowners since the inception of the Plan.

Rather than cite each landowner individually, we include reference to their concern and interest in maintaining and enhancing Sage Grouse populations in a special acknowledgement to the Middle Park Ranching Community. Listed along with this community are the organizations and agencies that have provided their support of this Plan:

Middle Park Ranching Community
Blue Valley Sportsmen
Bureau of Land Management
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Colorado River Water Conservation District
Colorado State Forest
CSU Cooperative Extension Service
Denver Water
Grand County Commissioners
Middle Park Habitat Partnership Program
Middle Park Land Trust
Middle Park Stockgrowers Association
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service, Sulphur Ranger District
U.S. Forest Service, Parks Ranger District
U.S. Forest Service, Dillon Ranger District

Implementation of Projects

The first three years were envisioned as a time to gather and coordinate a wide spectrum of information regarding Sage Grouse activity, habitat use, and vegetative condition. It was felt at the time that the knowledge base available was incomplete, and that delineation and assignment of field activities required a more complete understanding of Sage Grouse and their habitat. In the past year, the committee's focus has begun to shift toward on-ground projects affecting improvement of grouse habitat on a landscape basis. While it is still too early to expect measurable results in terms of population increase, there are numerous indicators that Greater Sage Grouse populations have remained fairly stable, with moderately high lek counts being reported since 1999.

Summary of efforts from 2000-2002

Vegetation data gathered since the mid-1970's was compiled into a Geographic Information System (GIS) database. Vegetation transects were established and monitored to track trends in grouse habitat. Monitoring of sagebrush exclosures to track sagebrush successional changes over time was initiated. Further delineation and mapping was undertaken to identify Threatened and Endangered species habitat, and other wildlife species and plants that would be affected by future vegetation treatments favoring Sage Grouse. Research project started and completed; designed to study bird occurrence and habitat use (nesting, brood-rearing, summer) in Middle Park. Coordination and mapping of wintering Sage Grouse use was undertaken. Fence modifications were made on Pinto Valley to decrease mortality of grouse flying into the fence from adjacent lek as well as decreasing raptor perch sites. A seasonal road closure was put into effect on a BLM two-track road to protect the adjoining Gravel Pit lek. Contacts were made with all landowner cooperators and the Conservation Plan was distributed.

Radios were placed on 63 Sage Grouse in the winter of 2001 to monitor seasonal habitat use and mortality. A research project was initiated and completed that was designed to accurately estimate Sage Grouse populations in Middle Park and to test assumptions behind using lek counts to estimate population size. A second research project was begun to examine chick development relative to perceived habitat condition. Cultural surveys completed on 200 acres of BLM, for future vegetation treatments. One hundred thirty-five acres of vegetation treatment (Dixie harrow) on State and BLM land conducted which included interseeding. Three-year project began to better align phone harvest survey results with field-collected data (primarily observational and wing barrel data).

First year completed of two-year research project which examined chick development and use of general habitat-condition classes. A potentially new lek was discovered through monitoring of radioed-birds. New information gained with regards to nesting, brood-rearing, late summer, and winter habitat. Informational tour of sagebrush communities was conducted with Stephen Mosen who is developing the statewide sagebrush Best Management Practices Guideline. Identification of high-value Sage Grouse habitat is completed; this effort was led by The Nature Conservancy. Harsha Gulch project to enhance wet areas completed. 100 acres of cultural clearance completed in Sulphur Gulch, preparatory to vegetation treatment for Sage Grouse.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

Numerous projects, such as fertilization and vegetation treatments, were put on hold this year because of drought. Over 900lbs of clover purchased and provided to landowners for use around field edges to benefit grouse. Two seeders were purchased. Approximately 240 acres of sagebrush were treated north of Pinto Valley, using a Lawson aerator and Dixie harrow with broadcast seeding. Greater Sage Grouse featured in public relation tours of area and in a birding guide to West Grand County. Sage Grouse wings were read at the local level for a more timely analysis of population characteristics. Photo-monitoring of lek sites was begun and additional vegetation monitoring transects were set. Databases continued to be developed and centralized.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

MPSGC finalized their Work Plan for 2004 in January of this year, and forwarded the Work Plan to the USFWS. This work plan carried forward several of the 2003 field projects that were deferred because of drought conditions, including fertilization and vegetation treatment projects. Landowners were being contacted for use of the Dixie harrow and sagebrush thinning projects. Interseeding of clover is underway with the procurement of another 1000 pounds of seed. Mapping (GIS) projects identifying existing and potential Sage Grouse habitats are scheduled and have been partially completed thus far.

Measurable Results and Trends

Because of the lag that can be expected between the time of project initiation and population response, it would be difficult to attribute measurable gains in Sage Grouse populations to actual on the ground projects. The MPSGC does feel that its Sage Grouse populations are relatively stable; although there continues to be extensive development and conversion of habitat types in some areas of Middle Park. The area of Sage Grouse occurrence most vulnerable to impact, East Grand County, continues to show lek numbers that are equal to or greater than numbers reported 10 years prior. While several of the smaller leks appear tentative at this point, we are seeing increased numbers at a couple of the larger and more robust lek sites. After three years of observation, we anticipate recognizing the Hill Creek site as a recognized lek site. We anticipate the likelihood that there is at least one other lek site which we have yet to discover in the Middle Park area. Overall lek counts continue to remain above historic averages.

From an information basis, the MPSGC feels it has made great strides in gathering and coordinating information regarding bird occurrence and behavior. Research projects have contributed greatly to the basis of this information, and have led to refinement of anticipated projects and efforts. Additional gains can be measured in the realized cooperation that has developed both between governmental agencies, and between public and private interests. Five years ago, there was a strong undercurrent of suspicion and concern relating to our mandate to protect and stabilize Sage Grouse populations in the area. Today, there is an increased interest and a deepened appreciation not only for the species in question, but for a number of the parameters relating to sagebrush habitat. The development of positive and informed attitudes ranks high in our measure of success.

Informational Items

MPSGC perceives a two-fold approach to developing a healthy perspective regards Greater Sage Grouse. The first is to present information that will enhance both local and visitor understanding of the values of our sagebrush habitats and more specifically, the grouse species that this habitat supports. Information was initially presented at the time of the development of the Conservation Plan, with presentations to Stockgrowers, the County Commissioners, and others. It was also individually passed on through local landowner contacts and discussion of the Sage Grouse plan itself. More recently, mention of Sage Grouse has been included in information kiosks, a birding guide for West Grand County, and continued presentation of wildlife values on a landscape basis, such as through the on-going Wolford Mountain tours. As of this point, we do not have a brochure specific to the Greater Sage Grouse of the area. Given the limits of the West Grand grouse population, we hesitate to focus much outside attention on grouse viewing activities at this time. We have always taken a multiple-species approach in our efforts to set forth a conservation plan and to secure the necessary habitat values relative to Sage Grouse and other wildlife species in the area.

The second approach is to not only present general information, but to more specifically relate how land use habits and practices can either benefit or debilitate Sage Grouse occurrence. This is our area of greatest attention and concern. We have anticipated incorporating best management practices into a format that would be acceptable and practical for the local landowner, so that they can better understand the nature and needs of Greater Sage Grouse in the area. It is likely that this will be the direction of some of our focus in the coming two years, as BMP's become available at the statewide level. Much of this approach continues to presently be a hands-on, word-of-mouth approach. However, given broader assistance and support, we anticipate further development of written materials relative to the importance and protection of Sage Grouse, and Sage Grouse habitat in Middle Park.

Lastly, information is being input into land use decisions on a regular basis. Examples are found in the supply of information to the BLM's travel management plan for the Wolford area, efforts to modify grouse-limiting activities on a seasonal basis, and continued contacts with the general public through personal contact.

NORTH PARK WORKING GROUP GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Status of Working Group

The North Park Greater Sage Grouse Working Group was initiated in 1998 and finalized the North Park Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan in December 2001. The North Park Conservation Plan, which covers all the sagebrush-dominated grasslands and the associated irrigated lands, mountain meadows and riparian areas in Jackson County, Colorado, includes conservation actions relating to issues affecting Sage Grouse and their habitats. The Working Group has remained active following the completion of the plan by holding meetings to update the members on efforts to improve Sage Grouse habitat as well as on the Sage Grouse lek count information. The Working Group has also sponsored a habitat project near lek sites and initiated a GIS database documenting

habitat treatment projects in North Park. Working group members include private landowners, members of the North Park Stock Growers, County Commissioners, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (Arapaho National Wildlife Staff), and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Jackson County Administrator and the Jackson County Commissioners have been instrumental in completing the Conservation Plan as well as in continuing to organize Working Group meetings.

Partnerships Established

The CDOW has formed multiple partnerships within the North Park community. In addition to the partnerships formed in the North Park Greater Sage Grouse Working Group, the CDOW is an active member on the Owl Mountain Partnership and Habitat Partnership Program Committees. These partnerships, which involve private landowners as well as multiple federal agencies (BLM, USFWS, USFS, NRCS), are actively trying to improve Sage Grouse habitat within North Park. The Owl Mountain Partnership was formed in 1993 with the goal of bringing together local citizens to work with agency personnel in a collaborative effort towards sustainable management of natural resources, local economics, custom, and culture. To further this goal, the Owl Mountain Partnership has implemented several habitat treatment projects in North Park. The Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) was initiated in 1990 and is aimed at resolving livestock/big game issues and conflicts through working with private landowners, sportsmen, and multiple agencies. The North Park HPP Committee has been extremely successful at forming partnerships with private landowners and, having solved many of the big game conflicts, has more recently focused on habitat improvement projects. Several of the habitat improvement projects have been aimed at improving Sage Grouse habitat as well as big game habitat.

Implementation of Projects

The North Park Greater Sage Grouse Working Group, Owl Mountain Partnership, and the Habitat Partnership Program have all been applying sagebrush habitat projects on the ground in North Park. These habitat projects have been on various ownerships and have been completed to benefit wildlife habitat. In fact, many of these projects have the stated objective of specifically improving Sage Grouse habitat. North Park is a high mountain basin with largely intact sagebrush communities. One of the goals in North Park has been to increase the age structure diversity in the sagebrush communities in order to benefit Sage Grouse habitats in the long term. Most of the projects have been mechanical treatments, in large part because they allow greater control over the area actually treated, and have usually been done in mosaics of small patches. Large-scale sagebrush treatments are not generally considered beneficial for Sage Grouse. Mechanical treatments in North Park include: brush beating, Dixie harrow, and Lawson aerator. Further, an important component of these habitat projects has been the partnership and cooperation of multiple private landowners and federal lessees. For example, HPP requires a Cooperative agreement requiring deferment from livestock grazing for two growing seasons post-treatment and agreement not to increase stocking levels for 5 years after treatment. HPP then provides electric fencing to assist in deferment.

The following projects were completed in sagebrush communities in North Park with an objective of improving Sage Grouse habitat. Unless stated otherwise, the main objective of the following projects has been to create a diversity of sagebrush age classes and to increase the abundance and diversity of grasses and forbs. Increased grasses and forbs are considered beneficial for Sage Grouse brood rearing habitat. As noted earlier, these projects are generally applied in a mosaic rather than a block. Thus, the actual treated area is generally much less than what has been listed as the treatment. For example many of the treatments leave roughly half of the area as untreated sagebrush.

Summary of efforts from 2000-2002

2000

- 70 acre Brush Beat on BLM
- 175 acre Dixie Harrow on the Owl Mountain State Wildlife Area
- 123 acre Dixie Harrow on Private and the Delaney Butte State Wildlife Area
- 118 acre Dixie Harrow on Colorado State Trust Land
- 114 acre Dixie Harrow on Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge
- 139 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 200 acre Dixie Harrow and seeding on Private

2001

- 90 acres of spike hand-applied to Private and BLM uplands with the goal of improving livestock distribution in order to improve adjacent riparian bottoms for Sage Grouse brood rearing
- 82 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 120 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 33 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 60 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 309 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 232 acre Dixie Harrow and seeding on BLM to test whether an area with almost no understory could be improved

2002

- 160 acre Brush Beat on BLM
- 410 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 550 acre Dixie Harrow on Private
- 230 acre Lawson Aerator on BLM
- 150 acre Lawson Aerator and seeding on Private. This project was planned and implemented by the North Park Sage Grouse Working Group, with funding applied for by North Park HPP Committee and granted by the Colorado HPP Statewide Council. The goal of this project was to improve early brood rearing habitat around some leks that had declined in recent years in order to hopefully improve lek attendance.

The North Park Sage Grouse Working Group, in partnership with HPP and the Owl Mountain Partnership, applied for and received funding from the Colorado

HPP Statewide Council for funding to create a GIS database of habitat treatments in North Park. The GIS database will both document completed projects and assist in planning future habitat treatments. The boundaries of all habitat treatments completed since 1994 were GPSed (using a Trimble GPS) and imported into ArcView GIS. The CDOW, Owl Mountain Partnership, HPP Committee, and Jackson County GIS will continue to maintain this GIS database for future habitat treatments. Please see the attached map for habitat treatments (listed in this report) as displayed in the North Park Habitat Projects GIS database.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

260 acre Dixie Harrow on private land. The treatment area was designed in a mosaic that was intended to mimic a fire. The site was characterized by older big sagebrush with almost no understory. The goal was to increase grass and forb cover and diversity for Sage Grouse brood rearing habitat.

Several permanent line-intercept transects were established to measure sagebrush canopy in Sage Grouse nesting habitat.

The Owl Mountain Partnership partnered with a large ranch in North Park to fund the development of a grazing plan for approximately 64,000 acres of private, BLM, and Colorado State Trust lands. The Goal was to address several issues/areas in need of improvement and improve overall grazing management on both public and private land. One of the explicit goals was to address Sage Grouse habitat needs in the grazing plan and rotation. The reviewing team includes CDOW, BLM, CO State Board of Land Commissioners, USFS, and ranch personnel. In 1999 the same ranch partnered with Owl Mountain Partnership to develop a similar grazing plan for another portion of the ranch that covered over 100,000 acres of public and private land. The previous grazing plan has been extensively monitored and adapted in order to improve overall rangeland health, including Sage Grouse habitat.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

HPP is partnering with the BLM on the field assessment for a sagebrush project on BLM. HPP will assist with funding for the archeological clearance and BLM will provide actual implementation dollars. The project goal is to increase big sagebrush age structure diversity as well as to increase cover and diversity of grasses and forbs. 2004 will be the planning year with the actual project implementation scheduled for 2005.

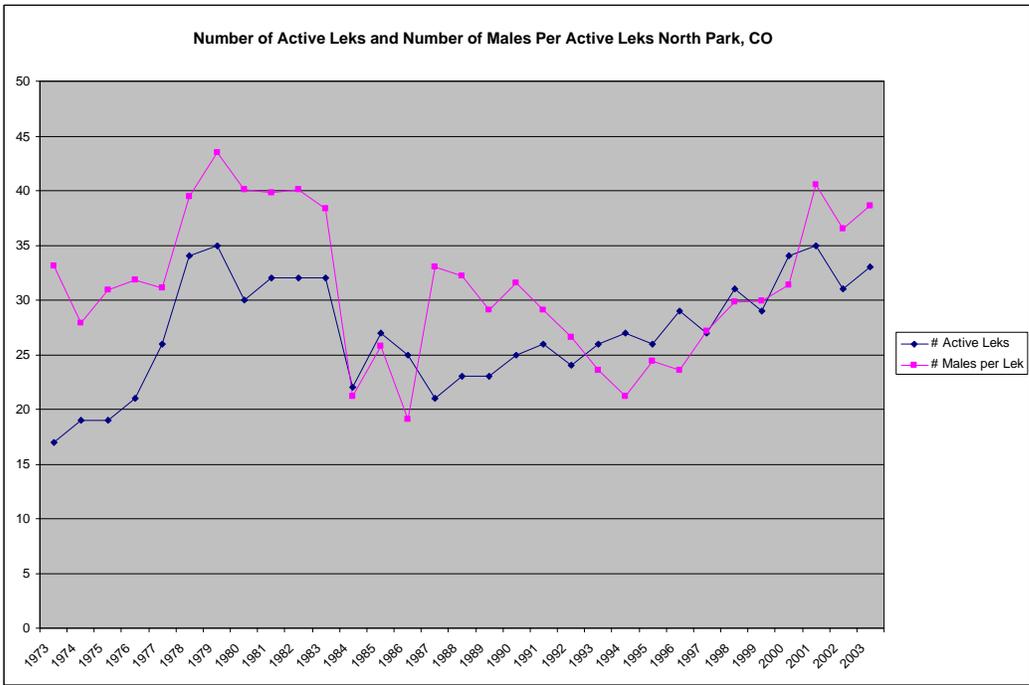
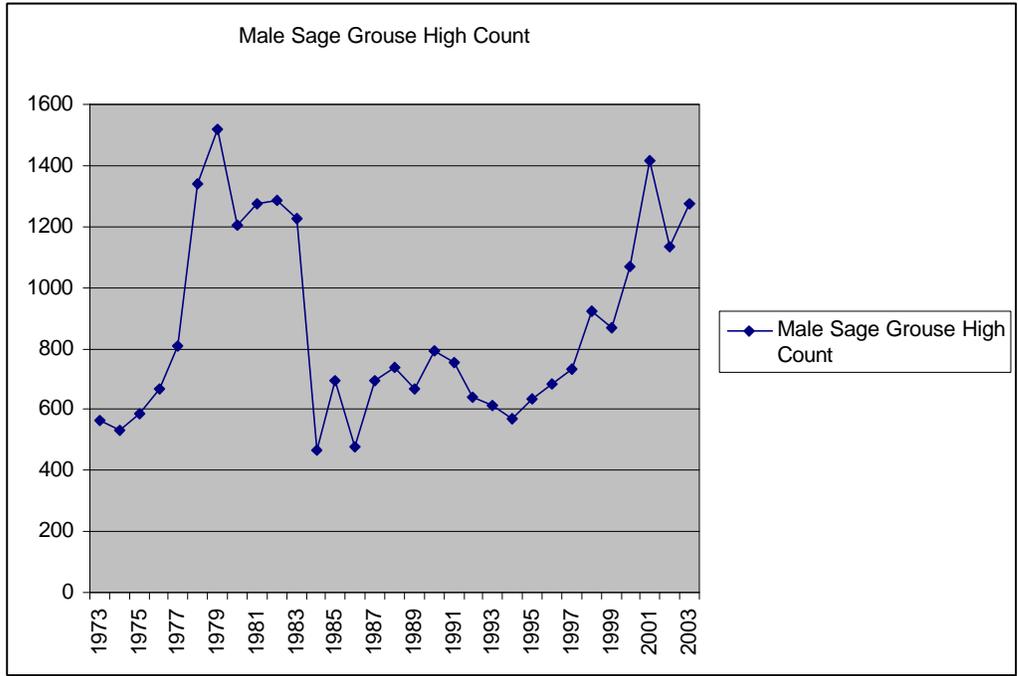
The BLM is constructing an Interpretive Site on an Auto tour in North Park. The interpretive display will describe the benefits of sagebrush habitat as well as discuss Greater Sage Grouse and their habitat needs.

The Nature Conservancy is working to garner funding and hopefully finalize a 1600 acre conservation easement in Greater Sage Grouse habitat.

Measurable Results and Trends

The CDOW began monitoring Greater Sage Grouse leks in North Park in the 1950s although annual lek counts were not well organized until 1973. Recent lek count

data (high count for males) indicate that Sage Grouse numbers are close to the high point reached in 1979, which is notable considering several drought years in North Park. Number of active leks and number of males per lek also remain close to the high.



Vegetation Monitoring Efforts

As discussed above, several habitat treatment projects have been completed in North Park. In order to monitor and assess the results of these treatments, HPP and Owl

Mountain Partnership require pre-treatment and post-treatment line-intercept transects. Data collected includes, percent mature sagebrush canopy cover, percent juvenile sagebrush canopy cover, percent seedling sagebrush canopy cover, percent grass canopy cover, percent forb canopy cover, percent bare ground, and percent litter. Due to time and personnel constraints the number of transects per treatment is not statistically valid, however, these transects still provide useful information.

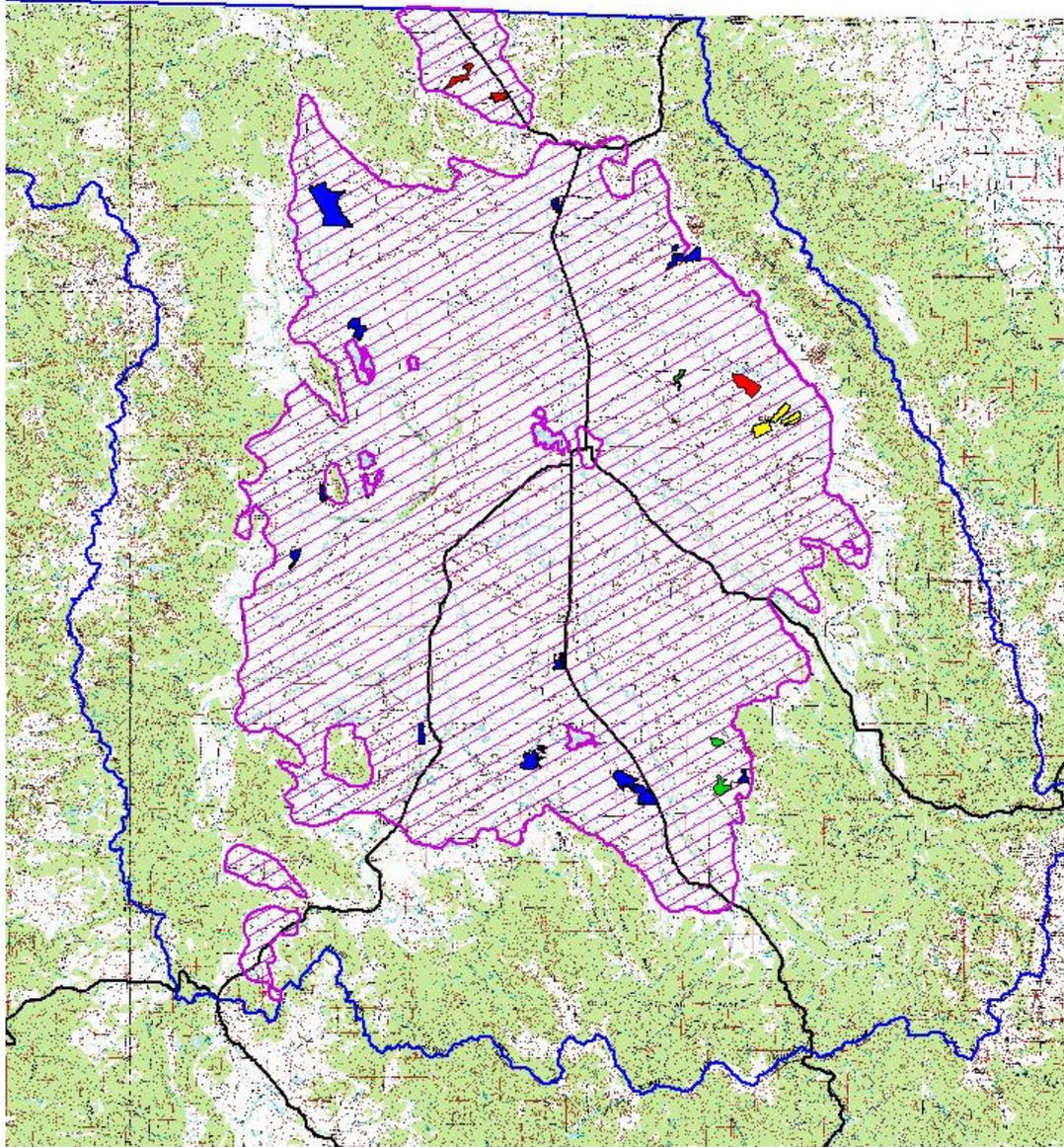
Informational Items

The CDOW has been working with the North Park Chamber of Commerce to provide Greater Sage Grouse lek viewing tours. In addition to lek viewing, the tours involve a presentation on Sage Grouse biology and habitats presented by either CDOW or Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge personnel. The CDOW has also developed a watchable wildlife Greater Sage Grouse viewing area for general members of the public. The CDOW provides lek viewing protocol for those who go to the viewing area.

An article was printed in the Jackson County Star newspaper on March 11, 2004 following a recent North Park Greater Sage Grouse Working Group meeting. The article highlighted the status of Sage Grouse and the reasons behind formation of the working group. Following is a paragraph from this article:

“One of the reasons the North Park Sage Grouse Working Group was formed was to help prevent listing of the bird by hatching plans to protect it. At the moment, North Park’s plan seems to be working well. There actually are more birds here than in 1983, according to annual counts.”

Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Treatment Projects
North Park, Colorado



- Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Treatment
- BRUSH BEAT
- DIXIE HARROW
- LAWSON AERATOR
- SPIKE
- Greater Sage-Grouse Occupied Range
- Jackson County Boundary
- Highways

7 0 7 14 Miles



Map Created April 13, 2004

NORTHWEST COLORADO WORKING GROUP GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Status of Working Group

The Northwest Colorado Sage Grouse working group formed in 1996 and consists of more than 70 organizations, agencies and individuals. Local conservation planning has been in progress from 1996 to present. The Northwest Colorado Greater Sage Grouse conservation plan is expected to be completed in the summer of 2004. Northwest Colorado (principally Moffat County with portions of western Routt and northern Rio Blanco counties) supports the largest population (both numbers and geographic extent) of Greater Sage Grouse in Colorado. Greater Sage Grouse occupy more than 2,600,000 acres in this area with annual spring male counts exceeding 2100 grouse in each of the past four years.

Partnerships Established

Long-lasting, broad-based local conservation partnerships have been developed and include state and federal resource managers, local government, private landowners/ranchers, surface coal mines, natural gas companies and the local power cooperative. Listed below are organizations and agencies that have been involved in either the plan development and/or conservation activities that have benefited Sage Grouse:

Local Ranchers and Landowners
Kennecott Energy-Colowyo Coal Mine
Trapper Mining Inc.
EnCana Corporation
Moffat County
Routt County
Yampa Valley Electric Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Monarch and Associates
Colorado State University Extension
Upper Colorado Environmental Plan Center
University of Idaho
Colorado Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit
Colorado Division of Wildlife
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Forest Service
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Sierra Club
The Nature Conservancy
Northwest Colorado HPP Committee
Yampa-White River HPP Committee
Moffat County Land Use & Grazing Advisory Boards
Craig Chamber of Commerce
Colorado State Land Board
Quail Unlimited

Besides working together on the conservation plan, other important projects have been accomplished through various partnerships. The CDOW, BLM, and NRCS have cooperated in designing sagebrush habitat treatments to benefit or reduce impacts to Sage Grouse. A jointly designed and funded research project to define Sage Grouse survival and habitat use and answer pressing management questions was developed. Scores of private landowners were involved with the research and opened their lands to the project. In an exciting new effort, a joint partnership between CDOW, Moffat County, Routt County, Colorado State University Extension and the Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center to collect and create foundation seed for northwest Colorado native forbs began. An effort involving CDOW, the Working Group, Moffat County, and natural gas production companies has been initiated to evaluate and mitigate the impacts of natural gas development on Sage Grouse.

Implementation of Projects

Summary of efforts from 2000-2002

Efforts on lek counts substantially increased beginning in 1999 and continue to the present.

A radio-telemetry project began to study Greater Sage Grouse survival rates, vegetation parameters of successful habitats, and Sage Grouse movements. Over 200 radios were placed on in two large study areas.

A detailed sagebrush habitat vegetation assessment was completed on several BLM allotments in north-central Moffat County.

The BLM conducted mechanical treatments in several areas of Sage Grouse habitat in Moffat County to rejuvenate sagebrush stands. Projects totaled approximately 3000 acres and were designed to leave substantial untreated islands of sagebrush for grouse habitat.

The CDOW conducted a 40 acre brushbeat for wet meadow/brood rearing habitat enhancement on Browns Park State Wildlife Area.

The CDOW brushbeat 130 acres on Little Snake State Wildlife Area to enhance Sage Grouse brood habitat.

A 1000 acres of CRP plantings were enhanced to improve nutritive quality for Sage Grouse on private lands northeast of Craig.

Numerous small prescribed fires were conducted on privately owned upland riparian areas to restore riparian function and enhance Sage Grouse brood range.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

Development of Colorado sagebrush key and best management practices manual was assisted by field efforts underway in northwest Colorado.

Second year of Sage Grouse chick survival/forb quality study was completed.

Prescribed burn was completed on Little Snake State Wildlife Area.

The nutritive quality of 500 acres of historic/potential Sage Grouse habitat were enhanced southeast of Hayden, CO through brush control and reseeding.

A five mile long water pipeline/distribution system was completed north of Maybell, CO to enhance livestock distribution and lessen impact on Sage Grouse.

The pipeline included several ground accessible tanks for grouse to access water.

The BLM completed 3 prescribed fires (1200 acres total) to maintain sagebrush parks and remove juniper encroachment areas around Douglas Mountain.

Encroaching brush was cleared on Fan Rock lek site northeast of Craig, CO to enhance use by Sage Grouse and has been successful; lek counts are up substantially on this lek.

Field collection of several Moffat County native forbs was completed to derive germination description and develop native seed stock.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

Sage Grouse occupied range and important seasonal habitats were completely remapped in March 2004.

A multi-year research study of chick fostering, chick survival, dispersal and chick nesting fidelity commenced.

A detailed Sage Grouse habitat assessment was conducted on a 31,000 acre BLM allotment in southwestern Moffat County.

A project to quantify and map sagebrush dieoff/defoliation areas in Sage Grouse habitat resulting from 2002-2003 drought will occur.

The Northwest Colorado Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan will be completed.

A conservation easement will be obtained on 1800 acres of CRP/sagebrush bottoms south of Hayden, CO and will include positive management strategies for Sage Grouse and sharp-tailed grouse habitat.

A conservation easement will be obtained on 4100 acres of sagebrush rangeland and river riparian bottom east of Maybell and will contain Sage Grouse habitat management actions.

BLM brushbeat 500 acres in Sage Grouse brood areas on Douglas Mountain.

BLM brushbeat and reseeded 217 acres in Conway Draw to restore a drought related sagebrush die-off.

The Red Wash burn (120 acres) was reseeded with palatable forbs to restore degraded upland riparian area (Little Snake State Wildlife Area).

A water distribution system was developed with ground accessible tanks on Little Snake State Wildlife Area.

An approximately 5 mile long pipeline/water distribution system was installed for improved livestock management and to increase Sage Grouse habitat condition with ground accessible tanks on private land north of Craig.

Efforts began to establish a foundation stock of native forbs collected in 2003.

Field collection of seed continues.

Measurable Results and Trends

Sage Grouse counts in northwest Colorado have exceeded 2100 males per year since 2000, approaching levels not seen since the late 1970s.

A research project (master's thesis) was completed on northwest Colorado Sage Grouse survival and habitat requirements. A second thesis and several peer reviewed publications are in progress.

A research project (master's thesis) is in progress on results of chick survival/habitat quality study in northwest Colorado.

Habitat use mapping was completed based on locations of greater than 200 radio collared grouse.

Sage Grouse habitat management is included in habitat management requirements of Ranching For Wildlife (RFW) contracts. These contracts make up 200,000 acres in

NW Colorado. RFW is a CDOW/Private Land hunting and habitat management program.

Informational Items

The CDOW developed an informational brochure entitled Yampa Valley Grouse describing the three species of grouse (Sage Grouse, Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse and Blue Grouse) in the Yampa Valley and their habitat requirements. The Northwest Colorado Sage Grouse Work Group developed an informational poster describing Sage Grouse, their seasonal habitat needs, and opportunities to get involved with Sage Grouse conservation in northwest Colorado. The Northwest Colorado Sage Grouse Work Group sponsored an informational video presentation featuring Sage Grouse lek behavior and conservation issues.

NORTHERN EAGLE/SOUTHERN ROUTT WORKING GROUP GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Status of Working Group

The Northern Eagle/Southern Routt work group began formulating a conservation plan in 1998 and produced a draft in July 2000. However, things stagnated for several years after the draft was disseminated. The Group re-formed in April 2003 and has made steady progress since that time toward completing a conservation plan for the local population. Completion of the plan is expected in June 2004. This version of the plan has considerably more involvement and dedication of group members than the previous version, particularly in the area of conservation actions.

Participation of local landowners and agencies since April 2003 has been greater and more consistent than in the 1998-2000 period. This can be attributed to the use of a professional facilitator/mediator, providing meals at meetings, and a more convenient and comfortable meeting location.

Partnerships Established

In the process of developing the conservation plan, informal partnerships have been developed with:

Routt County Cooperative Extension (CSU)
Colorado Rural Electric Association
Yampa Valley Electric Association
Holy Cross Energy
XCEL Energy
Western Area Power Administration
Local Ranchers
Bureau of Land Management
U. S. Forest Service
The Nature Conservancy
Upper Colorado Habitat Partnership Committee
Upper Yampa Habitat Partnership Committee
Local ORV groups

Implementation of Projects

Thus far, little has been done in terms of habitat projects. Part of this is due to the fact that the plan conservation plan is not yet completed, but perhaps more importantly, there is a lack of detailed knowledge about where this population of Sage Grouse spends its time. While lek locations are fairly well-known, less is known about nesting areas, early and late brood-rearing areas, and winter range.

Biologists and landowners have been hesitant to initiate projects without knowing more of these details, for fear of negatively altering portions of the sagebrush community that may be important in its current condition. For this reason, a radio telemetry project was undertaken in 2003.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

In fall of 2003, a radio telemetry project was initiated with the capture of five Sage Grouse in southern Routt County. Local landowners have been very cooperative and supportive of this project and have provided virtually complete access to the Colorado Division of Wildlife for trapping and subsequent trapping of the birds.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

The telemetry project begun in 2003 will continue and expand. An additional 17 birds will be captured in April 2004 as the project expands southward to Eagle County. In addition, the Conservation Plan will be finalized. Implementation of conservation actions spelled out in the plan will then begin. An assessment of sagebrush/Sage Grouse habitat condition in northern Eagle County is being undertaken by the BLM, Glenwood Springs Resource Area. Field work will be completed this summer and a report will follow.

Measurable results and Trends

The number of male Sage Grouse counted on leks in northern Eagle County increased to 14 in 2003, compared to 7 on 2002 and 3 in 2001. While 1 year is not necessarily significant, any increase in northern Eagle County is a very positive development. Fourteen birds is more consistent with late numbers from 1995-2000, which ranged between 13 and 18. (These numbers were down considerably from the '80's early '90's which ranged between 27 in 1994 and 79 in 1987). Numbers are holding fairly steady in southern Routt County, and are consistent with the last 30 years.

Information Items

A local newspaper, the Steamboat Pilot and Today, published an article about the efforts of this work group on September 3, 2003. A reprint of this article is found in the Executive Summary section of this report.

MEEKER-WHITE RIVER WORKING GROUP GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Status of Working Group

The Meeker-White River Sage Grouse population consists of a small, isolated group of birds east and south of Meeker, CO. The area occupied by this population consists of approximately 41,100 acres with additional nearby areas of vacant/historic

and potential habitat. Only one lek is known to be active in the population area, but spring counts exceeded 40 males in 2003, up substantially from the previous year. No local work group has been formed to address Sage Grouse conservation in this population area. State and federal resource managers and interested private landowners have been working cooperatively to protect and enhance Sage Grouse habitats during the course of other work. Conservation planning for the population will be addressed in the Colorado Statewide Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan which will commence in the summer of 2004 and be completed in the summer of 2005.

Partnerships Established

Partners in Sage Grouse conservation in the Meeker-White River population area are:

Local Ranchers/Landowners
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Bureau of Land Management
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Colorado State University Extension
Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center
Yampa-White River HPP Committee

These partnerships have led to active cooperation of CDOW, BLM, and NRCS in designing sagebrush habitat treatments to benefit or reduce impacts to Sage Grouse on all ownership types. A joint effort between CDOW, Colorado State University Extension and the Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center to collect and create foundation seed for northwest Colorado native forbs, begun for the northwest Colorado population area will also have benefit for Meeker-White River grouse.

Implementation of Projects

Summary of efforts from 2000-2002

CDOW and the Yampa-White HPP Committee purchased a seed drill available to landowners to enhance Sage Grouse and sharp-tailed grouse habitats. Approximately 800 acres of CRP and other grasslands in many small parcels across several landowners have been reseeded with bunchgrasses and palatable forbs to enhance Sage Grouse habitats.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

Field collection of several Moffat County native forbs for germination description and development of native seed stock will have benefit to the Meeker birds and the development of a Colorado specific sagebrush key and best management practices manual in 2003 will allow for better habitat descriptions and more effective management.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

Proposed projects for the 2004 season include revised Sage Grouse range mapping, collection and propagation of native forbs, and acquisition of conservation easements in Sage Grouse habitats. Sage Grouse occupied habitat, vacant habitat and potential habitat were completely re-mapped in March, 2004 to better focus future habitat development work. Germination trials for forbs

collected in 2003 are complete. Seeds will be planted at the Environmental Plant Center in 2004 to establish foundation stock. Additional field collections will also be made during the summer of 2004. While the forbs are collected in the Northwest Colorado population area, they have application to the Meeker-White River area also. Efforts are progressing to secure a 3000 acre conservation easement in Sage Grouse habitat near Meeker. Additional interest in easements has been expressed.

Measurable Results and Trends

The Colorado specific sagebrush key and best management practices manual developed from field work in northwest Colorado and elsewhere on the west slope provides important management information for this population. Lek activity in this population is low, but lek counts and other observations show significant increase in Sage Grouse use of the Little Beaver drainage in the past two years.

PICEANCE BASIN/ROAN CREEK WORKING GROUP GREATER SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Status of Working Group

The Piceance Basin/Roan Creek Sage Grouse population consists of a relatively small, isolated group of birds in naturally fragmented habitat in the White River and Colorado River drainages. It is located southwest of Meeker, CO and northeast of Grand Junction, CO. The area occupied by this population consists of approximately 305,000 acres with additional areas of vacant/historic and potential habitat totaling 310,000 acres in close proximity. Leks tend to be small and inconsistent in activity. Ten of fifty-three known lek sites were active in 2003 with seventy-four males counted.

No local work group has been formed to address Sage Grouse conservation in this population area. State and federal resource managers and interested private landowners have been working cooperatively to protect and enhance Sage Grouse habitats during the course of other work. Conservation planning for the population will be addressed in the Colorado statewide Greater Sage Grouse conservation plan which will commence in the summer of 2004 and be completed by the summer of 2005.

Partnerships Established

Partners in Sage Grouse conservation in the Piceance Basin/Roan Creek population area are:

Local Ranchers/Landowners
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Bureau of Land Management
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Colorado State University Extension
Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center
Yampa-White River HPP Committee
American Soda

These partnerships have led to active cooperation of CDOW, BLM, and NRCS in designing sagebrush habitat treatments to benefit or reduce impacts to Sage Grouse on all

ownership types. A joint effort between CDOW, Colorado State University Extension, and the Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center to collect and create foundation seed for northwest Colorado native forbs, begun for the northwest Colorado population area will also have benefit for Piceance Basin/Roan Creek grouse.

Implementation of Projects

Summary of efforts from 2000-2002

A two year telemetry study of Sage Grouse movements and habitat use in the Piceance Basin concluded during this period. The study provided important information about this unusual and poorly understood population. Sage Grouse habitat enhancement projects in the Piceance Basin/Roan Creek population area between 2000 and 2002 included control of encroaching tall shrubs, sagebrush thinning, understory restoration, and understory enhancement by reseeding. Areas of extensive encroachment by tall serviceberry shrubs around the Magnolia lek site were selectively cleared with a Hydroaxe to enhance Sage Grouse security during the breeding season. Twelve hundred acres of sagebrush on the Piceance State Wildlife Area were thinned with a Dixie harrow to enhance understory plants for Sage Grouse nest cover and brood forage while maintaining adequate sagebrush for nest sites. Four hundred acres of this treatment were also interseeded with palatable forbs to enhance Sage Grouse brood range. Sagebrush areas approximately 500 acres in size near the Magnolia leks, currently unused by Sage Grouse, were mowed to rejuvenate the community and enhance future use by Sage Grouse. A large pipeline corridor through key Sage Grouse habitat was reclaimed with sagebrush and forb species palatable to Sage Grouse.

Description of efforts this past year (2003)

Habitat efforts in 2003 in the Piceance Basin/Roan Creek population area consisted primarily of planning for energy development and looking for solutions to conflicts between proposed natural gas development and Sage Grouse habitat. Recommendations for a 1200 well field on narrow ridges occupied by Sage Grouse include moving roads and pads to the sides of ridges, increasing temporary land disturbance and the cut and fill required, to maintain strips of viable habitat along these ridges. Field collection of several Moffat County native forbs for germination description and development of native seed stock will have benefit to the Piceance birds also and the development of a Colorado specific sagebrush key and best management practices manual in 2003 will allow for better habitat descriptions and more effective management.

Description of efforts planned to be completed by 12/2004

Proposed projects for the 2004 season include revised Sage Grouse range mapping, collection and propagation of native forbs and some habitat treatments. Sage Grouse occupied habitat, vacant habitat and potential habitat were completely re-mapped in March, 2004 to better focus future habitat development work. Germination trials for forbs collected in 2003 will be planted at the Environmental Plant Center to establish foundation stock. Additional field collections will be made during the summer of 2004. While the forbs are

collected in the Northwest Colorado population area, they have application to the Piceance Basin/Roan Plateau area also. The Bureau of Land Management has a prescribed burn planned in an area of heavy juniper encroachment on Wolf Ridge once used by Sage Grouse. This burn will initiate the process of returning this area to suitable Sage Grouse habitat.

Measurable Results and Trends

The trend for this population, gathered from lek counts, is difficult to ascertain, but counts have remained relatively steady and activity at some long abandoned lek sites has been noted in 2004. The master's thesis produced as a result of the telemetry study in the Piceance Basin provides important population information and recommendations for future habitat management in this area of naturally fragmented Sage Grouse habitat. The Colorado specific sagebrush key and best management practices manual developed from field work in northwest Colorado and elsewhere on the west slope also provides important management information.

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IDAHO

Executive Summary

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission (IFGC) adopted a statewide Sage Grouse plan in 1997. This plan outlines a process for local working groups to develop local plans to improve local conservation efforts. Six local working groups are currently active and developing actions to help Sage Grouse. Projects completed for Sage Grouse in Idaho include habitat projects, population and habitat inventories, as well as research to develop new Sage Grouse conservation tools. Protection of existing habitat from wildlife and cheatgrass invasion is a key conservation measure in Idaho. BLM is making major progress toward implementing needed conservation measures to control the frequency and size of wildfires in important Sage Grouse habitat. Public outreach on Sage Grouse conservation is ongoing media attention has been intense, especially in 2004.

Idaho's Sage Grouse Advisory Committee

This group includes 10 members from the general public, four members from agencies responsible for land management in Idaho, and one member from a tribe with important Sage Grouse habitat. The group was appointed to include a broad range of views on Sage Grouse conservation and individuals. All members are knowledgeable about Sage Grouse and using collaboration to solve natural resource problems. Several technical advisors also attend meetings. This group began meeting in March 2003, includes at least one member of each local working group, and has three primary purposes:

1. Information sharing
2. Helping locate and distribute funding for need Sage Grouse projects
3. Helping the state update and revise the 1997 Idaho Sage Grouse Management Plan

Idaho's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) is leading an effort to revise the 1997 Idaho Sage Grouse Management Plan. The IDFG is working closely with the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and members of the State Advisory Committee on this effort. A draft of the document is scheduled for completion in September 2004 and a final plan will be completed in December 2004. The document will include conservation measures for all significant threats to Idaho Sage Grouse and will have measures tailored especially for local areas by local working groups. The key objective of the final document will be to meet the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Policy to Evaluate Conservation Measures (PECE).

Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

Overview: These groups are open to anyone interested in Sage Grouse conservation. There are currently six groups active and two more being formed. Meetings typically include 15-25 participants and are held monthly or bi-monthly. The process usually includes a period to identify local issues, gather existing local data, develop strategies to address local issues, and identify needed funding and assignments. The groups are self-directed and usually have professional facilitation. Memberships of all groups include livestock permittees, state and federal agencies, as well as hunters and other conservationists. IDFG, BLM, and U.S. Forest Service are jointly funding a statewide Sage Grouse planning coordinator for at least 3 years. An IDFG staff biologist provides leadership for the statewide planning effort including local working group efforts.

Owyhee Local Work Group

This group began meeting in 1998 and completed a local plan in 2000. They are working on many projects including:

- Forb and grass seedings
- A prescribed burn to reduce juniper invasion of grouse habitat
- Radio-telemetry projects to document important grouse habitat
- Aerial surveys to search for leks in remote areas
- A survey of Owyhee County residents to help document occupied grouse habitat
- Seeding a historic wildfire where little sagebrush currently grows

Jarbidge Local Work Group

This group began meeting in 1999 and is currently revising a draft local plan. They are working on many projects including:

- Fifteen fencing projects to improve livestock distribution
- Radio-telemetry projects to document important grouse habitat
- Aerial surveys to search for leks in remote areas

Shoshone Basin Local Work Group

This group began meeting in 1994. It has a completed a local plan. They are working on many projects including:

- Water developments and fences
- Reducing grazing on private land to improve grouse habitat

Greater Curlew Local Work Group

This group began meeting in 1998 and is finishing a draft plan. They are working on many projects including:

- Riparian improvement projects

- Radio-telemetry projects to document important grouse habitat
- Upper Snake Local Work Group**

This group began meeting in 1998 and has completed a local plan. They are working on many projects including:

- Riparian improvement projects
- Radio-telemetry projects to document important grouse habitat
- A major habitat mapping project
- A spring Sage Grouse festival in the rural community of Dubois

Challis Local Work Group

This group began meeting in 2001 and is developing a risk assessment to prioritize needs in their local area. They are also working on a project to compile existing data on Sage Grouse habitat and populations.

Implementation of Projects

There are many on-the-ground habitat projects underway in Idaho. The state has received special federal grants to assist with Sage Grouse conservation totaling \$700,000 of which \$300,000 has been spent on management planning and habitat projects, \$300,000 is committed to ongoing projects and \$100,000 is currently being offered to landowners for new Sage Grouse habitat projects.

2000-02 Projects

- Completion of 4 local working group plans.
- Completion of over 20 Sage Grouse habitat projects including sagebrush seedings, forb and grass seedings, fencing to better distribute livestock, and riparian fencing.
- Radio telemetry work in 8 different areas of the state to document important seasonal habitat of Sage Grouse.
- Completion of genetic work on Idaho Sage Grouse.
- Completion of a statewide Sage Grouse habitat map. The format developed by Idaho is now being used in other states.
- Compilation and analysis of 50 years of Sage Grouse lek and production data.
- Outreach using TV, radio and written media.
- Completion of 4 graduate student projects on Sage Grouse ecology.
- Aerial surveys of thousands of square miles of Sage Grouse habitat looking for unknown leks.

2003 Projects

- Completion of 15 habitat projects statewide.
- Completion of the publication “Monitoring of Greater Sage Grouse Habitat and Populations” now being used throughout the West.
- Completion of a lek monitoring training tool to improve the lek counting efforts throughout the West.

- Completion of a Sage Grouse brochure for Owyhee County.
- Updating the Idaho Sage Grouse habitat map completed in 2002 including more data on important Sage Grouse areas.

2004 Project Planned:

- Completion of the update of the 1997 Idaho Sage Grouse Management Plan including detailed conservation measures for all significant threats to Idaho Sage Grouse.
- Completion of the second update of the Idaho Sage Grouse habitat map to include recently documented important habitat.
- Radio telemetry on 5 study areas to continue to document important Sage Grouse habitat.
- Completion of at least 20 Sage Grouse habitat projects.
- Formation of local working groups to cover all the Sage Grouse habitat in the state.
- Completion of the IDFG assignment to WAFWA to write the Rangewide Sage Grouse Conservation Assessment.
- Monitoring of Sage Grouse populations for mortality from West Nile Disease.
- In cooperation with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe conduct the first aerial surveys on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation.

Habitat Trends

Habitat protection is a high priority for all agencies and landowners in Idaho. Wildlife is a huge threat and BLM has allocated major resources to improving wildlife suppression through better training, fire crew relocations, and enhanced aerial suppression efforts. In short, sagebrush steppe is now seen as a very valuable resource in Idaho. Federal land managers are also now using sagebrush and natives grasses and forbs when seeding wildfire sites.

Population Trends

Idaho counts about 50 lek routes including about 350 leks annually. In addition, about 300 additional leks are surveyed for presence or absence of birds. Lek count trends in Idaho have been generally up since 1995. Chick production has varied and usually reflects weather events. The most important impact on Sage Grouse trends is loss of sagebrush habitats and invasion of annual grasses into important habitats.

Research

IDFG reassigned its lead Sage Grouse researcher, Jack Connelly, to work full-time on the WAFWA Rangewide Conservation Assessment in March 2003. Jack continues to work on this project and 3 other IDFG researchers are now assigned full time to work on Sage Grouse. IDFG research staff efforts include developing detailed statewide habitat maps, population inventories, and new information on breeding habitat characteristics.

Outreach

IDFG staff is working hard to get out the message of what Sage Grouse need and what is being done. There have been nearly constant newspaper articles on Sage Grouse and potential listing for the last year. This has included a large, front-page article in Idaho's largest newspaper in February 2004. An excellent example of a grass-roots effort to improve the public's awareness of Sage Grouse issues is the beginning of "Dubois Sage Grouse Days" in 2003. This spring festival is held in an isolated town of 300 people and attracted 65 people in 2004, including bird watchers from several hundred miles away, to a fundraising banquet. The town plans to use funds raised to build informational highway signs in the area.

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MONTANA

Executive Summary

The state of Montana supports an estimated 27 million acres of Greater Sage Grouse-inhabited sagebrush grasslands (Montana Sage Grouse Work Group 2002), which is second only in size to Wyoming's Sage Grouse habitat base. Sage Grouse range from the eastern plains to intermountain valleys of southwestern Montana. About half of their habitat is on public and tribal lands and the remainder is privately owned. Interagency planning and coordination will help address potential impacts to much of the publicly owned sagebrush grasslands (Montana Sage Grouse Work Group 2002).

Privately owned sagebrush habitats, however, are vulnerable to fragmentation or even total loss. As has happened in other western states, sodbusting and measures taken to control sagebrush continue to reduce Montana's remaining Sage Grouse habitat base. Converting prairie to cropland has become a proven method in Montana for appreciating land values. Also, new technologies in herbicides and seed genetics, renewed emphasis on converting virgin prairie to "organic" or chemical-free cropland, and advances in farming equipment almost guarantee widespread threats to Sage Grouse habitats will persist.

In addition to Sage Grouse, Montana's sagebrush grasslands support 6 other *sagebrush obligate* species including sage thrasher, sage sparrow, brewer's sparrow, sagebrush lizard, pygmy rabbit, and sagebrush vole (Carlson 2001, Paige and Ritter 1999, Rich 1999). As many as 46 additional species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians in Montana are considered *sagebrush associated*. Among both groupings, 15 species including the ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, blue-gray gnatcatcher, pygmy rabbit, preble's shrew, dwarf shrew, merriam's shrew, fringed myotis, spotted bat, townsend's big-eared bat, pallid bat, sagebrush lizard, great plains toad, western hognose snake, and milk snake are listed as "Animals of Concern" in Montana (Carlson 2001). These species are considered "at-risk" due to their very localized distribution and/or vulnerability to extinction.

Counts of males on leks during spring have been used to provide an index of relative size and trend of breeding populations of Sage Grouse in Montana since the 1950s. Statewide, Sage Grouse numbers increased from the mid-1960s through 1973 and fluctuated about that level until 1984. Sage Grouse declined rather sharply statewide from 1991 through 1996 and increased through 2000. Long-term harvest trends, based on post-hunt surveys of hunters, when interpreted along with lek counts, also provide insight to long-term changes in Sage Grouse numbers at a statewide scale.

Map of Montana's Sage Grouse Range

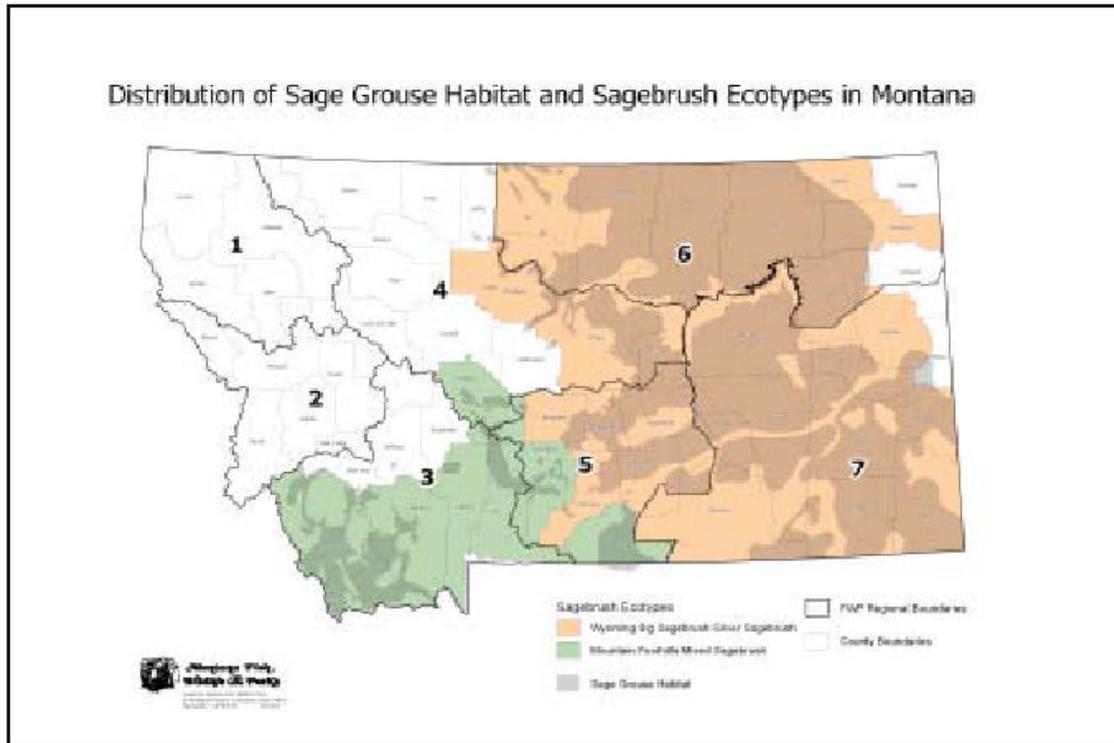


Figure I-1. Distribution of Sage Grouse Habitat and sagebrush ecotypes in Montana. Map provided by FWP Information Services.

Fig. I-1 includes sage grouse distribution information from MFWP and BLM wildlife biologists digitized at varying scales. All other data layers obtained from the Natural Resource Information System.

Table I-1. Sagebrush Ecological Units by Sub-Unit, FWP Region, and County

Ecological unit Sub-unit	FWP Region	County
Mountain Foothills Mixed Sagebrush		
Southwestern	R3, R4, R5	Beaverhead, Madison, Park, Meagher, Sweetgrass
South Central	R5	Carbon
Wyoming Big Sagebrush-Silver Sagebrush		
Southeastern	R5, R7	Carter, Powder River, Dawson, Wibaux, Big Horn, Custer, Fallon, Prairie
Central	R4, R5, R6, R7	Stillwater, Wheatland, Yellowstone, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Treasure, Rosebud, Fergus, Petroleum, Garfield, McCone, Chouteau, South Blaine, South Phillips, South Valley
North Central	R6	Northern Blaine, Northern Phillips, Northern Valley, Hill, Daniels, Roosevelt

Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

Status of the State Plan

The "MANAGEMENT PLAN AND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES FOR SAGE GROUSE IN MONTANA" was revised by the Montana Sage Grouse Work Group in March 2004.

Purpose of the Plan

Montana's conservation strategy provides for coordinated management across jurisdictional boundaries and development of community support that will promote successful implementation. Participants in the Montana Sage Grouse work group (SGWG) who have developed the plan include representatives of federal and state agencies, tribal representatives, private organizations, and several individuals from the general public, all of whom have an interest in the issue of Sage Grouse conservation.

The plan establishes a process to achieve Sage Grouse management objectives and provide a framework to guide local management efforts and coordinated management across jurisdictional boundaries. Regional or local groups will adapt and implement strategies from the statewide plan to improve or maintain the sagebrush steppe in their respective geographical areas. Throughout development of the plan, numerous views were expressed that emphasized the need to keep Sage Grouse management in balance with social, cultural, and community values.

The overall goal of the plan is to - **Provide for the long-term conservation and enhancement of the sagebrush steppe/mixed-grass prairie complex within Montana in a manner that supports Sage Grouse and a healthy diversity and abundance of wildlife species and human uses.**

Objectives include maintaining the distribution and integrity of sagebrush steppe communities and maintaining the distribution of Sage Grouse populations within the mountain foothills mixed sagebrush and Wyoming big sagebrush-silver sagebrush ecotypes based on a consistently applied monitoring protocol.

Sage Grouse Local Working Groups



The Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Plan establishes a process to achieve Sage Grouse management objectives and is intentionally adaptive in nature to meet unexpected or unknown situations. Plan implementation will be achieved through state and federal agency efforts and various local work groups, e.g., Sage Grouse work groups, watershed groups, coordinated resource management groups, etc. The state-level work group will continue to provide coordination, oversight, and review of local planning efforts.

Consistent documentation of data collection procedures and methodologies is necessary to ensure that monitoring results are comparable over time. Implementation groups along with local, state, and federal agencies will be responsible for documenting their accomplishments. Data and accomplishments will be reported annually to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks by the first of the calendar year. Soon after, state work group members will meet to summarize accomplishments, assess on-the-ground management actions, measure progress in resolving resource conflicts, identify additional data or conservation needs, and make recommendations for adjusting objectives or actions, if needed. This coordination will include appropriate consultation and cooperation with rangeland users, general public, landowners, academia, private and state organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies.

Local Work Groups

Critical to the success of the plan is active participation by local working groups. Local working groups will comprise a diversity of stakeholders who will use the Plan as a basis for identifying issues in the area and for developing and implementing creative solutions, taking into account local conditions. The solutions can be unique to the region and based on observations, knowledge, and experience of the stakeholder members, in coordination with scientific data and consistent with agency policies and programs.

A statewide coordinator will be responsible for assisting each local working group in developing and implementing appropriate conservation actions, facilitating the organization and recruitment of members, helping conduct and officiate working group meetings, resolving conflicts, producing educational material, and organizing media and public outreach for keeping the public informed of working group activities. As a start, eighteen months of funding has been acquired for this position that included contributions from BLM, FWP, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. A request for proposals for a local working group coordinator has been advertised. When hired, the coordinator contract will be administered through the Montana Wildlife Federation, with oversight by members of the statewide Montana Sage Grouse Work Group.

Role

The role of the local work groups is to adapt the plan to specific local areas to develop and implement strategies that will improve or maintain the sagebrush steppe and reduce or mitigate factors that may further reduce Sage Grouse habitats or populations.

Mission Statement: Each group should create a mission statement consistent with the goal of the statewide management plan and conservation strategies and with the role of the local work groups.

Guiding Principles: To ensure that the plans will be in balance with social, cultural, and community values, the following four principles provide the framework to guide local work group efforts. Each local work group may determine additional principles and ground rules to improve the efficiency of group. The guiding principles are:

- 1) Conservation actions implemented for Sage Grouse will contribute to the overall health of sagebrush communities across the landscape.
- 2) Conservation strategies will integrate local, regional, and national needs for

conservation planning.

- 3) Wildlife professionals, land managers, private landowners, and all others who have a stake in sagebrush communities will be tolerant, understanding, and respectful of other perspectives and focus on areas of common interest.
- 4) This plan is not intended to exclude any uses or activities or infringe on legally defined private property rights; rather, it serves to provide solutions to problems and address issues that negatively affect Sage Grouse and degrade sagebrush community health.

Scope of Authority: The role of local work groups is to develop and implement strategies consistent with Sage Grouse and sagebrush habitat conservation. Implementation of strategies will be accomplished within the scope of agencies. existing policies and in voluntary cooperation with private landowners. Whereas work groups may influence agency policy, they cannot change agencies. policies nor mandate management strategies on private land.

Organization

Location and Time Frames: It is anticipated that eleven local groups will be formed over a three-year period. Locations of the local groups were determined by a combination of factors including ease of accessibility, habitat type, identified issues, etc. The first three groups will begin within one year of the plan's adoption. Within a year of the start of the first groups, an additional three or four groups will begin, and within a year of that, another three or four groups will commence. Due to the long-term nature of the plan, we anticipate that local groups will be active for 10-20 years.

The schedule for start up of the local work groups is as follows:

YEAR ONE

<u>Town</u>	<u>Characteristics of Area</u>
Dillon	Meetings are currently underway Habitat quality issues exist Idaho work provides a foundation
Broadus	Coalbed methane is an issue Information is lacking about population, distribution, and habitat use Rangeland management issues, e.g. burning, exist There are common issues with Wyoming and tribal governments
Glasgow	Good Sage Grouse populations exist There is local interest Canadian populations associated with northern Montana populations There is the possibility of cooperative work with and tribal governments and parties in Alberta This is silver sagebrush country

YEAR TWO

Winnett,
Grass Range,
Winifred

Good populations of Sage Grouse exist
Good data is available
Issues include rangeland conversion, burning,
potential oil and gas development

Miles City,
Forsyth

Good populations of Sage Grouse exist
Data is fair
There is local interest
Issues include coal development, power plants, and
mines
There is an opportunity to work with tribal
governments

Red Lodge

Good data is available
Sage Grouse population is stand-alone, isolated
There is an opportunity to work with tribal govts

White Sulphur Springs

Sage Grouse population is isolated
There is restoration potential

YEAR THREE

Terry

Good populations of Sage Grouse exist
Rangeland conversion (plowed) is an issue

Harlem,
Chinook,
Malta

There is an active tribal wildlife program

Roundup,
Ryegate,
Jordan

Good populations of Sage Grouse exist
Fragmentation of habitat is an issue

Other Considerations:

Membership: Membership in the local work groups is open to all interested parties but should include a balanced selection of local stakeholders. Initial invitations to the formation of the group may be by public announcements or personal contacts through appropriate referral sources. Some communities in Montana already have organized natural resource working groups that may be able to expand to include Sage Grouse conservation, thereby avoiding duplicated efforts. In addition, county extension agents, tribal governments, BIA, NRCS, professional societies, RACs, etc., may be incorporated to implement local conservation efforts.

Because efforts of the groups will require long-term commitments by the core members, the groups may want to identify criteria to recognize 'core members' and allow

‘core members’ a different degree of authority from general meeting attendees. This could be done at the discretion of each local group.

Funding: Where needed, an initial two to three years of funding for the local groups will be provided through several sources including agencies and grants. After the initial funded period, the local groups will be self-funded. Assistance in identifying sources of available monies will be provided through resource and support personnel as listed below.

Resources and Support: Initial meetings will be chaired by a facilitator to ensure the group meetings are balanced, orderly and remain on task. The facilitator will be available for meetings until the group begins to coalesce and his or her participation is no longer needed.

One or two agency staff members will be available at each meeting to provide technical support as needed. Their anticipated role is to provide biological information, clarify agency policies and programs, and contribute as a technical resource as needed.

Education: We anticipate using academia, agency expertise, and state work group experience to bring local groups up to speed on the issues surrounding Sage Grouse conservation.

Expectations: Within two years local working groups are expected to -

- Coordinate issue development with appropriate agencies
- Develop action steps to implement the plan
- Seek creative solutions
- Identify priority areas through issue development
- Have at least one project funded and implemented within two years
- Provide a list of measurable results with a timeline
- Provide a plan for monitoring results

Partnerships Established

Montana has a strong partnership established in its effort to conserve and restore the Sage Grouse. The following is a list of the major agency partners in the state of Montana –

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP)
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC),
- Trust Land Management Division (School Trust Lands)
Montana Department of Agriculture
U.S. Forest Service (FS)
USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
DOI - Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
National Wildlife Refuge System (NWR)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
Tribes

Others participating in the process to develop the Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse included representatives from the following list of diverse groups –

Montana Petroleum Association
Ranchers from throughout the state
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana Stockgrowers
Montana Natural Heritage Program
National Wildlife Federation
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Montana Audubon
Montana Farm Bureau
Montana Stockgrowers
Montana Legislature
North America Grouse Partnership
MSU, Ecology
Southwest Stockgrowers
Montana Falconers Association
Headwaters Wildlife Association

Implementation of Projects

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

Habitat Montana Program

Although not a land management agency, FWP has authority to enter into conservation easements, or land purchases in some cases, to protect and enhance wildlife habitats. FWP has demonstrated its ability to work effectively with private landowners. Under the **Habitat Montana Program**, FWP currently holds easements on 65,000 acres of land within the occupied range of Sage Grouse. FWP manages these properties to conserve native range and wildlife species; covenants attached to the properties prohibit manipulation of sagebrush habitat, subdivision, or converting native rangeland to cultivated farmland. FWP has developed a managed grazing system, i.e., rest-rotation grazing, for each easement and has assigned a top priority to sagebrush-grasslands among habitats needing protection and management. This priority would carry into the future. Approximately 10,000 acres have been protected in this manner annually.

Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program

FWP's **Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (UGBHEP)** has helped fund rest rotation grazing management systems on 552,000 acres of land through term agreements with private landowners. The program can be used to re-establish native vegetation and to purchase conservation easements. Sagebrush-grasslands have been a priority of UGBHEP, with approximately 50 percent of funding being used to enhance

sagebrush habitats. FWP would expect this contract program to continue into the near future.

Sagebrush Initiative

The FWP has been awarded a federal grant through the Landowner Incentive Program that will be matched with funds from the state Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program. This ‘**Sagebrush Initiative**’ will result in the purchase of sagebrush habitat protection on approximately 183,000 acres of privately owned Sage Grouse-occupied habitat by June 30, 2006. The 30-year agreements will prohibit conversion to cropland and sagebrush control measures.

Sagebrush habitat protection projects under this program are prioritized based on Sage Grouse habitat distribution. Wambolt et al. (2002) suggested occupied Sage Grouse habitats are indicative of healthy sagebrush ecosystems. This suggests that other species that utilize sagebrush habitats would be at least as likely to utilize the same areas. Sage Grouse leks are generally considered to be the approximate center of the non-migratory Sage Grouse’s annual range (Connelly et al. 2000). For example, in Montana, research has shown that approximately 2/3rds of Sage Grouse nesting activities occur within 2 miles of a lek (Sage Grouse Work Group 2002). Therefore, to maximize the effectiveness of this program for Sage Grouse and other species that rely on healthy sagebrush habitats, protection would target sagebrush grasslands associated with Sage Grouse leks as well as documented Sage Grouse wintering areas.

Privately owned sagebrush grassland habitats within 2 miles of active leks or including critical wintering areas would be the highest priority properties for enrolling into the program. Further prioritization of projects would be based on juxtaposition to other protected habitats (e.g. public lands), association with other Sage Grouse leks, habitat condition, species of concern in the project area, and landowner interest in additional habitat improvements such as setting up wildlife-friendly grazing systems. The following prioritization sequence has been established, and the priority map developed for Sage Grouse projects under this program.

Sagebrush Initiative Program PRIORITIZATION SEQUENCE

- 1) Establish two-mile dissolved buffer around “active” or “believed to be active” leks
- 2) Identify core*, peripheral**, and reservation polygons
- 3) Determine 3 priority levels for both core and peripheral habitat using a step-down query method.

That is:

- 4) Priority Level 1 (analyze core and peripheral separately)
 - a. Query top 30% male Sage Grouse density
 - b. Of those, select polygons that are < 61% federal land
 - c. Of those, select polygons that are < 35% cropped
- 5) Priority Level 2 (analyze core and peripheral separately)

Of the remaining polygons that are not Priority 1:

 - a. Query top 31-60% male Sage Grouse density
 - b. Of those, select polygons that are <61% federal land
 - c. Of those, select polygons that are <35% cropped

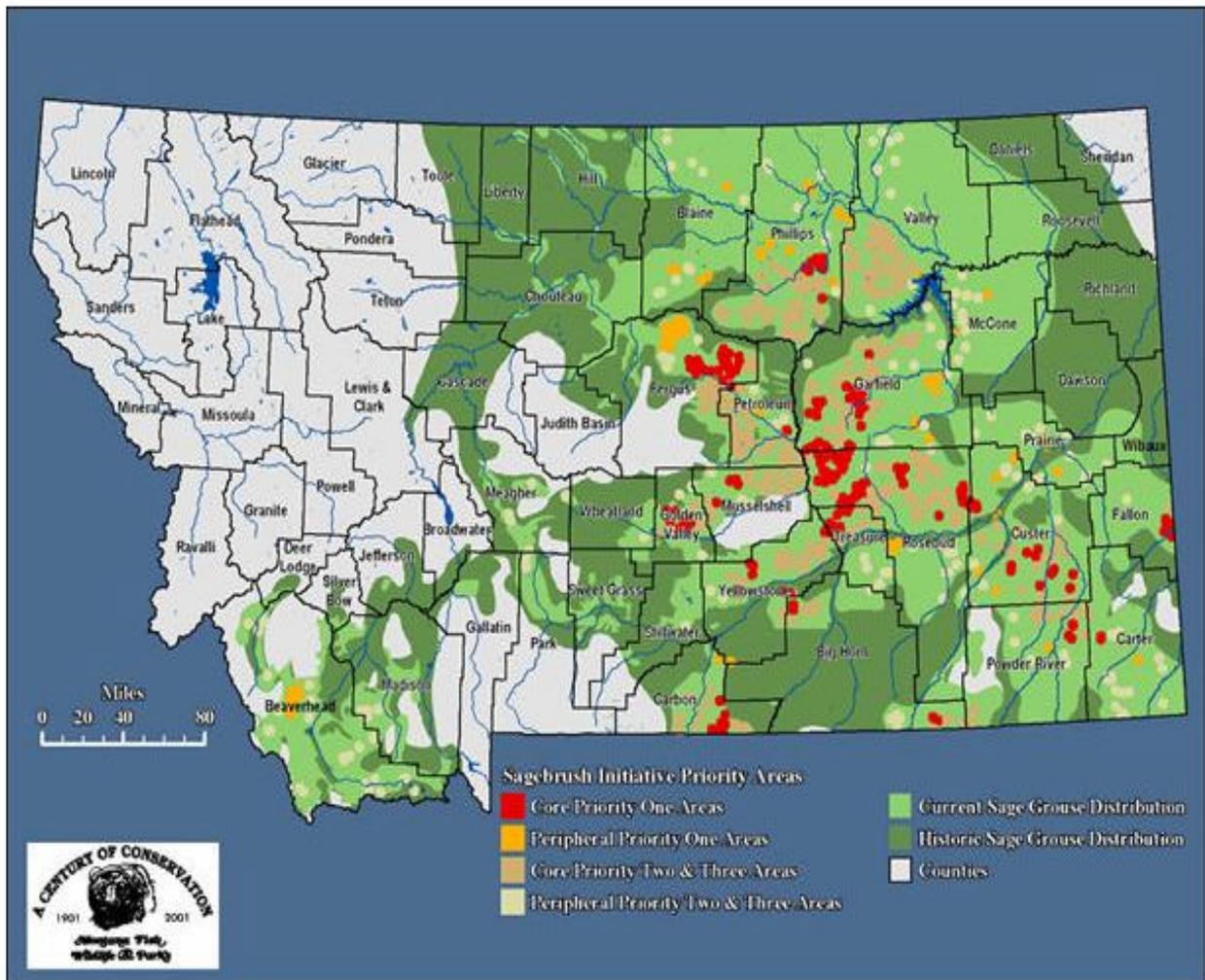
6) Priority Level 3 – All remaining polygons that were not selected in the first two prioritizations.

* Core Habitat – Large (>150 square miles), relatively intact contiguous habitat supporting a continuous complex of leks. Core habitats are characterized by relatively high densities of Sage Grouse and leks

** Peripheral Habitat – Sage Grouse habitat associated with a lek or scattered group of leks. These habitats

generally support lower densities of Sage Grouse and are less productive either due to periphery of range or habitat fragmentation. A scattered group of leks in peripheral habitats can comprise 25 or more square miles per lek. These may be islands of habitat involving a single lek or a small lek complex that is isolated from a larger core habitat.

Sage Grouse Initiative Priority Areas



USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The long-established working relationship between NRCS and private landowners presents the opportunity to effectively educate and advise the public about the importance of sagebrush-grassland and Sage Grouse conservation. NRCS is committed to assisting private landowners with proactive sagebrush-grassland conservation.

NRCS is committed to the following actions to conserve sagebrush-grassland and Sage Grouse in Montana

- Actively participate in the Montana Sage Grouse Working Group.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners for the restoration and management of native grasslands and shrub-lands.
- Faithfully follow NEPA, Threatened and Endangered Species, and Biology policy while providing technical and financial assistance to private landowners. This includes obtaining input from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologists as a part of planning and implementation of brush control projects. Management recommendations found in Guidelines to Manage Sage Grouse Populations and Their Habitats in Montana., prepared by the Montana Sage Grouse Technical Committee, will be considered when assisting private landowners who wish to implement brush control actions.
- Accelerate education efforts with private landowners on the importance of diverse plant and animal communities on native rangeland, as well as life history and habitat requirements of Sage Grouse.

NRCS will provide technical and financial assistance for native grassland and shrubland conservation through the following programs:

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Projects involving restoration and management of native prairie receive high priority for funding under WHIP. A number of existing contracts involve funding development of grazing systems intended to enhance biodiversity and to improve ground cover for ground-nesting birds.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Development of grazing systems to improve native grasslands and shrublands is eligible for technical and financial assistance under EQIP.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Sagebrush-grasslands occurring within WRP contract acreage will be protected from conversion to other land uses. Grazing will only be allowed for habitat enhancement purposes.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

Sagebrush-grasslands will be given priority points for enrollment in the GRP. The GRP will provide protection for these habitats ranging from 10-year contracts to permanent easements.

Contact Information

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Nevada – California Bi-State

Nevada and Eastern California's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

In Nevada and California, a concerted effort has been made to develop a Sage Grouse conservation plan that will be implementable and effective into the future, based on planning efforts at the local level. The statewide strategy was developed by the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team, including key agency and private stakeholder representatives providing direction to local area planning groups to develop their own regional plans. Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn has been committed to Sage Grouse conservation planning since its inception in 2000, and continues to maintain contact with the planning endeavor through the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team. The first edition of the Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan will be released in June 2004. Planning efforts will continue into the future as more data is collected and projects are implemented using an adaptive management approach.

Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

Nevada's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan first kicked off in November 2000, due to biologists' concerns about a downward trend in Sage Grouse populations. Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn appointed the Governor's Sage Grouse Team to develop a statewide Sage Grouse conservation effort with the goal of identifying a planning strategy that would help conserve Greater Sage Grouse and its habitat. The team consisted of about 30-members from the public and private sector working together to develop a statewide strategy based on the philosophy of "en libra" that challenged state, local governments, and federal agencies to work at a local level with community residents to identify risks to the bird and develop strategies to conserve Sage Grouse and Sage Grouse habitat for the future.

The planning strategy emphasized local participation and decision-making, while offering each local planning group the tools, resources and current scientific information they need.

Numerous partners have been involved in this comprehensive statewide planning effort, and have played an integral part in the whole process. Federal partners to date include: USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). State partners include California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Nevada Department of Agriculture, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, Nevada Department of Conservation and natural Resources, Nevada Farm Bureau, Nevada Indian Commission, Great Basin bird Observatory, Nevada Association of Counties, Nevada Wildlife Federation, Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group, Nevada Cattleman's Association, Sierra Pacific Power Co., University of Nevada Reno, and the Sierra Club. This varied list of partners has been essential to the success of the planning effort.

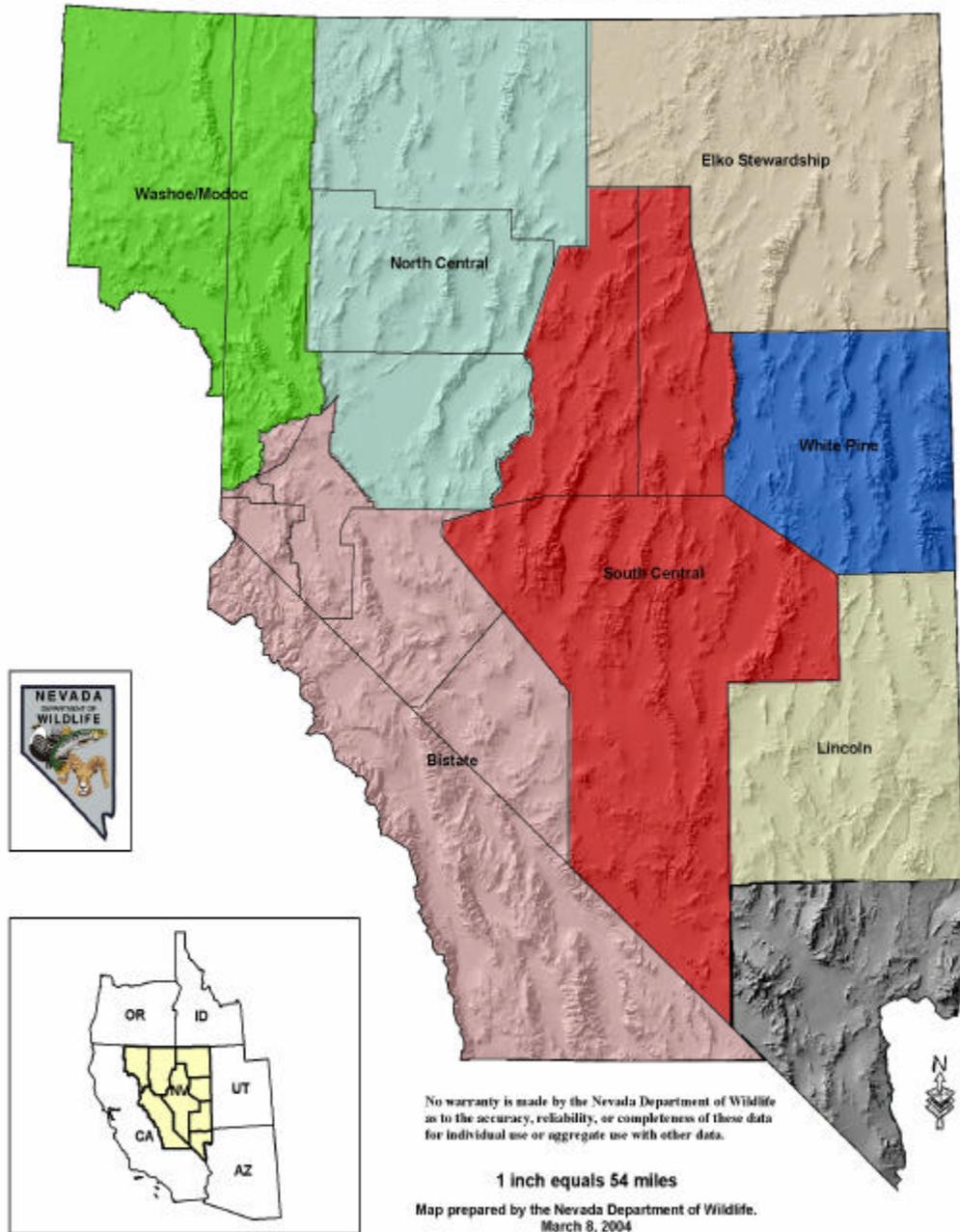
Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

A draft of the Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan was completed in April 2004. The document includes an introduction, conservation assessment, conservation strategy, implementation and coordination, monitoring, and summary chapters, as well as several appendices that include project descriptions, survey protocols, population estimate methodology, and R-value criteria just to name a few. An external scientific peer review team (ESPRT) has been established to evaluate this draft and provide technical comment back to the Governor's Team. Local Area Conservation Planning (LACP) group members continue to work within their resource specialty areas to develop ongoing commitments for funding and implementation of the plan. The LACP members also have the opportunity to review and provide input to this draft of the state plan during the same time period that the ESPRT is evaluating the plan. The first edition of the plan will be completed in June 2004.

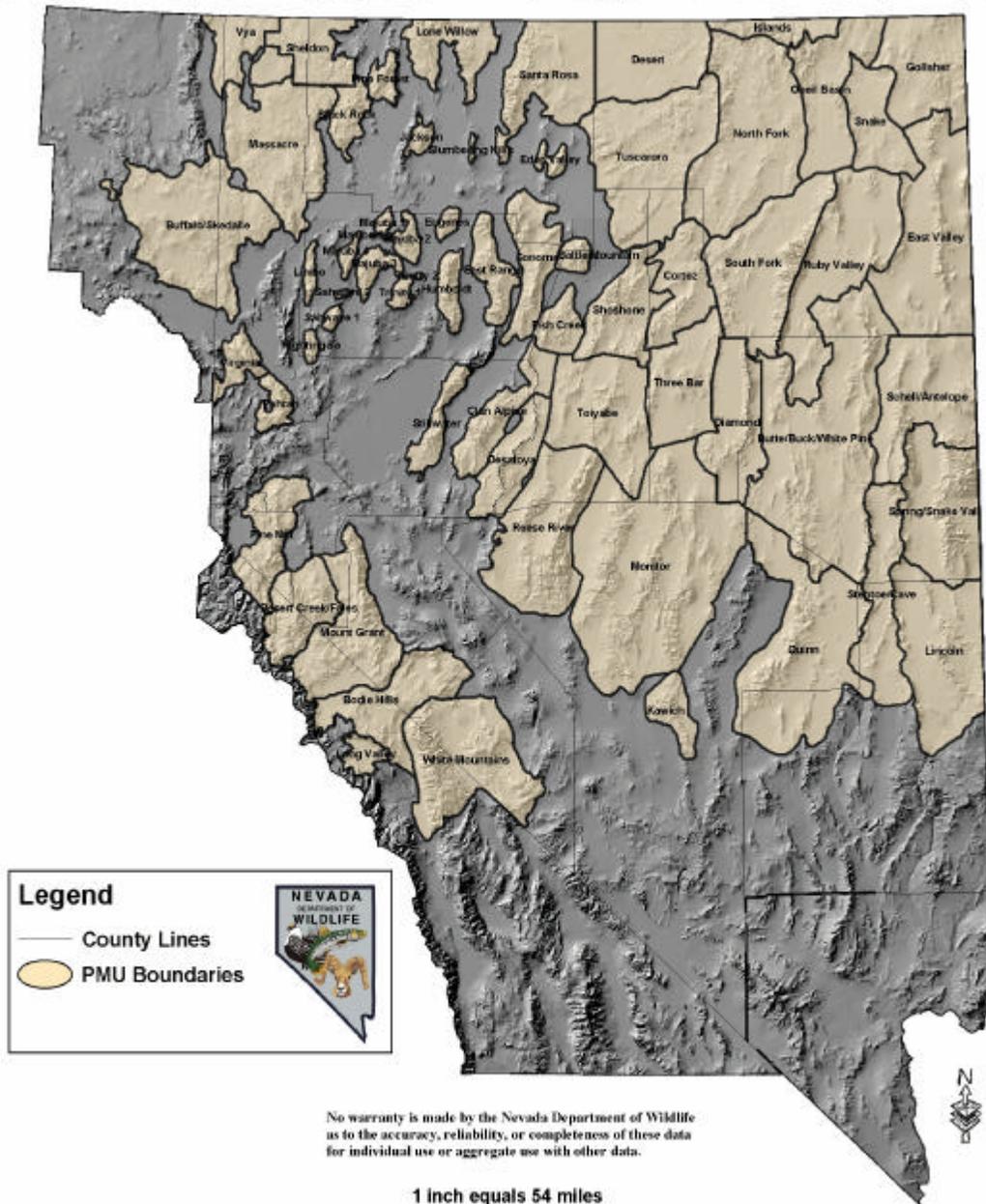
Status of Local Area Planning Groups

Since February 2002, seven local planning groups have worked long hours to identify threats to the birds in their respective regions, and to develop their regional plans to protect the bird for the long term. Within each LACP, several Population Management Units (PMU's) were identified based on aggregations of leks and information regarding seasonal movements and habitat use of birds from those leks. Maps of LACP delineation and PMU boundaries can be found on the following two pages.

Local Area Conservation Planning Units



Sage Grouse Population Management Units (PMUs)



Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

Bi-State LACP Group (CA-NV)

The Bi-State Local Area Planning Group is developing a conservation plan for Greater Sage Grouse populations in east-central California and southwestern Nevada. Two state fish and game agencies, the California Department of Fish and Game and Nevada Department of Wildlife, together with two state BLM offices, and two Forest Service Offices, have led these planning efforts, with the help of a diverse group of interested private individuals.

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) received a non-traditional grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act to develop a conservation plan for Greater Sage Grouse in Mono County, California. Section 6 funds are used for the recovery of listed and candidate species under ESA. The grant for Sage Grouse was given under a special category used to develop conservation agreements for candidate species. Although not a candidate species, genetic information collected to date has shown Greater Sage Grouse in Mono County, CA and Lyon County, NV to be unique. The data suggests that the Mono/Lyon population has been separated from other Greater Sage Grouse populations for some time. Therefore, conservation of the Mono/Lyon population is being addressed as a unique population of grouse.

In support of developing a conservation plan, the grant is also being used to collect information on distribution and seasonal ranges, demographics, genetics and morphology, and habitat selection of Greater Sage Grouse throughout Mono County, CA. In 2003, CDFG contracted with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct a large scale telemetry project to be used in developing the local conservation plan, and the study is now in its second year. The Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service are also participating in an interagency approach to gather data and develop the conservation plan. The Bi-State group will continue to develop the plan over the next year and integrate information collected by this study using an adaptive management approach.

Annually, the California Department of Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management cooperatively gather multiple counts on each known Sage Grouse lek and search for new leks in the Bi-State Planning Area. All known leks are surveyed simultaneously on a given day in each of the discrete populations in the Bi-State area, including the Bodie Hills and Long Valley, which have two of the largest leks known range-wide. In 2004, more than 200 males were found on the largest lek in Long Valley and 100 males on the largest lek in the Bodie Hills. By counting all of the leks on the same day, the agencies are able to estimate the total population in each area. In the late 1990's, a let-down fence was constructed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power on their lands near the large lek in Long Valley after evidence of bird mortalities was discovered on the old fence. These efforts to gather data and protect key Sage Grouse leks are an excellent example of the cooperative management by state, federal, and non-government agencies to conserve Greater Sage Grouse in the Bi-State area.

Hunting is allowed on the California side of the Bi-State Planning Area, under very conservative permit allocations, based on good lek count data. In 2003, 25 1-bird permits were issued in Long Valley and 10 1-bird permits were issued in the Bodie Hills

for a 2-day hunting season. Peripheral populations to the north in the Fales area and to the south in the White Mountains are closed to hunting because of smaller population numbers. On the Nevada side of the line, hunting of Sage Grouse has been discontinued due to low populations of Sage Grouse.

To date several projects have been identified in the planning process. The following is a summary of efforts planned to begin in 2004:

- Begin a more comprehensive sampling and analysis of genetics of Sage Grouse in peripheral areas of the Bi-State population to better understand the connectivity to other Greater Sage Grouse populations.
- Begin a telemetry study to determine lek sites, seasonal movements, genetics, and habitat use of Sage Grouse in the White Mountains, which represent the most southwestern extent of the species range.
- Develop and implement interagency fire management guidelines to protect key Sage Grouse habitats throughout the Bi-State planning area.
- Develop conservation agreements on key private lands in the Pine Nut and Desert Creek/Fales PMU's.
- Conduct pinyon/juniper removal in the vicinity of strutting grounds on the western portion of the Bodie Hills. Numbers of male Sage Grouse attending these leks has decreased in association with the diminished habitat.
- Road closures/rerouting to reduce disturbance associated with recreational activities near key strutting grounds in the Long Valley area of the South Mono PMU.

Elko County LACP – Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group (NV)

The Elko County Stewardship Group is a conservation planning group that existed prior to Governor Guinn's request for local planning efforts. Their conservation work shifted to Sage Grouse after Governor Guinn's call to action on Sage Grouse. This is one of the richest and most diverse areas of the state resource-wise. But recently, the wildlife in the northeastern part of the state have been challenged with increasing invasion of exotic species (cheat grass) and a devastating fire cycle in 1999-2000 that destroyed 1.6 million acres of range, much of it prime mule deer and Sage Grouse habitat.

Over the last 10 years, NDOW has implemented restoration work on nearly 40,000 acres in the western portion of the county where the wildfire and cheat grass issue has impacted nearly 90% of historic deer winter range in one mule deer management area. Almost all of this project work is within historic or existing Sage Grouse habitat. The overarching goal of many of these projects is to reestablish sagebrush in areas where wildfires have effectively eliminated this essential element of mule deer and Sage Grouse habitat. Costs associated with these projects have exceeded \$1,000,000. With collaborative efforts involving BLM, USFS and private landowners, NDOW has taken an active role in the rehabilitation of important sagebrush habitats following wildfires. Over the last four years, NDOW has spent over \$250,000 in Elko County in efforts to restore sagebrush to 30,000 acres impacted by fire, all of which have value to Sage Grouse.

In addition, data collection efforts on Elko County Sage Grouse populations have been increased to better quantify the birds' population on trend leks in the area.

Additional population inventory work has been conducted on a frequent basis with Elko BLM. A significant effort has been undertaken during the last several years to identify new Sage Grouse strutting grounds using GIS models to predict lek locations. Both helicopter and ground surveys have been employed to identify new leks, using both volunteer labor and agency personnel. This continuing collaborative effort between agencies has allowed BLM/NDOW personnel to visit nearly 1,500 leks and identify nearly 300 new leks over the last four years in Elko County alone.

Elko County's Sage Grouse conservation planning effort relies to a great degree upon a willing partnership with the local BLM District and US Forest Service District Offices. To date, habitat and population inventories are being conducted collaboratively, and Sage Grouse conservation efforts are being integrated into the federal land use planning documents as they are developed. As part of one study, the Hubbard Vineyard Allotment in northeastern Elko County, BLM implemented holistic management practices to shift grazing activity during the critical nesting season for Sage Grouse. Data from this study and others may help formulate a knowledge base for future management actions. The US Forest Service in the area has incorporated Greater Sage Grouse into the region's list of sensitive species, and has identified Sage Grouse as a management indicator species. The Forest Service reseeded 3,000 acres in the Jarbidge Ranger District and 500 acres in the East Humboldt Range with bitter brush and sagebrush to benefit Sage Grouse and mule deer. Forest Service planning documents in the district include several recommendations to improve habitat conditions for several species, including Sage Grouse.

Private partners, such as mines provide additional funding for Sage Grouse conservation activities in northeastern Nevada. In addition to mitigating direct impacts associated with surface mining activities, creative solutions have often included off-site mitigation to address impacts to Sage Grouse and sage brush habitats. Newmont Gold has provided funding for habitat restoration on more than 8,000 acres of sage brush habitat, while various other mining partners, such as Barrick, Independence, and Bootstrap have provided for rehabilitation of another 1,300 acres of habitat for Sage Grouse as well as a number of other species.

White Pine LACP Group (NV)

The White Pine County planning group is located in far east-central Nevada near the state's border with Utah. White Pine and Lincoln County were once a joint LACP; however, because Sage Grouse conservation plans were being developed by each county's respective Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) committee, the group decided to split in mid-2003 and complete a plan covering each county's respective portion of the planning area.

The following Sage Grouse project proposals have been formulated out of the planning effort and are currently in their initial stages of development:

- Summer 2004 - Mechanical removal of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees from four springs/riparian areas to improve late brood habitat values on USFS lands.
- Summer 2004 - Establish field trial sites in south Steptoe Valley within existing crested wheatgrass seedings to evaluate various treatment methods for the reestablishment of native vegetation on 244 acres of BLM administered lands.

- Summer 2004 - Thinning of pinyon and juniper trees on approximately 800 acres to release the sagebrush/grass/forb understory in the Gleason Creek watershed. This watershed is utilized by Sage Grouse for nesting and brood rearing.
- Summer 2004 - Conduct prescribed burning (1,300 acres) and green stripping (17 miles) to diversify sagebrush age class/ structure and reduce potential for future catastrophic wildfire in known Sage Grouse habitat as well as removal of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees on BLM lands within Cave Valley.
- Summer/Fall 2004 - Construct fuel breaks in south Steptoe Valley and north White River Valley watersheds in sagebrush habitats using a variety of methods (mechanical and burning). A total of 870 acres will be treated for this project. Study plots will be developed to allow for a direct comparison of selected treatment combination. Seeding will be done post-treatment with native species only.
- Spring 2004/2005 - Radio collar approximately 16 Sage Grouse and conduct follow-up telemetry to delineate seasonal ranges, reveal nesting habits and verify PMU boundaries. NDOW/BLM cooperative effort.
- 2003 through 2007 - Restore/improve 6,000 acres of sagebrush steppe vegetation in Great Basin National Park. Mechanically thin encroaching pinyon trees to release remnant understory vegetation. Reintroduce fire as a natural disturbance to maintain and enhance sagebrush steppe and savannah communities in areas that were once seasonal Sage Grouse habitat.
- 2006 – Treat 1,000 acres of pinyon/juniper invaded sagebrush habitat on USFS lands. This project is part of a multi state research experiment to evaluate treatment and restoration methods and will be conducted through the Rocky Mountain Research Station of the USFS.
- 2005 through 2008 - Revision of USFS grazing allotment plans to update range standards to better provide for the needs of Sage Grouse.

Other projects have occurred in recent years, unrelated to the Sage Grouse planning process, which could have benefits to Sage Grouse. These would include watershed assessment by the BLM and the Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition, removal of tress from springs and associated riparian habitats on public land, and strip treatment of thick sagebrush followed by seeding on private land Sage Grouse habitat.

Lincoln County LACP Group (NV)

Lincoln County is located in southeastern Nevada and is considered the southernmost distribution of Sage Grouse within the state. The Lincoln County Sage Grouse Conservation Plan was prepared by the Lincoln County Sage Grouse Technical Review Team under the guidance of the Lincoln County Coordinated Resource Management Steering Committee. The document is designed to utilize an adaptive management strategy in order to take advantage of all possible actions. Those involved with the Lincoln County Sage Grouse Conservation Plan felt that pilot projects should be designed, developed, and implemented so as to provide information as to levels of success as well as improving or increasing Sage Grouse habitat within the plan area.

The following projects have been identified and scheduled to be accomplished in the next five years:

- Pinyon/Juniper removal near lek sites in Little Spring Valley, Table Mountain, Eightmile, Grassy Mountain, and Fogliani Ranch areas. The objective of this project is to remove all pinion and juniper trees within 0.5 miles of existing lek sites. Most of these sites are administered by the BLM.
- Remove pinyon/juniper from several sites and seed with appropriate grass/forb mixes. Convert sites that are transitioning, or have transitioned to pinyon/juniper-dominated sites back into sagebrush grassland sites. The areas identified for removal are administered by the BLM.
- Reach and maintain wild horse Appropriate Management Levels (AML) in Herd Management Areas (HMA) and remove all wild horses not in HMA's. Examine use by wild horses in Sage Grouse habitat and make recommendations for management. This project is under the authority of the BLM under the Wild Horse and Burro Act.
- Mechanical treatment of sagebrush and subsequent seeding of grasses and forbs to diversify monotypic habitats in Little Spring Valley, Hamlin Valley, South Spring Valley, Lake Valley and Cave Valley areas. The objective of this project is to reduce cover of decadent sagebrush and re-establish native grasses and forbs, important to Sage Grouse nesting cover and forage, as part of the sagebrush plant community.
- Restore spring sites that have been inundated with pinion/juniper. Identify spring sites with adjacent pinyon/juniper woodland and determine land ownership. Conduct mechanical treatments and or prescribed fire to remove pinyon/juniper woodlands around springs.
- Seed forbs into historic crested wheat seedings. This project would involve various methods (aerial, drilling, etc.) of planting seeds or forbs into crested wheat seedings where sagebrush is re-establishing itself, but forbs are lacking.
- Improve the availability of water by creating water developments in suitable Sage Grouse habitats. At least twelve water developments are proposed in various areas throughout the Lincoln and Cave PMU's.

Washoe-Lassen-Modoc LACP Group (CA-NV-Pyramid Lake Tribe)

The Washoe-Lassen-Modoc Sage Grouse Planning group is located across Lassen County in northeastern California and Washoe County in northwestern Nevada. The regional planning group also includes the Pyramid Lake Tribe in northern Washoe County in Nevada. The Pyramid Lake Tribal Council approved a resolution in April 2003 to commit to Sage Grouse planning and coordination efforts. In addition, the tribe has worked to develop its own Tribal Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.

Overall, the Washoe-Modoc-Lassen planning approach included specific task groups for habitat conservation, private lands conservation and Sage Grouse population conservation risk assessments and corresponding conservation actions to achieve the goals and objectives of the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategies. Resource personnel conducted individual risk assessment for each population management unit (PMU), and included conservation actions planned and proposed for a five-year period. Within the specific conservation plans for each PMU, the task groups assessed each risk

and conservation measure in respect to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife (WAFWA) guideline pertinent to local conditions and restraints affecting Sage Grouse.

Private lands risk assessments were accomplished with private land mapping using Sage Grouse lek distribution and habitat overlays. The Private Lands Task Group of the Washoe-Lassen-Modoc LACP group provided a comprehensive list of private land projects to be administered by the Nevada Department of Wildlife's private lands program.

The following projects have been identified as important to the Sage Grouse conservation efforts of this planning group, and are scheduled for completion by December 24, 2004:

Population Conservation

- **Recreational Hunting:** Seasons and limits were adjusted to maintain a harvest at or below 10% of the fall population estimate.
- **Aerial Lek Discovery Surveys:** Common to all population management units, these surveys will locate and establish trend leks for population estimates and trend studies.
- **Wing Collections and Assessments:** Wings will be collected from hunts within each population management unit to determine annual recruitment to the population.
- **Predator Research:** The Grassy Camp/Hart Camp raven control project will be completed to determine the affects of raven control on Sage Grouse nesting success. Findings of this research may apply treatments to other population management units in the future.
- **Telemetry Studies:** Aerial and ground surveys on radio collared birds in the Pah Rah/Virginia Population Management Unit will continue. These data are essential to locate critical habitat on private and tribal lands within the planning unit.

Private Lands Conservation

Private lands and Sage Grouse habitat overlays are being compiled to prioritize private land incentive programs. These programs are found in the draft population management plans. Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) Tier II funding has been granted that will be used to develop conservation easements on four private lands projects where leks are pre-existing.

Habitat Conservation

Major land use plan revisions are under way in the Buffalo Hills/Skedaddle, Massacre and Vya Population Management Units of the Bureau of Land Management. These new Resource Management Plans will set the framework for project implementation by the Bureau of Land Management.

Full fire suppression to specifically delineated Sage Grouse habitats is currently the BLM policy applied to lands delineated in these conservation plans. Monitoring of sagebrush restoration of previous wild fires is ongoing to determine the proper

rehabilitation prescriptions for future wildfires. Land use revision or amendments are under way or proposed in future planning.

Wild horse gathers to appropriate management levels are under way and dependent on this year's budget.

Livestock grazing permits are being issued by comprehensive environmental assessments. Standards and Guidelines are being applied to permits that are in compliance to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Sage Grouse Guidelines. Livestock are excluded from the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge to restore and research Sage Grouse habitat restoration.

Juniper control is being considered in land use plan revisions to allow for large-scale projects to restore sagebrush communities in Massacre and Vya Population Management Areas. Past small projects are being monitored to measure the effects of the projects.

About 2, 200 acres in Lassen County were acquired in 2000 to provide sites for restoration, enhancement and protection of sage/steppe plant communities and associated wildlife species as sites for impacts of the Sierra Pacific Power Company Alturas Project (365kv power line) and the Tuscarora Gas Transmission Company Project (natural gas pipeline). Target species included Sage Grouse and pronghorn antelope. These sites are within important Sage Grouse seasonal use areas and will provide significant opportunities for enhancing sagebrush habitats.

North Central LACP Group (NV)

The North Central LACP encompasses a vast amount of area including Churchill, Pershing, and Humboldt Counties and contains a relatively high number of Population Management Units (19). Sage Grouse conservation plans have been completed for four PMU's and drafts have been completed for three other PMU's. The North Central LACP group has a prioritized list of PMU plans to accomplish in the future and will continue their efforts accordingly.

Four PMU plans have been completed to date within this LACP. The following are highlighted projects proposed for implementation:

Lone Willow PMU

- Establish wide green-strips of low flammability perennial grasses between cheatgrass areas and unburned sagebrush/grass habitat types that provide important Sage Grouse habitat in the Lone Willow PMU.
- In 2004, initiate a survey of all roads, disturbed areas, water sources and streams, meadows, camp areas, stock handling facilities, and other areas where noxious weeds are likely to establish within the Lone Willow PMU. Select a random sample of additional upland sites for survey. For all populations found develop a strategic treatment plan following the principles of integrated weed management.
- Within the Lone Willow PMU, revise BLM resource management plans to identify key Sage Grouse habitat locations as high priority suppression sites, and ensure local and regional suppression organizations know where these sites are located.
- Minerals staff in the Winnemucca Field Office will provide the wildlife and range management specialists quarterly updates about exploration activities (including

new mining claims) so that BLM and NDOW can develop pre-activity review/planning meetings with mining companies to identify potential effects to Sage Grouse early in the planning process, and develop mining/exploration operational plans that minimize/prevent adverse impacts to Lone Willow's Sage Grouse population.

Clan Alpine PMU

- Over the next five years, map areas of monotypic sagebrush to help identify areas that would benefit from mechanical or prescribed treatments within the Clan Alpine PMU. Projects will be coordinated between BLM, NDOW, and the livestock operator and will be designed to create a mosaic of different age classes of sagebrush and increase the amount of herbaceous material for the benefit of Sage Grouse.
- Over the next five years, document the amount of pinyon/juniper encroachment in the Clan Alpine PMU through the use of aerial photographs and other mapping sources to help identify areas for future treatment. Protection of important R-0 and R-2 habitats will be a priority.
- Within the Clan Alpine PMU, manage livestock utilization in nesting and early brood rearing habitat to leave sufficient herbaceous height to provide hiding cover for nests and young chicks.
- Over the next five years within the Clan Alpine PMU, attempt to capture and radio telemeter 15 Sage Grouse and monitor the birds movements over the life of the transmitters to help identify seasonal movements and habitat use.

Desatoya PMU

- Conduct the BLM proposed riparian protection projects in Smith and Topia Canyons in 2004. The projects are designed to protect and restore critical meadow and riparian habitats.
- Design and implement Sage Grouse habitat enhancement projects in the Haypress Meadows area by 2006. The projects are aimed at enhancing critical Sage Grouse upland and meadow habitats (R-0). The BLM, NDOW, and livestock operator will work together in the design of the project to ensure that the movement or management of livestock within the allotment will not be impacted.
- Design and implement the private lands habitat enhancement project in Porter Canyon by 2004. Proposed treatments include pinyon/juniper removal, erosion control, and the re-seeding of areas following treatment. Meadow and riparian fencing has been completed.
- Over the next five years, attempt to capture and radio telemeter 15 to 20 Sage Grouse to determine if the population is migratory or non-migratory and if it is part of a larger metapopulation. Tracking of the bird's movements would help increase the knowledge and understanding of the current distribution and key habitats for Sage Grouse within the PMU. The effort will also help determine if habitats are fragmented or are still intact.

East Range PMU

- Over the next five years, capture 10 Sage Grouse and outfit them with radio telemetry collars. Monitor the bird's movements for up to two years to identify

- critical habitats and learn more about current distribution of Sage Grouse in the PMU. Use the results to design and implement projects designed to protect, improve and increase the quantity and quality of those habitats.
- Over the next two years, amend the Winnemucca District's Fire Plan (BLM) to call for "full suppression" in Sage Grouse habitat. Due to the likelihood of cheatgrass invasion and the loss of sagebrush habitats from fire, prescribed burns shall be analyzed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that important Sage Grouse habitats are protected.

South Central LACP Group (NV)

The South Central Planning Group is located in south-central Nevada and covers an extensive area including Eureka, Lander and Nye Counties. The group meets monthly and is following the outline provided by the Nevada Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team. Highlights of the projects to be undertaken as part of the local area plan include:

- Telemetry Project-19 birds were captured and collared in 2003. Regular tracking have resulted in valuable information being gathered relative to predation, winter range and over-all movement.
- Late Summer Brood Rearing Habitat-inspection of high country riparian meadows near Battle Mountain has resulted in a cooperative agreement between the BLM, private landowners and BLM permittees to renovate 3 meadows. The renovation includes weed control, fencing and grazing plans.

In addition, a number of projects conducted by the Battle Mountain Field Office of the BLM and the US Forest Service in past years have positively impacted Sage Grouse habitat in Eureka, Lander and Nye Counties.

Information Items

Funding Obtained for Sage Grouse Conservation Efforts

The Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan effort has been a cooperative effort funded and supported by state and federal agencies as well as tribes and volunteers. Pitman Robertson and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants have assisted the state agencies with funding the conservation planning and monitoring efforts necessary to formulate a comprehensive plan. Federal agencies including the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have also provided funding and personnel time to this effort. In addition, funding to implement the Sage Grouse plan on private lands has been established through grants from the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) among others.

Nevada received LIP Tier I grants for 2003 to begin a private lands program as well as fund a private lands coordinator position. Additionally, in a cooperative effort between the California Department of Fish and Game and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, LIP Tier II grant funding was received for 2004 to purchase conservation easements on private lands along the border of Nevada and California that afford key habitat to Sage Grouse habitat including important strutting ground sites.

The BLM has provided substantial support with regards to monitoring efforts and on-the ground actions in the form of habitat improvement through monies obtained from Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) and Challenge Cost Share funds. Challenge Cost Share monies obtained through the Winnemucca District of the BLM have supported the Nevada Department of Wildlife's aerial lek survey program in important Sage Grouse habitats such as the Lone Willow and Santa Rosa PMU's in Humboldt County. The Elko District of the BLM has used BAER funds to determine the level of use and impacts to Sage Grouse strutting grounds from wildfire in Elko County.

In addition, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's WHIP program funded \$47,851 in conservation efforts on two projects to develop Sage Grouse habitat. A project near Cave Valley in northern Lincoln County reduced overgrown sagebrush canopy and reseeded a 578-acre tract to encourage grasses and forbs for improved nesting cover for Sage Grouse. Another project in Lander County in the Desatoya Range applied brush management to 51 acres to reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment, and to fence a wet meadow to improve Sage Grouse brood rearing habitat. In the future, additional WHIP funding may become available for Sage Grouse conservation work.

Volunteer Participation Integral to Overall Sage Grouse Planning Effort

Since January of 2000, Nevada's Sage Grouse conservation effort has relied extensively on volunteers for both planning efforts and Sage Grouse strutting ground ("lek") counts. Over the past four years, 176 volunteers have participated on the Governor's Sage Grouse Team, as part of the local area planning groups, and in conducting Sage Grouse lek counts, where valuable data is collected identifying the range of the bird. Volunteer time and effort has served as state match for federal funding, with nearly 7,000 hours volunteered at a value of \$210,800 since January 2000. In addition, volunteers donated 81,813 miles on their vehicles to traverse the state for meetings and Sage Grouse projects.

The Sage Grouse planning effort has taken wing in Nevada, but only due to the extraordinary effort of a number of citizens who have committed themselves to conserving the bird and its habitat. This has not only been beneficial to the bird, but has been a valuable experience for those citizens who have participated in the volunteer program, allowing them to gain knowledge about Sage Grouse, its habitat, and conservation issues facing the species.

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NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

The planning process is underway and progressing well. Initial meetings of concerned and involved agencies (United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, North Dakota Game and Fish Department) began in August 2001. Subsequent meetings held through August 2003 were expanded to include the Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Dakota State Land Department, and National Wildlife Federation. North Dakota has now joined South Dakota to complete the planning process in cooperation with WAFWA guidelines established by the USFWS, PECE policy document. Writing of the plan is under contract with North Dakota, South Dakota, and the WAFWA National Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team contributing. The plan is due to be completed by 1 July 2004.

Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

Sage Grouse range in North Dakota is limited to approximately 800 square miles. Thus one local working group is all that is necessary to solicit and involve the public. Upon completion of the draft, a local working group will be formed to implement projects under guidelines suggested by the plan.

WAFWA Cooperation

North Dakota is a member of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and a signatory to the MOU between member states with regard to conservation and management of Greater Sage Grouse in North America. North Dakota has attended and been a member of the Western States Sage Grouse Technical Committee and has hosted a meeting in the past. North Dakota continues to work with WAFWA and has contributed funds and samples for genetic diversity studies sponsored by WAFWA and now has contracted, through WAFWA, to have the North Dakota Sage Grouse Conservation Management Plan completed this year.

State Conservation Efforts

Lek Count Surveys

Spring lek counts and surveys were initiated by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in 1951. Since that time surveys and counts have been made all but two years (1960, 1962). Sage Grouse are found in western Bowman, western Slope and southern Golden Valley counties in North Dakota. In preparation of the Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats (April, 2004) all past survey data were reviewed and summarized. The entire Sage Grouse range was surveyed by air in 1980 and 2000. Portions of the range will be flown (surveyed) in coming years to search for new leks and locate leks that have moved. The rugged Sage Grouse terrain is not conducive to thorough ground surveys but lek counts from the ground are possible.

Wintering Sage Grouse Surveys

Winter survey data were gathered by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department during early years of study (late 1940's, early 1950's). Little has been done since that time. In 2004, plans are to use aerial surveys to locate and map big sagebrush habitat, followed by a Sage Grouse population survey during winter 2004-5.

Sage Grouse Harvest

The Sage Grouse hunting season in North Dakota was closed after the 1922 hunting season. Prior to closure, Sage Grouse were included with sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens for an annual prairie grouse season. Thus seasons and limits were liberal. The season was closed until 1964, but has been open each year since then except for 1979. Seasons and limits have been very restrictive, with the daily bag limit never exceeding one bird. Seasons have been closely monitored, with personnel actively in the field during the entire season, use of hunter survey cards, wing collections, and annual hunter questionnaires. During the past 10 years wing collections have averaged 24/year and harvest has averaged 42 Sage Grouse per year. In 2003, samples were collected from five harvested Sage Grouse and sent in for West Nile Virus testing. All samples were negative.

Research

North Dakota recently partnered with South Dakota, United States Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management to obtain information on big sagebrush steppe habitats and associated bird life in the Sage Grouse range of both North and South Dakota. Two theses have been produced, *Greater Sage Grouse on the Edge of Their Range: Leks and Surrounding Landscapes in the Dakotas*, and *Sagebrush Steppe Habitats and their Associated Bird Species in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wyoming: Life on the Edge of the Sagebrush Ecosystem*. Several papers are in preparation for publication based on these studies. Turnover of University personnel delayed further studies, but negotiations are now underway to continue these studies with emphasis on Sage Grouse population data, including movements, winter range, and nesting habitat.

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OREGON

Oregon's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

The statewide conservation plan (Plan) for Sage Grouse in Oregon is comprised of two parts: 1) a population and habitat assessment, and 2) an implementation strategy. The population and habitat assessment will identify the primary challenges and opportunities for Sage Grouse conservation in the state. This part of the Plan is nearing completion, and an internal review is scheduled for early May. The implementation strategy will identify (propose) regional working groups where specific conservation strategies can be put into practice and evaluated. A series of public scoping meetings have been scheduled for May 2004 in a number of the areas identified as potential working group locations. The Plan is scheduled to be released for public comment by early September 2004. Once the Plan is finalized, regional working groups and conservation projects should be initiated by early 2005.

Partnerships Established

The Oregon Sage Grouse and Sagebrush Habitat Conservation Team is a cooperative alliance of governmental and private entities organized to develop a conservation strategy for Sage Grouse and their habitats. The final draft of the Plan outlined above will be agreed upon by all members of the Team. This partnership was established in 2001 and contains the following membership:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Chair)
Oregon Division of State Lands
USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Refuges
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Ecological Services
Oregon State University – Range Science
Oregon State University - Fisheries and Wildlife Science
John Day/Snake Resource Advisory Council
SE Oregon Resource Advisory Council
Private Landowner Representative (Currently the National Cattlemen's Beef Assoc)

Implementation of Projects

State Efforts

Several actions have been implemented during 2000-present to further the understanding of Sage Grouse populations in Oregon and sagebrush shrub-steppe habitats upon which these birds depend. These actions include:

- conducting multi-year helicopter surveys,

- establishing the Team,
- completing the *Sage Grouse Problem Analysis*,
- developing the *Interim Management Guidelines for BLM lands*,
- hiring a full-time Conservation Planner,
- completing a relational database of lek survey data,
- cooperatively creating a GIS based map of Sage Grouse habitat.
- created statewide summary of production inventory data
- compiled statewide summary of population data derived from "Wing Bees"

Since spring 2000, systematic helicopter surveys have been conducted to increase the accuracy of Sage Grouse distribution in Oregon. The surveys are ongoing but to date have resulted in 319 hrs of flight time, covering 3,949 mi², and 50 potential new leks have been found. The Team established a charter, by-laws, and approved an outline for the conservation strategy. It is within this framework that the Plan timelines are as stringent as they are. Completed in 2002, the purpose of the *Problem Analysis* was to summarize current knowledge on Sage Grouse, identify knowledge gaps and provide direction for future research. Concurrent with these efforts a multi-stakeholder group (including several of those represented by the Team) developed an interim strategy *Greater Sage Grouse and Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines*, for managing Sage Grouse on BLM administered land in Oregon and Washington.

In 2003, conservation activities included: ODFW hired a full-time staff person for Sage Grouse planning; BLM and ODFW developed a relational database of Sage Grouse lek site and survey information, and created an Oregon Sage Grouse habitat map. These data are integral to the Plan.

As indicated above, several projects are scheduled for completion in 2004 with regard to the Plan itself. Additionally, on a local scale ODFW will be collaborating with U.S. FWS at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge on an upland game bird brood habitat project that will enhance riparian and mesic meadow vegetation as brood foraging sites.

Local Efforts

The following compilation of projects is a small sample of the type of projects farmers and rancher are implementing in the counties round the state of Oregon containing Greater Sage Grouse habitat. This list is in no way all inclusive but was solely developed to illustrate the efforts private land managers are putting forth in managing their lands and in so doing benefiting the habitat occupied by Sage Grouse.

Baker County

- Baker County producers have been involved in juniper control effort in the Burnt River area. This is both cutting juniper, and utilizing them for "rip rap" on a stream. In addition, all Taylor grazing funds have gone for rangeland weed control for approximately the last 10 years. These projects were not geared directly at Sage Grouse management, but these projects meet several resource goals have positive impacts on Sage Grouse habitat.

Crook County

- A group of four ranchers in South Crook County developed and implemented a weed management plan to eradicate 300 acres of noxious weeds listed on the state's class 'A' noxious weed list. By controlling this noxious weed, habitat is restored to a more natural and productive level increasing Sage Grouse habitat.
- A group of Crook County ranchers implemented a reseeding project on 750 acres of rangeland increasing productivity and enhancing habitat attributes.
- The development of 12 springs by 4 Crook County ranchers will help increase livestock distribution on their privately managed grazing lands. Water developments not only increase livestock distribution but also benefit wildlife.
- A group of Crook County livestock producers installed 50 miles of pipeline providing additional watering sites to several hundred acres of rangeland pasture. These water developments provide various rotational grazing options and the ability to more intensively manage livestock on these sites.
- Through the collaboration of 8 different ranchers, a juniper removal project was implemented and 10,000 acres of juniper was removed in Crook County. A project of this magnitude will undoubtedly have significant results on the restoration of these ecosystems.

Deschutes County

- Three Deschutes County ranchers developed 6 off site watering sites and have increased livestock distribution and management on their rangeland pasture.

Harney County

- Harney county producers have been active in at least 2500 acres of private land juniper control. Juniper control will ultimately provide positive results for Sage Grouse habitat.
- Several Harney County producers have been involved in implementing controlled burns in the mountain big sage sites and will help create more diverse habitat mosaics in the older decadent stands.
- Longer term management changes made by nearly all livestock producers in Harney County are giving the grass a chance to succeed, especially in the riparian areas. Alterations in these management practices will hopefully result in increased habitat availability for Sage Grouse.

Lake County

- As one Lake County rancher states. As we manage our land for the benefit of livestock and wildlife, we've seen an improvement in Sage Grouse habitat, and an increase in Sage Grouse numbers. Some of our land management practices include:
 - Rest rotation grazing
 - Development and maintenance of water holes
 - Distribution of water via pipelines

- Maintaining safe water sources for Sage Grouse by eliminating perches for predators
- Spraying brush where too much large sage exists
- The management of the O’Keeffe Ranch believes that often good range management results in good Sage Grouse conservation. Some of the recent things that we have done that enhance Sage Grouse habitat are:
 - In 1996, 97, and 98 a cost share project with the NRCS 324 acres of sagebrush rangeland in the Barley Camp area was mechanically cleared of juniper.
 - In 1998 another 300 acres of sagebrush rangeland in the Pope Springs area was treated with a controlled burn, this removed invading juniper and encouraged more herbaceous vegetation.
 - In the falls of 2001 and 02 meadow stabilization was done with check dams to approximately 500 acres of meadows in the 2500 acre sagebrush rangeland pasture that the O’Keeffe Ranch had recently acquired adjoining Sagehen Butte.
- Cahill Ranch private land practices aid Sage Grouse populations. The largest project which Cahill Ranch has implemented was juniper removal in the long canyon area south of Adel. In a joint effort with the NRCS, approximately 60 acres of juniper around a spring were removed with a caterpillar loader. This spring which would go dry in the hot days of July and August will now run a year round flow.
- In this same area in union with the BLM, a controlled burn was completed on the private and public lands of the west pasture of the Round Mountain allotment. Approximately 2000 acres plus were treated in an effort to control the encroaching juniper in this area.
- Tucker Hills is an area of private and public land that has substantial encroachment of medusahead rye as well as 2 active Sage Grouse leks. In 2001 OSU Extension, BLM, ODFW and the private landowners started a medusahead control project to benefit wintering deer, Sage Grouse and livestock. To date we have only worked on private land because of the BLM spray injunction but the plan is a cooperative project that crosses ownership’s.
- Beaty Butte Sage Grouse Research. From 1999 through 2003 several individuals cooperated in the chick mortality study run by Mike Gregg. In that study there were 3 study areas, Hart, Beaty Butte and Sheldon. The Beaty Butte study area had a field camp for the research crew located at South Corral Spring which is owned by the Beaty Butte Grazing Association (private). The grazing association was very helpful throughout the field work by providing a site for the base camp and water as well as helping crew members access various parts of the study area.

Malheur County

- Malheur County producers have made modifications to some windmill wells by replacing them with solar pumps. Water will then be piped to troughs as well as fenced ponds which will be seeded accordingly for wildlife habitat. Two windmills have been modified but there are multiple ponds and troughs being developed covering approximately 4000 acres.

- Several Malheur County producers are implementing riparian protection buffer zones that will include some upland seeding. This project involves approximately 2 miles of stream in 2 different pastures with a fenced buffer about 100 feet wide. The upland re-vegetation project will enhance approximately 400 acres.
- A Juniper control project in Ironside has accommodated the removal of 200-300 acres of Juniper.
- A wildlife protection project has been implemented by a Malheur County rancher. The project included fencing of rangeland and development of a series of small ponds for wildlife. It also included rangeland seeding of 20 acres of irrigated land and 20 acres of dryland cropland.

Measurable Results and Trends

Sage Grouse populations in Oregon appear to have been stable since the early 1980s. This is based on two types of data: the average number of males/lek and an annual rate of change in lek size for leks with greater than 2 years of observations. Both data sets indicate no significant change in spring population trend for the time period. However, the production (Chick/Female ratios from the harvest data) trend has been increasing since 1993. Combined, these data suggest that the Oregon Sage Grouse population is stable and likely in an upward trend in the population cycle.

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SOUTH DAKOTA



South Dakota's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

The planning process is well underway and drafts of 3 sections of the plan are already out for peer review. The planning effort is being completed in cooperation with WAFWA under guidelines established by the USF&WS, PECE Policy document. The final plan draft is expected to be completed by July 1, 2004. The draft plan will be submitted by the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (SDGSP) for public review and comment. Plan documents will reflect regional cooperation with the states of North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana.

Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

Plans are also underway for the formulation of one or two "local working groups" or Consolidated Resource Management Groups that can plan and implement projects for Sage Grouse and Sage Steppe habitat conservation in South Dakota's primary Sage Grouse Range under guidelines established in the state Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.

Partnerships Established

As a member of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and a signatory to the MOU between member states of WAFWA with regard to the conservation and management of Sage Grouse in North America, South Dakota is actively networking with WAFWA, adjoining states, and members of the Interagency Sage Grouse Conservation Framework Team, to advance Sage Grouse and Sage Steppe conservation planning and conservation work. South Dakota has attended WAFWA Sage Grouse Workshops, technical committee meetings and training and Symposiums designed to address Sage Grouse issues across their range.

Implementation of Projects

Lek Count Surveys: Spring surveys of male and female Sage Grouse have been conducted in South Dakota periodically over the past 30 years. Primary survey areas include Butte and Harding Counties. Lek activity data has accumulated since 1972. In preparation for a comprehensive Sage Grouse planning effort, a thorough review, consolidation, and reorganization of lek count data was conducted in December 2003 through March of 2004. A better grasp of Sage Grouse lek density and distribution was obtained and documented. A comprehensive lek count survey is being conducted during the spring of 2004 in Butte, Harding and Fall River Counties to better clarify population estimates and distribution.

Wintering Sage Grouse: Attempts have been made during the winter of 2003/2004 and will continue in future years, to identify Sage Grouse wintering areas. Some data was collected in February of 2004 in Harding County. A comprehensive lek, wintering and brood habitat map will be further developed during 2004 through 2008 to help further identify critical Sage Grouse range in the state.

Aerial lek Census: Aerial flights will be conducted in April 2004 to confirm locations of active leks in Butte and Harding Counties and attempt to identify new or

historical leks that have not been surveyed in several years. Aerial flights will also be conducted in Fall River County to identify leks or populations of birds that have not been surveyed. The only known active lek in Fall River county was inactive during the spring of 2003 but several sightings of Sage Grouse in the area tend to suggest that the lek or leks have moved. Attempts will be made to locate and survey displaying male Sage Grouse during the spring of 2004.

Fall Sage Grouse Bag Check: Hunter Bag checks of harvested Sage Grouse have been conducted since 2000 and will continue as long as South Dakota has a Sage Grouse hunting season. The Sage Grouse season runs for two days on public lands in Harding and parts of Butte counties. The bag limit is one bird. The season provides an opportunity for bag checks to provide harvest data, and sex and age composition data. Biological samples are collected for DNA work being conducted at the University of Denver and West Nile Virus testing that is being conducted at the University of Wyoming.

Research

SDGFP recently funded research studies on big sagebrush steppe habitats and associated bird and mammal species in western South Dakota. The work was contracted to the Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences Department at South Dakota State University. Two students participated in the study. Joe Smith conducted an M.S. study to investigate Sage Grouse leks and surrounding habitats in western North and South Dakota. Smith found a steady decline in Sage Grouse numbers as determined by lek surveys in South Dakota from 1972-2002 and an apparent abandonment of areas along the eastern edge of the species' active breeding range in the state. Smith found that sagebrush density appears to positively affect lek size in the Dakotas. Amy Lewis is nearing completion of a PhD dissertation on sagebrush steppe habitats and associated bird species in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wyoming. Lewis documented 33 bird species on transects through sagebrush habitats in South Dakota. Lewis recommended periodic monitoring of vegetation and land use trends in sagebrush habitats to accommodate sagebrush obligates, such as Sage Grouse, Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, and sage sparrow. Tim Mullican of Dakota Wesleyan University conducted small mammal surveys in sagebrush habitats in South Dakota. Final results of the small mammal surveys have not yet been received by SDGFP. The project will formally conclude on June 30, 2004.

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UTAH

Executive Summary

Sage Grouse, sagehen and sage chicken, are all common names used when referring to Utah's largest native grouse; a gallinaceous, or "chicken-like" bird, that has evolved over millennia in the vast sea of sagebrush rangeland found only in the west. Two species of Sage Grouse are found in Utah. The Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is found north and west of the Colorado River, while the Gunnison Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) is found south and east of the Colorado River, mostly in San Juan County. Sage Grouse in Utah occupy habitats from 4,000-9,000 feet in elevation in the Colorado Plateau and Great Basin geographic regions.

Based on historical accounts and observations, it's likely that Sage Grouse originally occurred in portions of all of Utah's 29 counties where there was sufficient sagebrush and grass/forb habitats to support birds. Present-day research suggests that Sage Grouse were historically found throughout some 33.2% of Utah's landscape. The Greater Sage Grouse occupied 32.2% of Utah while the Gunnison Sage Grouse was found in 1.0% of the state. Today only 13.6% of Utah's landscape is inhabited by Sage Grouse. The Greater Sage Grouse occupies 97.9% and Gunnison Sage Grouse 2.1% of this area. The current distribution of Sage Grouse represents just 40.9 % of the historical distribution of Sage Grouse in Utah. Thus, Greater and Gunnison Sage Grouse currently occupy 41.3% and 26.7 %, respectively, of their potential historical distribution.

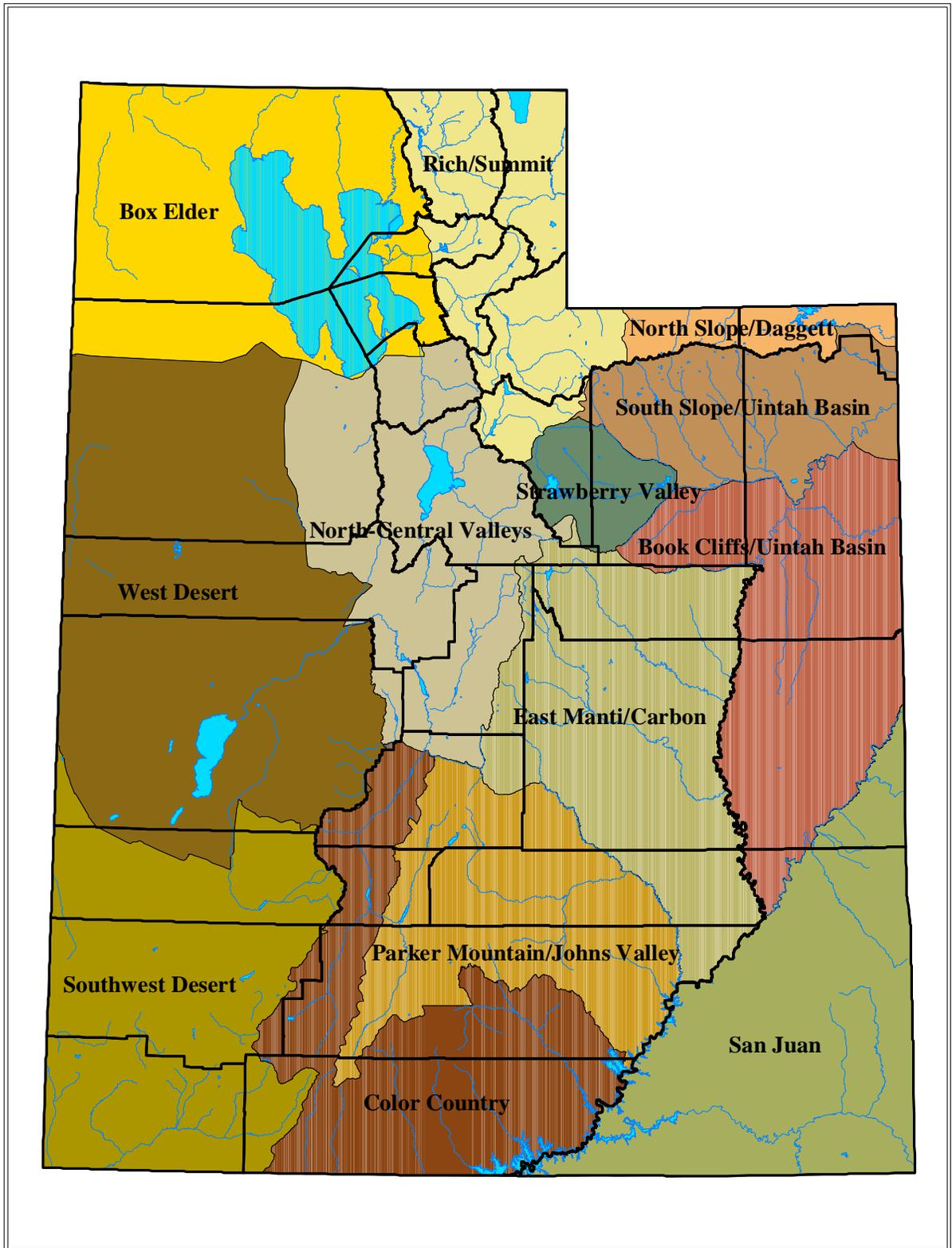
The largest Greater Sage Grouse populations in Utah are at present restricted to Blue and Diamond Mountains in Uintah County, Parker Mountain (mainly in Wayne County), Rich County, western Box Elder County, and western Garfield County.

Utah's Strategic Management Plan

In June of 2002, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Regional Advisory Councils and the Utah Wildlife Board adopted a Strategic Management Plan for Sage Grouse. The plan identifies an array of statewide Sage Grouse issues and concerns as well as strategies to be implemented for addressing issues and concerns. Within the plan, Utah is divided into 13 Sage Grouse management units based on current distribution of birds. Sage Grouse conservation issues and concerns as well as suggested strategies for addressing those issues and concerns are identified for each of the 13 management units individually.

As part of the conservation planning process outlined in the strategic management plan, Sage Grouse local working groups are being established to cover each of the 13 management units.

Utah's Sage Grouse Management Units



Sage Grouse Local Working Groups

Local working groups are basically committees made up of local private citizens, farmers, ranchers, grazers and local grazing associations, local community leaders, county commissioners, local state senators and representatives, county extension agents, university personnel, conservation organizations, and state and federal natural resources management agency personnel. Sage Grouse local working groups are tasked with completing local Sage Grouse conservation plans that not only meet the needs of Sage Grouse, but also the economic, political and social needs of local communities.

Beginning in spring of 2001, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and Utah State University Extension Services partnered to establish a full-time position called a Community-based Conservation Extension Specialist (CCES). The role of the CCES is to establish, facilitate and maintain Sage Grouse local working groups to cover each of the 13 management units identified in the strategic management plan. When fully implemented, there will be a total of 11 local working groups that will cover the 13 Sage Grouse management units.

To date, nine Sage Grouse local working groups have been established in the following management units: 1) Box Elder (began August 2001); 2) Color Country (began November 2001); 3) Parker Mountain/John's Valley (began February 1998); 4) Rich/Summit (began December 2002); 5) San Juan (began May 1997); 6) Strawberry Valley (began May 2003); 7) Southwest Desert (began November 2001); 8) Uintah Basin which encompasses North Slope/Daggett, South Slope/ Uintah Basin and Book Cliffs/Uintah Basin management units (began November 2003) and 9) West Desert (began November 2003). Established local working groups are in various stages of completing local Sage Grouse conservation plans. Local working groups should be pulled together and meeting in the East Manti/Carbon and North Central Valleys management units in the near future.

The crux of Sage Grouse local working groups is to bring local people together to work cooperatively to benefit Sage Grouse and benefit local communities that could potentially be affected by Sage Grouse management issues; including the possibility of the birds being listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Local working groups strive for consensus in their community decisions. In many Sage Grouse management units, on-the-ground university graduate students, conducting experiments and research, are able to provide the local working group with timely population and habitat data. The data is used by the local working group to make educated and informed decisions based on science rather than hearsay or anecdotal information.

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WASHINGTON

Executive Summary

The Sage Grouse was listed as a threatened species by the state of Washington in 1998. In May 2001, the Washington population of the Sage Grouse also became a Candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) found that listing as Threatened was warranted but precluded by higher priority listing activities. The state's State Recovery Plan summarizes the state of knowledge of Sage Grouse in Washington and outlines strategies to increase their population size and distribution in order to ensure the existence of a viable population of the species in the state.

The Sage Grouse has been declining in Washington and many parts of its range in North America. The reduction in Sage Grouse numbers and distribution in Washington is primarily attributed to loss of habitat through conversion to cropland and degradation of habitat by historic overgrazing and the invasion by cheatgrass and noxious weeds. Sage Grouse occur on about 8% of their historical range in the state. The population is estimated to have declined 62% from 1970 to 2003. Local extirpations have been noted as recently as the 1980's. The statewide breeding population of Sage Grouse in Washington in 2003 was estimated to be 1,011 birds. This estimate is based on leks counts of males, and probably is an underestimate.

Washington's Sage Grouse Recovery Plan

The State Recovery Plan was completed May 2004: The recovery plan is available on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife web site at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/diversty/soc/recovery/sage_grouse/index.htm.

Implementation of Projects

Translocation into the Yakima Training Center population

With the cooperation of Nevada Department of Wildlife. There were 25 hens were translocated from Nevada to the Yakima Training Center in Yakima County Washington. Genetic data indicated that the 2 Washington populations, and the Yakima population in particular, have undergone a genetic bottleneck, and a infusion of out-of-state birds would help restore normal genetic diversity. The birds are being monitored and additional birds will be introduced next year if necessary.

Feasibility Assessment for Reintroduction on the Yakama Reservation

Habitat mapping and a feasibility assessment has been conducted for the Yakama Reservation. The final report has not been released, but results indicate that sufficient habitat probably exists to support a reintroduced population.

Foster Creek Habitat Conservation Plan

The Foster Creek Conservation District represents many of the agricultural land owners in Douglas County with lands that support the other Sage Grouse population. The district is completing an HCP that will include coverage for Sage Grouse.

Range-wide genetic analysis of sub-specific taxonomy

Washington provided samples and contributed to a range-wide genetic analysis of specific and sub-specific taxonomy in Sage Grouse.

Shrub-steppe restoration

Several shrub-steppe restoration projects are underway or planned in Washington, including on the Hanford Reach National Monument, the Yakima Training Center, and on lands owned by BLM, The Nature Conservancy, and WDFW. Many more restoration projects will be needed before Sage Grouse will be recovered in Washington.

Range-wide conservation assessment

Mike Schroeder is involved in the preparation of the range-wide conservation assessment being completed by WAFWA.

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WYOMING

Executive Summary

People involved in the Sage Grouse issue have initiated conservation planning efforts focused on outlining what is required to sustain or perpetuate populations. Wyoming elected to create this comprehensive statewide document, with locally developed plans to follow. The Wyoming strategy focuses on implementation by local working groups. In the absence of plans developed at local levels, goals and tasks and Recommended Management Practices (RMPs) should guide planning and management efforts.

Using the concepts of rangeland health as a management philosophy (National Academy of Sciences 1994) should lead to a more balanced rangeland ecosystem, including a mosaic of seral stages beneficial to the Greater Sage Grouse.

Wyoming's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

In July of 2000, the Wyoming Sage Grouse Working Group was formed to develop a statewide strategy for conservation of Sage Grouse in Wyoming. After an organizational meeting June 21, 2000, potentially affected interests submitted names of potential representatives that would be acceptable to the interest groups. The working group was then selected and consisted of 18 Wyoming citizens from diverse backgrounds including agricultural, industrial, governmental, environmental, hunting, and Native American tribal interests.

Group Members Included:

Linda Baker, Pinedale; Larry Bourret, Laramie; Joel Bousman, Boulder; Tim Byer, Douglas; Tom Christiansen, Green River; Joe Evans, Cheyenne; Bill Gerhart, Cheyenne; Larry Hayden-Wing, Laramie; Larry Knoch, Rawlins; Don Lamborn, Kemmerer; Bruce Lawson, Casper; John Marton, Buffalo; Tom Rinkes, Lander; Stacey Scott, Casper; Albert Sommers, Pinedale; Renee Taylor, Casper; Western Thayer, Ft. Washakie; and Mark Winland, Gillette. The facilitator was Bob Budd.

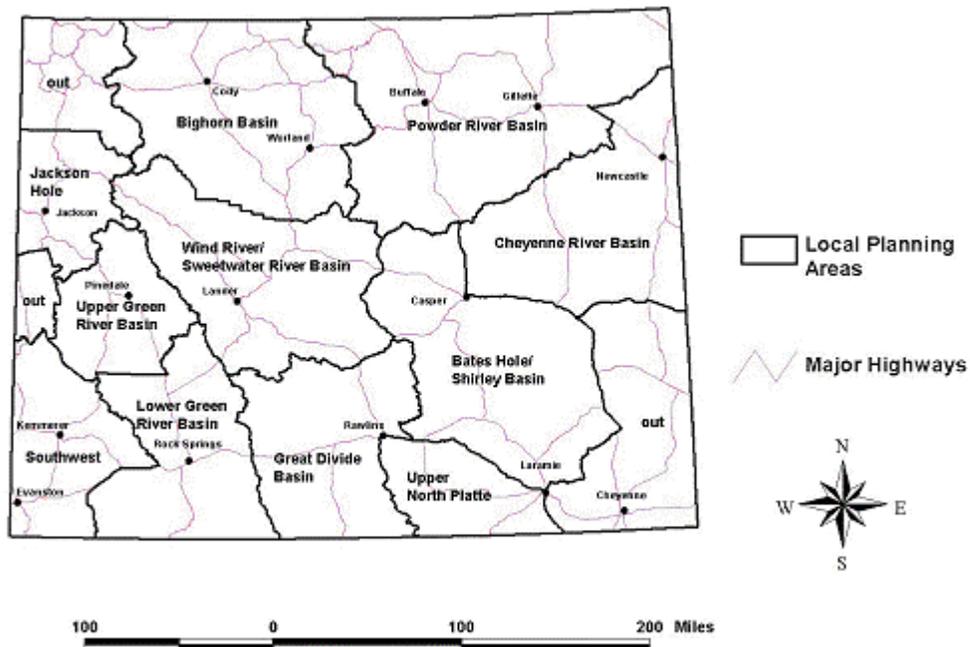
Many others participated in several meetings and their contributions to the planning efforts were significant. The group had numerous meetings, all open to the public and publicized via Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) news releases and the WGFD website.

The Sage Grouse Working Group drafted the Wyoming Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan and submitted it to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in July 2002. A 60 day public comment period followed and the resulting comments were directed back to the working group for consideration. In May 2003, a final draft of the plan was presented to the commission, which formally adopted the document in June 2003.

Status of Local Working Groups

The statewide working group recommended eleven local working groups be formed as shown in Figure 1. In 2004, local working group(s) should be formed in Upper Green River Basin, Powder River Basin, and Bates Hole/Shirley Basin to address local Sage Grouse conservation plans. In 2005, additional groups should be initiated in Great Divide Basin, Wind River/Sweetwater River Basin, Lower Green River Basin, and Southwest. By 2006, local work groups should be initiated in the Upper North Platte, Bighorn Basin, Jackson Hole, and Cheyenne River.

Figure 1. Local conservation planning areas for Sage Grouse.



Local Working Groups are expected to complete the following tasks in the first two years:

- identify and prioritize issues affecting Sage Grouse in their area
- identify solutions to problems affecting Sage Grouse in their area
- develop an action plan geared toward addressing these problems
- identify priority areas for implementation of conservation actions
- identify funding sources to implement conservation actions
- recommend to private, State or Federal land managers at least one project
- provide annual updates of progress to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and other affected agencies

Partnerships Established

Parties involved in the initial statewide planning effort included: agricultural, industrial, governmental, environmental, hunting, and Native American tribal interests.

The very important partnership established is the one put together by Dr. Dave Naugle (University of Montana) to address West Nile virus issues in Sage Grouse in Wyoming, Montana and Alberta, Canada. Partners include: University of Montana, Montana State University, University of Alberta, University of Wyoming, Wyoming State Vet Lab, Wyoming Game and Fish, Bureau of Land Management (MT and WY), U.S. Geographical Survey, Wyoming Dept. of Health, Wyoming Wildlife-Livestock Disease Partnership, Petroleum Association of Wyoming, Thunderbird Wildlife Consulting, Wolf Creek Charitable Foundation, Eyas Foundation, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Wyoming has one of four members of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Sage Grouse Framework Team that comes from within its ranks.

Implementation of Projects

The State of Wyoming has made the decision that implementation will be led by the local working groups. The role of the local working groups is to adapt the statewide plan to specific local areas and develop and implement strategies that will improve or maintain Sage Grouse populations and habitats.

On-the-ground habitat projects specifically designed for Sage Grouse benefit have not yet been implemented. A priority list of projects is expected to be recommended in 2005 by the local working groups, with implementation soon to follow. Numerous range/habitat management projects have been conducted in recent years with goals and objectives other than Sage Grouse. These types of projects have increasingly recognized and considered impacts (positive and negative) to Sage Grouse.

The following items describe State of Wyoming efforts already underway or completed.

- Wyoming participated in the range-wide genetic analysis of sub-specific taxonomy by providing samples and contributing funding.
- Wyoming has hired a full-time Sage Grouse Program Coordinator, and a GIS mapping technician to complete tasks outlined in the Wyoming Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.
- Hunting seasons have been considerably more conservative in recent years to insure harvest does not prohibit the ability of Sage Grouse populations to increase when conditions allow.
- Research conducted by the University of Wyoming Cooperative Research Unit, with funding and logistical support from various sources, continues to evaluate the effects of energy development and determine range management practices most compatible with Sage Grouse production.
- Efforts to monitor Sage Grouse population trends in Wyoming have increased lek counts from 35 leks in 1994, to 447 in 2003; (a nearly 13-fold increase).

Industry's involvement in Greater Sage Grouse conservation.

These describe the myriad of stipulations, conservation measures, and studies that the oil and gas industry is currently involved with in the State of Wyoming as it pertains to the Greater Sage Grouse. This shows that industry is actively implementing conservation measures for protection of the Sage Grouse. These examples demonstrate that the protection measures have increased and become more stringent over time.

1. **Standard Stipulations:** The following stipulations have been in place since the 1980s through the various BLM Resource Management Plans:
 - a. Surface disturbance within 0.25 mile of a Sage Grouse lek will be avoided (No Surface Occupancy).
 - b. Operators will restrict construction activities from March 1 through July 31 within a 2.0-mile radius of active Sage Grouse leks in suitable Sage Grouse nesting habitat as determined during on-site reviews of proposed development (seasonal restriction).
2. **Additional Protection Measures:** The following provides examples of additional protection measures that are in place through different oil and gas development projects throughout the state:
 - a. **Green River Resource Management Plan (October 1997)**
 - i. Aboveground facilities (power lines, storage tanks, fences, etc.) are prohibited on or within ¼ mile of grouse breeding grounds (leks). Placement of facilities, “on” (very low profile) or below ground, and temporary disruptive activities, such as occur with pipeline construction seismic activity, etc., could be granted exceptions within ¼ mile of leks, in certain circumstances.
 - ii. To protect breeding grouse, disruptive activities will avoid occupied grouse leks from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m. daily. The actual area to be avoided and appropriate time frame (usually March 1 through June 15) will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
 - iii. To protect grouse nesting habitat, seasonal restrictions will apply within appropriate distances from the grouse lek. Appropriate distances (up to two miles) and time frames (usually March 1 through June 30) will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
 - b. **Pinedale Anticline Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Project (July 2000):**
 - i. To protect important raptor and/or Sage Grouse breeding/nesting habitat, activities or surface use will not be allowed from February 1 through July 31 to protect breeding and nesting within certain areas encompassed by the authorization. The same criteria apply to defined raptor and/or Sage Grouse winter concentration areas from November 15 to April 30.
 - ii. Surface disturbance within 0.25 mile of a Sage Grouse lek will be avoided. Linear disturbances such as pipelines, seismic activity, etc., could be granted exceptions.

- iii. Permanent (life of the project), high profile structures such as buildings and storage tanks will not be constructed within 0.25 miles of a lek.
 - iv. During the Sage Grouse mating season, from March 1 through May 15, surface uses and activities will not be allowed between the hours of midnight and 9:00 a.m., within a 0.5-mile radius of active leks.
 - v. Operators will restrict construction activities from March 1 through July 31 within a 2.0-mile radius of active Sage Grouse leks in suitable Sage Grouse nesting habitat as determined during on-site review of proposed development areas. If an active nest is located, an appropriate buffer area will be established on a case-by-case basis to prevent direct loss of the nest or indirect impacts from human-related disturbance. The appropriate buffer distance will vary, depending on topography, type of activity proposed, and duration of disturbance.
 - vi. If active Sage Grouse strutting or nesting is identified in an area proposed for disturbance, which is outside the dates of March 1 through July 31, surface-disturbing activities will be delayed in the area until strutting or nesting is completed.
 - vii. If existing information is not current, field evaluations for Sage Grouse leks and/or nests will be conducted by a qualified biologist (paid for by industry) prior to the start of activities in potential Sage Grouse habitat. These evaluations for leks and/or nests will be conducted if project activities area planned in potential Sage Grouse habitat between February 1 through July 31. BLM wildlife biologists will ensure that such surveys are conducted using proper survey methods.
- c. Decision Record and FONSI for the Atlantic Rim Interim Drilling Project, Doty Mountain (February 2004):
- i. Construction and surface occupancy cannot occur any time within 0.25-mile of existing leks for Greater Sage Grouse.
 - ii. Construction, drilling, and other activities potentially disruptive to strutting and nesting Greater Sage Grouse are prohibited during the period of March 1 to June 30 for the protection of strutting and nesting areas.
 - iii. Construction, drilling, or other activities that could disrupt nesting raptors or Greater Sage Grouse are prohibited during the period from March 1 through June 30 (Greater Sage Grouse) for the protection of nesting areas from these species.
 - iv. Surface occupancy or use within 0.25-mile of a Greater Sage Grouse strutting or dancing ground will be restricted or prohibited unless the operator and BLM arrive at an acceptable plan for mitigation of anticipated impacts.
 - v. All pits and open cellars must be fenced for the protection of wildlife and livestock. Fencing must be in accordance with BLM

specifications. Netting must be placed over all production pits to eliminate any hazard to migratory birds or other wildlife.

d. Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Powder River Basin Oil and Gas Project (April 2003):

- i. For any surface disturbing activities proposed in sagebrush shrublands, the Companies will conduct clearance surveys for Sage Grouse breeding activity during the Sage Grouse's breeding season before initiating the activities. The surveys must encompass all sagebrush shrublands within 0.5-mile of the proposed activities.
- ii. The Companies will locate compressor stations so that noise from the stations at any nearby Sage Grouse or sharp-tailed grouse display grounds does not exceed 49 decibels (10 dBA above background noise) at the display ground.
- iii. The Companies will construct power lines to minimize the potential for raptor collisions with the lines. Potential modifications include burying the lines, avoiding areas of high avian use (for example, wetlands, prairie dog towns, and grouse leks), and increasing the visibility of the individual conductors.
- iv. The Companies will locate aboveground power lines, where practical, at least 0.5-mile from any Sage Grouse breeding or nesting grounds to prevent raptor predation and Sage Grouse collision with the conductors. Power poles within 0.5-mile of any Sage Grouse breeding ground will be raptor-proofed to prevent raptors from perching on the poles.

3. Current Greater Sage Grouse Studies: The following briefly outlines current Sage Grouse studies being conducted in Wyoming in which the oil and gas industry is participating:

- a. Sage Grouse Oil and Gas Impact Study: Phase I and Phase II of the study, *Potential Impacts of Natural Gas Development on Sage Grouse Strutting Activity and Seasonal Habitat Selection in Southwest Wyoming*, began in the late 1990's. Primary funding for this research has come from the Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Energy's Oil and Gas Technology Partnership Program. Additional funding and services have come from various cooperators (including industry) in the project area. This project area is located on the Pinedale Anticline and is intended to analyze the true impacts oil and gas development have on Sage Grouse during different phases and times of the years.
- b. Southwest Wyoming Project Biologist: The Petroleum Association of Wyoming (PAW) has participated in the past with the BLM and Game & Fish Department (G&F) in a cooperative effort to fund a Wyoming Game & Fish Department Oil & Gas Biologist. This effort began in April of 2000 and unfortunately ended in 2002 due to lack of interested parties applying for the position.

The purpose of the project was to: A) Evaluate the effectiveness of the existing mitigation measures of oil and gas development and their effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat; B) Determine if big game winter ranges are affected by oil and gas development and if negative trends are detected, utilize observations to determine what additional or alternative mitigation could be implemented that might lessen impacts; and C) Determine and analyze for the most effective techniques that would accelerate habituation for the co-existence of oil and gas development and wildlife. This also included a review of active and non-active leks in the Rock Springs and Rawlins management areas.

- c. Coal Bed Natural Gas Study: PAW is currently involved in a study with Dr. Dave Naugle with the University of Montana to analyze the impacts coal bed natural gas activity has on Sage Grouse. This study is being conducted in the Powder River Basin on private property.

In conjunction with this study, an effort is being made to incorporate monitoring efforts for West Nile virus and Sage Grouse in Montana and Wyoming. Monitoring and research efforts will be centered in five major areas. Industry is actively working with local counties and landowners to implement mosquito control measures through larvicide’s treatment.

Sage Grouse Population Status in Wyoming

Sage Grouse are a large upland game bird considered a “landscape species,” annually using widespread areas of sagebrush habitats. Sage Grouse are common throughout Wyoming because Sage Grouse habitat remains relatively intact compared to other states. Figure 2 shows current and historical Sage Grouse distribution in Wyoming.

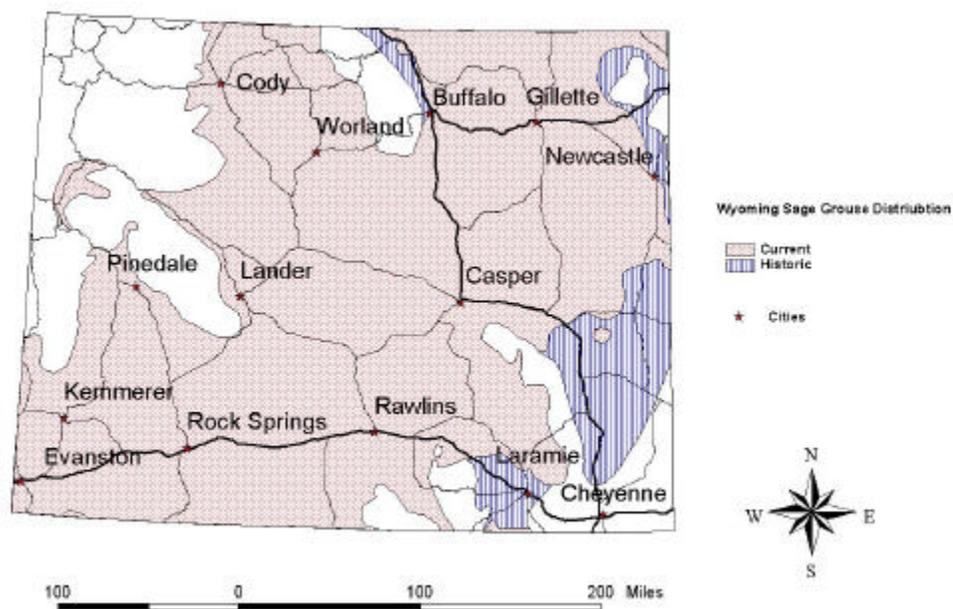
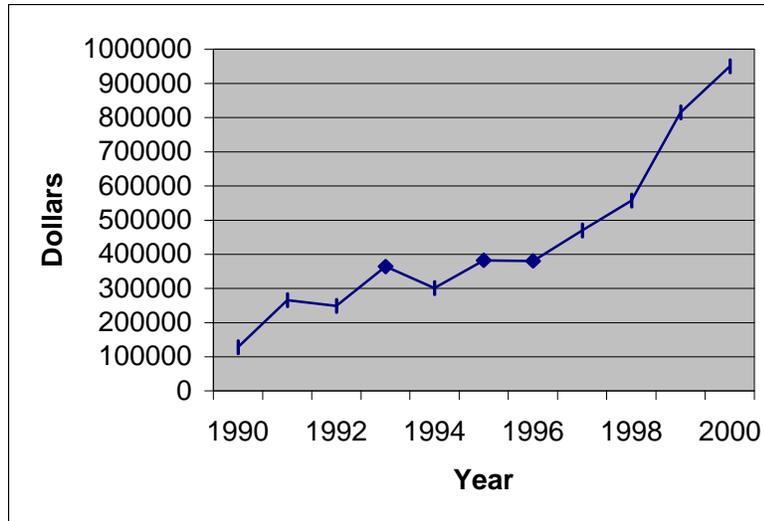


Figure 2. Wyoming Greater Sage Grouse distribution

Figure 3. shows a rapid upturn in funding being dedicated to management of Sage Grouse populations in Wyoming.

Figure 3. WGFD annual Sage Grouse management expenditures 1990-2000



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C. TRIBAL EFFORTS

The tribes are important to the conservation of the Sage Grouse in the West. Referred to as the sagehen by most tribes, this bird is found on nearly all their lands. The tribes' efforts to conserve the sagehen are as varied as the states efforts. Many tribes do not consider their conservation efforts to be for any one species, but for all creatures that inhabit the land, including themselves. When you ask about sagehen projects or efforts, they may not be able to describe one, as they do not focus on that species alone.

The tribes are participating in the several of the local working groups established in the sagehen's range. Some have not been able to participate to the extent they would like due to the lack of staff or funding needed to attend the meetings, but many have been very involved. The following are just a few examples of tribal involvement in the conservation of the sagehen in the State of Nevada.

The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, in northern Nevada, is a member of the Washoe-Lassen-Modoc Local Area Conservation Planning (LACP) group, and has actively attended the group's meetings. The tribe is surveying and documenting habitat use by the sagehen, and coordinating their conservation efforts with the Nevada Division of Wildlife. They have identified several previously unidentified lek sites, and have developed a GIS mapping system to track the leks and other important habitat on their lands. The tribe is working with NRCS to obtain funding for a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program contract to improve habitat and range management on the reservation where sagehens are present. Development on private lands just south of the reservation is consuming the opens lands in that area. This will result in the sagehens depending more on the open tribal lands. The Tribal Council has passed a resolution on Sagehen Conservation and the importance of the sagehen to the tribe. This tribe has been involved in endangered species conservation for many years, as there are several species on their reservation that are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The members of the Indian Colony at Bridgeport Nevada are participants in the Bi-state LACP that includes land in California and Nevada. The Colony represents members of the Paiute, Shoshone, Washoe, Mono, and Miwok Tribes. They have been actively participating in the LACP meetings and planning sessions. The tribal elders have described large populations that use to inhabit the area, but are now few in number. They have been able to describe historical locations where they would go to watch the sagehen do their dance that are not now serving as leks sites. These historical sites, located on public lands, may be priority areas for restoration.

This report captures only a part of the tribes' efforts to conserve the sagehen and improve sagebrush ecosystem. Because of the cultural importance of the sagehen to some of the tribes, and the respect tribes have for all creatures, they can be counted on to be strong partners in any efforts to conserve this species.

D. CANADIAN EFFORTS

THE PROVINCES OF CANADA

Status of Sage Grouse in Canada

The Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been designated as “Endangered” in Canada. Greater Sage Grouse have experienced significant declines throughout their range in North America. Historically, Sage Grouse were more widely distributed in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. In Alberta, they have experienced a 66-92 % decline over the last 30 years, and in British Columbia, they are considered extirpated. In Alberta, the Sage Grouse is found only in a 4,000 km² area of the extreme southeastern corner of the province, east of the Milk River and south of Cypress Hills to the Saskatchewan border. The Sage Grouse is also found in the southwestern corner of Saskatchewan.

Population: As of spring 2004, there were only 94 males strutting at 8 leks and the total spring population of Sage Grouse in Alberta is estimated at fewer than 500 birds. In Alberta and Saskatchewan combined, it is estimated there are approximately 800-1300 individuals.

Threats: Fortunately, very little Sage Grouse habitat has been cultivated in southeastern Alberta. Large ranching units continue to prevail as the predominant land use. Livestock may influence the vegetation quality of Sage Grouse habitat and increase bird exposure to predators and extreme weather. Recent studies indicate that livestock grazing is at light to light-moderate stocking rates in southeastern Alberta and rangelands were significantly de-stocked during recent drought conditions.

There is also a concern with respect to isolation of the Alberta population from larger possibly core populations further south in Montana. A large swath of cultivation across northern Montana may be functioning as a barrier to perhaps historic ebb and flow of Sage Grouse into Alberta.

Agricultural practices, however, are not the only threat to the Sage Grouse. Activities associated with exploration for oil and gas can fragment and reduce the availability of suitable habitat and can disrupt breeding activities.

Climate is another factor that may be involved; short summers and harsh winters can have drastic effects on the ability of individuals to find enough food to survive year-round and reproduce in the spring. Drought and water management might also limit the availability of herbaceous vegetation that is important to the Sage Grouse during the summer and silver sagebrush stands must receive periodic moisture events be sustained.

An emerging threat is the West Nile Virus (WNV). In summer 2003, five Sage Grouse deaths from WNV in Alberta were confirmed. Sage Grouse in Montana and Wyoming also died from WNV. It appears that Sage Grouse may be very susceptible to this virus, and biologists plan to monitor this situation closely.

Status of Conservation Plan and Local Stakeholder Groups

An inter-provincial Sage Grouse recovery team has completed a Greater Sage Grouse Recovery Strategy that has been approved by the Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

A local community based stakeholder group of affected interests has been established to prepare an Alberta Recovery Action Plan for this species. In addition, population monitoring and research on habitat selection and population dynamics will support the recovery effort for this species.

Local Conservation Measures

The Greater Sage Grouse has been designated as "Endangered" under Alberta's *Wildlife Act* and this makes it illegal to hunt or harm this grouse, or disturb its nests in Alberta at any time.

Other work being done includes efforts to protect Sage Grouse leks and adjacent nesting areas on public land. Most of the remaining leks are on public land, therefore, conservation and management will take place through regulations and negotiation with disposition holders. On private land, conservation of habitat and protection of leks will only be achieved through active involvement and cooperation of landowners.

Research plans are being developed to investigate of West Nile Virus and mitigations that can be used to protect this species.

E. USDA - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Strategic Plan

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OF SAGEBRUSH HABITAT A VOLUNTARY APPROACH TO SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION AND RECOVERY

The Role of Natural Resource Conservation Service

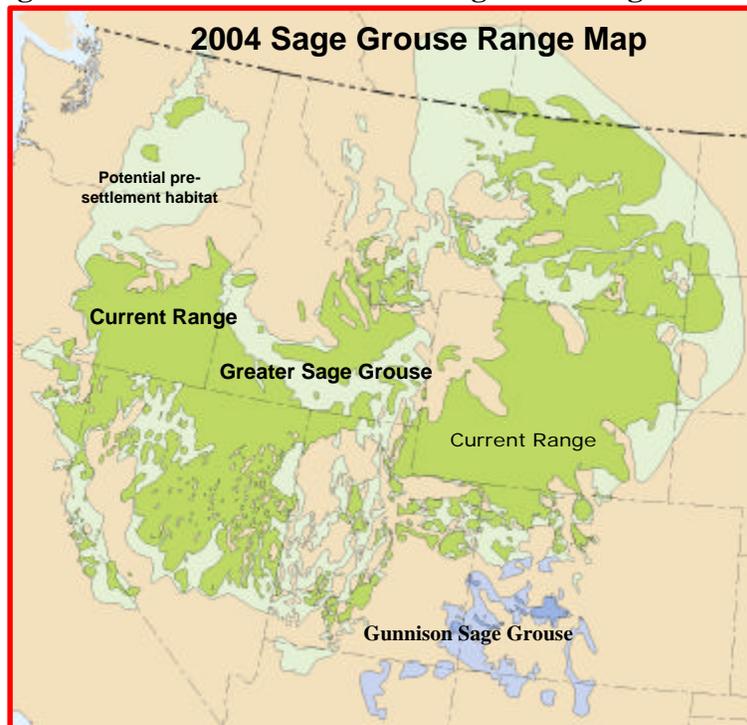
Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) goal is to help maintain and improve Sage Grouse habitat as part of larger management efforts that provide for multiple land benefits. *NRCS programs are voluntary and dependent on the willingness of landowners to participate.*

Background

Primary threats to the Sage Grouse are the conversion, fragmentation and degradation of its habitat. Sagebrush habitat has declined 50% from its historical acreage. Sage Grouse as well as many other species, require a healthy, balanced sagebrush ecosystem that incorporates perennial grasses and broadleaf herbs as well as sagebrush.

Sage Grouse populations exist in Washington, California, Utah, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana (see Figure 1). It has declined in each of these states and has been eliminated in an additional five (Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska (Figure 1). Populations have declined 90% overall since records have been kept (30% since 1985). Private lands comprise 28%, nearly 40 million acres, of the total acreage where existing populations occur; the remaining is on state, tribal, and public lands. Less than 3% of the sagebrush habitat is in parks or reserves.

Figure 1. Present and historical range of the Sage Grouse.



Existing Efforts

National

- NRCS has committed more than \$30,000 to a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation project for the North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) to establish the North American Grouse Management Plan.
- NRCS has also developed a draft Sage Grouse technical note through a collaborative agreement with the Wildlife Habitat Council to assist NRCS field staff with technical assistance on Sage Grouse considerations.
- The NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute has committed \$100,000 in 2004 to encourage research on the affects of conservation practices on Sage Grouse.
- National guidance was sent to the State Conservationists in the eleven western States encouraging them to give a higher priority to Sage Grouse habitat during implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs.

State

- NRCS is working with private landowners through technical assistance and cost share programs. States are focusing on Sage Grouse and conserving their associated habitats by taking a proactive approach and providing leadership to assist land holders and partners in the improvement and sustainability of sagebrush communities.
- States containing existing populations of Sage Grouse have focused activity on nearly 8 million acres of private land. Technical and financial assistance through EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program), WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program), CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), WRP (Wetland Reserve Program), GRP (Grassland Reserve Program) and FRLPP (Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program) for conservation practices including:
 - range land planting
 - livestock fencing
 - water developments
 - rangeland treatments
 - prescribed grazing
 - conservation cover
 - field borders
 - land reclamation for fire control
 - critical area planting
 - reduction of incidental chemical spraying
 - pest management
 - brush management
 - shrub establishment
 - native grass and legume establishment
 - riparian herbaceous plantings
 - riparian forest plantings
 - wetland restoration
 - farmland protection of sage brush habitat

Strategy for Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement

NRCS has developed a proactive strategy to continue its efforts to assist landowners to voluntarily conserve this species and its habitats. Following are detailed elements of the proposed strategy to conserve and restore Sage Grouse populations across its range.

Increase the emphasis of Farm Bill Programs on Sage Grouse habitat

- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program – give priority to projects that enhance or restore Sage Grouse habitat
- Environmental Quality Incentive Program – increase emphasis on projects that enhance Sage Grouse habitat.
- Wetlands Reserve Program – restore wetland wintering areas (riparian area and associated wetland) within Sage Grouse habitat
- Grasslands Preserve Program and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program— higher priority given to obtaining conservation easements with lands that contain sagebrush habitat

Develop Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA)

- NRCS develops conservation plan with landowner (in cooperation with USFWS) and state agencies so if species is listed the landowner is assured of protections. This increases motivation of landowners to restore a declining habitat.

Plant Material Centers (PMCs) actions

- Develop sage steppe landscape restoration techniques
- Develop techniques for improving restoration and interspersions of grasses and forbs within sagebrush habitat
- Develop techniques for control and management of invasive species such as cheat grass

Develop a MOU with North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP), Western Governor's Association (WGA) and NRCS

- Define efforts, products and how we can work together
- Focus on a conservation plan/strategy that coincides with the Grouse Management Plan
- Engage private land holders up front, on what it means to have Sage Grouse present by obtaining their presence and viewpoints in early meetings
- Support a publication to identify success stories for WGA

Establish a liaison position with NAGP

- Improve relationship, partnership and understanding among partners
- Improve technology development and transfer for Sage Grouse and associated species
- Many new clients will be reached to protect and restore Sage Grouse habitat
- Proactively focus on the Sage Grouse to assist in the conservation and restoration of Sage Grouse populations

Actively participate in State Technical Committees and local and state Sage Grouse Working Groups (LWG's) in each state

- Coordinate LWG objectives into local conservation plans
- Identify opportunities to focus farm bill programs on Sage Grouse habitat

Utilize Adaptive Management

- Complete Ecological Site Descriptions, with wildlife partners, to identify site potential for habitat and to provide a baseline for conservation planning and monitoring efforts
- Monitor ongoing conservation practices installed for the Sage Grouse and determine the effects
- Coordinate investigations of conservation practices for the Sage Grouse with the research community and modify practices accordingly

ANTICIPATED ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT WILL BENEFIT SAGE GROUSE HABITAT IN 2004 AND 2005

NRCS provides cost share and technical assistance to landowners on a voluntary basis, therefore on the ground benefits depend upon the willingness of landowners to implement conservation practices that benefit Sage Grouse.

The Tables on the next page show acres benefited by NRCS efforts. Primary benefits were derived from cost share or technical assistance where the Sage Grouse is the primary target. Secondary benefits were derived from conservation practices in Sage Grouse habitat that will improve rangeland health or the acquisition of conservation easements on lands containing sage brush habitat and have a slightly positive affect on Sage Grouse

The 2004 figures are based upon the results of program sign ups as of April 2004. In several states the specific acres are undetermined or estimated because the final data will not be available until the end of the fiscal year. Data for 2005 is an estimate based upon projections if farm bill appropriations remain constant. Greater emphasis will be placed on encouraging applications for Sage Grouse habitat in 2005 by giving higher priority to projects that benefit Sage Grouse habitat.

2004

<i>STATE</i>	<i>ACRES OF PRIMARY BENEFIT</i>	<i>ACRES OF SECONDARY BENEFIT</i>
CA	50	400
CO	5,295	5,950
ID	500	4,500
ND	0	10,000
NV	4,132	375,000
MT	0	130,000
OR	400	6,000
SD	0	100,000
UT	63,427	36,330
WA	0	0
WY	6,295	418,705
TOTAL	79,699	1,086,855

2005

<i>STATE</i>	<i>ACRES OF PRIMARY BENEFIT</i>	<i>ACRES OF SECONDARY BENEFIT</i>
CA	8,000	undetermined
CO	0	7,000
ID	500	45,000
ND	3,200	8,000
NV	2,200	791,880
MT	0	260,000
OR	300	3,500
SD	500	125,000
UT	24,621	56,200
WA	0	0
WY	27,000	166,624
TOTAL	66,321	1,363,204

III. CONCLUSION

A. Future Actions

There is an unprecedented conservation effort occurring in the West. Eleven states, several Indian tribes and two Canadian Provinces are working to protect the Greater Sage Grouse, a bird whose habitat covers most of the Western United States. Given the scope of this area, which stretches from Colorado to California and north from Utah to Montana, the conservation effort described in this document is nothing short of remarkable.

Hundreds of stakeholders representing a cross section of Western interests—including ranchers, environmental organizations, industry groups and government agencies—have joined together to form sixty-four local working groups. These groups are busy collecting new scientific data about the Sage Grouse, identifying key conservation priorities, forging partnerships for conservation with local landowners, and insuring that the practices identified are implemented on the land.

Local leaders are taking the initiative to protect the grouse. This demonstrates that the West—the home of so many of our country’s natural landscapes and native species—can mobilize its resources on a massive scale to preserve our natural environment. The West is charting a new course toward grassroots-driven species protection.

Most importantly, this effort is critical because it is good for the species. A climate of trust and cooperation where landowners work in good faith with government agencies is the only sure course toward long-term Greater Sage Grouse conservation. If the health and viability of the Greater Sage Grouse is a primary concern, then we should look first to local, cooperative measures like those detailed in this report to ensure our success.

What does the future hold for the Greater Sage Grouse? Without the effort that is taking place across the West, its future would certainly be in doubt. The conservation of the Greater Sage Grouse will not be a single species affair. All the sagebrush ecosystem species will benefit if we keep the partnership’s effort moving forward.

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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe of Nevada
South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks
USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
Walker River Paiute Tribe of Nevada
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Yerington Paiute Tribe of Nevada

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