MANAGEMENT ZONE IV - IDAHO

Within Idaho, there are five identified populations in Management Zone 4, which exists mostly in Idaho but includes a large part northeastern Nevada and eastern Oregon. Three of these populations, Weiser, Sawtooth, and East-central Idaho, are relatively small and isolated but were identified by Garton et al. 2011. The remaining two populations, Northern Great Basin and Snake-Salmon-Beaverhead are relatively extensive but separated by the Snake River and a large belt of agricultural land. These two areas likely are large enough to support current populations. The Idaho Governor's Sage-Grouse Task Force recently characterized sage-grouse habitat by four individual Conservation Areas ("CA") across the state: two north (Mountain Valleys, Desert) and two south (Southwest, Southeast) of the Snake River. Each Conservation Area was then divided into Core, Important, and General Management Zones ("MZs") based upon modeling of sage-grouse breeding bird density, BLM's modeling of habitat connectivity and persistence, scientific on-the-ground knowledge, and the recommendations of the Task Force. Although wildfire, infrastructure, and invasive species pose threats for sage-grouse in all CAs, wildfire and invasive species tend to be a greater issue in the Desert and Southwest CAs than in the Mountain Valley or Southeast CAs. Additionally, sage-grouse habitats in the Desert and Southwest CAs are relatively contiguous, while those in the Mountain Valley and Southeast CAs tend to be more fragmented.

The concepts of redundancy, resistance, and representation within the management zone were not discussed or specifically considered when developing state conservation areas or management zones. However, these areas were designated based on best available data on sage-grouse habitats and populations. The three small populations in this management zone may not be viable over the long-term because of isolation and small population size. Thus, it is unlikely that the three small Idaho populations in this zone are resilient to threats and/or disturbances.

Weiser

This small population in western Idaho did not have sufficient data to allow analysis by Garton et al. (2011). However, 2010 data indicated the area had 14 occupied leks. Recently some connection with the Baker, OR population has been documented. The area is generally characterized by a high proportion of private land and a local working group has been actively pursuing conservation measures.

Sawtooth

This small population in central Idaho did not have sufficient data to allow analysis by Garton et al. (2011). No occupied leks are known to exist at this time. This area is largely encompassed by the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and includes a high proportion of public land. This population declined to 1 male on 1 lek in 1986 and was subsequently increased by translocation during the mid-1980s.

East-central Idaho

Areas within the East Idaho Uplands in the Blackfoot River drainage downstream from Blackfoot Reservoir have historically provided popular sites for greater sage-grouse hunters. The area is generally characterized by a high proportion of private and state land and a local working group has been actively pursuing conservation measures. Nevertheless little information is available on sage-grouse populations other than some limited location and attendance data on a few leks. No lek routes have been established within this area that would allow consistent monitoring of sage-grouse populations. This lack of data is largely due to very difficult access in most years during winter and spring. Analysis of limited data by Garton et al. (2011) suggests that this population has a low probability of persistence. Although causal observation and some historic data suggest the study area provides adequate breeding and nesting habitat, sage-grouse numbers appear to be very low. Initial summer surveys in 2011 suggested sage-grouse were reasonably widespread throughout the area. However, given the apparent overall quality of the habitat, sage-grouse numbers seem surprisingly low and difficult to explain. Factors that could act to reduce sage-grouse populations in this area include sagebrush treatments in breeding habitat, West Nile virus, and loss or fragmentation of winter range.

Northern Great Basin

This large population extends into northeastern Nevada, northwestern Utah, and eastern Oregon. This area contains a large amount of publicly managed land (largely BLM). Despite efforts to manage wildfire risks, wildfires and invasive species have continued to reduce the quality of habitat in portions of this area. The Murphy fire complex recently affected roughly 600,000 acres of habitat for this population. A recent rate of change analysis indicated that at

least part of this large population (based in Idaho) has been stable to increasing from 2007-2010. Garton et al. (2011) indicated that this population had virtually no chance of declining below 50 in 30 or 100 years. Population analysis indicated that sage-grouse will fluctuate around a carrying capacity that will decline from an estimated 6,770 males in 2007 to 1787 males in 2037 if current trends continue (Garton et al. 2011).

Snake-Salmon-Beaverhead

Recent data indicates this large population extends into southwestern Montana. This area contains a large amount of publicly managed land (largely BLM and USFS). Within the southern portion of this population, wildfires and invasive species have continued to reduce the quality of habitat. The mountain Valley portions of this population appear to have relatively stable habitats. A recent rate of change analysis indicates this population has been stable to increasing from 2007 to 2010. Garton et al. (2011) indicated that this population had virtually no chance of declining below 500 in the next 100 years. Population analysis indicates that sage-grouse fluctuated around 5000 males since 1992.