From:	Deibert, Pat
To:	Lyons, James
Cc:	Noreen Walsh
Subject:	Re: New study provides definitive link between grass height, SG nest success
Date:	Monday, December 15, 2014 5:21:49 PM

Hello Jim -

Thanks for sharing the article. A few thoughts after reviewing.

1. We have known for quite some time that grass height is important for nest success - this study confirms (quite elegantly) that point. However, the grass heights for successful nesting vary across the species range. I think this is a great paper for NE WY and SE MT. I'm not sure its applicable elsewhere (in terms of actual grass heights). There are many areas across the species' range where those grass heights are typically unattainable simply due to soil type and annual precipitation - yet we have lots of grouse there (e.g. low elevation areas of NV). The reference made to grass heights by region (7 and 10.2) is from the paper by Connelly et al. 2000. Those numbers were averages of heights around successful nests - there were obviously successful nests on both ends of the bell curve.

2. This is one of the few studies I'm familiar with where female age did not contribute significantly to nest success. I don't doubt the study's results, but attribute that to simple variation to key factors across the species' range that contribute to nest success.

3. It is clear we cannot overgraze areas beyond their biotic potential, and we definitely need to adjust grazing in periods of drought. However, grazing management should be tailored to the location and conditions. Perhaps the key is to be more nimble in grazing management (e.g. changing stocking rates or time of turn out during a drought).

4. Identifying a residual grass height in the plans may be a helpful tool in managing grazing. But those heights must be commensurate with the biotic potential of the area. Given the large size of areas that some of these plans cover it could become complex and difficult to enforce (i.e. areas at higher elevation with more precipitation vs. lower areas with less precipitation). I don't know about the viability of including precise numbers in a NEPA document - I will leave that to planners. Perhaps this is a more viable option for field office implementation?

4. Mr. Molvar apparently missed a the final paragraph of the paper:
"Habitat management within a PAC-based conservation strategy may benefit populations, but sage-grouse are a wildland species, and grass height is of little consequence if sagebrush systems continue to be replaced by anthropogenic land uses (Knick et al. 2013). Viability of ranching as a predominant land use may in part determine the future of sage-grouse conservation in the West."

I do believe that this is an important paper contributing to our understanding in how to manage rangelands for sage-grouse. But I remain unconvinced that this single paper provides the entire solution.

I'm happy to talk with you more about this if you wish.

pat

On Fri, Dec 12, 2014 at 4:20 PM, Lyons, James <james_lyons@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

FYI. We should discuss. Seems to me that it has implications for how we move forward on the grazing provisions of the plans.

What do you think Pat?

Jim

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: **Erik Molvar** <emolvar@wildearthguardians.org>
Date: Tue, Dec 9, 2014 at 3:33 PM
Subject: New study provides definitive link between grass height, SG nest success
To: "Kornze, Neil" <nkornze@blm.gov>
Cc: "Greenberger, Sarah" <sarah_greenberger@ios.doi.gov>, James Lyons <james_lyons@ios.doi.gov>, "Bean, Michael" <michael_bean@ios.doi.gov>

Folks,

As I'm sure you recall, we conservationists have been pressing for residual grass height standards to provide adequate hiding cover in breeding, nesting, and brood-rearing habitats.

Up to this point, there have been quite a number of studies indicating habitat selection for areas with at least 7" grass height (Great Basin) and 10.2" grass height (northern plains), but few definitive links between inadequate grass height and population declines.

The missing link was published this week (attached). This should provide all the scientific evidence you need to quiet the doubters and get residual grass height standards incorporated into the livestock grazing management sections of the sage grouse RMP amendments.

Best wishes,

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Jim Lyons
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