Frequently Asked Questions:
Greater Sage-grouse: Data Call and Conservation Efforts Database

Why is the Service requesting data on greater sage-grouse?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is initiating its formal status review of the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) to determine the need for potential listing as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act.

In 2010, the Service determined that ESA protection was warranted for greater sage-grouse but precluded by higher priorities. In 2011, the Service agreed to conduct a status review as part of a court settlement to determine if the threats facing the bird warrant a threatened or endangered designation.

Since 2009, the already large volume of research and conservation planning for greater sage-grouse has increased, as states, federal agencies, companies, and numerous ranching and conservation groups pursue a remarkable conservation campaign designed to head off a listing. To ensure this status review is based on up-to-date information, the Service is asking for conservation partners to provide a wide variety of information that will be needed to make a scientifically and legally strong decision.

Over the next several months, the Service will be gathering and analyzing available information on the species as part of its status review. The Service is required to use the best scientific and commercial data available in the development of ESA determinations and any subsequent proposed rules. The listing decision is due in September 2015.

What kind of data is the Service requesting?

The Service is collecting qualitative and quantitative information and data on the greater sage-grouse status review through two separate avenues. Population status and threat information will be collected by the Service via email and mail (aka the "data call"). Planning and project information that is designed to provide a conservation benefit to greater sage-grouse will be entered into a database (Conservation Efforts Database) specifically designed for this status review.

What kind of information is important for the data call?

The Service is requesting spatially explicit data from the years 2009-2014 in the following subject areas: Population status, trends and numbers; habitat status and trends; data on hunter harvest and other uses; disease and predation.

What is the Conservation Efforts Database?

The CED is a secure, easy-to-use, GIS database that is designed to capture information about the large number of incentive-based conservation and regulatory actions that are underway by conservation partners throughout the 11-state range of greater sage-grouse. The database was developed to provide a transparent way to give credit to conservation partners for their conservation actions as we conduct our status review.

These conservation actions include landscape-scale federal and state land management plans that either prescribe or encourage conserving important sage-grouse habitat, as well as on-the-ground habitat restoration projects to address piñon-juniper encroachment, replace cheatgrass with native vegetation, improve wet meadow habitats, or install fire breaks, among a host of project types. The sum of these

efforts, which also include conservation easements, habitat improvements and governmental regulatory mechanisms, could have a significant influence on the Service's upcoming status review.

How will the data be used?

In its 2010 finding, the Service determined that the primary threat to greater sage-grouse was the loss and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat. In 2013, the Service and the states produced a report (Conservation Objectives Team report) which identified threats to sage-grouse, conservation objectives targeted at conserving priority areas for conservation, and conservation measures that would likely help achieve those objectives. Within the database, information regarding conservation efforts will be linked to spatial data. This will allow us to analyze the information and evaluate it at various spatial scales. Between now and September 2015, the Service must evaluate the degree to which threats to the survival of sage-grouse have been reduced by conservation projects and regulatory actions achieved between 2009 and 2014.

How will the Service credit the conservation projects that are happening on the ground?

Conservation projects must be implemented, or have a high likelihood of being implemented in order to be evaluated in the status review. In addition, the effectiveness of conservation actions and regulatory mechanisms must demonstrate effectiveness in reducing or removing threats.

Will voluntary conservation efforts be counted?

Incentive-based conservation strategies play an important role in the conservation of sage grouse, especially on private lands. Large-scale, implemented and effective conservation efforts will be entered into the CED. Examples include Voluntary Federal, State, NGO, Local and Tribal habitat restoration programs including those done by the Sage Grouse Initiative; Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreements; Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances; Programmatic Restoration Plans for Invasive Plants; and Programmatic Reclamation Plans. Other projects that benefit sage-grouse, such as removing conifers, restoring wet meadows, reducing wildfire fuels, removing perching structures like powerlines and communication towers, marking fences and others will also be evaluated.

How does this information get entered into the database?

Federal land managers, Tribal governments, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, industry representatives, and universities will be authorized to enter information into the CED.

How can landowners with information about private property make sure their conservation efforts are counted?

Landowners who have participated in sage-grouse conservation projects should work with their project planning and/or project funding partners to ensure that it is included in CED.