

Greater sage-grouse



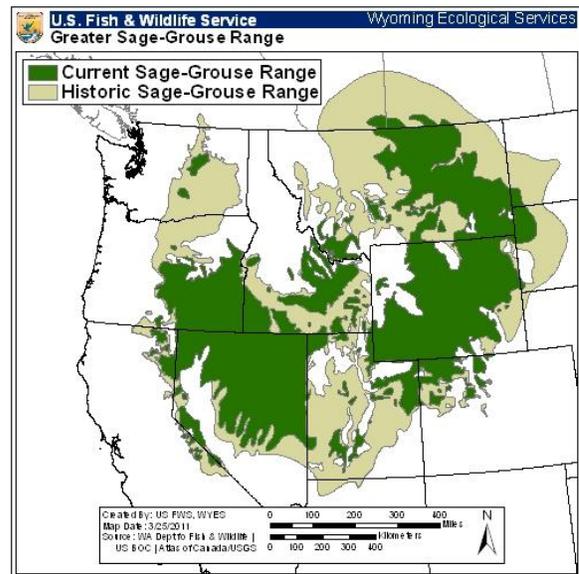
The greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The Service has determined that proposing the species for protection is precluded by the need to take action on other species facing more immediate and severe extinction threats.

Description

Greater sage-grouse or commonly known as: sage hen, sage fowl, sage cock, sage chicken, heath cock and heath hen. Is a large, ground-dwelling bird, up to 30 inches long and 2 feet tall, weighing from 2 to 7 pounds. It has a long pointed tail with legs feathered to the base of the toes. Females are mottled brown, black, and white coloring which serves as a camouflage from predators. Males are larger and more colorful than females with feathers around the neck and bright yellow air sacs on their breast, which they inflate during their mating display. The birds are found at elevations ranging from 4,000, to over 9,000 feet and are dependent on sagebrush for cover and food. The greater sage-grouse has an average life span of 1 ½ years, however they have been seen to live up to 9 years.

Location

Currently, greater sage-grouse are found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Eastern California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, South Dakota, Wyoming, and the Canadian Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Greater sage-grouse occupy approximately 56% of their historical range



Diet

One of the most interesting aspects about the greater sage-grouse is its nearly complete reliance on sagebrush. Throughout much of the year, adult sage-grouse rely on sagebrush to provide roosting cover and food. Sagebrush is a group of woody shrubs with silvery leaves that stay green all year long. Sagebrush provide materials for nesting and associated plants provide high-protein insects for food, a critical diet for chicks in their first month of life. In winter, over 99 percent of their diet is sagebrush leaves and buds. These birds cannot survive in areas where sagebrush no longer exists.

Greater sage-grouse**Reproduction**

During the spring breeding season, male sage-grouse gather together and perform courtship displays in areas called leks (also known as “strutting grounds”), which are relatively open sites surrounded by denser sagebrush. These leks which may be as large as a football field are used for many generations of sage-grouse. Males defend individual territories within leks, by strutting with tails fanned and emitting drumming sounds from the air sacs on their chests to attract females. The mating season generally begins in March, but ultimately depends on weather conditions. Females lay a clutch of 6-9 eggs from mid March to mid-May. Sage-grouse hens raise one brood in a season, and re-nesting is uncommon.

Threats

These birds cannot survive in areas where sagebrush no longer exists. The distribution of greater sage-grouse has contracted, most notably along the northern and northwestern periphery and in the center of the historic range due to loss of sagebrush habitat. A sage brush community may take years to recover from disturbance and some range management practices. Greater sage-grouse populations are negatively affected by energy development activities (primarily oil, gas, and coal-bed methane); especially those that degrade important sagebrush habitat, even when mitigative measures are implemented. Impacts can result from direct habitat loss, fragmentation of important habitats by roads, pipelines and power lines, and direct human disturbance. The negative effects of energy development often add to the impacts from other human development, resulting in declines in greater sage-grouse populations. Other important factors in the species’ decline include fire and invasive plant species.

Recovery

Fish and Wildlife Service joined with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), representing all of the Western state wildlife agencies, and several other federal agencies in 2006 to develop the Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. The release of this strategy marked a true turning point, enabling a shift from conservation planning to conservation implementation incorporating adaptive management principles to inform and guide future management practices. The Service has also worked closely with the NRCS in developing conservation opportunities on private lands through their sage-grouse initiative.

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