

The final COT report provides detailed information regarding the major threats to the greater sage-grouse and provides information regarding the degree to which threats need to be addressed. This report has served as the basis for our evaluation of regulatory and voluntary planning efforts and will continue to serve as an evaluation tool to analyze the conservation measures during the status review. In addition, the COT report identified the most important geographies for the long-term persistence of the species. These have been identified as Primary Areas of Conservation, also known as PACs. These PACs have been identified by the participants of the COT as areas with the highest density of birds on the landscape with in the range of the greater sage-grouse. Another factor identified on the COT report were discretely identifiable populations and the principle threats that might be acting on each of those populations that need to be ameliorated to ensure the long-term persistence of each population. The Service intends to use the PACs and COT report in establishing much of the baseline for the analytical framework for the status review. The Service intends to use the population densities within the PACs and populations to evaluate current and future conditions for the species by ~~evaluating~~ the degree to which PACs or populations that have higher degree of population density are affected by or have some risk of threats to those areas.

The principle factors leading to the 2010 finding were habitat fragmentation, principally due to invasive species and fire, energy development and associated infrastructure, and sage brush conversion due agricultural practices, along with a lack of adequate regulatory mechanisms to address those threats. This will be the starting point for any analysis we conduct for the species status assessment. The Service will be quantifying, to the extent the data allows, the potential risk of these threats to PACs and populations with the greatest population density as well as the likely benefits of regulatory actions that will be applied to the landscape in relation to implementation of regulatory planning documents, State plans, etc.

We will evaluate non-regulatory conservation measures using a similar construct (where is it being applied, is it addressing threats identified in the COT report, etc.). Non-regulatory conservation actions will need to be categorized based on their certainty of implementation, for example legislative actions to guarantee funding for localized fire management while, not regulatory, provides a level of certainty that would be similar. Second, the Service must evaluate the adequacy of the all the actions in terms of effectiveness at addressing the threats to the species. The data call and Conservation Efforts Database will request information in a format to aid in this analysis. In addition, we plan to scale appropriate analysis to the suite of activities addressing the major threats and document in our record how these non-regulatory actions were evaluated and considered. The evaluation of the likely benefits of these actions s will be analyzed in the context of the effect of these actions on abundance and distribution at different population scales.

Predictions of threats, conservation actions, and regulatory actions will be projected into the future using an analytical framework to provide a greater degree of resolution than was portrayed in the 2010 finding. All of this will be cast in the form of abundance and distribution both now and into the future. The exact metric has yet to be developed but examples might be percent of populations persisting over time or percent distribution or possibly some index of habitat fragmentation in to the future. At this