

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
SPOTLIGHT SPECIES ACTION PLAN**

**Common name:** Greater sage-grouse  
**Scientific name:** *Centrocercus urophasianus*  
**Lead Region:** Mountain-Prairie Region (Region 6), Denver, Colorado; Other affected Regions – R1 and R8  
**Lead Field Office:** Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office  
5353 Yellowstone Road, Suite 308A  
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307-772-2374

**Species Information:**

**Status:** Species-at-risk  
**Other:**

- Non-warranted finding published January, 2005; remanded December, 2007; currently under review for whether listing is warranted range-wide (due 2/26/10).
- “Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy” drafted by the Western Association of Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee, 2006 (Strategy). The information included in this Spotlight Species Action Plan is excerpted from the Strategy and it’s implementing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) unless otherwise noted.

**Threats:** Habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, habitat degradation, hunting, disturbance, life history (population cycles, genetic diversity, etc.), exurban development, energy development, invasive species, disease, mining, livestock grazing, climate change.

**Target:** Species status maintained or improved. Greater sage-grouse (sage-grouse) are under the management authority of State wildlife agencies. In an effort to coordinate management across the diversity of threats, microhabitats, and management strategies in the species’ range (11 states and 2 provinces), WAFWA drafted the 2006 Conservation Strategy, with Service participation. The overall goal of the range-wide Strategy is to maintain and enhance populations and distribution of sage-grouse by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations. This Strategy was intended to guide conservation and other important activities (e.g. consistent monitoring protocol). In 2008, the Service became signatory to a MOU with WAFWA and other Federal agencies, committing to implement the Conservation Strategy. Service staff have already been identified to serve on teams created by the MOU to assist with the Conservation Strategy implementation.

**Measure:** To produce and maintain neutral or positive trends in populations and maintain or increase the distribution of sage-grouse in each Management Zone of the Conservation Strategy. This spotlight species action plan is intended to assist with implementation of the Conservation Strategy where appropriate. The Strategy is outlined

in 7 sub-strategies: 1) Conservation actions, 2) Monitoring the effectiveness of conservation actions, 3) Monitoring the implementation of conservation actions, 4) Research and technology, 5) Funding, 6) Communications, and 7) Adaptive management. Service staff serve on teams created by the MOU to assist with the Conservation Strategy implementation.

**Actions:** Assist with the Conservation Strategy implementation. The 2008 MOU focuses on conserving Greater sage-grouse through the implementation of range-wide, State and local conservation strategies and/or plans for these species, including the Comprehensive Strategy. Management for the conservation or recovery of other sagebrush-dependent species of conservation concern shall be similarly guided by existing plans, premised upon the best available science, and approved by appropriate State, Provincial and/or Federal agencies.

#### **Sage-grouse Working Groups**

The States and Provinces will continue support for Working Groups to develop and implement State, Provincial, Management Zone, Agency, and Local Conservation Plans. Participation will be open to all interested parties including, but not limited to, landowners, land users, industry, other interested publics, and representatives of local, State, Federal and tribal governments, as appropriate. U.S. Federal Agency participation in working groups will be in a manner consistent with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

#### **Range-wide Interagency Sage-grouse Conservation Team**

The Parties will establish a Range-wide Interagency Sage-grouse Conservation Team (RISCT or Team) to be composed of the voting members of the WAFWA Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee, and one (1) technical expert each from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Forest Service (FS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The RISCT will provide technical expertise to the Executive Oversight Committee in facilitating implementation of the Comprehensive Strategy, where consistent with applicable statutory authorities, and otherwise assisting with its implementation, evaluation and long-term success using adaptive management principles. Internal Team operational procedures will be determined by the RISCT. The RISCT will develop an initial plan of action for the implementation of the Strategy to the EOC six (6) months from the effective date of the MOU and report annually to the EOC for review, redirection and revision.

#### **Executive Oversight Committee**

The Parties will establish an Executive Oversight Committee (EOC) to be composed of the Director of each WAFWA member agency, or their designee, from each state and province within the range of the Greater sage-grouse, and one (1) management representative from each of the signatory federal agencies to this agreement, to periodically review overall progress in implementing the Comprehensive Strategy and conservation measures for other species of conservation concern in the sagebrush biome. Based on such review, the EOC will meet with the RISCT at least annually to provide general guidance, as needed, for continuing implementation of the

Comprehensive Strategy and conservation measures for other species of conservation concern.

#### **WAFWA Member Agencies**

The member State and provincial agencies will, as appropriate and consistent with each State and provincial missions and authorities, provide for species management, population monitoring and evaluation consistent with adaptive management principles and guided by the best available science. Member agencies will consider the Comprehensive Strategy, State, Provincial, local working group plans and the most current sage-grouse guidelines to manage sage-grouse populations. Member agencies will work collaboratively to facilitate data and information management and access, to the extent possible; provide technical, management, and scientific information in support of understanding the sagebrush biome and sage-grouse populations; and where appropriate ensure that all products resultant from this MOU reflect the best available science and have received independent, scientific peer review where appropriate and applicable.

#### **U.S. Federal Agencies**

The BLM, FWS, FS, USGS, FSA and NRCS will as appropriate and consistent with each agency's mission and authorities, provide for habitat protection, conservation, habitat monitoring, restoration, and evaluation consistent with adaptive management principles and guided by the best available science of the sagebrush biome, for sage-grouse and other sagebrush dependent species of conservation concern, and consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable laws, regulations, directives and policies. In doing so, these agencies will consider the WAFWA Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy, existing Guidelines to manage sage-grouse populations and their habitats (Connelly et al., 2000) and subsequent revisions thereof, State and Local Conservation Plans, and other appropriate information in their respective planning and implementation processes. Parties will work collaboratively to facilitate data and information management and access, to the extent possible; provide technical, management, and scientific information in support of understanding the sagebrush biome; and where appropriate ensure that all products resultant from this MOU reflect the best available science and have received independent, scientific peer review where appropriate and applicable.

**Estimated costs of the actions:** Funding is needed to implement conservation actions and is critical to the success of the Strategy at the local, regional and range-wide level. The funding sub-strategy (Chapter 6 of the Strategy) addresses funding and appropriate administrative structure. A review of local, state, and agency plans confirms that all were written with the acknowledgement that (1) new capacity was needed to accomplish range-wide conservation within the sagebrush biome but no such funding was available at the time, and (2) a completed plan was necessary before funding needs and mechanisms could be identified. Although not all of the conservation plans are complete, there is sufficient information to reasonably judge range-wide needs for funding new conservation capacity and appropriate administrative structure. Table 6.1. of the Strategy identifies the Issue, sub-issue, and appropriate goals identified by the Range-wide Issues Forum participants. Where costs were identified by Forum participants, cost estimates per

year, the number of years to implement and the total cost of implementation are identified. Estimates of resources needed to implement the comprehensive range-wide strategy in the short-term were \$10,445,000 (Table 6.1 in the Strategy).

**Role of other agencies:** The Strategy highlights the importance of developing associations among local, state, provincial, tribal, and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens to design and implement cooperative actions to support robust populations of sage-grouse and the landscapes and habitats upon which they depend. The implementation MOU for the Strategy specifies actions (described above) for the various State, Provincial and/or Federal agencies.

**Role of other ESA programs:** The Candidate Conservation program is the primary ESA program for implementing the Strategy. Several Candidate Conservation Agreements are currently under development throughout the range of the Greater sage-grouse.

**Role of other FWS programs:** The Refuge and Partners for Fish and Wildlife have the ability to implement measures from the Strategy on FWS and private lands to further the conservation of Greater sage-grouse.

**Additional funding analysis:** The sub-strategy (Chapter 6) proposes a funding source approach that, if implemented, could provide the necessary funding to successfully implement and complete this range-wide strategy by providing a new and additional funding source that is outside current state and federal budgetary constraints.

For the Service, our highest priorities for additional funding would be to:

- Hire a Service sage-grouse coordinator to assist States and other Federal agencies with implementation of Conservation Strategy
- Fund priority actions identified in the Conservation Strategy
- Fund additional conservation action on private lands through the Partners program

  
Project Leader

9-30-2009  
Date