

PWS presentation at Mar 2011
meeting w/ BLM + USFS in Reno, NV

Greater sage-grouse: Status and Future



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Status under ESA

Both species of sage-grouse are candidates for listing under ESA

- Greater sage-grouse – March 23, 2010
- Gunnison sage-grouse – September 28, 2010

Candidate status =

- Listing is **WARRANTED**
- No regulatory protection under ESA



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Overview

As a candidate species:

- The birds remain managed by the States
- Sagebrush habitats are managed by landowners

- Approximately 60% of extant Greater sage-grouse habitats in Federal ownership

- BLM manages 52%
- FS manages 8%
- Other Federal agencies manage 1%

- Approximately 55% of extant Gunnison sage-grouse habitats in Federal ownership



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That means we have already determined it is warranted for listing.

Candidates receive no protection under ESA. But, a candidate status by definition means we found the birds meet the standard for listing under ESA.

Greater: Federal lands: BLM = 52%; USFS = 8%, Other (NPS, BOR, FWS) = 1%
State = 5%
Private = 31%

Gunnison – Federal = 54.5%; BLM=43%; NPS = 2%; USFS = 1%
State = 2%
Private = 43 %

Break-down of Federal land ownership percentages

As candidates, States retain management of the birds. However, the habitat is managed by the landowner.

BLM has the management responsibility for the majority of the extant habitat of the greater sage-grouse, and a good chunk of the habitat for the Gunnison sage-grouse. Therefore, the BLM has to be a key player in keeping grouse from moving to fully listed.

Key Threats

Habitat fragmentation is the issue, but
“fixing” habitat is difficult

Primary causes of habitat fragmentation: Greater sage-grouse

- Energy Development
- Invasive Species/Fire
- Agriculture



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Primary causes of habitat fragmentation: Gunnison sage-grouse

- Residential and Road Development
- Invasive Species
- Fences and Powerlines



I can provide specific examples if needed

For Gunnison, the habitat fragmentation problem has resulted in increased predation, and therefore predators were identified as a listing factor.

How Much is Enough?

- Minimum amount of sagebrush habitat needed by either species of sage-grouse for long-term persistence unknown



- Landscapes containing large and contiguous sagebrush patches and sagebrush patches in close proximity increase the likelihood of sage-grouse persistence



Challenge

How do we deal with habitat and habitat fragmentation on a landscape level and within our management frameworks in a way that is meaningful to sage-grouse?



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how do we get better at this so we aren't in a position of drafting a listing proposal?

The NRCS has taken the first steps to address fragmentation on private lands. Their aggressive initiative to reduce fragmentation on the local level will cumulatively add to reduced fragmentation at a larger scale. We have provided the conferencing for this effort.

Regulatory Mechanisms



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Both species of sage-grouse also warranted listing based on the lack of sufficient regulatory mechanisms

This may be the easiest “threat” to address – definitely the one we can effect the most immediate change



So easy to focus on the habitat, but need to remember regulatory mechanisms – we listed on 2 issues. That doubles our opportunities!

Regulatory mechanisms are those legal instruments that each agency can implement to conserve habitat. They need to have authority, some permanency, and consistency.



First Step!

KEEP WHAT IS GOOD GOOD!

Do no harm!

Protect with regulatory mechanisms and good management decisions

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Won't pull back where we are, but won't push us closer to a potential listing proposal.

Align management decision with what we know about sage-grouse persistence.

This point is key – we can't continue to lose habitat as we can't replace it

Regulatory mechanisms may be the best, most immediate step you can take to promote long-term conservation. Remember inadequacy of sufficient regulatory mechanisms is one reason the sage-grouse became a candidate. We may not be able to change habitat quickly, but we can conserve what we have through regulation.

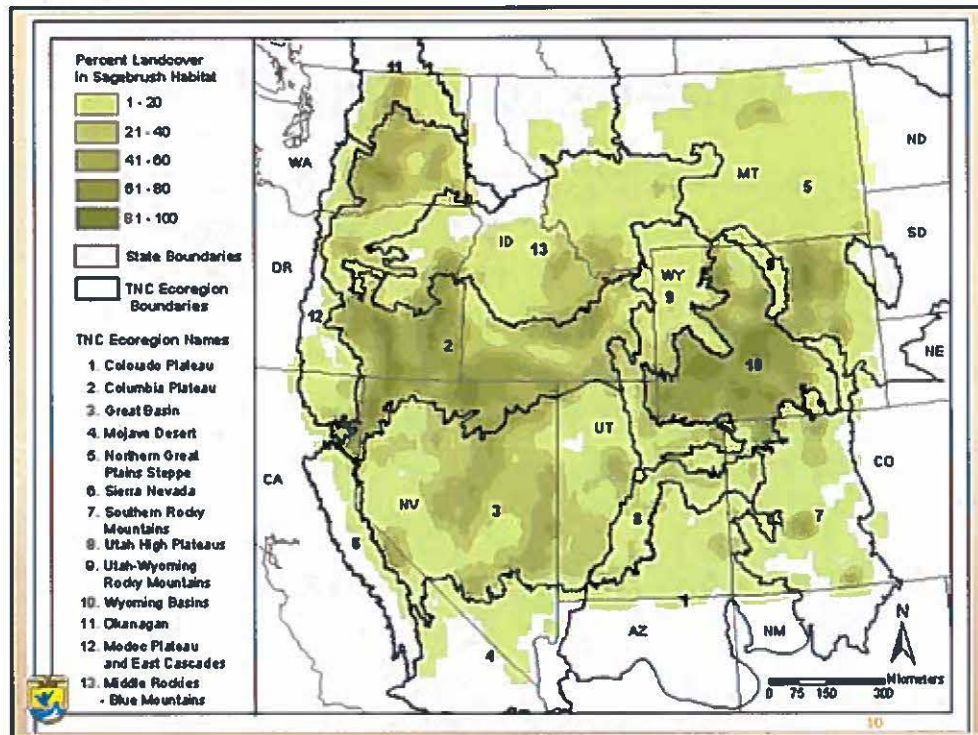
Where to Focus?

- Greater: Two large strongholds provide the landscape scale, contiguous habitats sage-grouse need. Without these the long-term persistence may not be possible.
- Gunnison: The Gunnison Basin is the key area to be maintained.
- Does this mean other areas don't matter?

NO



These areas are needed to reduce the extinction risk for the species. So they need to be considered the "bare minimum" for species persistence. But other areas are essential for connectivity and genetic integrity, and perhaps most importantly, recovery.



Use this map to show the two stronghold areas that have the necessary contiguous habitat. These areas are essential, but may not be sufficient
 Two areas for greater are border of OR, ID, NV and UT, and SW WY
 Gunnison basin is by the "7"

How to Approach These Strongholds

Habitat concerns can be impacted in 2 ways:

1. By habitat improvement/restoration
2. By creating regulatory mechanisms that conserve suitable habitat and prevent additional degradation/fragmentation



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So easy to focus on the habitat, but need to remember regulatory mechanisms – we listed on 2 issues. That doubles our opportunities!

Number 1 is not unimportant, but improving or restoring sagebrush habitat takes a long time.

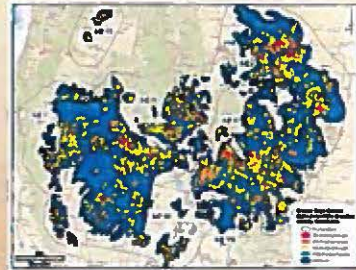
We are under a statutory obligation to do an annual review of each candidate, move it up or down in the priority list according to its status, and to issue a proposed rule to list as soon as other higher priority species have been addressed.

“Regulatory mechanisms” guide what impacts will occur to existing habitat, and putting them in place now will help ameliorate a big threat that we and others have identified for sage-grouse.

Conservation by Design

Emerging research demonstrates that
we can meet resource development
needs **AND** minimize habitat
fragmentation

Will require a paradigm shift



Is there a way to meet our multi-use mandates and still minimize fragmentation

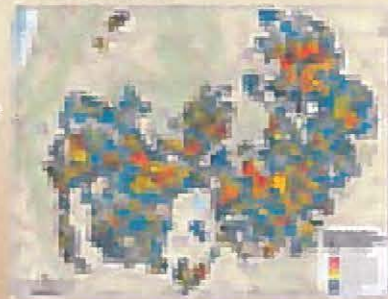
We have to be willing to say no sometimes

Build to minimize impacts first, not mitigate later

Conservation by Design

How do we meet the resource development needs **AND** minimize habitat fragmentation?

- Address habitat and regulatory mechanisms strategically, focusing first on areas that contribute the most to species status and probability of persistence.
- Wyoming example



Example

Wyoming Core Area Strategy

Core Area Strategy identifies:

- Areas where development should be limited for conservation;
- Areas where development will have less impact on long-term conservation; and
- Establishes parameters for keeping fragmentation below tolerable thresholds for the grouse.



Results:

Up to 82% of breeding sage-grouse population conserved on 23% of land surface



Up to 82% of breeding sage-grouse population conserved on 23% of land surface

WY BLM IM mirrors the Wyoming Core Area Strategy until RMPs can be completed or amended to incorporate the strategy in them.

Restrictions on development doesn't mean NO development. It simply means consider need, placement, and alternative methods to achieving goals (e.g. directional drilling).

Example

WY BLM State IM and RMP Amendments

WY IM 2010-012 :

- "Greater sage-grouse habitat management policy on Wyoming BLM Administered Public Lands including the Federal Mineral Estate.
- Mirrors State's Core Area Strategy



Results:

- Will be incorporated into RMPs under revision
- Statewide amendment
- Being developed for those RMPs that are not being revised.



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Conservation Opportunity

- Implement Strategic conservation/Conservation by Design to address habitat concerns.
- Develop effective regulatory mechanisms that address sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats



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What does the Service want?

Need to conserve landscapes but that does not preclude development

Wyoming is the example

Regulatory mechanisms must be applied and be consistent across the species range.
Active conservation also on-going

Summary

- Annual review of candidates.
- Listing must proceed when higher priorities are resolved (unless status has changed).
- The BLM administers 52% of Greater and 42% of Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.
- Prioritize stronghold areas.
- Revise RMPs to establish regulatory mechanisms.



Conservation Opportunity

Sage-grouse are just the tip of the iceberg



Conserving sage-grouse conserves a lot of other species in the sagebrush ecosystem that either are at risk and have not yet risen to the top of the list of concerns, or are at risk.