

Rangewide Energy Project Checklist for Consistency With the COT Report and Sage-grouse Mitigation Framework

The Service employs the COT Report (COT) and the Sage-grouse Rangewide Mitigation Framework (Mitigation Framework) when reviewing a new energy or infrastructure project, as these documents provide important Service recommendations and guidance applicable to the siting, construction, restoration, operations, maintenance, and mitigation of new energy or infrastructure projects. New energy and infrastructure projects, if placed in or near sage-grouse habitats, will exist on the landscape for decades or longer and accrue direct and indirect impacts to sage-grouse and their habitats. Affirmative conservation actions taken now can help lessen potential negative population trends in the future.

The Service and States collaboratively developed the COT to summarize threats to sage-grouse and its habitats, and define broad actions and measures that should be followed to address declining sage-grouse populations and habitat trends. For energy and infrastructure projects, the COT also provides specific Conservation Objectives, with energy and infrastructure project-specific options for actions and measures to avoid impacts to sage-grouse and their habitats. Where impact avoidance cannot be fully accomplished, the COT provides options for actions and measures to minimize energy and infrastructure impacts. The Mitigation Framework complements the COT's summary of threats, and conservation concepts and guidance, and further identifies factors the Service can use in evaluating the efficacy of mitigation actions in addressing a project's unavoidable direct and indirect effects to sage-grouse.

Using these two source documents, this sage-grouse checklist (Checklist) was developed for Service use to help determine if proposed energy projects and the associated infrastructure are consistent with the recommendations and guiding concepts provided in the COT and the Mitigation Framework. The concepts and questions, identified in the Checklist, are the Service's interpretations and applications of the COT and the Mitigation Framework, as applied to energy and infrastructure projects. Further guidance with sector specific concepts and questions for each

major energy sector may be developed by the Service in future. The Checklist should be used by Service staff to determine if energy and infrastructure projects are consistent with the COT and Mitigation Framework, where such projects and activities occur in sage-grouse PACs, PPH, PGH, and/or state-designated sage-grouse habitat. Use of the Checklist will improve the consistency of the Service's assessments across jurisdictional boundaries and sage-grouse conservation across the range.

CONSISTENCY WITH COT AND MITIGATION FRAMEWORK: GUIDING CONCEPTS and QUESTIONS ¹	RED/YELLOW /GREEN (No, Maybe, Yes)	Explanation/ Rationale
1. <u>Avoid Siting Energy Projects in PACs:</u> Are Project features and associated infrastructure <u>sited</u> outside of PACs <u>to the extent possible</u> ? If PACs are not avoided, explain the rationale for siting decision.		
2. <u>Avoid Impacts to GRSG Habitat in PACs:</u> Are Project activities (construction, upgrading, operations and maintenance) designed <u>to avoid</u> so that there are no new direct or indirect <u>impacts</u> to GRSG habitat in PACs <u>to the extent possible</u> ?		
3. <u>Avoid Impacts to Other GRSG Habitats that Occur Outside of PACs:</u> Are Project features (including associated infrastructure) and activities sited and designed <u>to avoid</u> so that there will be no new direct or indirect impacts to identified (outside of PAC) GRSG habitats <u>to the extent possible</u> ?		
4. <u>Minimize Impacts to Sage-grouse Habitats that Cannot be Avoided If Avoidance of Identified Sage-grouse Habitat Does Not Occur:</u>		

Comment [JB1]: I think it should be briefly explained what the ratings means– I'm assuming that a project wouldn't have to be all "green" to be consistent. For example, any of 1-3 could be red for various reasons (valid existing rights, etc.) – but if in the end 4-9 are green, then the project's probably as consistent as it can be...

Comment [JB2]: Seems like 1-3 should be in a hierarchy. i.e., a project may have to impact habitats outside of PACs in order to avoid impacts inside of PACs.

¹ Examples of COT and Mitigation Framework sources are provided below for the Checklist's guiding concepts and questions.

Are Project features sited in non-GRSG habitat? Are GRSG habitats adequately buffered from Project features and activities? Are effective and comprehensive BMPs proposed for a Project's design, siting, construction, and O&M phases?		
5. Consider Direct and Indirect Impacts: Have the Project's direct and indirect impacts to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitats (i.e., construction, upgrading, and operation/maintenance of energy developments, type of road, frequency of use, etc.) and other biologically important features been assessed and quantified using a scientifically defensible approach?		
6. Address Impacts by Population Status and Habitat Type/Condition/Importance: Has GRSG population status and habitat quality been factored into the impact assessment and <u>compensatory</u> mitigation calculations, across the Project's entire action area?		
7. Offset Direct and Indirect Impacts: <u>Where required to fully offset impacts, Does the compensatory mitigation follow the Mitigation Framework's mitigation standards (siting, duration, additionality, effectiveness, durability, and appropriate metrics)?</u>	Should there be an NA option here if impacts avoided?	
8. Monitor Project Impacts and Mitigation Benefits: Has a monitoring plan been identified that evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of avoidance, minimization, restoration, and compensatory mitigation measures? Is adaptive management included in the plan to respond to monitoring results if desired outcomes are not achieved?	Should there be an NA option here if impacts avoided?	
9. Net Conservation Benefit to Sage-grouse: <u>If impacts were not completely avoided, Does the Project, when considered in its entirety (avoidance,</u>	Should there be an NA option here if impacts	

minimization, restoration, compensatory mitigation) and over the life of Project impacts, provide a net conservation benefit for sage-grouse?	<u>avoided?</u>	
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Comment [JB3]: Conflicts a bit with the wording of #7. What's the correct rating here if all impacts are fully offset, but the mitigation doesn't meet the goal for conservation gain? Or – if all impacts are completely avoided, without conservation gain? Might this be re-worded such that impacts are, at a minimum, offset – with a goal (like an extra star or something) for achieving net conservation benefit?

Examples of COT and Mitigation Framework sources for concepts, questions:

1. **Avoid Siting Energy Projects in PACs:** COT: General Conservation Objective 1a, Framework: Part I: Avoidance and Minimization
2. **Avoid Impacts to GRSG Habitat in PACs:** COT: Energy Development Conservation Measure 1, COT: Infrastructure Conservation Option 1, Framework: Part I: Avoidance and Minimization
3. **Avoid Impacts to Other GRSG Habitats that Occur Outside of PACs:** COT: Specific Conservation Objective 4, Framework: Part I: Avoidance and Minimization
4. **Minimize Impacts to Sage-grouse Habitats If Avoidance of Identified Sage-grouse Habitat Does Not Occur:** COT: Energy Development Conservation Measure 2, COT: Infrastructure Conservation Option 2, Framework: Part I: Avoidance and Minimization
5. **Consider Direct and Indirect Impacts:** COT: Summary of Threats, COT: General Conservation Objective 1, Framework: Determining Metrics and Accounting Systems
6. **Address Impacts by Population Status and Habitat Type/Condition/Importance:** COT: Summary of Threats, Framework: Determining Metrics and Accounting Systems
7. **Offset Direct and Indirect Impacts:** Framework: Part II, Standards of Mitigation, COT: Infrastructure Conservation Option 9
8. **Monitor Project Impacts and Mitigation Benefits:** COT: General Conservation Objectives 3.e and 4.b, Framework: Determining Metrics and Accounting Systems
9. **Net Conservation Benefit to Sage-grouse:** Framework: Mitigation Program Goals