

Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan

In Nevada and California, a concerted effort has been made to develop a sage grouse conservation plan that will be implementable and effective into the future, based on planning efforts at the local level. The statewide strategy was developed by the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team, including key agency and private stakeholder representatives providing direction to local area planning groups to develop their own regional plans. Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn has been committed to sage grouse conservation planning since its inception in 2000, and continues to maintain contact with the planning endeavor through the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team. The first edition of the Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan will be released in June 2004. Planning efforts will continue into the future as more data is collected and projects are implemented using an adaptive management approach.

Nevada Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy

Nevada's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan first kicked off in November 2000, due to biologists' concerns about a downward trend in sage grouse populations. Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn appointed the Governor's Sage Grouse Team to develop a statewide sage grouse conservation effort with the goal of identifying a planning strategy that would help conserve Greater Sage Grouse and its habitat. The team consisted of about 30-members from the public and private sector working together to develop a statewide strategy based on the philosophy of "en libra" that challenged state, local governments, and federal agencies to work at a local level with community residents to identify risks to the bird and develop strategies to conserve sage grouse and sage grouse habitat for the future.

The planning strategy emphasized local participation and decision-making, while offering each local planning group the tools, resources and current scientific information they need.

Numerous partners have been involved in this comprehensive statewide planning effort, and have played an integral part in the whole process. Federal partners to date include: USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). State partners include California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Nevada Department of Agriculture, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, Nevada Department of Conservation and natural Resources, Nevada Farm Bureau, Nevada Indian Commission, Great Basin bird Observatory, Nevada Association of Counties, Nevada Wildlife Federation, Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group, Nevada Cattleman's Association, Sierra Pacific Power Co., University of Nevada Reno, and the Sierra Club. This varied list of partners has been essential to the success of the planning effort.

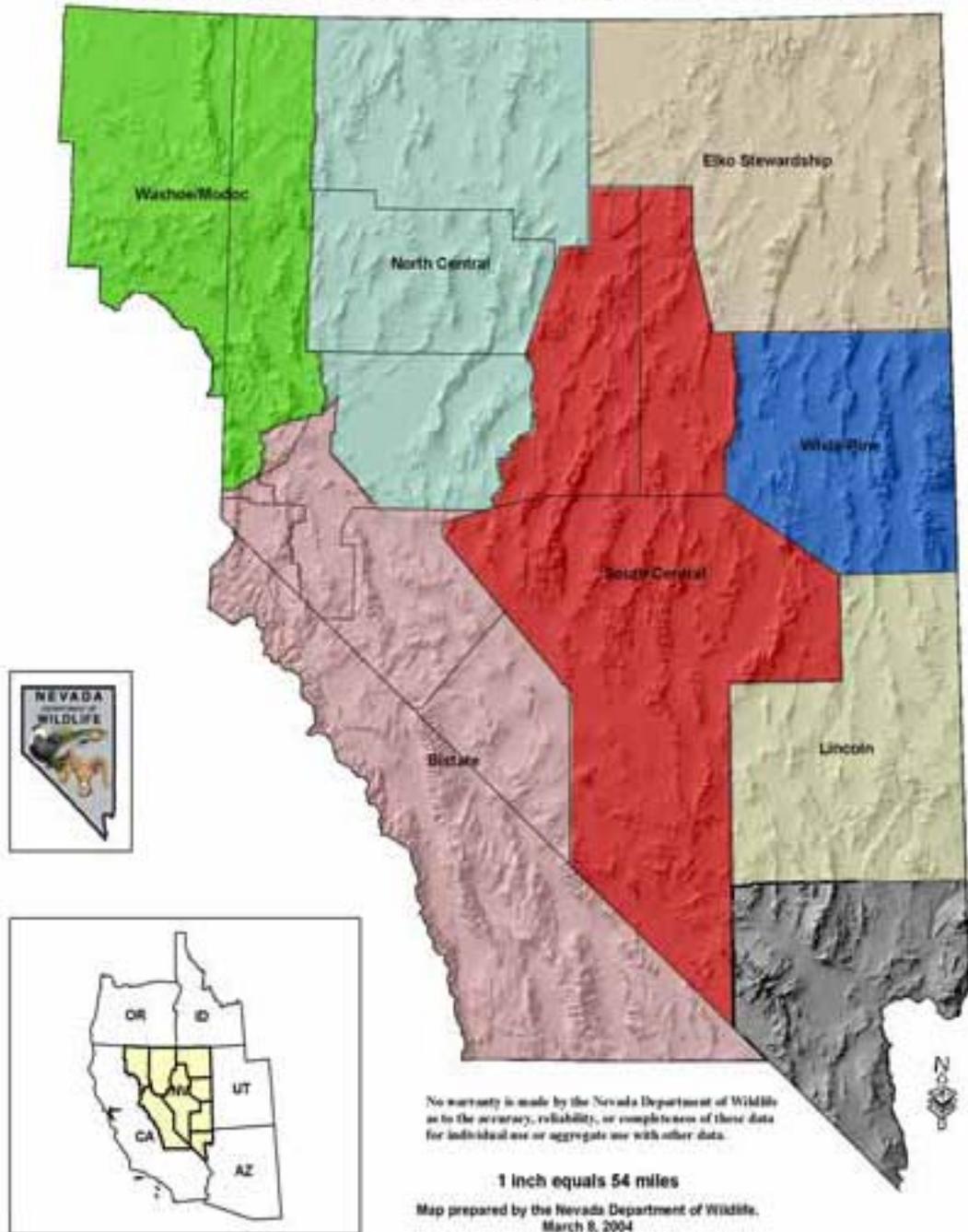
Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan Status

A draft of the Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan was completed in April 2004. The document includes an introduction, conservation assessment, conservation strategy, implementation and coordination, monitoring, and summary chapters, as well as several appendices that include project descriptions, survey protocols, population estimate methodology, and R-value criteria just to name a few. An external scientific peer review team (ESPRT) has been established to evaluate this draft and provide technical comment back to the Governor's Team. Local Area Conservation Planning (LACP) group members continue to work within their resource specialty areas to develop ongoing commitments for funding and implementation of the plan. The LACP members also have the opportunity to review and provide input to this draft of the state plan during the same time period that the ESPRT is evaluating the plan. The first edition of the plan will be completed in June 2004.

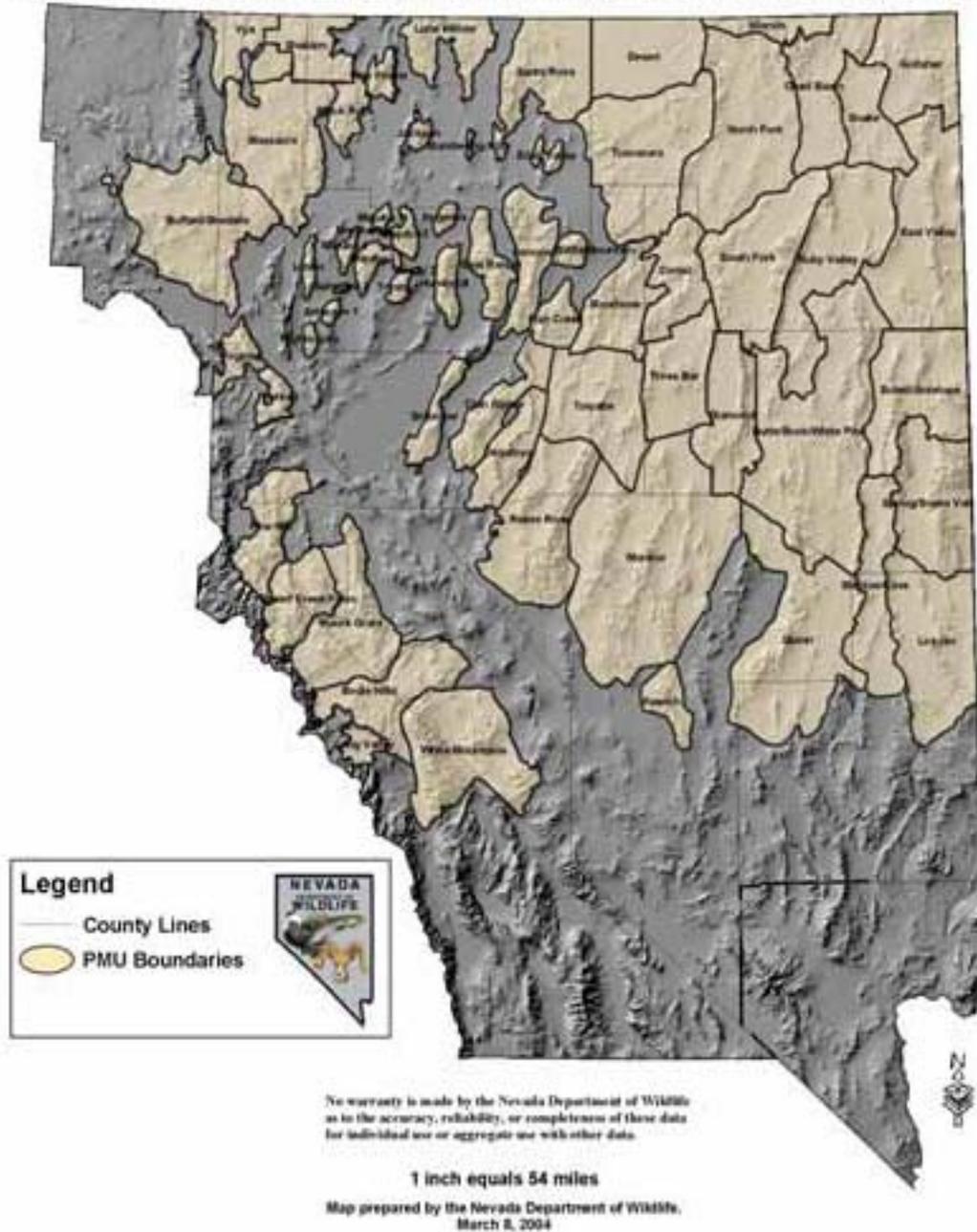
Local Area Planning Group Status

Since February 2002, seven local planning groups have worked long hours to identify threats to the birds in their respective regions, and to develop their regional plans to protect the bird for the long term. Within each LACP, several Population Management Units (PMU's) were identified based on aggregations of leks and information regarding seasonal movements and habitat use of birds from those leks. Maps of LACP delineation and PMU boundaries can be found on the following two pages.

Local Area Conservation Planning Units



Sage Grouse Population Management Units (PMUs)



A brief synopsis of local area planning group efforts in Nevada and California are reported below:

Bi-State LACP Group (CA-NV)

The Bi-State Local Area Planning Group is developing a conservation plan for greater sage grouse populations in east-central California and southwestern Nevada. Two state fish and game agencies, the California Department of Fish and Game and Nevada Department of Wildlife, together with two state BLM offices, and two Forest Service Offices, have led these planning efforts, with the help of a diverse group of interested private individuals.

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) received a non-traditional grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act to develop a conservation plan for greater sage grouse in Mono County, California. Section 6 funds are used for the recovery of listed and candidate species under ESA. The grant for sage grouse was given under a special category used to develop conservation agreements for candidate species. Although not a candidate species, genetic information collected to date has shown greater sage grouse in Mono County, CA and Lyon County, NV to be unique. The data suggests that the Mono/Lyon population has been separated from other greater sage grouse populations for some time. Therefore, conservation of the Mono/Lyon population is being addressed as a unique population of grouse.

In support of developing a conservation plan, the grant is also being used to collect information on distribution and seasonal ranges, demographics, genetics and morphology, and habitat selection of greater sage grouse throughout Mono County, CA. In 2003, CDFG contracted with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct a large scale telemetry project to be used in developing the local conservation plan, and the study is now in its second year. The Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service are also participating in an interagency approach to gather data and develop the conservation plan. The Bi-State group will continue to develop the plan over

the next year and integrate information collected by this study using an adaptive management approach.

Annually, the California Department of Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management cooperatively gather multiple counts on each known sage grouse lek and search for new leks in the Bi-State Planning Area. All known leks are surveyed simultaneously on a given day in each of the discrete populations in the Bi-State area, including the Bodie Hills and Long Valley, which have two of the largest leks known range-wide. In 2004, more than 200 males were found on the largest lek in Long Valley and 100 males on the largest lek in the Bodie Hills. By counting all of the leks on the same day, the agencies are able to estimate the total population in each area. In the late 1990's, a let-down fence was constructed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power on their lands near the large lek in Long Valley after evidence of bird mortalities was discovered on the old fence. These efforts to gather data and protect key sage grouse leks are an excellent example of the cooperative management by state, federal, and non-government agencies to conserve greater sage grouse in the Bi-State area.

Hunting is allowed on the California side of the Bi-State Planning Area, under very conservative permit allocations, based on good lek count data. In 2003, 25 1-bird permits were issued in Long Valley and 10 1-bird permits were issued in the Bodie Hills for a 2-day hunting season. Peripheral populations to the north in the Fales area and to the south in the White Mountains are closed to hunting because of smaller population numbers. On the Nevada side of the line, hunting of sage grouse has been discontinued due to low populations of sage grouse.

To date several projects have been identified in the planning process. The following is a summary of efforts planned to begin in 2004:

- Begin a more comprehensive sampling and analysis of genetics of sage grouse in peripheral areas of the Bi-State population to better understand the connectivity to other greater sage grouse populations.

- Begin a telemetry study to determine lek sites, seasonal movements, genetics, and habitat use of sage grouse in the White Mountains, which represent the most southwestern extent of the species range.
- Develop and implement interagency fire management guidelines to protect key sage grouse habitats throughout the Bi-State planning area.
- Develop conservation agreements on key private lands in the Pine Nut and Desert Creek/Fales PMU's.
- Conduct pinyon/juniper removal in the vicinity of strutting grounds on the western portion of the Bodie Hills. Numbers of male sage grouse attending these leks has decreased in association with the diminished habitat.
- Road closures/rerouting to reduce disturbance associated with recreational activities near key strutting grounds in the Long Valley area of the South Mono PMU.

Elko County LACP – Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group (NV)

The Elko County Stewardship Group is a conservation planning group that existed prior to Governor Guinn's request for local planning efforts. Their conservation work shifted to sage grouse after Governor Guinn's call to action on sage grouse. This is one of the richest and most diverse areas of the state resource-wise. But recently, the wildlife in the northeastern part of the state have been challenged with increasing invasion of exotic species (cheat grass) and a devastating fire cycle in 1999-2000 that destroyed 1.6 million acres of range, much of it prime mule deer and sage grouse habitat.

Over the last 10 years, NDOW has implemented restoration work on nearly 40,000 acres in the western portion of the county where the wildfire and cheat grass issue has impacted nearly 90% of historic deer winter range in one mule deer management area. Almost all of this project work is within historic or existing sage grouse habitat. The overarching goal of many of these projects is to reestablish sagebrush in areas where wildfires have effectively eliminated this essential element of mule deer and sage grouse habitat. Costs associated with these projects have exceeded \$1,000,000. With collaborative efforts involving BLM, USFS and private landowners, NDOW has taken an active role in the rehabilitation of important sagebrush habitats following wildfires. Over

the last four years, NDOW has spent over \$250,000 in Elko County in efforts to restore sagebrush to 30,000 acres impacted by fire, all of which have value to sage grouse.

In addition, data collection efforts on Elko County sage grouse populations have been increased to better quantify the birds population on trend leks in the area. Additional population inventory work has been conducted on a frequent basis with Elko BLM. A significant effort has been undertaken during the last several years to identify new sage grouse strutting grounds using GIS models to predict lek locations. Both helicopter and ground surveys have been employed to identify new leks, using both volunteer labor and agency personnel. This continuing collaborative effort between agencies has allowed BLM/NDOW personnel to visit nearly 1,500 leks and identify nearly 300 new leks over the last four years in Elko County alone.

Elko County's sage grouse conservation planning effort relies to a great degree upon a willing partnership with the local BLM District and US Forest Service District Offices. To date, habitat and population inventories are being conducted collaboratively, and sage grouse conservation efforts are being integrated into the federal land use planning documents as they are developed. As part of one study, the Hubbard Vineyard Allotment in northeastern Elko County, BLM implemented holistic management practices to shift grazing activity during the critical nesting season for sage grouse. Data from this study and others may help formulate a knowledge base for future management actions. The US Forest Service in the area has incorporated Greater Sage Grouse into the region's list of sensitive species, and has identified sage grouse as a management indicator species. The Forest Service reseeded 3,000 acres in the Jarbidge Ranger District and 500 acres in the East Humboldt Range with bitter brush and sagebrush to benefit sage grouse and mule deer. Forest Service planning documents in the district include several recommendations to improve habitat conditions for several species, including sage grouse.

Private partners, such as mines provide additional funding for sage grouse conservation activities in northeastern Nevada. In addition to mitigating direct impacts associated with surface mining activities, creative solutions have often included off-site mitigation to address impacts to sage grouse and sage brush habitats. Newmont Gold has

provided funding for habitat restoration on more than 8,000 acres of sage brush habitat, while various other mining partners, such as Barrick, Independence, and Bootstrap have provided for rehabilitation of another 1,300 acres of habitat for sage grouse as well as a number of other species.

White Pine LACP Group (NV)

The White Pine County planning group is located in far east-central Nevada near the state's border with Utah. White Pine and Lincoln County were once a joint LACP; however, because sage grouse conservation plans were being developed by each county's respective Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) committee, the group decided to split in mid-2003 and complete a plan covering each county's respective portion of the planning area.

The following sage grouse project proposals have been formulated out of the planning effort and are currently in their initial stages of development:

- Summer 2004 - Mechanical removal of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees from four springs/riparian areas to improve late brood habitat values on USFS lands.
- Summer 2004 - Establish field trial sites in south Steptoe Valley within existing crested wheatgrass seedings to evaluate various treatment methods for the reestablishment of native vegetation on 244 acres of BLM administered lands.
- Summer 2004 - Thinning of pinyon and juniper trees on approximately 800 acres to release the sagebrush/grass/forb understory in the Gleason Creek watershed. This watershed is utilized by sage grouse for nesting and brood rearing.
- Summer 2004 - Conduct prescribed burning (1,300 acres) and green stripping (17 miles) to diversify sagebrush age class/ structure and reduce potential for future catastrophic wildfire in known sage grouse habitat as well as removal of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees on BLM lands within Cave Valley.
- Summer/Fall 2004 - Construct fuel breaks in south Steptoe Valley and north White River Valley watersheds in sagebrush habitats using a variety of methods

(mechanical and burning). A total of 870 acres will be treated for this project. Study plots will be developed to allow for a direct comparison of selected treatment combination. Seeding will be done post-treatment with native species only.

- Spring 2004/2005 - Radio collar approximately 16 sage grouse and conduct follow-up telemetry to delineate seasonal ranges, reveal nesting habits and verify PMU boundaries. NDOW/BLM cooperative effort.
- 2003 through 2007 - Restore/improve 6,000 acres of sagebrush steppe vegetation in Great Basin National Park. Mechanically thin encroaching pinyon trees to release remnant understory vegetation. Reintroduce fire as a natural disturbance to maintain and enhance sagebrush steppe and savannah communities in areas that were once seasonal sage grouse habitat.
- 2006 – Treat 1,000 acres of pinyon/juniper invaded sagebrush habitat on USFS lands. This project is part of a multi state research experiment to evaluate treatment and restoration methods and will be conducted through the Rocky Mountain Research Station of the USFS.
- 2005 through 2008 - Revision of USFS grazing allotment plans to update range standards to better provide for the needs of sage grouse.

Other projects have occurred in recent years, unrelated to the sage grouse planning process, which could have benefits to sage grouse. These would include watershed assessment by the BLM and the Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition, removal of tress from springs and associated riparian habitats on public land, and strip treatment of thick sagebrush followed by seeding on private land sage grouse habitat.

Lincoln County LACP Group (NV)

Lincoln County is located in southeastern Nevada and is considered the southernmost distribution of sage grouse within the state. The Lincoln County Sage Grouse Conservation Plan was prepared by the Lincoln County Sage Grouse Technical Review Team under the guidance of the Lincoln County Coordinated Resource Management

Steering Committee. The document is designed to utilize an adaptive management strategy in order to take advantage of all possible actions. Those involved with the Lincoln County Sage Grouse Conservation Plan felt that pilot projects should be designed, developed, and implemented so as to provide information as to levels of success as well as improving or increasing sage grouse habitat within the plan area.

The following projects have been identified and scheduled to be accomplished in the next five years:

- Pinyon/Juniper removal near lek sites in Little Spring Valley, Table Mountain, Eightmile, Grassy Mountain, and Fogliani Ranch areas. The objective of this project is to remove all pinion and juniper trees within 0.5 miles of existing lek sites. Most of these sites are administered by the BLM.
- Remove pinyon/juniper from several sites and seed with appropriate grass/forb mixes. Convert sites that are transitioning, or have transitioned to pinyon/juniper-dominated sites back into sagebrush grassland sites. The areas identified for removal are administered by the BLM.
- Reach and maintain wild horse Appropriate Management Levels (AML) in Herd Management Areas (HMA) and remove all wild horses not in HMA's. Examine use by wild horses in sage grouse habitat and make recommendations for management. This project is under the authority of the BLM under the Wild Horse and Burro Act.
- Mechanical treatment of sagebrush and subsequent seeding of grasses and forbs to diversify monotypic habitats in Little Spring Valley, Hamlin Valley, South Spring Valley, Lake Valley and Cave Valley areas. The objective of this project is to reduce cover of decadent sagebrush and re-establish native grasses and forbs, important to sage grouse nesting cover and forage, as part of the sagebrush plant community.
- Restore spring sites that have been inundated with pinion/juniper. Identify spring sites with adjacent pinyon/juniper woodland and determine land ownership. Conduct mechanical treatments and or prescribed fire to remove pinyon/juniper woodlands around springs.

- Seed forbs into historic crested wheat seedings. This project would involve various methods (aerial, drilling, etc.) of planting seeds or forbs into crested wheat seedings where sagebrush is re-establishing itself, but forbs are lacking.
- Improve the availability of water by creating water developments in suitable sage grouse habitats. At least twelve water developments are proposed in various areas throughout the Lincoln and Cave PMU's.

Washoe-Lassen-Modoc LACP Group (CA-NV-Pyramid Lake Tribe)

The Washoe-Lassen-Modoc Sage Grouse Planning group is located across Lassen County in northeastern California and Washoe County in northwestern Nevada. The regional planning group also includes the Pyramid Lake Tribe in northern Washoe County in Nevada. The Pyramid Lake Tribal Council approved a resolution in April 2003 to commit to sage grouse planning and coordination efforts. In addition, the tribe has worked to develop its own Tribal Sage Grouse Conservation Plan.

Overall, the Washoe-Modoc-Lassen planning approach included specific task groups for habitat conservation, private lands conservation and sage grouse population conservation risk assessments and corresponding conservation actions to achieve the goals and objectives of the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategies. Resource personnel conducted individual risk assessment for each population management unit (PMU), and included conservation actions planned and proposed for a five-year period. Within the specific conservation plans for each PMU, the task groups assessed each risk and conservation measure in respect to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife (WAFWA) guideline pertinent to local conditions and restraints affecting sage grouse.

Private lands risk assessments were accomplished with private land mapping using sage grouse lek distribution and habitat overlays. The Private Lands Task Group of the Washoe-Lassen-Modoc LACP group provided a comprehensive list of private land projects to be administered by the Nevada Department of Wildlife's private lands program.

The following projects have been identified as important to the sage grouse conservation efforts of this planning group, and are scheduled for completion by December 24, 2004:

Population Conservation:

- Recreational Hunting: Seasons and limits are adjusted to maintain a harvest at or below 10% of the fall population estimate.
- Aerial Lek Discovery Surveys: Common to all population management units, these surveys will locate and establish trend leks for population estimates and trend studies.
- Wing Collections and Assessments: Wings will be collected from hunts within each population management unit to determine annual recruitment to the population.
- Predator Research: The Grassy Camp/Hart Camp raven control project will be completed to determine the affects of raven control on sage grouse nesting success. Findings of this research may apply treatments to other population management units in the future.
- Telemetry Studies: Aerial and ground surveys on radio collared birds in the Pah Rah/Virginia Population Management Unit will continue. These data are essential to locate critical habitat on private and tribal lands within the planning unit.

Private Lands Conservation:

Private lands and sage grouse habitat overlays are being compiled to prioritize private land incentive programs. These programs are found in the draft population management plans. Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) Tier II funding has been granted that will be used to develop conservation easements on four private lands projects where leks are pre-existing.

Habitat Conservation:

Major land use plan revisions are under way in the Buffalo Hills/Skedaddle, Massacre and Vya Population Management Units of the Bureau of Land Management. These new Resource Management Plans will set the framework for project implementation by the Bureau of Land Management.

Full fire suppression to specifically delineated sage grouse habitats is currently the BLM policy applied to lands delineated in these conservation plans. Monitoring of sagebrush restoration of previous wild fires is ongoing to determine the proper rehabilitation prescriptions for future wildfires. Land use revision or amendments are under way or proposed in future planning.

Wild horse gathers to appropriate management levels are under way and dependent on this year's budget.

Livestock grazing permits are being issued by comprehensive environmental assessments. Standards and Guidelines are being applied to permits that are in compliance to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Sage Grouse Guidelines. Livestock are excluded from the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge to restore and research sage grouse habitat restoration.

Juniper control is being considered in land use plan revisions to allow for large-scale projects to restore sagebrush communities in Massacre and Vya Population Management Areas. Past small projects are being monitored to measure the effects of the projects.

About 2, 200 acres in Lassen County were acquired in 2000 to provide sites for restoration, enhancement and protection of sage/steppe plant communities and associated wildlife species as sites for impacts of the Sierra Pacific Power Company Alturas Project (365kv power line) and the Tuscarora Gas Transmission Company Project (natural gas pipeline). Target species included sage grouse and pronghorn antelope. These sites are within important sage grouse seasonal use areas and will provide significant opportunities for enhancing sagebrush habitats.

North Central LACP Group (NV)

The North Central LACP encompasses a vast amount of area including Churchill, Pershing, and Humboldt Counties and contains a relatively high number of Population Management Units (19). Sage grouse conservation plans have been completed for four PMU's and drafts have been completed for three other PMU's. The North Central LACP group has a prioritized list of PMU plans to accomplish in the future and will continue their efforts accordingly.

Four PMU plans have been completed to date within this LACP. The following are highlighted projects proposed for implementation:

Lone Willow PMU

- Establish wide green-strips of low flammability perennial grasses between cheatgrass areas and unburned sagebrush/grass habitat types that provide important sage grouse habitat in the Lone Willow PMU.
- In 2004, initiate a survey of all roads, disturbed areas, water sources and streams, meadows, camp areas, stock handling facilities, and other areas where noxious weeds are likely to establish within the Lone Willow PMU. Select a random sample of additional upland sites for survey. For all populations found develop a strategic treatment plan following the principles of integrated weed management.
- Within the Lone Willow PMU, revise BLM resource management plans to identify key sage grouse habitat locations as high priority suppression sites, and ensure local and regional suppression organizations know where these sites are located.
- Minerals staff in the Winnemucca Field Office will provide the wildlife and range management specialists quarterly updates about exploration activities (including new mining claims) so that BLM and NDOW can develop pre-activity review/planning meetings with mining companies to identify potential effects to sage grouse early in the planning process, and develop mining/exploration operational plans that minimize/prevent adverse impacts to Lone Willow's sage grouse population.

Clan Alpine PMU

- Over the next five years, map areas of monotypic sagebrush to help identify areas that would benefit from mechanical or prescribed treatments within the Clan Alpine PMU. Projects will be coordinated between BLM, NDOW, and the livestock operator and will be designed to create a mosaic of different age classes of sagebrush and increase the amount of herbaceous material for the benefit of sage grouse.
- Over the next five years, document the amount of pinyon/juniper encroachment in the Clan Alpine PMU through the use of aerial photographs and other mapping sources to help identify areas for future treatment. Protection of important R-0 and R-2 habitats will be a priority.
- Within the Clan Alpine PMU, manage livestock utilization in nesting and early brood rearing habitat to leave sufficient herbaceous height to provide hiding cover for nests and young chicks.
- Over the next five years within the Clan Alpine PMU, attempt to capture and radio telemeter 15 sage grouse and monitor the birds movements over the life of the transmitters to help identify seasonal movements and habitat use.

Desatoya PMU

- Conduct the BLM proposed riparian protection projects in Smith and Topia Canyons in 2004. The projects are designed to protect and restore critical meadow and riparian habitats.
- Design and implement sage grouse habitat enhancement projects in the Haypress Meadows area by 2006. The projects are aimed at enhancing critical sage grouse upland and meadow habitats (R-0). The BLM, NDOW, and livestock operator will work together in the design of the project to ensure that the movement or management of livestock within the allotment will not be impacted.
- Design and implement the private lands habitat enhancement project in Porter Canyon by 2004. Proposed treatments include pinyon/juniper removal, erosion control, and the re-seeding of areas following treatment. Meadow and riparian fencing has been completed.

- Over the next five years, attempt to capture and radio telemeter 15 to 20 sage grouse to determine if the population is migratory or non-migratory and if it is part of a larger metapopulation. Tracking of the bird's movements would help increase the knowledge and understanding of the current distribution and key habitats for sage grouse within the PMU. The effort will also help determine if habitats are fragmented or are still intact.

East Range PMU

- Over the next five years, capture 10 sage grouse and outfit them with radio telemetry collars. Monitor the bird's movements for up to two years to identify critical habitats and learn more about current distribution of sage grouse in the PMU. Use the results to design and implement projects designed to protect, improve and increase the quantity and quality of those habitats.
- Over the next two years, amend the Winnemucca District's Fire Plan (BLM) to call for "full suppression" in sage grouse habitat. Due to the likelihood of cheatgrass invasion and the loss of sagebrush habitats from fire, prescribed burns shall be analyzed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that important sage grouse habitats are protected.

South Central LACP Group (NV)

The South Central Planning Group is located in south-central Nevada and covers an extensive area including Eureka, Lander and Nye Counties. The group meets monthly and is following the outline provided by the Nevada Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team. Highlights of the projects to be undertaken as part of the local area plan include:

- Telemetry Project-19 birds were captured and collared in 2003. Regular tracking have resulted in valuable information being gathered relative to predation, winter range and over-all movement.

- Late Summer Brood Rearing Habitat-inspection of high country riparian meadows near Battle Mountain has resulted in a cooperative agreement between the BLM, private landowners and BLM permittees to renovate 3 meadows. The renovation includes weed control, fencing and grazing plans.

In addition, a number of projects conducted by the Battle Mountain Field Office of the BLM and the US Forest Service in past years have positively impacted sage grouse habitat in Eureka, Lander and Nye Counties.

Affirmative Conservation and Outreach Actions

Funding Obtained for Sage Grouse Conservation Efforts

The Nevada and Eastern California Sage Grouse Conservation Plan effort has been a cooperative effort funded and supported by state and federal agencies as well as tribes and volunteers. Pitman Robertson and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants have assisted the state agencies with funding the conservation planning and monitoring efforts necessary to formulate a comprehensive plan. Federal agencies including the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have also provided funding and personnel time to this effort. In addition, funding to implement the sage grouse plan on private lands has been established through grants from the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) among others.

Nevada received LIP Tier I grants for 2003 to begin a private lands program as well as fund a private lands coordinator position. Additionally, in a cooperative effort between the California Department of Fish and Game and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, LIP Tier II grant funding was received for 2004 to purchase conservation easements on private lands along the border of Nevada and California that afford key habitat to sage grouse habitat including important strutting ground sites.

The BLM has provided substantial support with regards to monitoring efforts and on-the ground actions in the form of habitat improvement through monies obtained from Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) and Challenge Cost Share funds. Challenge

Cost Share monies obtained through the Winnemucca District of the BLM have supported the Nevada Department of Wildlife's aerial lek survey program in important sage grouse habitats such as the Lone Willow and Santa Rosa PMU's in Humboldt County. The Elko District of the BLM has used BAER funds to determine the level of use and impacts to sage grouse strutting grounds from wildfire in Elko County.

In addition, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's WHIP program funded \$47,851 in conservation efforts on two projects to develop sage grouse habitat. A project near Cave Valley in northern Lincoln County reduced overgrown sagebrush canopy and reseeded a 578-acre tract to encourage grasses and forbs for improved nesting cover for sage grouse. Another project in Lander County in the Desatoya Range applied brush management to 51 acres to reduce pinyon-juniper encroachment, and to fence a wet meadow to improve sage grouse brood rearing habitat. In the future, additional WHIP funding may become available for sage grouse conservation work.

Volunteer Participation Integral to Overall Sage Grouse Planning Effort

Since January of 2000, Nevada's sage grouse conservation effort has relied extensively on volunteers for both planning efforts and sage grouse strutting ground ("lek") counts. Over the past four years, 176 volunteers have participated on the Governor's Sage Grouse Team, as part of the local area planning groups, and in conducting sage grouse lek counts, where valuable data is collected identifying the range of the bird. Volunteer time and effort has served as state match for federal funding, with nearly 7,000 hours volunteered at a value of \$210,800 since January 2000. In addition, volunteers donated 81,813 miles on their vehicles to traverse the state for meetings and sage grouse projects.

The sage grouse planning effort has taken wing in Nevada, but only due to the extraordinary effort of a number of citizens who have committed themselves to conserving the bird and its habitat. This has not only been beneficial to the bird, but has been a valuable experience for those citizens who have participated in the volunteer program, allowing them to gain knowledge about sage grouse, its habitat, and conservation issues facing the species.

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