



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office
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Reno, Nevada 89502
Ph: (775) 861-6300 ~ Fax: (775) 861-6301

August 24, 2012

Dear Interested Party:

Subject: Data Call Request to Assist in Preparation of Bi-State DPS of Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Rule and Proposed Critical Habitat

On March 23, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published a 12-month status review finding for the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) in the Federal Register (75 FR 13910). Within this finding, we determined that the Bi-State population of the greater sage-grouse (previously referred to as the Mono Basin area population) located along the border of central California and Nevada met our standards for recognition as a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) and as such represented a listable entity under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). Further, our 12-month finding concluded that this DPS warranted the protection of the ESA but that listing the Bi-State DPS of greater sage-grouse at that time was precluded by the need to address higher priority species first. The result of this finding was the placement of the Bi-State DPS of greater sage-grouse on the candidate list for future action, meaning the DPS does not receive statutory protection under the ESA, and the States of Nevada and California continue to be responsible for managing the population.

In coordination with our Washington Office and a legal settlement agreement, the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office (NFWO) has an established timeline of September 2013, by which a proposal on our listing and critical habitat actions will be completed. The NFWO is initiating a new data call to inform this new decision for the Bi-State DPS of the greater sage-grouse. The NFWO will once again review the species' status to determine what listing action should be taken based on scientific data. Potential actions include, proposing the DPS for listing or removing the species from the candidate list. If the DPS is proposed for listing, we will also propose areas to be designated as critical habitat.

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IN AMERICA 

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Enclosed is a list of information/data we are collecting for this review. To the extent possible, please provide the requested information, including spatial data when appropriate and available. More details of the types of data requested are included in the enclosed sheet. We have not specified a format for receiving the information requested and leave that to your discretion. Please do not send raw data unless specifically requested on the enclosed sheet. All information should be submitted to our office no later than September 28, 2012.

We appreciate your efforts in providing the Service the best scientific data regarding the Bi-State DPS of greater sage-grouse. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Steve Abele at (775) 861-6300.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Edward D. Koch".

Edward D. Koch
State Supervisor

Enclosure

Data Request for the Bi-State DPS of Greater Sage-Grouse

The following is a general outline of items for which we are seeking information. We understand that not every responder will need to address every issue or have knowledge of some issues in their locale. Please provide the information that is applicable for your area of jurisdiction. We are requesting information you may have collected since the completion of the *Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California* on June 31, 2004. We recognize that much of this data has been submitted to the Service previously but encourage additional submissions as applicable. As a default, please send anything that seems relevant, which was not previously provided to the Service for consideration in the March 2010 12-month finding.

As for conservation efforts, we are requesting supporting materials and any updates to the information provided in conjunction with the *Bi-State Action Plan*. Specifically, status of the project, planned or implemented, and the determination and measure used to assess project effectiveness.

This outline may not be complete. If additional data, not identified below, is deemed pertinent or if underrepresented stakeholders with relevant knowledge are known, please provide this information as well. In general, the items below are intended to assess potential stressors to the DPS. Habitat improvement projects or other conservation efforts should be captured in the associated conservation efforts database compiled in conjunction with the *Bi-State Action Plan*.

Data Request:

Population status, trends and numbers: This section is primarily directed towards State agencies for response.

1. What are the trends and population size estimates by PMU or population for your State?
 - a. Is the trend expected given weather conditions and population cycling?
2. Has there been any significant change in the populations in your State (more than normal annual fluctuations)?
 - a. If yes, do you know the cause of the population change? Please describe.
3. What are the recent lek counts for your State and known limitations to this metric due to effort?
4. Do you have information that informs degree of isolation among populations for your State (telemetry, genetic)?
5. Do you have information that informs understanding of specific life history vital rates?
6. Do you have information that informs historical distribution, historical lek occurrence, or new lek/distribution?

Habitat status and trends: To the extent possible, for each of items listed below please provide locations, PMUs affected, acreage affected and geospatial data if available. The

primary focus of these questions is directed at occupied habitats (at least during one season) or sagebrush habitats that are essential for long-term species persistence (e.g. connectivity corridors).

1. Areas of sagebrush lost due to permanent conversion (e.g. agricultural lands, subdivisions). In addition to the information requested above, please identify the stage of loss (e.g. proposed, in NEPA review, completed).
 - a. Please identify proposed areas of conversions that have a high certainty of occurrence.
 - b. Land acquisitions/exchanges/easements and details on rights acquired or changes in management. What is the duration of these agreements?
2. Please identify areas that will be converted in association with Farm Bill Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP).
3. For areas where CRP has/is providing habitat for grouse, have there been areas where the lands have been put back into production, resulting in a loss of habitat? If so, please estimate the number of acres potentially lost.
4. Acres of occupied sagebrush habitats that were lost to fire (either wild or prescribed fires) within the past 20 years. Cause of fire, post fire restoration efforts, and current condition. Identify fire management activities intended to conserve sagebrush (fire breaks).
5. Information that could inform our understanding of expansion (both historic and future potential) of conifers or cheatgrass into sagebrush.
6. Incursion of other invasive species that affects habitat quality and utility for sage-grouse. Please identify the invasive species.
7. Proposed energy developments and any associated stipulations (Spatial data appreciated). In addition, please identify the type (oil, gas, wind, solar, hydropower, geothermal, uranium, etc.) and stage of development, lease/well/turbine/development density, and life of project. Further, any information describing the potential/likelihood of future activity.
8. Please provide information regarding new, proposed, or expanded mining activities (Spatial data appreciated). Additionally, any information informing the potential/likelihood of future activity.
9. Existing and proposed transmission corridors for energy transmission (Spatial data appreciated). Include status (e.g. NEPA completed, under construction, proposed), and any efforts to minimize impacts to sage-grouse and sagebrush. Any known impacts caused by existing lines.
10. Other existing or proposed infrastructure (roads, fences, pipelines, cell towers, etc - Spatial data would be appreciated). Identify areas of concern due to degradation or known mortality and areas where impacts have been addressed (closures, fence marking, let down, etc).
11. Grazing impacts – any significant changes that affect habitat abundance and quality. Allotment data including prescription, current utilization, most recent assessment (LHA, etc). Sagebrush treatments that either remove sagebrush habitats or alter their ability to

provide current seasonal habitats (e.g. converting winter habitat to more open canopies that may support brood-rearing).

- a. Please include treatments conducted for the benefit of wild ungulates.
 - b. Please identify horse management areas, targeted management level, current level, and any documentation of habitat condition (positive or negative).
12. Please identify any known losses of habitat connectivity, both within and between populations.
 13. Please identify any other resources that could inform understanding of current habitat condition/quality.
 14. Please identify any other factors that may affect habitat quality (OHV, water management, removal of irrigated agricultural lands).

Changes in Regulatory Mechanisms: Regulatory mechanisms are those that are enforceable by either state or local statute, federal land management documents, etc. They do not include voluntary efforts. However, please provide information on any voluntary efforts that may be affecting sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats. If these efforts have not yet been implemented, or not yet shown to be effective, please identify those projects within the conservation efforts database.

1. Identify the status of RMP, LRMP, INRMP, HCP, etc. revisions that will affect sage-grouse or sagebrush (either positive or negative), if any.
2. Identify any changes in the status or existence of guidance documents that influence interpretation of existing regulatory mechanisms and which affect sage-grouse or sagebrush (positive or negative) on other Federal lands (e.g. BLM IMs, FS IDs, etc). The Service would appreciate each agency's explanation of how and when (circumstances and how often) the realistically/actually implement the various aspects of each applicable policy and regulation that may affect sage-grouse individuals, populations, and/or habitat.
3. Identify any new regulatory mechanisms that minimize impacts from fire, invasives, energy development, etc. If new regulatory mechanisms are being considered, you should also identify those, along with the certainty of application.
4. Identify existing or new State or local (e.g. county) efforts to address threats?
5. Identify current zoning restrictions or other covenants that may restrict development.

Hunting and other uses:

1. What are your current harvest regulations?
2. Have there been any changes to hunting regulations for sage-grouse? If so, please identify the reason behind the change, and if applicable, any results.
3. Have there been any changes in recreational impacts (positive or negative) or in religious use of sage-grouse?
4. Please identify current research projects on sage-grouse in your State, and whether or not the project includes bird capture or collaring.

Disease and Predation: (please provide locations where appropriate)

1. Please report any West Nile virus outbreaks or documented occurrences.
2. Are you aware of any new diseases/parasites that have population-level effects?
3. Are you aware of any information informing predator impacts on sage-grouse populations or vital rates?
4. Do you have any data that suggests that predators may be limiting sage-grouse in any part of the DPS, independent of habitat conditions?
5. Do you have data that supports increases in predator populations that are affecting sage-grouse as the result of habitat alterations?
6. Have measures been implemented to address predator occurrence either directly or indirectly?

Other Factors:

Do you have any new information regarding negative effects of pesticides, contaminants, recreational activities or other human disturbance (Mammoth airport), drought and other climatic conditions on the DPS?

Please report any new information on the impacts of climate change on sage-grouse or their habitats.

Conservation Partnership and Funding Commitments:

1. How are conservation measures being funded? What funding has been spent or committed? For what, where?

Literature:

Please identify any pertinent literature you feel is important for our review. In addition to citations, if you have cited any literature above, please provide the page numbers of the actual citation.

Contact person(s):

Please provide us a contact(s) regarding all of the above requested data in case we have questions.