

A Summary of Conservation Activities of the Glasgow, MT Sage-grouse Local Working Group



The role of the sage-grouse local working groups is to adapt the state plan to specific local areas to develop and implement strategies that will improve or maintain the sagebrush steppe and reduce or mitigate factors that may further reduce greater sage-grouse habitats or populations. (Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage-grouse in Montana 2005)

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This “Summarizes the Conservation Actions” taken by the Glasgow Sage-grouse Local Working Group (SG-LWG) divided into sections as follows:

- Description of the local working groups
- A brief description of conservation issues identified by the Glasgow Sage-grouse SG-LWG as they relate to 12 overall state conservation issues identified in the *Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage-grouse in Montana*
- A list of specific issues to the Glasgow SG-LWG
- A short overview of activities taken to accomplish the conservation strategies identified in the state plan
- And of the twelve conservation issues identified in the state plan which were have been addressed specifically by the Glasgow SG-LWG.

The *Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Greater Sage-grouse in Montana 2005* was developed over the course of two years, it is the plan for managing sage-grouse in Montana. The Plan states:

“The role of the sage-grouse local working groups is to adapt the plan to specific local areas to develop and implement strategies that will improve or maintain the sagebrush steppe and reduce or mitigate factors that may further reduce greater sage-grouse habitats or populations.”

The Glasgow sage-grouse local working group is one of three formal working groups in the state the other two are located in Dillon and Miles City. One additional group in Petroleum County Conservation District in central Montana, is proactively “functioning” like a sage-grouse local working group. The Montana local working group boundaries were determined at a statewide executive meeting held in Billings, Montana in January 2009. The Glasgow SG-LWG area encompasses the four counties of Blaine, Phillips, Valley and McCone some of the largest counties in the state. For practical reasons the Glasgow SG-LWG has recently made a concerted effort to move meetings and workshops between Malta and Glasgow to attract and accommodate people who for logistical reasons have not attended.



The Glasgow Sage-grouse Local Working Group Area Shown in Gold

TABLE 1 TWELVE STATEWIDE SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY MONTANA SG-LWGs 2005	
Fire Management	Power Lines and Generation Facilities
Harvest Management	Predation
Livestock Grazing Management	Recreational Disturbance of Sage-grouse
Mining and Energy Development	Roads and Motorized Vehicles
Noxious Weed Management	Vegetation
Outreach, Education, and Implementation	Managing Other Wildlife

Note: This report does not take into account extensive conservation efforts underway in Montana by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP). Only activities conducted by the Dillon SG-LWG are reported.

TABLE 2. OF THE TWELVE SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE STATE PLAN THE GLASGOW SG-LWG ADDRESSED THEM AS SHOWN 2007-2010*	
Fire Management	W
Harvest Management	
Livestock Grazing Management	W,F
Mining and Energy Development	W, F
Noxious Weed Management	W,F
Outreach, Education, and Implementation	W,F
Power Lines and Generation Facilities	
Predation	
Recreational Disturbance of Sage-grouse	W,F
Roads and Motorized Vehicles	W,F
Vegetation	W,F
Managing Other Wildlife	

*Cells highlighted in blue indicate that the item was specifically addresses during the time period either by:

C = Correspondence – public comment letter

W = Workshop topic

F = Field tour

FA = Field activity i.e. planting, placing fence markers

TABLE 3 KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY USFWS
<p>Key issues are focused on the objectives of the state plan – sage-grouse populations and sage-grouse habitat. It is assumed that primary emphasis will be given to those populations that are known or suspected to be at risk, or where future actions could create new risk factors. Areas with stable populations will be less of a focus (except where future actions could be a problem).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider populations at risk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The populations viability north of the Milk River is unknown and in question given the proximity to declining populations across the border in Canada • Identify future actions or situations that could create new risk factors for population viability. In this area this includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased gas exploration and development in southern Phillips County ○ Power line extension across the area

TABLE 3 Cont: KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY USFWS

- West Nile Virus (known to kill birds that contract the disease)
- Other?
- Actions that reduce or minimize sage brush habitat. In this area this includes:
 - New conversion of sage brush land to cropland
 - Eliminating sage brush (including burning, plowing, or use of herbicides) as part of efforts to rid areas of club moss, to promote grass growth, or other
 - Wildfire
- Adequate seasonal habitat
 - Drought and other factors can affect forb and insect production, both of which are important food sources for young sage-grouse
 - Water availability
- Predation and hunting
 - In its evaluation to list sage-grouse the federal Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that predation and hunting are less significant effects on population than other factors. Some believe that these factors have much more negative impacts and that more research is needed on predation and hunting to determine their actual effects on sage-grouse population viability.

A SUMMARY OF THE CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES FOR THE GLASGOW SG-LWG

From 2007-2010 the Glasgow SG-LWG held over nine meetings, events or projects, encompassing regularly scheduled meetings, tours, grant applications, outreach and an on-the-ground field projects. Table 5 lists the event in chronological order along with the day, location and type of activity. A brief summary of some of the events follows:

WORKSHOPS / TOURS

The Glasgow SG-LWG capitalized on a grant offered through the Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and sponsored a full day event held at the Cottonwood Inn in Glasgow September 26, 2008. The workshop agenda included presentations on range management, the ecology of sage-grouse in the Glasgow area, weed management and regulatory status of the bird summarized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. A field tour followed to see sage-grouse habitat and discuss habitat issues, then the tour returned to the Cottonwood Inn for a dinner and social to further develop relationships with conservation partners.

The Glasgow SG-LWG sponsored a joint public meeting December 15, 2009 “*Winter Roundup with a Twist*”. The workshop was co-sponsored with two other important conservation partners, Valley County Conservation District (VCCD) and the Milk River Watershed Alliance (MRWA).



Joint Tour of the Valley Conservation District, the Milk River Watershed Alliance and the Glasgow SG-LWG



Workshop held at the Cottonwood Inn in Glasgow, Rod Heitschmidt addressing the group



Program for "Winter Roundup with a Twist"

MOVING MEETINGS:

To engage landowners residing in four very large northeastern Montana counties of Blaine, Phillips, Valley and McCone, the local working group split their meetings between Glasgow and Malta. Meetings were designed to inform landowners and the public about sage-grouse populations in northeast Montana and to focus attention on the twelve identified threats which influence long-term survival of those populations. Moving meeting locations enabled the Glasgow SG-LWG to accommodate those people who wished to attend however, with great inconvenience coming from the Malta area.

Declines in sage-grouse populations have been documented across the west. The sage-grouse population in the Glasgow area has remained relatively stable. The State of Montana sage-grouse plan sets long-term goals of maintaining or increasing sage-grouse populations and habitats. The ultimate goal of the local working group is to involve local communities in efforts to maintain or increase population numbers and at the same time, avoid a listing under the Endangered Species Act.

GRANTS:

The Glasgow SG-LWG secured a grant used to obtain expert speakers and to facilitate field tours. At one of their meetings David Naugle, Ph.D of the University of Montana presented the results of research on sage-grouse and energy development at a meeting in Malta. A variety of studies have been published recently documenting various impacts of energy development to sage-grouse and this was also presented. An awareness or understanding of these studies inform participants, landowners, agency staff and other stakeholders is critical to propagating a science-based understanding and response to the unique and

substantial challenges as well as promoting potential strategies for conserving sage-grouse under various energy development proposals.

Consistent with the Montana sage-grouse state plan “*Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana*”, the Glasgow SG-LWG has partnered with conservation districts, FWP and others to focus attention on sage-grouse. The state plan suggested grants as a means to fund the SG-LWG activities and they are critical to support what has largely been a volunteer effort for sage-grouse conservation. The Glasgow SG-LWG applied for a 2011 “Sage-grouse Opportunity Grant” offered in support sage-grouse local working group activities.

ON THE GROUND PROJECTS:

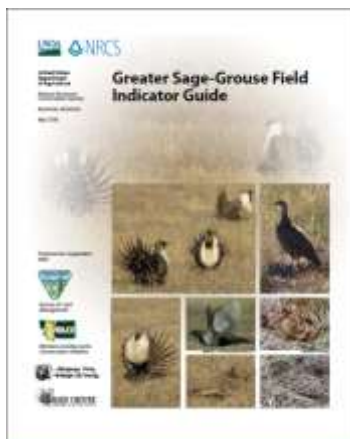
The Glasgow SG-LWG members have been involved in placing fence markers and escape ramps at several sites in Philips and Valley counties.

PUBLICATIONS:

A new sage-grouse publication titled *Greater Sage-grouse Field Indicator Guide* was published by NRCS with working group input and participation. It is an illustrative guide to sage-grouse field indicators and an important outreach tool that provides hands-on information about sage-grouse. It is useful for people in the field (out on the land) such as landowners, hunters, sports people and wildlife enthusiasts. The publication is available for download at the Montana NRCS website below.

http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/ecs/biology/sagegrouse/sg_fieldguide/index.html

The publication has since been reprinted by NRCS’s national headquarters and distributed to all eleven western states having sage-grouse.



CHALLENGES:

The Glasgow SG-LWG has been successful in providing outreach and education on local issues despite having no operational budget. As would be anticipated, they have encountered challenges not necessarily unique to them but nevertheless, indicative of individual interests having to come together for a common goal. The Glasgow SG-LWG has successfully acquired small grants which they have used to schedule workshops, field trips, engage professional speakers, and advertise on local radio stations, newspapers, and bulletin boards. Interest in sage-grouse by landowners has fluctuated, primarily with the threat of endangered species listing.

Table 5
Glasgow Sage-grouse Local Working Group Activities 2007-2010

Date	Activity	Location
November 8, 2006	Meeting in the Cottonwood Inn on Glasgow. Regular working group meeting followed by workshop and presentations	Glasgow
October 26, 2007	Regular meeting	Glasgow
September 26, 2008	Public workshop, Cottonwood Inn Glasgow / presentation session followed by field tour and dinner at Cottonwood Inn	Glasgow
February 19, 2009	Regular planning meeting	Glasgow
March 10, 2009	Regular meeting	Malta
September 8, 2009	Planning meeting , workshop, Valley County Conservation District, Milk River Alliance	Glasgow
December 15, 2009	Workshop "Winter Roundup with a Twist" Glasgow Elks Lodge, sponsored by Valley County Conservation District, Milk River Alliance and Glasgow SG-LWG	Glasgow
August 20, 2010	Sage-grouse Opportunity Grant development and planning working group committee	Billings
November 4, 2010	Open meeting, brainstorming session and planning	Malta

**GLASGOW LOCAL WORKING GROUP
SAGE-GROUSE ACTION PLAN**

“Draft plan developed however not finalized”