

Greater Sage-Grouse

Conservation Objectives Team Draft Report



Greater sage-grouse in Red Desert, Wyoming / USFWS

Background

The greater sage-grouse is a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act, which means that it has been determined to warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and a proposed rule or change in determination must be made by the end of fiscal year 2015 as a condition of a court approved settlement agreement.

What is the Conservation Objectives Team (COT)?

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) wanted to work in advance of the 2015 decision to develop conservation objectives for the greater sage-grouse that could help both the Service and all conservation partners direct conservation actions for the species. The Service recognizes that state wildlife agencies have management expertise and have management authority for greater sage-grouse. The Service created a Conservation Objectives Team (COT) of State experts and Service representatives to accomplish this task.

How will the draft report be used?

The COT was formed and charged to develop information that might be useful in evaluating the species status under the ESA. It was also intended that State, Federal, local and private entities with permitting or land management authority would use the information between now and September 2015 to take

conservation action. Such actions might involve modifying or amending regulatory frameworks to ensure the long-term conservation of the species by avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating the threats to the species, or focusing voluntary conservation efforts in ways that will benefit the species the most.



Male greater sage-grouse / Jeannie Stafford USFS



Male greater sage-grouse (right) struts for female (left) / USFS

Is the COT’s work completed or is there more to do?

The COT has provided a draft report which is being evaluated via a scientific peer review process. The COT will evaluate the results of the peer review and determine how to finalize the report.

The COT report talks about “ameliorating” threats. What is meant by the word “amelioration?”

Amelioration is improvement to a condition or situation. For the greater sage-grouse, threat amelioration would reduce or remove threats so as to improve the status of the species and/or its habitats.

What is a “Priority Area for Conservation?”

Because each State or Federal agency uses different terminology for important habitat for greater sage-grouse (core, priority, etc.), the COT developed Priority Areas for Conservation to embrace all the various concepts of key habitat areas for greater sage-grouse.

The report says that “the COT recommends that impacts be avoided to the maximum extent possible” in each Priority Area of Conservation (PAC).

What is meant by the phrase “maximum extent possible?”

The objective is to reduce threats to the point that there are no impacts to the population of greater sage-grouse. There may still be impacts to individuals, but long-term population trends should be stable, or preferably increasing.

What percent of the PACs are in federal ownership (e.g. BLM, FS)?

Approximately 64% of the land within the PAC’s is under Federal ownership or administration based on 2005 land ownership data. This is subject to revision based on new data or analysis.

How will the COT’s recommendations affect ongoing conservation efforts for the greater sage-grouse?

Many individual states either have completed or are in the process of completing state plans that will guide conservation efforts for the greater sage-grouse. The draft COT report does not replace or supersede those efforts. Instead it can serve as a guide to help all conservation partners focus their conservation efforts on the threat-reduction activities that will benefit the species the most.

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**For more information visit:
<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse/>**

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