



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Beyond Boundaries

Sage-Grouse Initiative Fact Sheet

October 2011



Background/Purpose



The sage-grouse, a ground-dwelling bird native to the American West, is a “candidate” species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI) aims to increase grouse populations through targeted, science-based delivery of the right

conservation practices in the right places across ranch lands in 11 western states.

The same conservation practices that promote healthy grazing lands also benefit the sage-grouse. The SGI seeks to holistically conserve sage-grouse through sustainable ranching.

Goals/Objectives

Healthy, working ranch lands are key to conserving this species. Partnering with ranchers and using win-win conservation solutions that benefit grazing lands and sage-grouse habitat, SGI seeks to proactively conserve the species and keep populations healthy enough to avoid an ESA listing.

NRCS uses scientific evaluations carried out by independent scientists to provide the feedback necessary to adaptively manage SGI, thus maximizing its biological return on conservation investments.

Conservation Funding and Practices

NRCS and its conservation partners in the West have worked to improve sage-grouse habitat for some time. NRCS built on these efforts by declaring the Sage-Grouse Initiative a national priority in 2010.

NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to implement the Initiative using Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and the Wetlands Reserve Program.

Conservation delivery is targeted within high sage-grouse abundance centers to maintain large and intact grazing lands resulting in landscape-wide improvements across the species' range. Practices include the creation of sustainable grazing systems to improve hiding cover for birds, marking or moving high risk fences near breeding sites to reduce collisions and removal of encroached conifer for re-colonization of suitable habitats.

Participation and Partnerships

Partnerships are critical to our success. Ranchers in 11 western States (California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming) are participating in SGI to conserve this at-risk species.

Close collaboration with many stakeholders, including State, local and Federal agencies, Tribes, and non-government organizations, ensures that NRCS activities complement efforts already underway. SGI fosters coordination and implementation on a landscape-wide scale while ensuring local input and actions.

Benefits to Producers

What's Good for the Rancher is Good for the Grouse

By addressing threats common to sage-grouse and sustainable rangelands, ranchers can proactively avoid ESA regulations while simultaneously improving the productivity of their grazing resources. Healthy sage-grouse habitats also benefit other wildlife species. If an eventual ESA listing takes place, participating ranchers know they can continue implementing their SGI conservation plans without increased restrictions or regulations.



Sage Grouse and Ranching

Beneficial for Both

- Healthy, large, unfragmented range land
- A well-designed grazing plan
- Range land plant diversity
- Perennial native grass cover and forbs
- Management of weeds and invasive species
- Removal of encroaching conifer (primarily juniper/pine)
- Healthy, productive springs and seeps
- Productive sagebrush grassland with perennial grass understory

Negative for Both

- Urbanization/subdivision
- Human development including roads or power lines that fragment the range and spread weeds
- Encroached conifer that reduces forage and deters bird use
- Overgrazing by livestock
- Dominant club moss and blue grama
- Tanks that drown wildlife and foul stock water
- Agricultural tillage

Benefits to Resources and the Public

SGL is a win-win solution for ranchers and for the grouse. Healthy rangelands that include habitat for sage grouse and other wildlife will help ensure the viability of Western ranching and preserve a rural way of life in the West.

For more information, see www.nrcs.usda.gov/initiatives/sqi or contact Tim Griffiths at tim.griffiths@mt.usda.gov (406) 587-6812

