

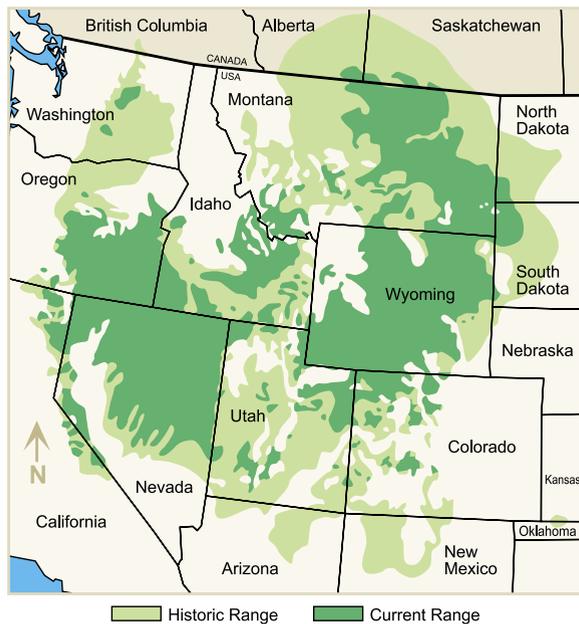


Reduced Sage Grouse Population

Sage grouse originally inhabited 13 states and three Canadian provinces. The species was first described for science by Lewis and Clark during their 1804 expedition. Sage grouse are currently found in parts of 11 states and southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Sage grouse strongholds remain in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon. Even in these states, changing land uses have raised concerns over the species' future. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has considered adding the species to the threatened and endangered species list.

Conversion to urban development and the resulting fragmentation of millions of acres of sage grouse habitat have contributed greatly to the decline of the species. Grazing management strategies that change plant species composition, structure, or production over time are detrimental. Oil and gas development, especially near leks (strutting areas) during the critical time of breeding, can cause additional pressure. Sage grouse are also prone to injury and death from collisions with fences, power poles/lines, and vehicles.

Sage Grouse Range, 2000



Map courtesy: Dr. M. Schroeder, Washington Department of Wildlife.

Issues Posing Risk to Sage Grouse

Wildlife agencies have identified 12 major issues in sage grouse conservation. Four of the issues can be addressed through proper rangeland management and revegetation of critical habitats.

Vegetation. Past management and/or use of rangelands has altered the density, structure, and composition of big sagebrush and related understory plant communities. In some cases, this has reduced seasonal habitat for sage grouse.

Grazing. The effects of livestock on sage grouse habitat, and on the birds themselves, may be positive, negative, or neutral depending on the specific grazing prescription and the site.

Noxious Weeds. Noxious weeds and other undesirable weed species have spread across all western states at an unprecedented rate. Invasive plants such as cheatgrass and juniper displace desirable native plant species and degrade rangeland health. In many cases the displaced species are critical to sage grouse survival.

Mining and Energy Development. Much of the nation's oil and gas resources are found under sage grouse habitats across the western United States. Careless development and production activities can fragment and degrade sage grouse habitat.

Loss of sagebrush-grasslands in some western states has approached 50 percent. This type of habitat is important to sage grouse throughout their life cycle. Sage grouse chicks and juveniles require habitat with a diverse succulent plant community offering nutritious grazing and a supply of insects. Adult sage grouse rely heavily on Wyoming and mountain big sagebrush for food in winter, and expand their diets to include various forbs and insects in spring and summer.



For More Information

For additional information on NRCS conservation programs that can help improve sage grouse habitat, contact your local conservation district and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The office nearest you can be located on the web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Other sources of information on sage grouse include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and state fish and game departments.



Sage grouse rely heavily on mountain and Wyoming big sagebrush for food and cover.



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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Improving Sage Grouse Habitat through Revegetation and Rangeland Management



Photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Revegetation and Management Options for Improving Sage Grouse Habitat

Sage grouse habitat can be established by reclaiming disturbed lands with diverse plant communities that include native forbs, grasses, and shrubs. See the following tables for native species and cultivars/germplasms available for revegetation within the Intermountain West, the Great Basin, and the Northern Great Plains plant adaptation zones.

Introduced plants that also have potential value for sage grouse habitat improvement include alfalfa varieties, 'Appar' blue flax, and 'Delar' small burnet. Other important forbs during spring and summer nesting and brood-rearing include common dandelion, salsify, and prickly lettuce.

Studies have found that sage grouse populations and habitats are very compatible with livestock and grazing management. Practices, such as rotational grazing systems and exclusion of riparian areas, can enhance plant community vigor, suppress noxious weeds, and sustain diverse plant communities with forb components that benefit sage grouse.

Many NRCS conservation programs, including the Conservation Security Program (CSP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), can help improve sage grouse habitat.

Adapted Native Forb Species

Species	Region ¹	Cultivar Germplasm	Pure Stand PLS Lbs/ Acre ²
Slender white prairie clover	IMW	Antelope	3
Purple prairie clover	IMW	Bismarck, Kaneb	3
Prairie coneflower	IMW	Stillwater	1.2
Narrow-leaved purple coneflower	NGP	Bismarck	1
Lewis flax	GB, IMW, NGP	Maple Grove	4
Western yarrow	GB, IMW, NGP	Eagle, Great Northern	0.5
Rocky mountain penstemon	IMW, NGP	Bandera	1.5
Fuzzytongue penstemon	IMW, NGP	Old Works	4
Firecracker penstemon	GB	Richfield	4
Globemallow	GB, IMW, NGP	Common	2
Utah sweetvetch	IMW	Timp	18
Maximillian sunflower	NGP	Medicine Creek, Prairie Gold	0.1
Stiff sunflower	NGP	Bismarck	0.1
Arrowleaf balsamroot	GB, IMW	Common	0.1
Sego lily	GB, IMW	Common	0.1
Bluebells	GB, IMW	Common	0.1
Astragalus sp.	GB, IMW, NGP	Common	0.1
Hawksbeard	GB, IMW	Common	0.1
False dandelion	GB, IMW	Common	0.1
Sulphur flower buckwheat	GB, IMW, NGP	Common	0.1
Desert-parsley	GB, IMW, NGP	Common	0.1

¹ GB = Great Plains; IMW = Intermountain West; NGP = Northern Great Plains.

² PLS = Pure Live Seed. Grasses, forbs and shrubs will rarely be planted in a monoculture. Percentages of pure stand seeding rates will be used in species combinations developed to mimic a diverse native plant community.

Adapted Native Grass Species

Species	Region ¹	Cultivar Germplasm	Pure Stand PLS Lbs/ Acre ²
Bluebunch wheatgrass	GB, IMW, NGP	Whitmar, Goldar, P-7, Anatone	7
Snake River wheatgrass	GB	Secar	7
Bottlebrush squirreltail	GB	Sand Hollow, Fish Creek, Toe Jam Creek	7
Thickspike wheatgrass	GB, IMW, NGP	Critana, Bannock, Schwendimar, Sodar	6
Indian ricegrass	GB, IMW, NGP	Nezpar, Paloma, Rimrock, Ribstone	6
Big bluegrass	GB, IMW, NGP	Sherman	2
Sandberg bluegrass	GB, IMW, NGP	High Plains	2
Basin wildrye	GB, IMW, NGP	Trailhead, Magnar	7
Western wheatgrass	GB, NGP	Rosana, Arriba, Rodan	6
Galleta grass	GB	Viva	4
Slender wheatgrass	GB, IMW, NGP	Revenue, Pryor, San Luis	7
Mountain bromegrass	IMW	Bromar, Garnet	10
Idaho fescue	IMW	Joseph, Nezperce, Winchester	4
Little bluestem	NGP	Badlands	4
Side-oats grama	NGP	Pierre	4.5
Blue grama	NGP	Bad River	2

Adapted Native Shrub Species

Species	Region ¹	Cultivar Germplasm	Pure Stand PLS Lbs/ Acre ²
Mountain big sagebrush	GB, IMW, NGP	Hobble Creek, Common	less than 1
Wyoming big sagebrush	GB, IMW, NGP	Gordon Creek, Common	less than 1
Winterfat	GB, IMW, NGP	Hatch, Open Range, Northern Cold Desert	8
Western snowberry	IMW	Trapper	17.5
Common snowberry	IMW, NGP	Prospectors	17.5
Fourwing saltbush	GB, NGP	Rincon, Snake River Plains, Wytana	1



Stillwater germplasm prairie coneflower.



Great Northern germplasm western yarrow.



Antelope germplasm slender white prairie clover.