

**Habitat Characterization, Assessment and Monitoring  
for  
Conservation of the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment (DPS)  
of the  
Greater Sage-Grouse**

Prepared by: Bi-State Technical Advisory Committee

**Background**

*Listing Status*

On March 23, 2010 the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published their 12-month finding(s) for multiple petitions to list the Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In these findings, the Service designated Greater Sage-grouse in the Bi-State area of California and Nevada as a distinct population segment (DPS). The Service also found that listing the Bi-State DPS as threatened or endangered was warranted, but precluded, by higher priority listing actions. As a result of these findings, the Bi-State DPS was identified as both a distinct listing entity separate from Greater Sage-grouse range-wide and a candidate for listing under the ESA. The Bi-State DPS currently has a listing priority number of 3 (a relatively high priority). A proposed rule regarding listing of the DPS is anticipated in September 2013.

*Cooperative Conservation in the Bi-State Area*

Since 2002, the Bi-State Local Area Working Group (LAWG) has provided the forum and the catalyst for cooperative sage-grouse conservation efforts in the Bi-State area. The Bi-State LAWG was extremely active during development of the Nevada Governor's 2004 *Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California* (<http://www.ndow.org/wild/conservation/sg/plan/SGPlan063004.pdf>) and the Bi-State LAWG continues to be a model for cooperative sage-grouse conservation efforts today. The 2004 plan provided the focus for the implementation of multi-jurisdictional sage-grouse conservation actions in the Bi-State area until 2012, when the plan was updated and replaced with the *Bi-State Action Plan for Conservation of the Greater Sage-grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment* (<http://ndow.org/wild/conservation/sg/literature/Bi-State%20Action%20Plan.pdf>). This 2012 update was completed with the full support of the recently chartered Bi-State Executive Oversight Committee (EOC).

The Bi-State EOC was formed in early 2011 to further increase interagency coordination and to accelerate cooperative sage-grouse conservation efforts for the Bi-State DPS. The primary objectives of the Bi-State EOC are: 1) to leverage collective resources for prioritizing and implementing conservation actions, and: 2) to ensure consistent regulatory oversight, cooperative conservation, and achieve beneficial long-term conservation of the Bi-State DPS. A Bi-State Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which consists of biologist and conservation professionals from the cooperating agencies, was appointed by the EOC to provide science-based support for the cooperative conservation effort of the Bi-State LAWG. A fundamental component of this science-based support is the compilation, development, and use of the best available data to support the long-term conservation and management of Greater Sage-grouse habitat in the Bi-State area.

## **Proposal**

Requested funding would be used to fund the completion of three high priority actions in support of the long-term conservation and management of Greater Sage-grouse habitat in the Bi-State area:

- 1) Completion of a rapid habitat assessment for the Bi-State DPS based on currently available vegetation condition and trend data to support the on-going US Fish & Wildlife status review for the DPS.
- 2) Development of an improved vegetation base map for the Bi-State DPS to support a scientifically defensible Priority Habitat map for the DPS and to support a science based Conservation Planning Tool (CPT) to facilitate the long-term conservation and management of the DPS.
- 3) Completion of a synthesis and evaluation of current vegetation/habitat monitoring techniques being used by the various agencies responsible for management of the Bi-State DPS and the development of a standardized protocol for future vegetation/habitat monitoring and assessment efforts in the DPS.

## **Funding Proposal Breakdown**

### **Task 1: Rapid Habitat Assessment: \$75,000.00**

Requested funding would be used to conduct a rapid habitat assessment in support of the on-going US Fish & Wildlife Service status review for the Bi-State DPS of the Greater Sage-grouse. Proposed work would involve the compilation of available vegetation condition and trend monitoring data that is currently available into a summary document that describes habitat condition and trend in relation to Greater Sage-grouse habitat needs. The proposed work would also identify gaps in available vegetation condition and trend data and identify areas that are in need of this type of monitoring.

Data Compilation - \$20,000

Science Support - \$15,000.00

Vegetation Data Summary and Trend Analyses - \$40,000.00

### **Task 2: Habitat Classification: \$120,000.00**

Requested funding would be used to improve the quality and accuracy of the vegetation base map that provides the foundation for the Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) map and the Conservation Planning Tool (CPT) being developed to support the long-term conservation and management of the Bi-State DPS of the Greater Sage-grouse. Proposed field data collection, science support, and image acquisition and interpretation would be focused on areas where improved vegetation mapping is needed to increase the accuracy of the Priority Habitat (PH) map the predictive capabilities of the CPT model for the Bi-State DPS.

Field Inventory Team(s) - \$50,000

Science Support - \$20,000.00

Image Acquisition and Interpretation - \$50,000.00

Task 3: Habitat Monitoring Techniques & Habitat Assessment Protocols: \$60,000.00

Requested funding would be used to collect, evaluate and summarize vegetation monitoring/measurement techniques and habitat assessment protocols currently being used by land managers, state wildlife agencies and researchers in the Bi-State area to determine whether any components important to sage-grouse habitat needs are missing and to standardize future habitat monitoring and assessment efforts. Proposed work would be focused on the synthesis of current monitoring techniques and the development of a standardized protocol for future habitat monitoring and assessment in the Bi-State area.

Techniques/Protocols Synthesis & Evaluation - \$20,000.00

Science Support - \$15,000.00

Standardized Protocol Development - \$25,000.00