

NEVADA'S GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION PROJECT

A Strategy and a Plan

In August of 2000, Governor Kenny Guinn appointed a task force representing various interest groups and agencies to develop a plan that would conserve and protect Nevada's sage-grouse and their habitat. In October of 2001, this group completed the **Nevada Sage-grouse Conservation Strategy**. This document identified challenges, offered potential solutions and laid the groundwork for the formation of local working groups (n=7) and Population Management Units (PMUs) while at the same time provided these entities with a roadmap for developing conservation plans.

From 2001 to 2004, this task force (the Governor's Sage-grouse Conservation Team) embarked on an intensive planning effort for the state while local working groups developed plans for their respective areas and PMUs. In June 2004, the **1st Edition of the Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan for Nevada and Eastern California (State Plan)** was completed. This plan was built on information gathered from local working groups and PMU plans; consisting of 6 chapters that covered the following:

- Planning approach;
- Conservation goals and priorities;
- Risk assessment;
- Conservation strategies;
- Implementation approach; and
- Monitoring and research

The Risks or Threats

Each local working group (7) completed a local area conservation plan prior to the completion of the State Plan and did their best to complete PMU plans for areas that they deemed priority areas. A total of 7 local working group plans and **32 of 56 PMU plans have been completed** for the entire state. Each of these plans intensively reviewed the following factors affecting sage-grouse:

- Habitat quantity;
- Habitat quality;
- Wildfire;
- Habitat fragmentation;
- Livestock grazing;
- Wild Horses;
- Predation;
- Changing Land Uses;
- Hunting/Poaching;
- Disturbance;
- Disease;
- Pesticides;
- Cycles; and
- Climate/Weather

Of these risk factors, habitat quantity, habitat quality and wildfire have affected Nevada and California sage-grouse populations the most. In an analysis conducted by the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), **wildfires that occurred from 1999-2007 affected approximately 40% (364 of 912) of the active sage-grouse leks in Nevada** (see Figure 1). Additionally, these fires burned approximately 2.6 million acres of key sagebrush ecological types within the range of Greater Sage-grouse in Nevada amounting to a 12% loss of habitat over just 9 fire seasons.

Population Trends

Lek counts have been conducted by Nevada's wildlife agency since the 1950's; however, recent work (last 10-15 years) has been much more intensive than historic efforts. Over the last 9 years, NDOW biologists, volunteers, and federal agency personnel have surveyed an average of 737 leks each year of which approximately 314 are classified as active.

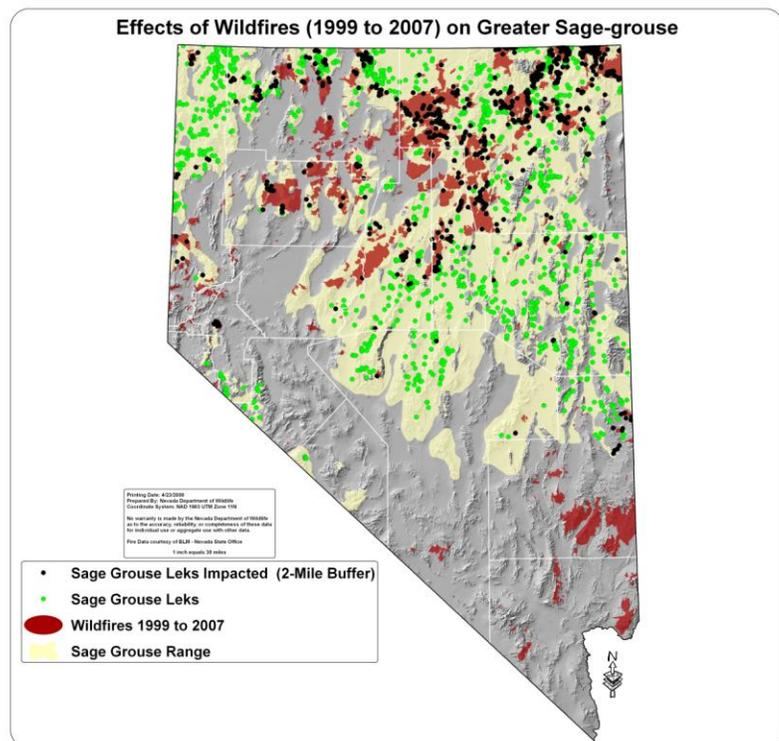


Figure 1. Sage-grouse leks and habitat affected by wildfire (1999-2007).

Since 1996, the lek counts show that Nevada has experienced a slight population increase when applying a logarithmic trend (Figure 2). This is largely due to a spike in the number of males attending leks in 2005 and is likely a result of several years of good recruitment.

The “On the Ground” Accomplishments

Over the last decade, several projects have been implemented to restore, enhance and maintain sage-grouse habitat. These projects have been implemented by NDOW, federal agencies and private landowners. However, much more can and needs to be done.

As an example, since fiscal year 2001, NDOW has implemented approximately 28 projects relating to fire restoration, habitat enhancement, research and maintaining existing habitats (Table 1, attached). These projects have totaled approximately **\$2.1 million and have collectively treated about 70,000 acres.** Additional projects have been implemented by federal agencies and private landowners as well.

What’s on the Horizon?

At the time that many sage-grouse plans were created, energy development was not foreseen as a critical threat to sage-grouse populations and their habitats; however, as the nation’s energy demands increased along with the USA’s commitment to reduce reliance on fossil fuel, Nevada became an area of interest because of the amount of public land in the state. The Nevada Governor’s Sage-grouse Conservation Team identified energy development (both renewable and non-renewable) as an important threat to sage-grouse and is in the process of developing a guidance document for energy development within sage-grouse habitats. The document, entitled **“Energy and Infrastructure Development Standards to Conserve Greater Sage-grouse Populations and their Habitats”**, is in the final stages of development and is due out in late March or early April 2010. The document will be included as an appendix to the State Plan.

In terms of conservation planning and implementation of sage-grouse habitat improvement projects, NDOW will continue to work with working groups, federal land management agencies and private landowners to reduce threats to the species. Although available funding is limited, the **North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act** could provide a substantial amount of funding to western sage-grouse states to implement conservation plans. This act, which is modeled after the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, is currently in bill draft and is supported by the Western Governors’ Association.

NDOW has initiated a **Partnership for Resource Conservation and Development (PRCD)** modeled after a successful program in Utah. This partnership is a coordinated, collaborative effort where resource agencies with a vested interest in conserving healthy, native ecosystems will work to accomplish common goals by pooling resources and funding. The simple vision of the PRCD is “a productive Nevada in harmony with a quality environment; Nevada’s environmental, economic and social values operate in harmony for sustainable long-term quality of life.”

Nevada Greater Sage-grouse Production and Average Male Lek Attendance

