

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Sage Grouse have declined in numbers and distribution throughout their west-wide range, including Nevada. This downward trend has resulted in petitions for listing of local populations of Sage Grouse in the states of Washington and Colorado. Some concerned citizens have advocated a range-wide listing, under the Endangered Species Act.

The listing of Sage Grouse as an endangered species would have a significant impact on Nevada. Since Sage Grouse are found throughout Nevada, except Clark County, land development and use, water use and recreational activities will be affected, impacting local economies in the process.

Seeking to address these concerns, Nevada Governor Kenny C. Guinn called a diverse group of interested parties together in August of 2000 to develop a statewide Sage Grouse conservation plan. Working through consensus, this group has prepared a planning system that offers tools, resources and current scientific information to formulate Sage Grouse conservation plans, emphasizing local involvement and decision-making.

The foundation of Nevada's plan of action lies in the creation of local planning groups charged with designing workable solutions to specific on-the-ground challenges in their respective areas. Local working groups will consider alternatives and develop and implement strategies for natural resource management actions that will enhance and benefit Sage Grouse. Through this process, local planning groups will have a unique opportunity to create conservation strategies before regulatory actions limit options and flexibility.

Traditionally, species and habitat management has been divided between various authorities that have often worked largely independent of one another, producing ineffective results. Development of Sage Grouse conservation plans through local collaborative planning processes, however, provides a critical opportunity to coordinate current land and bird management activities through a single integrated process, using adaptive management techniques. By working together, stakeholders have the opportunity to develop and implement an effective Sage Grouse conservation program that will balance sagebrush habitat, Sage Grouse populations, and economic considerations.

The Goals of the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Team are:

- 1. Create healthy, self-sustaining Sage Grouse populations well distributed throughout the species historic range by maintaining and restoring ecologically diverse, sustainable, and contiguous sagebrush ecosystems and by implementing scientifically-sound management practices.*

2. *Throughout the Sage Grouse's range in Nevada, have locally functional, well-informed groups empowered to actively contribute to Sage Grouse conservation while balancing habitat, bird, and economic considerations.*

In order to assist the Team in evaluating whether or not it is meeting these goals, the Team has further defined the following set of Desired Outcomes:

1. Over the next 20 years, apply active management techniques designed to improve Sage Grouse habitat quality from non-suitable to suitable to an average of 250,000 acres per year statewide.
2. Over the next 20 years, maintain or increase Sage Grouse management unit populations statewide (currently delineated into 64 units).
3. Over the next 20 years, maintain or increase Sage Grouse numbers statewide as indicated by assessment of 20-year population trend data.
4. Nevada's local conservation plans will include positive, incentive-driven solutions. Such solutions will minimize adverse economic impacts while maximizing the likelihood of plan success.
5. Nevada's local conservation plans will be models for collaborative planning that yield balanced solutions meeting the needs of Sage Grouse, Sage Grouse habitat and people.

To reach these Desired Outcomes, the Team has outlined in this document a series of process-based objectives designed to logically map out the implementation of the local team planning model. Under these objectives, the Team has provided an extensive list of suggested strategies to guide the local planning teams in their approaches to on-the-ground conservation solutions. In addition, the local planning teams will find a host of useful planning tools in this document's appendices – “a conservation tool box” if you will – which will provide further guidance and lead the way to successful attainment of the statewide goals through local consensus planning, implementation, and monitoring.

This document does not constitute the Governor's Sage Grouse Conservation Plan; rather, it is a Conservation Strategy designed to point the way to a successful Conservation Plan through localized problem-solving. Once all the local conservation plans have been completed, they will be compiled, evaluated, and coordinated into a comprehensive statewide Conservation Plan. It will be that comprehensive Plan that will then be presented to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the event that activities to list the Sage Grouse under the Endangered Species Act progress to a point where negotiations between state governments and that federal agency become necessary. It is hoped that the comprehensive Conservation Plan will result in the achievement of the appropriate conservation agreements between the State of Nevada and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representing endangered species interests for the United States government.

Implementation of the conservation strategies outlined in this document will be achieved largely through the efforts of the local planning teams. Treatments designed to improve Sage Grouse habitat will be applied, results will be monitored, and adjustments to techniques will be made as needed. As conservation actions are being evaluated for their species conservation effectiveness, so will they be constantly evaluated for their relative impact on local economies. Coordinated funding strategies and statewide coordination and prioritization of project implementation will be necessary to maintain momentum toward the achievement of statewide conservation objectives.

The conservation of Sage Grouse in Nevada will require a massive cooperative effort – possibly bigger than any wildlife challenge Nevadans have yet engaged, but it **can** be done. It is ***the right thing to do*** for Nevada.