

VIRGINIA-PAH RAH POPULATION MANAGEMENT UNIT
PRIVATE LANDS RISK ASSESSMENT

PMU Descriptions

The Pah Rah and Virginia PMU's are situated immediately west of Pyramid Lake, and cross into California, south of Honey Lake Valley and North of Interstate 80, Washoe County, NV and Lassen County CA (map 1). The Spanish Springs subdivision has encroached on portions of this PMU altering and usurping substantial portions of winter and nesting habitat.

Table 1, Acreage of PMU's

PMU ACERAGE				
PMU	Public Acreage	Private Acreage	Total Acreage	% Public
Pah Rah	82,118	69,525	151,643	54%
Virginia	184,651	19,910	204,561	90%

Late Brood Rearing Habitat

Key forbs on wet meadows become increasingly important to sage grouse chicks as the uplands dry (Savage 1969). Greer (1990) recommended that meadow grazing be delayed until mid-August to promote sage grouse chick survival and growth. Dobkin (1995) recommended that restoration should include removing livestock from wet meadows.

Private land uses will affect the population. Most of the water sources and wet meadows are privately owned. Many of these areas are preferred home sites and development of these areas will adversely affect the population. Negotiating conservation easements and purchasing important areas are effective methods to preserve habitat.

Roads and other factors (pumping ground water) can affect hydrological properties. Roads should be routed away from springs and around riparian areas. Since most water sources within these PMUs are on private property, some sort of out reach program will be necessary to stabilize and improve brood rearing habitat.

While vegetation in undisturbed meadows can become so dense as to limit use by sage grouse use, this appears to occur very rarely. Young sage grouse can scurry about under the taller vegetation, which provides escape cover. Extreme caution should be exercised when devising grazing schemes for meadows. Livestock select the more palatable forbs and grasses avoiding the less palatable wiregrass (*Juncus* spp.) and Iris. They can soon dominate a meadow grazed during the growing season and are of no value to sage grouse. Also the physical compaction of the moist and wet soil by hoofs can degrade the meadow and change hydrological regimes.

Indirect limiting of habitat (L.B.4, N.B.1, B.C.1 & W.C.1)

Off Highway Vehicles (OHV) have a detrimental impact to sage grouse. Use in an intrusive manner can adversely affect sage grouse. Excessive activity can disrupt feeding bouts, displaying birds on leks, cause flight response and even cause a shift to less suitable habitats and abandonment of nests. These disturbances can lead to increased movement and concomitant energy expenditures and increased predation risks and possibly displace the birds to less suitable habitat.

Table 8, OHV Goals

Seasonal Habitat	Goal	Risk Level
Winter	Avoid excessive disturbance of Birds	High
Leking	Avoid excessive disturbance of Birds	Low
Nesting	Avoid excessive disturbance of Birds	High
Brood Rearing	Avoid excessive disturbance of Birds	Moderate

Again due to the close proximity of these PMUs to the greater Reno – Sparks area this threat was rated as high.

Parts of these PMUs lie within the Southern Washoe County Urban Interface Plan Amendment area which closed several areas to all OHV use and throughout most of the area limited OHV use to existing roads and trails and designated an area as “open use” meaning that within the designated area there is no restriction on OHV use. The area covered under the plan amendment is south of township 23 north, which runs through Rancho Heaven and is north of Granite Peak. The remainder of these PMU’s lie under an open use designation.

Because the only known lek is on private property OHV use is not a threat. One of the roads leading to it is impassable during much of the leking period and the other road is controlled by the landowner. OHV use may be a threat to as yet unknown leks; however, potential threats cannot be assessed at this time.

Objectives: Prevent OHV disturbance to leking sage grouse.

Conservation Measures (Actions):

- As new leks are discovered, do not release locations to the general public.
- If disturbance becomes a problem, close the area during the leking period.
- If a discovered lek is on private property NDOW will discuss the importance of the area with the landowner.

Monitoring:

Agency personal including NDOW volunteers while doing lek surveys will evaluate various activities to aid in the determination as to whether specific activities are detrimentally affecting sage grouse.

Responsible Parties:

BLM/CDFG/NDOW/Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe/Private Land owners/OHV Groups.

Direct loss of lek (L.D.1)

Paving, surface mining, converting to cultivated agriculture and urban expansion can all lead to loss of leks however, with regard to these PMU's, urban expansion is the only serious threat and has resulted in the loss of 1 known lek (Bedelle flat) and probably several unknown leks.

Risk Level: High.

Objectives:

Prevent additional loss of leks

Conservation measures:

Do not permit utility development, which will adversely impact sage grouse leks, and as much as possible do not to permit surface mining in winter habitat. Conversion to cultivated agriculture and sales of riparian habitat will be addressed with private landowners. Inventory prior to disposal, retain lands providing habitat for sage grouse, acquire areas or negotiate conservation easements of critical areas. Retain tax delinquent parcels in sage grouse habitat. Require mitigation for unavoidable habitat disturbance.

Monitoring:

Annual lek surveys will assess the status of leks (active or inactive) and the number of male attendance.

Responsible Parties:

BLM/CDFG/NDOW/Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe/Private Land owners/Permitting Agencies/NRCS.