

VYA POPULATION MANAGEMENT UNIT
PRIVATE LANDS RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk #5: Loss of sagebrush habitat to mining and agricultural or urban expansion

Season/Habitat affected: All

Contributing Management Action 1: Mining

Risk Rating: Low

Contributing Management Action 2: Urban and agricultural expansion

Risk Rating: Low

There are no known mining claims in the Vya PMU. One "larger-scale" mining operation is known to have existed in the PMU, however, a mercury extraction operation in the Bald Mountain area. That mine went out of operation 60 to 70 years ago and little to no information exists for the mine. The extent of the mine appears to cover at least several scattered acres along an access road with much of the affected area currently overgrown with vegetation. About the only current "mining" activities in the PMU are gravel pits. These are associated with road maintenance activities and are fairly small and scattered. If gold prices were to go up substantially in the near future, it is conceivable that some new mining claims may show up. The overall risk of new mining operations, however, is considered low.

Approximately 83,000 acres (16.5%) of the Vya PMU is under private ownership. Private land is scattered throughout the PMU, mainly associated with water at springs and along drainages. Larger blocks of private lands associated with ranching activities are found in the north half of the area around Mosquito Valley, Cowhead Lake, and Coleman Valley. These large blocks of land are expected to remain as large tracts of land for the near future. Some seasonal cabins and yearlong residences exist, these also primarily associated with ranching activities. Agricultural expansion has probably reached its maximum extent with the largest operations around north Long Valley and Mosquito Lake, Coleman Valley and Cowhead Lake.

Land within the PMU has some opportunity for development, albeit probably small, and primarily in the form of seasonal recreational cabins and expansion around existing agricultural development. Many smaller private parcels with "absentee" owners exist in the PMU. These smaller parcels have a higher risk of being sold and private cabins built on them yet the risk is considered low overall. The PMU is relatively remote and has not seen any appreciable development in the last 10 years, however, some indications are that development is increasing.

Few well graveled roads, the lack of nearby services, and winter weather conditions generally prohibit late winter and early spring use of the area. The risk to sage grouse from development in the near future is therefore considered low in the Vya PMU.

Risk #8: Conversion of meadows to upland vegetation

Season/Habitat affected: Brood-rearing

Contributing Management Action: Reduced hydrologic functionality due to head-cutting, soil alteration (roads, heavy grazing), confinement of floodplain (roads, compaction) or other causes.

Risk Rating: Medium

To this point, current Rangeland Health Assessments have only indicated that the Board Corral Allotment is showing signs of head cutting, dewatering, and invasion by upland species (See discussion under Risk 7). Measures have already been undertaken to correct these problems such as specific stubble height requirements for riparian areas, adjustments of use dates, specific salting locations defined, and turning out of cattle, which have not previously grazed the allotment. This last stipulation is in place to help with cattle distribution.

Although most meadows on the Surprise Resource Area have roads to and through them, and most drainage have roads along them, the inherent rockiness and ephemeral nature of many systems helps to offset this risk, e.g. portions of Horse Creek. Roads, especially in drainages, continue to impact systems but are politically and logistically difficult to close or re-route.

More than one half of the thirty allotments that either fully or partially occur in the Vya PMU still need to be assessed using the Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines. Combined with the lack of knowledge concerning these aspects on private lands, and the supposition that there are likely more problem areas to be found in future RHA's, the risk of conversion of riparian meadows to upland vegetation is rated as moderate.

Risk #16: Artificially high predator population

Season/Habitat affected: All

Contributing Management Action 1: High speed roads, which increase the amount of road-killed animals and attract ravens.

Risk Rating: Low

Contributing Management Action 2: Urban expansion and ranchettes, which increase the amount of garbage and attract ravens.

Risk Rating: Low

Contributing Management Action 3: Agricultural expansion, which increases the amount of food for ravens.

Risk Rating: Low

Private lands are mostly uninhabited with little chance of additional urban or agricultural expansion (See discussion under Risk #5). With the exception of portions of the Barrel Springs Byway, Nevada highways 34 and 8A (45 mph, gravel), roads in the Vya PMU are mostly low speed. Therefore, there is a low risk of producing an artificially high predator population as a result of road kill, urban expansion, or agricultural expansion.