



STATE OF NEVADA

DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

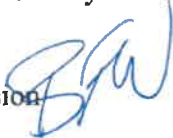
Game Division

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MEMORANDUM

February 22, 2017

To: Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners, County Advisory Boards to Manage Wildlife, and Interested Publics

From: Brian Wakeling, Administrator, Game Division 

Title: California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges Request for up to 20 Wild-trapped Greater Sage Grouse per year for up to 3 years for Translocation to the Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge in California – For Possible Action

Description: The Department received a request from the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges and the California Department of Wildlife to capture and translocate up to 20 greater sage-grouse per year for up to 3 years for translocation to the Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The Department is proceeding to fulfill the request and seeks the support of the Commission. The Commission may vote to support the Department's actions.

Presenter: Game Division Administrator Brian F. Wakeling

Summary:

Nevada works cooperatively to ensure population viability within a variety of wildlife species among western states and provinces represented in the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Greater sage-grouse is a species that merits frequent attention.

The Department has received a request from Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for up to 20 wild-trapped sage grouse each year for up to 3 years. The letters of request from both agencies detail the history of translocations, habitat restoration efforts, and collaboration among agencies to ensure effective conservation (attached).

Last year, Nevada's sage grouse saw growth in the adult segment of the population based on trend lek data of about 19%. Recruitment data from wing collection analyses estimated production at 1.56 chicks per hen which should support a stable to slightly increasing population in 2017. Favorable conditions prevail throughout much of the sage grouse range, and northern Washoe county populations are expected to provide a reasonable source for these translocations.

The Department intends to conditionally authorize the capture and translocation of sage grouse to Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge in California. The Department will receive annual progress reports from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge on the success of the translocation and viability of the population. At the same time, the Department will be conducting annual lek counts within the source population. If the Department finds that lek trends associated with these leks do not track with other leks in the region, or decline at an appreciable rate, then the Department will either direct CDF&G to other potential source populations or potentially suspend the activity until a population recovery is realized.

Recommendation:

The Department recommends that the Commission **VOTE TO SUPPORT THE CONDITIONAL AUTHORIZATION FOR THE CAPTURE AND TRANSLOCATION OF UP TO 20 GREATER SAGE GROUSE ANNUALLY FOR UP TO 3 YEAR FROM NEVADA TO THE CLEAR LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN CALIFORNIA.**



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



Brian Wakeling
Game Division Administrator
Nevada Department of Wildlife
1100 Valley Road
Reno, NV 89512

Mr. Wakeling,

Since 2005, our Departments have collaborated with USFWS and the Clear Lake Sage-Grouse Working Group to augment the sage-grouse population at Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge (CLNWR). Habitat improvements have included the treatment or removal of western juniper in approximately 30,000 acres of USFWS, USFS, BLM, and private land in the area. Translocations in the improved areas have been successful, based on monitoring by our Department and the USFWS, and the sage-grouse population at CLNWR is increasing.

The most recent augmentation of the CLNWR sage-grouse population occurred in early spring 2014. Since then, peak lek counts have remained stable at 30 males in 2015 and 33 males in 2016. This is a significant improvement over the 5 males present in 2005, prior to the first translocation. Our Department agrees with Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge staff that additional translocations into the CLNWR sage-grouse population will improve genetic diversity and further the goal of a self-sustaining population. Klamath Basin NWR staff has asked for the opportunity to translocate up to 20 grouse per year for the next 3 years beginning in 2017. In particular, the sage-grouse population at CLNWR would benefit from additional females, ideally a 2:1 Female:Male ratio.

Our Department supports continued augmentations of this isolated population at CLNWR. Significant habitat enhancement has occurred as a direct result of previous translocations and information obtained from monitoring efforts. It is our hope that recent and planned habitat enhancements along with periodic translocations will result in an increasing and sustaining sage-grouse population in the area. We will continue to assist with capture and translocation efforts and subsequent monitoring of translocated grouse at CLNWR should birds be available from Nevada.

Sincerely,


Timothy (T.O.) Smith
Chief Wildlife Program
California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
KLAMATH BASIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

4009 Hill Road
Tulelake, California 96134
Phone: (530) 667-2231 Fax: (530) 667-8337



November 7, 2016

Shawn Espinosa
Upland Game Staff Specialist
Nevada Dept. of Wildlife
1100 Valley Road
Reno, NV 89512

Dear Shawn,

We appreciate your past support of our bird translocation efforts to conserve greater sage grouse on Clear Lake NWR in Modoc County, California. While translocations were ongoing between 2005 and 2014 male lek attendance steadily climbed from a low of 5 males in 2005 to 35 in 2014. Since then the peak counts have been relatively stable at 30 males in 2015 and 33 in 2016. You may recall the first translocations from Nevada were done in 2007 and continued through 2014 except in 2009 and 2011. One hundred sage grouse including 56 females and 44 males have been moved from Nevada over the six years. The number of birds translocated ranged from 10 to 22 birds per year. An additional 45 birds were translocated from Oregon in 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2010.

The purpose of sage grouse translocations has been to increase genetic diversity and increase bird numbers while habitat work has been proceeding. Habitat work on the refuge and surrounding Modoc National Forest and private lands has focused on clearing of encroaching western junipers within sagebrush habitat. Most of the juniper trees on the refuge were removed beginning in 2006, while juniper cutting on surrounding lands began in earnest in 2010 with funding from the NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative program being the primary source of funds. Overall, since range restoration began in the vicinity of Clear Lake, over 28,000 acres have been treated at a cost of 2.7 million dollars. These efforts are a great benefit to the long term survival not only of sage grouse, but also of pronghorn, mule deer and other sagebrush obligate species.

While we have had success in stabilizing the sage grouse population on the refuge for now, we think that additional translocations are needed to further increase the population towards a more self-supporting level. After a three year hiatus we are again hoping to move additional birds to the refuge. We are asking for permission to translocate up to 20 sage grouse per year (or whatever number you think appropriate) for the next 3 years beginning in spring of 2017. We understand that drought and wild fires in recent years may have put a strain on grouse populations particularly in Northern Nevada and the request may not be an easy one. NDOW has been an integral partner with the Klamath Basin NWR in the efforts to restore the Clear Lake sage grouse population and we look to you again for help in this effort.

Sincerely,

Greg Austin
Project Leader



STRATEGIC HABITAT CONSERVATION THROUGH COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION

Background and Problem Statement

- ◆ Expansion of western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*), invasion of exotic annual grasses, and progressive decadence of sagebrush stands continue to degrade and reduce habitat quality for sage grouse.
- ◆ Large pockets of excellent sage grouse habitat exist throughout the PMU, however, many of these sites are inaccessible to sage grouse due to juniper densities exceeding 5% and migratory routes being blocked. This information is scientifically verified by USFWS data collected from radio marked grouse and GIS analysis.
- ◆ The Devil's Garden/Clear Lake PMU sage grouse population has steadily declined over several years reflected by lek counts of less than 10 strutting males in 2005 at the Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge.
- ◆ Phase 1 Juniper woodlands are prominent feature in landscape.
- ◆ Loss of wet meadow and brood rearing habitat.

Strategic Habitat Conservation Vision

RESTORE AND RECONNECT HISTORIC AND CURRENTLY VIABLE SAGE-STEPPE HABITATS
ON A LANDSCAPE LEVEL TO ENCOURAGE SAGE GROUSE TO REPOPULATE ABANDONED HABITAT

- ◆ Utilize USFWS scientific data from radio collared grouse to direct restoration efforts. (60 grouse collared in 2011)
- ◆ Engage all partners in the Sage Grouse Working Group to strategically select project sites based on the following Criteria:
 1. Proximity to Sage Grouse presence on known habitat utilization
 2. Habitat quality beneath juniper stand ie: Intact sage-steppe and perennial bunchgrass habitat.
 3. Sites potential to provide for nesting and brood rearing life history phases ie: wet meadow /springs
 4. Sites potential to reconnect viable habitats and migratory corridors to increase bird distribution.
 5. Sites categorized as Phase 1 juniper woodlands.
 6. Select sites with very little invasive annual grasses.
 7. Landowner willingness combined with available funding.
 8. Potential for site to be viable for rangeland/grazing management project.

HOW WILL WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS?

- ◆ Monitor Sage Grouse to determine whether they utilize or migrate through treated project sites.
- ◆ Implement our funded projects within two years of being contracted.
- ◆ Continue to enroll willing landowners in NRCS SGI program and USFWS/Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.
- ◆ Are Sage Grouse successfully establishing new lek sites ?

PROGRESS TO DATE

- ◆ NRCS & LBBV RCD has contracted over 20,460 acres of juniper removal from 2010 through the 2015.
- ◆ Implemented acres are 18,760 acres of juniper removal for both agencies on private & federal lands.
- ◆ USFWS and USFS have implemented 13,271 acres of juniper removal on lands complimenting the NRCS and private lands cuts.
- ◆ From only 10 strutting males in 2005 to 35 strutting males in 2014.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

LAVA BEDS - BUTTE VALLEY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT
P.O. Box 861, 611 Main Street, Tulelake, CA 96134 Phone: 530-667-3473 ext 110 Fax:530-667-3125

TRANSLOCATION - COOPERATIVE SUCCESS



Translocation 2010
USFWS, Local Ranchers, NRCS
and volunteers.



Translocation 2011
USFWS, USFS, NRCS volunteers, Lava Beds-
Butte Valley RCD and landowners.



Photo by: Michael Anderson

Translocation 2011-
USFWS, USFS, NRCS volunteers, Lava Beds-
Butte Valley RCD and landowners.

Translocation 2012
Landowners, USFWS, USFS, NRCS, and
Lava Beds-Butte Valley RCD
(right)



Partners Tour Fall 2013
Permittees, Landowners, USFWS, USFS, NRCS,
and
Lava Beds-Butte Valley RCD



Habitat Improvements enable Sage Grouse Translocation to augment the local population in the Clear Lake Population Management Unit, centered around the Clear Lake Wildlife Refuge. Partners include; Landowners, NRCS-Sage Grouse Initiative, US Forest Service, Lava Beds-Butte Valley Resource Conservation District, University of California Cooperative Extension, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, Nevada Department of Wildlife and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Conservation in Modoc County with Sage Grouse & sage obligate species being targeted.



June 2010—Grass and sage brush, bitterbrush habitat limited to areas without excessive Juniper canopy cover. Restoration work in the region reflects return of the sagebrush and grasses in 2-9 years.



Cutting began on the 600 acre parcel August 2010—Juniper trees ranged from seedlings to 30+” logs. The biggest trees were found in the fertile valleys, draining springs and seeps. Clean up Jan-Feb 2011.



In June of 2012 this habitat restoration project shows good growth of forbs, sagebrush recruitment is very positive with bitterbrush on the slopes reflecting substantial growth.

Sage Grouse and Sage Steppe Restoration Clear Lake, Modoc County, California

COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION IN ACTION

- ◆ Signed Devil's Garden / Clear Lake Population Management Unit Conservation Strategy for Sage Grouse in April 2010
- ◆ Sage Grouse Active Management Area consists of 254,000 acres of federal and private lands
- ◆ 40,000 acres of private land in the active management area for Sage Grouse Recovery
- ◆ 34,000 habitat on the Clear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
- ◆ 39 Grazing Allotments with over 12 permittees
- ◆ Signed by 15 parties; agencies, permittees and private landowners.
- ◆ Strategy targets sage steppe habitat restoration, particularly juniper removal.



Mowitz Pasture Sage Grouse brood rearing habitat and corridor to wintering area.

Partnership = Restoration = Economic Viability”

