

PROTECTING SAGE GROUSE AND THEIR HABITAT IN THE WEST

2012



What is a sage-grouse?

Chick

Female (Hen)

Male (Cock)



Nest w eggs



Lek

Where do Sage Grouse live?

- Sage-grouse need sagebrush.
- Landscape-scale species.
- Not all sagebrush has sage-grouse.
- Sage-grouse eat ONLY sagebrush leaves Nov – March.
- Sagebrush must extend above snow in winter.



Leks and Other Habitat

- Leks
 - Traditional breeding area
 - Center point for populations
 - Most hens nest within 4 miles of a lek
- Why are leks important?
 - Lek counts used for population estimates and trends
- Management must include all seasonal habitat (nesting, brood-rearing, transitional, and winter)



Listing of the Sage -Grouse

- A listing under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act would affect use of property and resources in 11 Western States
- Affects federal, state, and private property (No one may harm the species or its habitat)
- Places the species under exclusive federal control



Petitions to List the Sage grouse

Extensive History
1999 – 2003: FWS
received 8 petitions

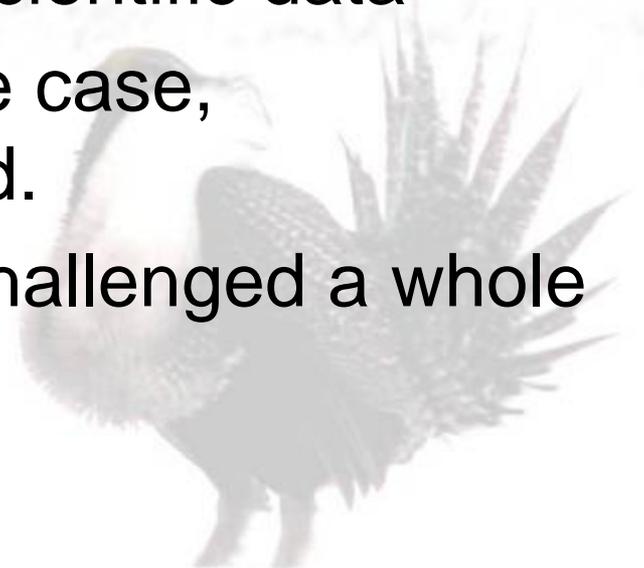


- 1999 – Columbia Basin populations
- 2001 – Mono Basin population (and 2005)
- 2002 – Western subspecies
- 2002 – Greater sage-grouse range-wide
- 2002 – Eastern subspecies
- 2003 – Greater sage-grouse range-wide (2)

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Recent Petitions

- 2005 – FWS determined “not warranted”
- Challenged by Western Watersheds Project in Idaho federal court (Judge Winmill)
- Court ordered a relook at the decision, based on alleged interference with the scientific data
- Utah moved to intervene in the case, intervention reluctantly granted.
- Other environmental groups challenged a whole series of ESA issues in D.C.



Latest Listing Decision

March 2010

- Warranted, but precluded by higher priorities
- WWP challenged this in federal court
 - Judge Winmill reluctantly upheld
 - Held evidentiary hearing recently on sufficiency of BLM plans
- Final decision by 2015
- Listing likely unless the situation changes



Listing Factors

A. Present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of habitat or range

B. Overuse for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes

C. Disease or predation

D. Inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms

E. Other natural or manmade factors affecting the species continued existence

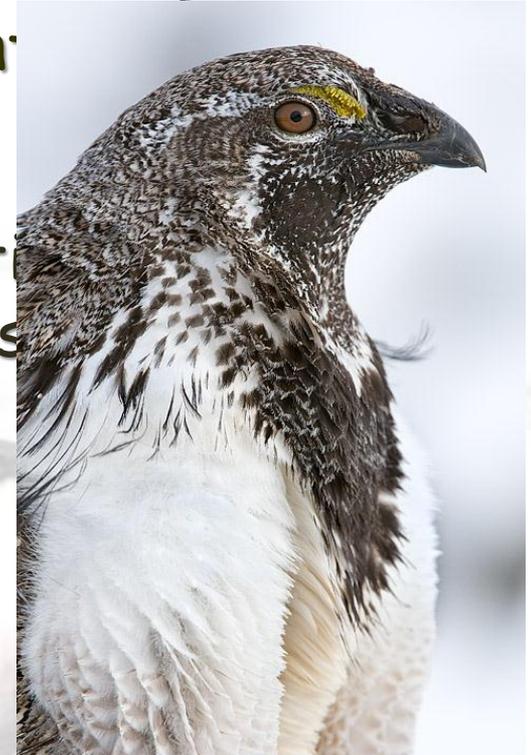


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Primary Threat

Habitat Fragmentation



Energy Development

- NE WY: 79% decline in 12 years
- No effect with ≤ 1 well pad per sq mi
- Most fields 16–128 pads per sq mi



Invasive Species/Fire

Historic fire cycle 200–350 years; now 70 to 158 years

In Great Basin: 27% of sage-grouse habitat has burned since 1980

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Second Threat

Inadequate Regulatory Mechanisms

FWS considered all governmental and other protection tools (mechanisms) including:

- Federal
- State
- County
- Conservation efforts

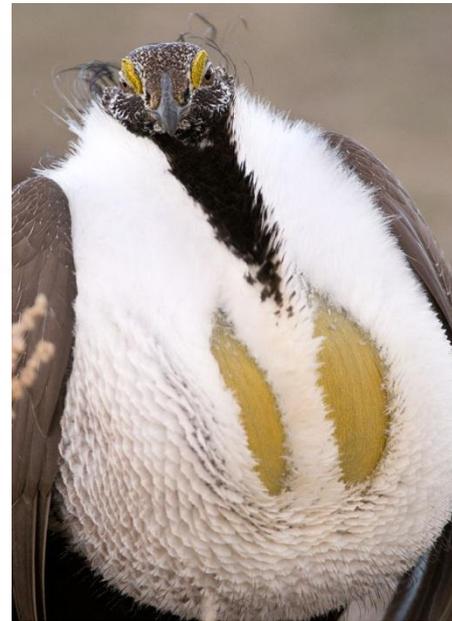
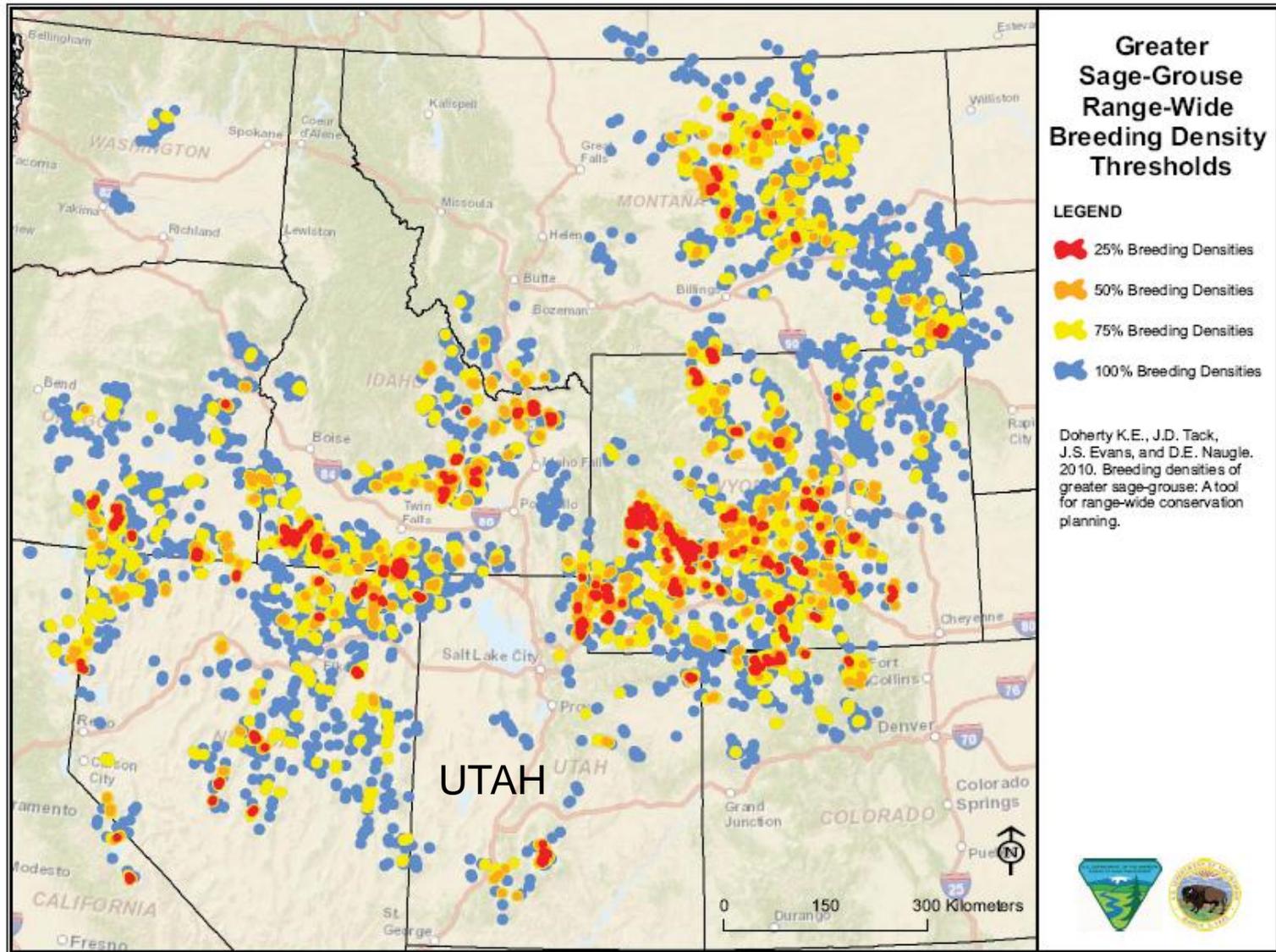


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Range-wide Lek Density Map



Wyoming's Efforts

- Gov Fruedenthal (D) convened a group to make recommendations about steps Wyoming could take to avoid a listing.
- Federal, state, and local governments, ranchers, oil and gas interests, the conservation community, academia etc were involved.

Plan that was accepted by the Fish and Wildlife Service as adequate to protect the species

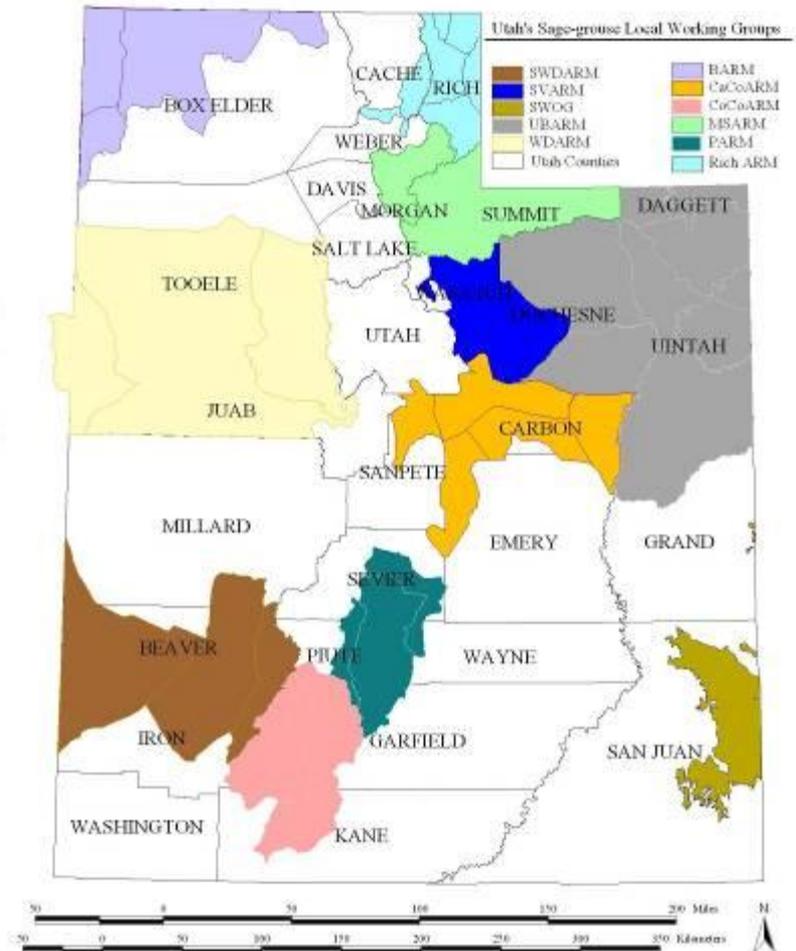


Utah's Efforts to Date

- Utah has been working to protect sage grouse in a proactive manner for years and has spent millions of state and federal dollars improving over 500,000 acres since 2004.
- A strong partnership among state, local, federal agencies, and private landowners is based on a shared commitment to achieve sound stewardship
- Utah initiated Local Working Groups in 2004, under the general direction of Utah State University, to consider sage grouse planning on a local basis.

Utah Sage-grouse Local Working Groups

- West Box Elder LWG
- Rich County Adaptive Resource Management
- Morgan/Summit LWG
- West Desert LWG
- Strawberry Valley LWG
- Uintah Basin LWG
- Castle Country LWG
- Southwest Desert LWG
- Parker Mountain LWG
- Color Country LWG
- San Juan County LWG (Gunnison sage-grouse)



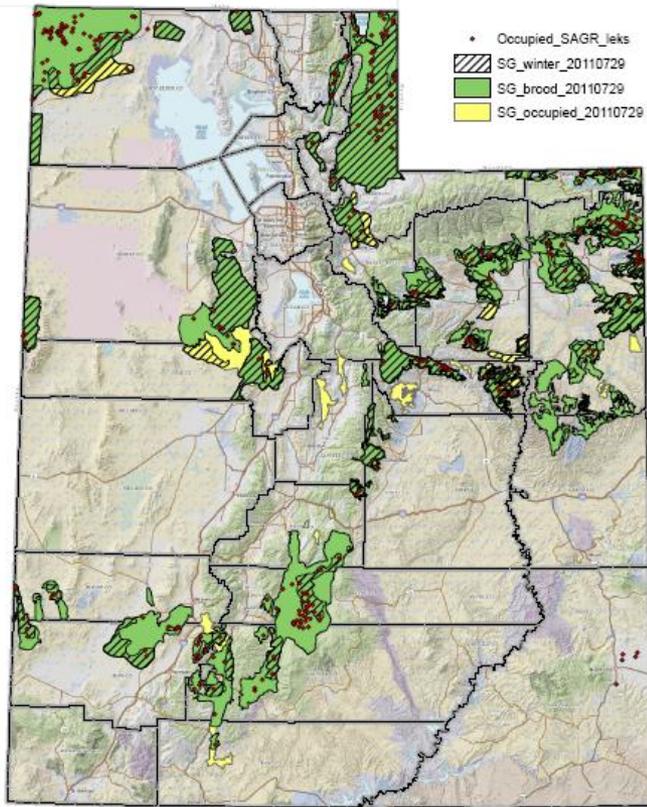
Local working group plans

Each plan identifies threats to sage-grouse

- Development
- Loss of quality habitat
- Drought and weather
- Parasitism/disease
- Wildfire
- Predation
- Hunting/Poaching
- Improper grazing
- Invasive plants



Distribution of Sage-grouse in Utah



**Approximately 14%
of Utah is currently
Occupied Sage-
grouse Habitat**



Utah Sage-grouse Lek Areas

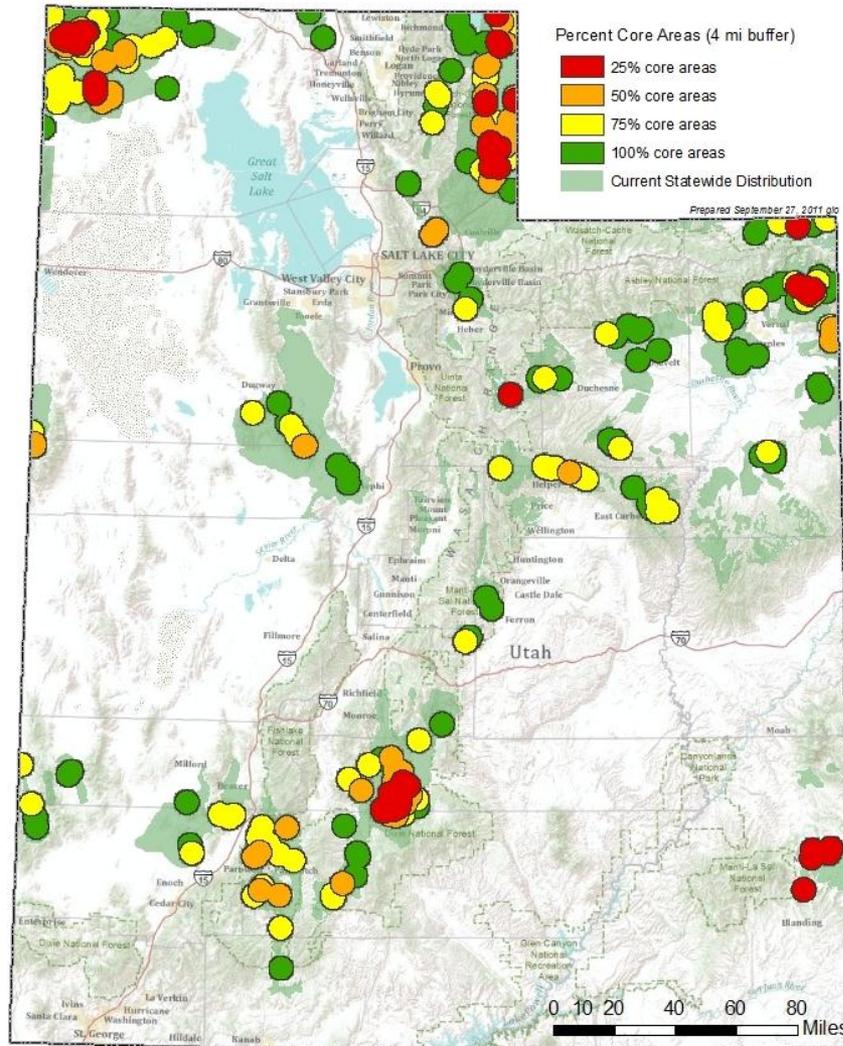


Figure 5. Important sage-grouse breeding density areas for Utah, based on 2002-2011 lek counts.

Utah Governor's Sage Grouse Working Group

- Convene a capable team of experts to identify the essential components of a Utah solution to address the threat of a Sage Grouse listing.
- Consider biology, economics, legal and historic precedents, protection for private property rights, energy and market realities
- Team consists of representatives from:
 - Governor's Office
 - Oil and Gas Industry
 - Agriculture
 - Division of Wildlife Resources
 - School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration
 - Private Landowner
 - The Nature Conservancy
 - Office of Energy Development
 - County Commissioners (2)
 - Oil Shale Industry
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Forest Service
 - National Resources Conservation Service



Considerations for a Utah Plan

- **Must be better than the provisions under a ESA listing decision**
- **Must consider the needs of the species**
- **Must consider the economic needs of Utah**
 - **Energy industry, recreation, ranching all vital**
- **Must protect private property and property interests**



The Best Way to Predict the Future is to Create It.



Photo: T. Black