

**Agenda Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT)**

**September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - 1:00 pm to 4:30 pm**

**DNRC Central Land Office – Conference Room**

8001 N. Montana Avenue  
Helena, MT 59602

**406/458-3500**

**Fax: 458-3506**

**1:00 Introductions**

MSGOT Members

**1:15 Background**

USFWS Listing (possible outcomes)

Executive Order 10-2014 and related documents

Senate Bill 261

Other Agency efforts

Fish Wildlife and Parks

Natural Resource and Conservation Service - Sage Grouse Initiative

Bureau of Land Management – Resource Management Plans

Governor’s consistency review

Environmental Quality Council (EQC) discussion

**2:15 Break**

**2:30 Action items**

MSGOT Procedure

Select a Chairperson

Draft By-laws/Operation manual

Decision-making

Meetings

Membership

Program

Rule making

**4:00 Public Comment**

## **FWP Sage-grouse Management & Conservation Actions**

- Range-wide Coordination
  - WAFWA's Sage-grouse Executive Oversight Committee and Sage-grouse Technical Team
    - Coordination among western state wildlife agencies involved in sage-grouse conservation, assisted with habitat conservation framework, conservation objectives team, and population trend analysis
  - Sage-grouse Task Force and Range-wide Interagency Sage-grouse Conservation Team
    - Coordination among western state wildlife agencies and federal resource management agencies regarding sage-grouse conservation
  - BLM Interdisciplinary Teams for Greater Sage-grouse updates to Resource Management Plans
    - Provided expertise, information, and informal/formal review to BLM throughout RMP development process
- Conservation Planning
  - 2005 Management Plan
    - Prepared, with many cooperators, a management plan detailing sage-grouse habitat requirements and recommendations for maintaining and enhancing good quality sage-grouse habitat
    - Includes an Adaptive Harvest Management framework for monitoring trends in male lek attendance and establishing hunting season regulations.
  - Local working groups
    - Facilitated local involvement in management plan development and implementation
  - Mapped Core Areas
    - Identified 28% of sage-grouse habitat that support 76% of the breeding population
    - Based on densities of displaying males
    - Includes important nesting, brood-rearing, and wintering habitat and connectivity to out-of-state populations
  - Genetics/connectivity
    - Working with UM and USGS researchers to identify genetic connectivity among populations to aid in habitat connectivity conservation planning.
  - Governor Bullock's Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Advisory Council
    - Co-chair of Advisory Council
    - Provided staff support to Council; organized meetings and prepared agendas; invited presentations from sage-grouse professionals
    - Provided expertise and research on sage-grouse ecology to Council
    - Prepared draft text, maps, and other products for final recommendations package
- Population Monitoring – used to inform population management and understanding population dynamics
  - Annual lek counts
    - Field efforts to count displaying males and locate new leks dating back to 1950's; survey protocols standardized in late 1990's
    - Maintain spatial database of leks and associated counts

- Provide sage-grouse information for new project development
- Wing barrels
  - Information collected locally; information can be used at local or larger scales.
- Demographic research
  - Led or supported demographic monitoring on nest success, hen survival, and chick survival in Petroleum (1974), Phillips (2006), Phillips & Valley (2009), Carter (2013) and Musselshell & Golden Valley (2006, current) counties.
- Other research (FWP led or supported)
  - Grazing management
    - Effects of livestock-friendly grazing systems on sage-grouse populations (ongoing, Lorelle Berkeley, FWP, PI)
    - Complimentary projects on invertebrates and songbirds related to grazing systems – same study area as sage-grouse work (Hayes Goosey, MSU, PI for invertebrate study; Victoria Dreitz, UM, PI for songbird work).
  - Habitat selection, use, migration corridors
    - Habitat selection and migration on the Hi-Line (Moynahan, PhD dissertation; Jason Tack, M.S. Thesis; Rebecca Smith, M.S. Thesis)
    - Habitat use in Carter Co. (Melissa Foster, FWP, lead)
    - Nesting habitat in central MT (Wallestad and Pyrah 1974, FWP)
  - West Nile virus
    - Documented sage-grouse mortalities from WNV in Montana (Dave Naugle, UM, PI)
  - Hunting
    - Evaluated effects of hunting on sage-grouse demographics (Jenny Sika, MSU/FWP, M.S. thesis)
- Habitat Conservation
  - Habitat Protection
    - Conservation easements - ~140,000 acres of native habitat within the sage-grouse range in Montana permanently protected from habitat loss.
    - Conservation leases – ~200,000 acres protected from conversion to cropland agriculture for 30 years; additional enrollment opportunities forthcoming
  - Habitat Enhancement
    - Grazing management – ~140,000 acres of enhanced sagebrush habitat and lowered risk of conversion to cropland agriculture
    - CRP enhancements, nesting cover – ~30,000 acres of habitat improvements implemented through our Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program
    - Fence-marking partnership – working with collaborators to minimize sage-grouse mortalities from fence strikes
  - Partnership positions to deliver USDA-NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative (SGI)
    - Provide financial support for SGI range positions (currently 4 position in Montana)
    - Provide technical expertise to state and regional SGI planning and direction.
  - Biological expertise
    - FWP biologists comment on new development projects and work with project proponents to advance development while minimizing impacts to sage-grouse, where needed.

- Training NRCS staff and development of the original Sage-Grouse Initiative, which is now a range-wide NRCS initiative, and assistance with SGI 2.0 which will direct NRCS funding for SGI 2015 – 2018.
- Population Management
  - Hunting season regulations
    - Set annual hunting regulations following framework in 2005 management plan
  - Translocations to Alberta
    - 41 birds were captured in north central Montana and translocated to Alberta in 2011-2012 to augment low population numbers in Alberta.
  - Access programs
    - Continue to work to provide access to high quality hunting opportunities. Examples include block management and Open Fields.
- FWP spent over \$6 million of hunter dollars on sage-grouse management and conservation in Montana in the past 15 years.