



QUICK FACTS: MONTANA SAGE GROUSE HABITAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM

WHAT IS THIS NEW PROGRAM AND WHY DID MONTANA START IT?

The greater sage grouse was once a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act across its range in 11 western states. Montana and 10 other western states developed conservation strategies to conserve sage grouse and address threats caused by habitat fragmentation, development, and loss of sagebrush. These state commitments led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to decide listing was not warranted.

Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy is based on the collaborative work of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Advisory Council and supported by diverse stakeholders. The 2015 Legislature passed the Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Governor Bullock signed Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015.

The Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program (Program) was created to facilitate implementation of the Executive Orders across state government, by federal land management agencies, and private entities seeking to develop projects in key sage grouse habitats. The Program is overseen by the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team. The Program is administratively hosted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Montana's goal is to conserve greater sage grouse and key sagebrush habitats so that Montana will maintain authority to manage its own lands, wildlife, and economy. Implementing Montana's Conservation Strategy will ensure that listing under the federal Endangered Species Act will never be warranted.

WHAT DO EXECUTIVE ORDERS 12-2015 AND 21-2015 SAY?

The Orders require the Program to review all proposed activities in sage grouse habitats designated as a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area. If the proposed activity will take place outside of these designated areas, Program review is not required.

The Orders guide where and how development and other activities occur in these designated areas. Certain limitations, stipulations or conditions may apply, depending on the project or activity. Other components establish general practices that apply to everyone. Mitigation may be required in some cases. Some activities are exempt from the Orders' requirements, while others may be grandfathered in.

The Executive Orders apply to all programs and activities of state government, including permitting, grant programs, and technical assistance. Through a consultation process, the Program will work with project proponents to first avoid impacts, minimize impacts, and restore impacted areas. The Program may require compensatory mitigation for impacts that can't be avoided, minimized or restored.

HOW DOES THE CONSULTATION PROCESS WORK?

Prior to submitting an application for a state permit or undertaking activities subject to the Executive Orders, contact the Program first. The consultation process should be completed prior to submitting an application to the permitting agency. State agency permitting programs will return incomplete applications which lack documentation if a consultation is required.

Proponents should have a thorough description of the proposal and identify all aspects of the project. Allow up to 45-60 days prior to submitting a permit application and more time for large or complicated projects. Once the consultation process is completed, the Program will provide complete documentation to project proponents.

HOW DO I START THE CONSULTATION PROCESS?

Visit <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov> for general information about the Program and to read the Executive Orders. Review the Sage Grouse Core Areas and General Habitat Map to determine whether your project would occur in sage grouse habitats designated as a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area. Click the Projects box on the bottom right of the screen to view the Program Map or begin the consultation process.

WHO IS THE PROJECTS WEB PAGE INTENDED FOR?

The Projects web page is for anyone proposing new activities that require a permit or who seek state funding or technical assistance for non-regulated activities in designated sage grouse habitats. State agencies undertaking state actions in designated sage grouse habitat will also use this page.



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Scientific studies have shown that sage grouse are very sensitive to habitat loss and disturbance during the breeding season. Through consultation and implementation of the Executive Orders, Montana aims to first avoid adverse impacts, then minimize them and restore habitats to pre-disturbance conditions. Impacts that cannot be avoided or minimized and restored will require compensatory mitigation.

WHY DO I HAVE TO USE THIS PROJECTS WEB PAGE?

The Projects web page creates an orderly, consistent way for the Program to receive and process requests for consultation. Providing complete information will help the Program review projects more efficiently. Your information will be kept secure and will not be sold or disseminated.

HOW DO I USE THE PROJECTS WEB PAGE?

View the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Map from the Program Home Page to determine if your project is within designated sage grouse habitat.

To start a project:

You will first need to create an ePass account

Once you have logged in follow instructions under the New Project tab

Step 1: Basics - Fill out your information.

- Type information in the fields provided.
- Include your contact information so the Program can contact you. It will be kept secure and will not be shared or disseminated.

Step 2: Disturbances - Draw your project on the map using your mouse like a pencil. Alternatively, upload a geospatial file using the Upload GIS File button.

- Use the search bar to find your project area quickly.
- Select a different base map by clicking on "Aerial, Street or Terrain" from the map layers.
- Turn on the sage grouse layers to see the designated habitats where the Executive Orders apply and the location of Lek No Surface Occupancy Areas.
- Draw the project using the tools provided on the left side of the map and your mouse.

Step 3: Questionnaire - Answer questions specific to your project type and activity.

Step 4: Attachments - upload additional information such as Plan of Development or EA.

Step 5: Review and Submit - Review information you provided. If correct, click "Submit."

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The user will receive an automated email response with a confirmation number verifying that the information was received by the Program. Each submission will be assigned a unique number. Program staff will determine whether the proposed activity would occur in a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area. The Program may contact you to get more information or discuss the proposed activity.

If the project is not in designated sage grouse habitat, the Program will contact you and refer you back to the permitting agency. If the project is in sage grouse habitat designated as a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area, the Program will review the proposed activity to determine whether it complies with the stipulations, conditions, and recommended practices outlined in Executive Order 12-2015.

If the activity would take place in a core area, the Program will calculate the density and disturbance levels within the project area using the Density Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT). The results will be compared to allowable thresholds set forth in Executive Order 12-2015. The Program will also determine whether the project complies with other components of Executive Order 12-2015.

WHEN CAN I SUBMIT MY PERMIT APPLICATION OR MOVE FORWARD WITH MY PROJECT?

When the consultation process is complete, the Program will provide a letter and other written documentation. This documentation should be attached to the application submitted to the permitting agency.

RESOURCES:

Contact the state agency. See <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov>. ♦ Email sagegrouse@mt.gov. ♦ Call 406-444-0554