

Summary of Memorandums of Understanding Affecting the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Management of Sage Grouse

*for the MEPA/Oversight Subcommittee of the Environmental Quality Council
by Krista Lee Evans, Resource Policy Analyst*

Introduction

There are currently two Memorandums of Understanding involving the management of sage grouse and their habitat that play a part in how the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) operates with regard to sage grouse management in Montana.

One Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been agreed to by the members of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). FWP is a signatory to this MOU. A second MOU involves the WAFWA and federal land management agencies. FWP is not a direct signatory to this MOU, however, as a member of WAFWA they are associated with, and impacted by, the MOU.

Memorandum of Understanding #1

Parties to the Memorandum of Understanding

- Members of Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies:
 - Alberta
 - Arizona
 - British Columbia
 - California
 - Colorado
 - Idaho
 - Montana
 - Nevada
 - New Mexico
 - North Dakota
 - Oregon
 - South Dakota
 - Utah
 - Washington
 - Wyoming

Objectives (emphasis added)

1. Maintain and increase where possible the present distribution of sage grouse.
2. Maintain and increase where possible the present abundance of sage grouse.
3. Develop strategies using cooperative partnerships to maintain and enhance the specific habitats used by sage grouse throughout their annual cycle.
4. Conduct management experiments on a sufficient scale to demonstrate that management of habitats can stabilize and enhance sage grouse distribution and abundance.
5. Collect and analyze population and habitat data throughout the range of sage grouse for use in preparation of conservation plans.

Actions (emphasis added)

It is the intent of the members of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to sustain and enhance the distribution and abundance of sage grouse through responsible collective management programs. These programs will include:

1. Identification of the present distribution of sage grouse in each member state/province.
2. Collection of sage grouse population data following standardized protocols throughout the range of the species.
3. Continuation of development of Conservation Plans based on the local working group concept.
4. Validation of habitat evaluation models.
5. Completion of genetic analyses across the range of sage grouse to more effectively define and manage individual populations.
6. Development of cooperative partnerships with interested individuals, and private, state, and federal land managers.
7. Support and implement the revised sage grouse population and habitat management guidelines.

Memorandum of Understanding #2

Parties to the Memorandum of Understanding

- ! Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- ! U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
- ! U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
- ! U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

Objectives (emphasis added)

1. Maintain, and increase, where possible, the present distribution of sage grouse.
2. Maintain, and increase, where possible, the present abundance of sage grouse.
3. Identify the impact of major land uses and hunting on sage grouse, and determine the primary causes for declines in sage grouse populations.
4. Develop a Rangewide Conservation Framework to provide for cooperation and integration in the development of Conservation Plans to address conservation needs across geographic scales as appropriate.
5. Develop partnerships with agencies, organizations, tribes, communities, individuals, and private landowners to cooperatively accomplish the preceding objectives.

Actions (emphasis added)

The States will convene Working Groups to develop State or Local Conservation Plans.

Working groups will be comprised of representatives of local, state, federal, and tribal governments, as appropriate. Participation will be open to all other interested parties. Federal participation in working groups will operate in a manner consistent with the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Working groups will be convened within 60 days of the effective date of this agreement.

Each State Conservation Plan will provide recommendations:

1. To protect and improve important sage grouse sagebrush habitats
2. To actively manage to improve degraded sagebrush ecosystems.
3. To reduce the fragmentation and isolation of sagebrush habitats.
4. To address non-habitat issues, such as hunting, if such issues are identified to limit sage grouse populations in an area
5. For desired population levels, distribution, and habitat conditions.