

**SAGE GROUSE STRATEGIES  
IDENTIFIED BY IMPLEMENTATION TEAM  
SEPTEMBER 24, 2007**

**The primary objective of the statewide Sage-grouse Implementation Team is to provide guidance for implementing strategies that enhance sagebrush ecosystems in varying stages of life form, age, and condition throughout Wyoming, including identification of costs and sources of adequate local, state, and federal funding. The ultimate goal is to stabilize and increase Sage-grouse populations. The primary mechanism to achieve this goal is development of agreements (Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, Candidate Conservation Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding) and incentives to insure management actions on private and public lands will continue in a manner that is ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable.**

**FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Funding strategies are actions that will require supplemental funding to implement. Funds identified are in addition to existing agency funds, and are generally viewed as minimum amounts required to achieve an immediate conservation objective.**

1. Complete extensive statewide mapping of seasonal habitat types, and identify areas by seasonal use. Document and map current efforts oriented toward sage grouse habitat enhancement (e.g. NRCS, WWNRT, etc.).

**PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY:** WGFD

**SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY:** BLM, LWG

**ADDITIONAL COST:** \$2,000,000 (\$1,000,000/year)

**SOURCE OF FUNDS:** Legislature

**START DATE:** immediate

**COMPLETION DATE:** December 2008

**RATIONALE:** Sagebrush habitat status and sage-grouse use information is currently incomplete. Without being able to identify important sage-grouse areas and use levels it is impossible to effectively plan any activity (e.g. development, mitigation, etc.) in a way that meaningfully conserves the species, particularly on a landscape scale.

2. Identify and fund a single coordinating entity for all mapping efforts statewide, including required capacity to manage data.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WGFD  
SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: UW, USGS  
ADDITIONAL COST: \$500,000  
SOURCE OF FUNDS: Legislature  
START DATE: immediate  
COMPLETION DATE: July 2008

RATIONALE: Mapping information is currently stored in many different locations, some of which are not known or not accessible to all parties that require the information for development planning and conservation activities. Consolidating maps and supporting data into one accessible location, in one “language”, will assist in providing the most current tools for those that are working to conserve sage-grouse (either through development design, mitigation planning, etc.) We anticipate restrictions may be placed on data from private lands, if requested, to protect landowners from unwanted intrusions.

3. Assure funding for long-term landscape monitoring of sage grouse populations and habitat uses, and expand monitoring to track sage-grouse movements and migration corridors.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WGFD  
SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: LWG  
ADDITIONAL COST: included in FY 09-10 budget  
SOURCE OF FUNDS: Legislature  
START DATE: immediate  
COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: Long-term monitoring is essential to track natural changes in the sagebrush landscape and resulting sage-grouse use so that development and conservation activities can be adjusted accordingly. Monitoring is also essential to determine the effectiveness of any conservation or mitigation effort. Sagebrush ecosystems are typically slow to respond to reclamation/enhancement activities (in some cases requiring greater than 50 years). As sage-grouse are a landscape species, using expansive areas to meet all their life needs, monitoring must occur on a large scale.

4. Fund educational efforts, on-the-ground resource enhancements, project monitoring, and other efforts identified and coordinated by local sage-grouse working groups, existing CRM efforts, and other entities.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WGFD  
SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: LWG, WDA  
ADDITIONAL COST: \$4,000,000 (\$2,000,000/year)  
SOURCE OF FUNDS: Legislature  
START DATE: immediate  
COMPLETION DATE: December 2009

RATIONALE: Many are unaware of the concerns facing sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem, or don't know how to address these concerns. Education through existing mechanisms will enhance the understanding of sage-grouse and sagebrush, and facilitate effective conservation efforts. On-the-ground enhancements identified as being necessary to conserve sage-grouse will fail without adequate funding for implementation and monitoring. Local sage-grouse working groups have identified many projects that are important to local sage-grouse conservation, but lack sufficient funding for implementation.

5. Fund conservation easements in areas of crucial habitat. Identify alternative intermediate and long-term conservation strategies, including term easements and habitat leasing. Include management stipulations to meet the mitigation purpose of easements or leases as separate contractual agreements with landowners. Identify lands that could be used as offsite mitigation or set-asides, including impacted lands that may be restored to sage-grouse habitat.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WWNRT  
SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: JIO, WLCI, NRCS  
ADDITIONAL COST: \$20,000,000 (one year funding)  
SOURCE OF FUNDS: Legislature  
START DATE: immediate  
COMPLETION DATE: July 2009

RATIONALE: In some areas the only way to meaningfully protect crucial sage-grouse habitats is through conservation easements. These are very expensive to implement, but are essential in areas of intensive development for long-term sage-grouse conservation. Funding at this level is estimated to conserve between 10,000 and 15,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat.

6. Implement aggressive invasive species prevention and control in sagebrush ecosystems, including full application of mill levies in counties that do not currently collect the full authorization.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WDA

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM, USFS, State Lands

ADDITIONAL COST: \$800,000 (\$400,000/year)

SOURCE OF FUNDS: Legislature

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: December 2009

RATIONALE: Invasive species are identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a primary threat to sagebrush ecosystems. Preventing and combating invasive species to ensure the conservation of intact, healthy sagebrush habitats is critical to conserving sage-grouse. This strategy will also provide benefits to other habitats and activities by preventing the spread of invasive species in Wyoming.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Policy recommendations identify needs in the existing framework of local, state, or federal management of sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitats. While these recommendations may carry some personnel burden or other financial implications, they are not viewed as immediate fiscal needs.**

1. Create a state mechanism to identify and enforce conservation thresholds for species of concern, and to preclude the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: Governor's Planning Office

START DATE: January 2008

COMPLETION DATE: July 2008

RATIONALE: The ability of the State of Wyoming to enforce conservation thresholds (the level at which the species needs to be maintained to ensure long-term survival and persistence in the State) for species of concern will result in reducing the need to list species in the future under the Endangered Species Act. Successful implementation of this strategy will ensure that Wyoming retains control of its wildlife resources. Conservation thresholds will be determined by the State, with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when requested, and will be based on the best scientific information available. These thresholds should be considered by all land managers when making decisions on how to design and implement projects.

2. Implement aggressive wildfire prevention and control in primary sage grouse habitats. Prioritize fire control and response to essential core areas of crucial need for sage-grouse, as identified by statewide mapping.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: State Forestry

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM, USFS, county fire

START DATE: July 2008

COMPLETION DATE: July 2009

RATIONALE: It is extremely difficult to successfully reclaim sagebrush habitats after a wildfire. Preventing wildfire or reducing its footprint in crucial sage-grouse habitats will protect these areas. This will also minimize reclamation expenses and help prevent the spread of invasive species.

3. Identify undeveloped lands that have high biological value for sage grouse. Protect identified areas through repurchase of valid existing rights, use of No Surface Occupancy lease stipulations, preclusion of leasing, or other appropriate measures as a means to insure high-quality habitat retention in the short-term, until reclamation or mitigation within the home range of the affected population is able to meet the needs of sage grouse in the immediate area.

**PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY:** BLM/USFS, State Lands

**SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY:** WGFD

**START DATE:** immediate

**COMPLETION DATE:** ongoing

**RATIONALE:** Restoring sagebrush habitats is extremely difficult and expensive. Retaining high quality areas that are important to sage-grouse (as identified by mapping) will contribute to persistence of sage-grouse while allowing for development activities in other areas.

4. Minimize the footprint for energy development, recognizing that all developments are unique, by implementing techniques recommended by local SG working groups, science advisory group, and industry that achieve this objective (e.g. mat drilling, multiple wells). Develop incentives to minimize footprints that may include tax exemptions, streamlined permitting, bond reductions, stipulation exceptions, and other innovative means to achieve conservation of Sage-grouse and their habitats.

**PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY:** BLM/USFS, State Lands

**SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY:** WGFD, OGCC

**START DATE:** immediate

**COMPLETION DATE:** ongoing

**RATIONALE:** Restoring sagebrush habitats is extremely difficult and expensive. Reducing the footprint of energy development will facilitate retention of local sage-grouse populations, which is critical in re-establishing the birds once development is complete, and will minimize reclamation expenses. Minimization techniques that are appropriate for each ecological area should be implemented.

5. Increase the acreage exemption for subdivision from the current 40 acres to 640 acres. Provide incentives for actions that minimize the footprint of housing development. Include natural resource values in subdivision planning requirements.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: Legislature, county government

START DATE: January 2008

COMPLETION DATE: July 2008

RATIONALE: Sage-grouse are a landscape species and require large open spaces, with suitable habitats, for survival. This strategy is proposed to minimize the impacts of subdivision development on sagebrush and sage-grouse. A statewide standard would allow for consistency in development planning.

6. County governments should participate financially in habitat conservation efforts, by providing matching funds, planning and policy assistance in areas of high impact to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitats.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: county government

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: County governments exert considerable influence on local development activities, and wildlife habitats. Engaging counties in conservation activities will enhance protection of crucial sage-grouse areas, as well as facilitating local education about sage-grouse and the concerns surrounding this species.

7. Develop a state regulatory framework for wind energy.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES: **WDA, ISC, WBC**

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: There is currently no defined State regulatory authority for wind energy development, unlike all other energy activities. While renewable energy development, particularly wind in Wyoming, is important, it should be done in a way that sensitive to Wyoming's natural resources in general, and sage-grouse in particular.

## PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

**Process recommendations identify actions that will lead to better management of sagebrush habitats. These recommendations are not intended to identify specific management actions, but to identify broad procedures that should be implemented locally to enhance sagebrush habitats, particularly habitats that have been, or may be, impacted by human activity.**

1. Develop a means for immediate response to wildfire, including stockpiling of native seed, control of invasive species, and alternative forage resources to allow rangelands to recover from fire events.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: State Forestry, BLM/USFS

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: WDA

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: July 2008

RATIONALE: Reclamation of areas burned by wildfire is often limited by the restricted availability of native seed sources and the intrusion of invasive species. Additionally, wildfire results in the loss of important rangelands which can result in consolidating livestock resources in smaller areas to maximize forage use. Providing alternative forage resources will help alleviate these situations if they occur.

2. Allow for adaptations to and exceptions from drilling/timing stipulations or conditions of approval where such would not unduly impact other species, and would clearly enhance sage-grouse. Allow for exceptions from stipulations where sagebrush habitat can be reclaimed or enhanced, without undue impact on other species.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM/USFS, State Lands

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: WGFD, USFWS

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: Development activities are often temporally or spatially restricted to protect other wildlife resources that are not at risk. Allowing adaptations and exceptions to stipulations or conditions of approval may result in increased reclamation opportunities and success, as well as facilitating implementation of other enhancement activities.

3. Identify strategies to develop forage reserves and/or lease alternative forage for livestock in areas of full-field development, or where rangeland restoration is desired.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WDA/WGFD

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM, USFS, State Lands

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: July 2008

RATIONALE: Loss of forage from energy development can result in consolidating livestock resources in smaller areas, which may have negative impacts on sage-grouse. Providing alternative forage resources will help alleviate these situations, and provide flexibility for rangeland restoration.

4. Use state and private lands as a model laboratory to test mitigation, reclamation, and management alternatives where permitting or other issues may limit management flexibility on federal lands.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: State Lands

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: WDA, WGFD, NRCS, UW

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: Creative alternatives to mitigation and reclamation are often untested due to the difficulty of complying with NEPA requirements on federal surfaces. By using State and private lands (with landowner cooperation), alternatives can be tested and monitored in a timely manner. Results may reveal better methodology or practices for the conservation of sage-grouse and their habitats, and will likely receive better reception for subsequent implementation.

5. Develop a mechanism to coordinate and target project funding.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: NRCS, WWNRT

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: WGFD, WDA, USFWS

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: July 2008

RATIONALE: There are several resources currently available, and in development, to fund conservation activities for sagebrush and sage-grouse. There is little if any coordination between funding sources, resulting in a "scattering" of projects on the landscape with unknown results for sage-grouse. Coordinating and targeting funds will ensure that highest priority items are accomplished and will leverage additional project funding.

6. Identify and adequately fund implementation of grazing strategies that enhance sagebrush ecosystems, using the best available science and information.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: WDA

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM, USFS, NRCS, WSGB, CDs

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: December 2008

RATIONALE: Livestock grazing can be economically and ecologically compatible with successful management of sagebrush and sage-grouse, and may enhance sage-grouse habitats. Incentives will allow increased participation in grazing strategies that enhance sage-grouse habitats.

7. Identify, develop, and utilize proven and reproducible mitigation measures for all impacts on Sage-grouse and their habitats, using the best available science and information.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM, WGFD

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: USFS, State Lands

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: Where habitat protection is not possible, mitigation will be necessary to conserve sage-grouse. Mitigation techniques need to address direct and indirect impacts of development on sage-grouse.

8. Implement water management strategies that limit the potential of West Nile virus infections, and otherwise benefit sage-grouse on all lands in Wyoming.

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: BLM, DEQ

SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY: State Lands, State Engineer, WDA

START DATE: immediate

COMPLETION DATE: ongoing

RATIONALE: West Nile virus is nearly always lethal in sage-grouse and can have significant effects on local populations. Designing and managing water developments to minimize habitat for mosquitoes will reduce the incidence of this disease in sage-grouse, and perhaps other species. However, if properly designed, sited and managed, water developments can enhance brood-rearing habitats for sage-grouse.