

Framework for the Greater Sage-Grouse

2020 Conservation Assessment

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework for the range-wide Conservation Assessment (Conservation Assessment) of the Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*; hereafter, sage-grouse) to be completed in the year 2020. The goal of the Conservation Assessment is to evaluate the implementation, or progress, of conservation efforts across the 11-state range of sage-grouse and to assist in determining the condition of sage-grouse and their habitats in 2020. This framework identifies obligations and commitments, and associated progress, made by conservation partners - the collection of federal, state, private, and non-profit, non-governmental organizations who are working collaboratively for sage-grouse conservation. The roles and responsibilities of conservation partners to report progress on conservation effort implementation are detailed. Additionally, a description of how an inter-agency Conservation Assessment Team (CAT), led by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) will review partner reports to analyze the implementation progress of the conservation efforts at a range-wide scale is described. The CAT will prepare the Conservation Assessment report, which will provide a scientifically based, range-wide assessment of the current condition of the sage-grouse and its habitats, while incorporating the progress of conservation since 2015 and the best available information on populations and trends. Through the Conservation Assessment report the CAT will also provide recommendations for adaptive management into the future.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the many partners engaged in conservation of sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem have united in an unprecedented range-wide collaborative effort. Continued declining population and habitat trends motivated states and federal partners to invest heavily in research and management to reverse downward trends and conserve sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem. During the same time, numerous petitions to list sage-grouse were received by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), prompting the agency to review the status of the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Following a “not-warranted” listing determination for sage-grouse in 2005, WAFWA completed the “*Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy*” (2006 Strategy; Stiver et al. 2006) to ensure long-term conservation of the species. The 2006 Strategy outlined the need to develop collaborations between all entities in the sagebrush ecosystem for the long-term conservation of robust populations of sage-grouse and associated landscapes and habitats. The goal of the 2006 Strategy was “to maintain and enhance populations and distribution of sage-grouse by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations” (Stiver et al. 2006, p. xxi). The 2006 Strategy identified key work areas (conservation actions, monitoring implementation and effectiveness of the actions, research and technology, funding, communications, and adaptive management) and identified the need for significant and sustained funding to support long-term conservation, leadership committed to supporting the conservation efforts, and an appropriate organizational structure to sustain range-wide conservation through time (Stiver et al. 2006, p. xxiv). While the 2006 Strategy became the cornerstone of sage-grouse conservation efforts and made significant progress in all work areas, many critical needs (e.g. enhancing the distribution of sage-grouse) identified in that document remain today.

In response to litigation regarding the 2005 finding, the USFWS re-visited the species' status in 2010 and concluded that continued unchecked habitat loss and fragmentation, coupled with the inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms to address loss and fragmentation, were significant threats to the sage-grouse (March 23, 2010; 75 FR 13910). In 2010, the USFWS added greater sage-grouse to its candidate list of species warranted for listing under the ESA. Additionally, sage-grouse population analyses found continuing range-wide declines (Garton et al. 2011).

Based on the terms of a court-directed settlement, USFWS reviewed the status of sage-grouse again in 2015, including the cumulative ongoing and anticipated effectiveness of conservation efforts implemented by all partners. Due to substantial and comprehensive conservation efforts and commitments by partners to reduce habitat loss and fragmentation through the combination of voluntary actions by private landowners and regulatory mechanisms adopted by states and the federal land management agencies, the USFWS reversed the 2010 finding and concluded that the species did not warrant protection under the ESA (October 2, 2015; 80 FR 59941). Emphasizing the importance of continued conservation and timely implementation of all the commitments from conservation partners, the 2015 finding concluded:

“The completion of this status review is not the end of our commitment to sage-grouse conservation. Our determination today is based on the best scientific and commercial data currently available. That determination, however, cannot guarantee that the sage-grouse (or other sagebrush ecosystem species) will not in the future warrant listing under the Act. New threats may develop, management may change, or the species may not prove as resilient as we concluded based on the currently available science. Thus, although our best judgment today indicates that successful sage-grouse conservation will be achieved by continued implementation of the regulatory mechanisms and conservation efforts we relied on in our finding above, we and our partners must carefully monitor threats to the sage-grouse and its response to those threats. Therefore, we will work with our Federal and State partners to conduct a sage-grouse status review in 5 years. This status review will inform adaptive management and guide future research needs to ensure that conservation efforts continue to benefit sage-grouse into the future. In the meantime, to ensure the long-term successes of this unprecedented conservation effort, we will continue to work with our partners to augment and improve current management within the sagebrush ecosystem. If at any time new information indicates that the provisions of the Act may be necessary to conserve sage-grouse, we can initiate listing procedures, including, if appropriate, emergency listing pursuant to section 4(b)(7) of the Act.” (October 2, 2015; 80 FR 59941–59942).”

After the 2015 finding, the conservation partners recognized that continued collaboration and subsequent evaluations of conservation efforts would be necessary to ensure long-term success (while also adapting management actions and conservation delivery as supported by new science). This determination is consistent with the tenets of the original 2006 Strategy, which measured success by reversing or stabilizing population and habitat trends - the ultimate goal of conservation actions, regulatory mechanisms and adaptive management (Stiver et. al 2006, p 1-8).

The framework outlined here builds off the 2006 Strategy and provides a guide for the Conservation Assessment and any subsequent assessments for sage-grouse. This framework is itself not a formal review of the species status, but rather identifies how obligations and commitments made by conservation partners will be assessed by the CAT in 2020, and into the future.

Scope of the 2020 Conservation Assessment

The goal of the Conservation Assessment is to evaluate the implementation, or progress, of conservation efforts across the 11-state range of sage-grouse and to assist in determining the condition of sage-grouse and their habitats in 2020. The Conservation Assessment report will provide a scientifically based, range-wide assessment of the current condition of the sage-grouse and its habitats, while incorporating the progress of conservation since 2015, the best available information on populations and trends, and recommendations for adaptive management into the future.

Given the importance of conservation efforts and regulatory mechanisms to the conservation of sage-grouse, the partners agreed to assess progress of their efforts five years following the 2015 not-warranted finding. Because a formal regulatory review of the status of the sage-grouse pursuant to the Endangered Species Act is not required at this time, this framework outlines the process conservation partners will use to report on the progress of their actions and remain accountable to their conservation commitments. The Conservation Assessment will document conservation actions, summarize current sage-grouse population status and trend; inform adaptive management; recommend improvements to management within the sagebrush ecosystem; and finally, identify research needs. The Conservation Assessment will determine whether the collective efforts to conserve sage-grouse are moving in the right direction and help ground-truth the implementation of regulatory mechanisms and conservation efforts across the range of sage-grouse. Given the slow response rates of sagebrush habitats and sage-grouse to many conservation efforts, the biological effectiveness of these regulatory mechanisms and conservation efforts will take more than five years to discern. Therefore, an effectiveness review will not be a part of the 2020 assessment, but it will provide information on species population numbers and sagebrush habitat availability to help ensure transparency, consistency, and to help inform all partners. Additionally, the conservation partners recognize that monitoring and adaptive management are necessary components in the strategic conservation “wheel”, as described in the 2006 Strategy (Stiver *et al.* 2006).

The objectives of the CAT’s collaborative Conservation Assessment in 2020 will:

- Evaluate the progress of implementation of federal and state commitments since 2015 made to the continued conservation of the sage-grouse and its habitats;
- Cumulatively assess sage-grouse population trends, sagebrush availability and lessons learned in order to inform range-wide adaptive management discussions;
- Assess new scientific information for sage-grouse and habitats that may inform conservation delivery; and
- Recognize the importance of continued conservation and, as part of adaptive management, recommend changes to conservation delivery in order to ensure continued success.

The CAT’s completion of these items in 2020 will require continued, coordinated teamwork from a variety of partners and stakeholders, and their associated skill sets, as described below under Roles and Responsibilities. The final Conservation Assessment report will compile and consolidate this information at a range-wide scale using the best available scientific information so that the report will serve as the central authority on the current condition of conservation actions by partners and trends for sage-grouse and their habitats. If necessary, the resulting Conservation Assessment report could be used by the USFWS as a foundation to help inform policy decisions under the ESA, should they be necessary.

Reporting

Expectations for Partners: Collecting and Reporting Information for the CAT.

The success of the Conservation Assessment will depend on the full and timely collection, storage, and reporting of data by all the conservation partners, regardless of affiliation. Expectations of the partners include:

- Collecting data associated with their conservation efforts, including implementation status;
- Entering the conservation effort information into the Conservation Efforts Database (CED);
- Qualitatively and fairly evaluating the progress of the effort towards meeting the project objective in a narrative report; and
- Participating on the CAT to help evaluate the implementation of the conservation actions at a range-wide scale.

The CAT will review both conservation effort data and any associated narrative reports collected in the CED beginning in Summer 2019, and may need to engage additional expertise to conduct any needed quantitative analysis (See the timeline in Figure 1 above). Sage-grouse population analyses should be completed by the summer of 2020 and the CAT will incorporate that information with the range-wide summary of conservation efforts to develop a comprehensive report for delivery to WAFWA. The CAT's final 2020 Conservation Assessment report will be presented at the WAFWA Sagebrush Executive Oversight Committee at their September 2020 meeting.

Data Collection.

All partners are responsible for collecting their own data. Data should be collected using the best scientific methods available, with the methodology identified. Supportive information should be pertinent to understanding the anticipated conservation effort desired outcomes.

Conservation Efforts Database (CED).

The CED collects data associated with conservation efforts for sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem from all conservation partners. The CED is a spatially-explicit centralized database and conservation planning tool that can track conservation efforts, help display the unparalleled investment in sagebrush conservation by all partners, and provide information that will improve siting of future conservation actions. This database has recently been updated by the USFWS, after extensive consultation with conservation partners, and can provide outputs of conservation efforts by time, category, geographical location, conservation partner and other relevant attributes. The CED will continue to be adaptable as new science helps to inform the implementation progress moving forward, and will continue striving to be interoperable with other existing tools and database. The CED will serve as the primary vehicle for reporting on conservation actions for sage-grouse, and will be essential to enable aggregating information across agencies and jurisdictions. Specific instructions for how conservation partners will enter data are forthcoming.

Beginning in November 2018, all conservation partners (not just CAT members) shall enter their conservation effort data into the CED. All data must be entered into the CED before June 30 2019, but partners are encouraged to input their data into the CED as they complete a conservation effort to help ensure that deadlines are met. The CED staff will provide technical support to conservation partners, as needed, such as helping transfer data from other databases where applicable, via the batch upload process. Additional details and instruction regarding data entry into the CED will be provided by the CED team if

requested. If the conservation partners would like their contributions considered in the assessment, they also will need to provide a narrative of how their conservation effort will achieve their objectives. These narrative reports will also be uploaded into the CED and are also described below.

Evaluating Data: Narrative Reports and Qualitative Assessments.

A narrative report provides conservation partners the opportunity to describe, analyze, and discuss their conservation efforts in more detail than is available through the CED. While much of the data will be captured and aggregated through the CED, certain efforts may be difficult to fully explain in a database. Any supplementary information in narrative report form that provides additional detail for conservation efforts entered into the CED should be uploaded to the CED simultaneously when entering the data for the project.

For conservation efforts conducted by an agency or organizations/individuals associated with a state or federal agency, an additional cumulative program report, also in narrative report form, should also be drafted and submitted to the CAT that details implementation, summarizes the results, and discusses the implications for near and long-term effectiveness of all conservation efforts implemented by that entity. If the implementation results are sufficient to determine which measures or efforts are ineffective, the report should also detail any needed management changes that can inform adaptive management.

The CED has been designed, and continues to evolve to incorporate efforts while protecting privacy information. Therefore, the CAT anticipates that the need for non-CED associated data reporting will be minimal. If you have concerns about providing information and/or narrative reports into the CED, please contact the CAT to discuss. The CED Team is committed to addressing concerns associated with privacy and data security.

A recommended structure for narrative reports is in Appendix C.

Independent Conservation Efforts.

Independent conservation efforts have a long and positive history in the United States. In the past the Western Governors' Association (WGA) developed a series of annual reports that detailed independent conservation efforts on behalf of sage-grouse. These independent efforts may not have a nexus to any state or federal funding, or to conservation partners such as a wildlife agency, but are valid conservation efforts. While difficult to capture all independent conservation efforts, the CAT will engage the WGA to reach individuals that are implementing independent conservation efforts. The CAT and CED teams will assist these entities to enter their data in the CED while respecting privacy concerns.

Roles and Responsibilities

For the Conservation Assessment, conservation partners responsible for implementing the regulatory mechanisms and conservation efforts will report on the progress of their respective efforts. Therefore, the responsibility for data collection and reporting falls to each conservation partner and requires that each partner commits to accurately and fairly collecting and evaluating their data prior to the initiation of the Conservation Assessment. Additionally, WAFWA will compile, analyze, and summarize the range-wide sage-grouse population data; federal agencies will compile and report on range-wide habitat characteristics (sagebrush availability and disturbance estimates in Priority Habitat Management Areas by Biologically Significant Units) datasets pursuant to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Greater Sage-Grouse Monitoring Framework (Monitoring Framework; BLM 2014). The USFWS

will provide information on applicable National Wildlife Refuge lands and private land activities supported by their Partner’s for Fish and Wildlife Program, and as a fully contributing member of the Conservation Assessment will also provide biological and policy expertise, as appropriate. Finally, the CAT will be responsible for evaluating all of the data and narrative reports at a range-wide scale to collectively assess the implementation of the conservation efforts and to determine if the objectives of the Conservation Assessment (identified above under Scope) have been achieved.

An estimated timeline is provided below in Figure 1 to show the roles of conservation partners and how the various sources of information will feed into the review. More information regarding the components of this schedule are discussed below.

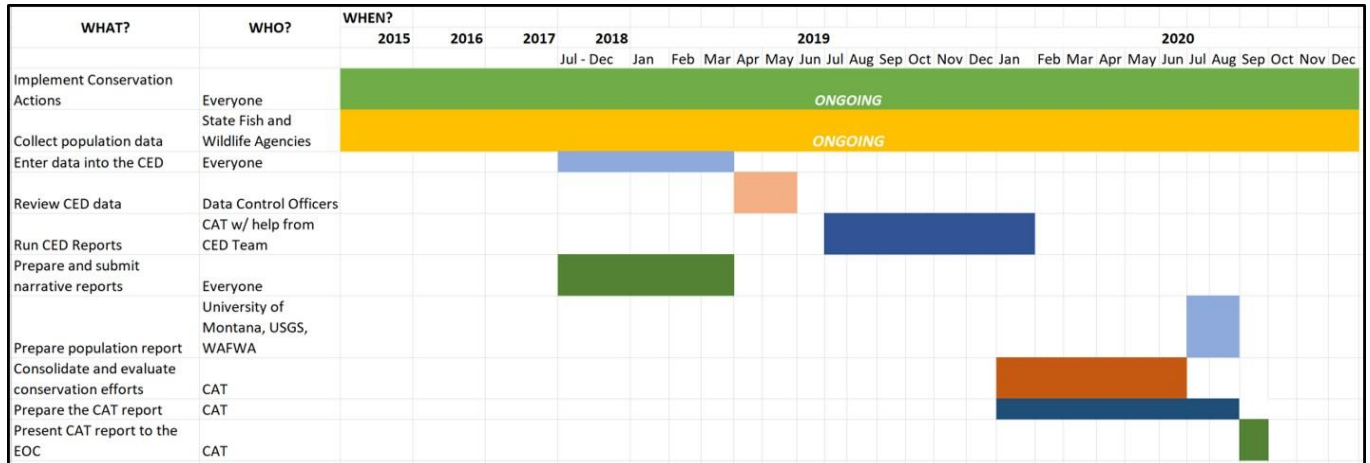


Figure 1. Estimated timeline illustrating the roles each conservation partner including various sources of information that will support the Conservation Assessment.

Conservation Assessment Team (CAT) Membership.

The composition of the CAT will be a diverse mix of conservation partners, with scientific, technical, and policy expertise. These diverse perspectives will ensure the CAT has robust knowledge of action efficacy and that they can effectively consider conservation actions and future projections. Collectively, team members will need to have a basic understanding of models and their utility in assessing species and habitat condition, and have a good working knowledge of conservation actions and expected outcomes, including the latest information on restoration and recovery of sagebrush habitats. Individual team members do not need be versed in every aspect of sage-grouse biology or conservation, but the team as a whole need to provide expertise that covers the entirety of the conservation actions that the CAT will be responsible for reviewing at a range-wide scale.

Beginning in March 2019, WAFWA will invite a broad spectrum of conservation partners to nominate CAT members. CAT members will need to devote significant time for review of the conservation actions submitted by the conservation partners and will need to be available to help synthesize and produce the Conservation Assessment report. The entire conservation community, not just one state, agency, or stakeholder group is responsible for the cumulative reduction and amelioration of threats to sage-grouse and its habitats across the range. As a result, conservation efforts are diverse, voluminous, occasionally complicated, and may require sophisticated analyses to assess progress and qualitative biological effectiveness, first as individual efforts, then collectively, and over different periods of time. Due to the initial complexity of this review and the need for consistency over time, consideration should be given to selecting members that can commit to this effort through 2020 and potentially beyond.

At the present, no funding has been identified for this effort. WAFWA expects that data collection, data entry in the Conservation Efforts Database (CED; description below), and time required for CAT membership would be absorbed by the individual conservation partners. Staffing of the CAT by WAFWA and any potential contracting of outside expertise are an unfunded need.

An initial listing of Conservation Partners is in Appendix A.

Authorities

Long term conservation success will be achieved by continued cooperative conservation and partnerships across private and public land ownership boundaries. Collectively, state and federal statutory authorities underpin this collaborative effort to work together to manage and conserve the species and its habitat so that the species does not warrant ESA protections. The states utilize their authority to manage sage-grouse populations, while the federal land management agencies have the authority to manage publicly-owned habitat for special status species such as the sage-grouse. States use additional authorities to manage their state-owned land and fund conservation on both private and public land. The USFWS uses its given authority to work with state, federal, and private entities to implement conservation efforts that would proactively preclude the need to protect species under the ESA.

A listing of the legal authorities that outline participation in this effort are listed in Appendix B.

Conservation Assessment Elements

In 2020, the Conservation Assessment will focus on assessing implementation of the conservation efforts, rather than the biological effectiveness of the actions. This underscores the importance that monitoring and data collection must continue to ensure that future reviews can fully evaluate the correlation between the conservation efforts and habitat quality, quantity, and population trends needed to evaluate the health of the sage-grouse. Data collected between 2015 and subsequent reviews will be necessary for future aggregation and a *quantitative* assessment of biological effectiveness. Therefore, in 2020, the CAT will assess the information submitted from federal agencies, states, and other partners to consider implementation progress and identify any gaps in implementation and recommend changes for adaptive management, at a range-wide scale.

Habitat

Monitoring Framework and Sagebrush Availability.

The availability of sagebrush, in conjunction with population information for sage-grouse, will be an important source of information for qualitatively assessing the progress of implementation in 2020. Sagebrush availability is one of three measures described in the BLM and USFS Monitoring Framework to monitor sage-grouse habitat and identifies where and how much sagebrush occurs within the range of sage-grouse. The Monitoring Framework describes the methods to monitor habitats and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the BLM's national sage-grouse planning strategy, the BLM resource management plans (RMPs), and the USFS's land management plans (LMPs) to conserve the species and its habitat (BLM 2014; Table 2). Regulations for the BLM (43 CFR 1610.4-9) and the USFS (36 CFR part 209, published July 1, 2010) require that land use plans establish intervals and standards, as appropriate, for monitoring and evaluations based on the sensitivity of the resource to the decisions involved. Therefore, the BLM and the USFS developed the Monitoring Framework, included in the 2015 plans, to describe the data to collect to evaluate implementation and effectiveness of the strategy and conservation measures; the frequency of reporting; and the spatial scale of reporting.

Sagebrush availability is defined as ecological systems that have the capability of supporting sagebrush vegetation and seasonal (where identified) sage-grouse habitats within the range of sage-grouse. The current geographic extent of sagebrush vegetation within the range-wide distribution of sage-grouse populations will be ascertained using the most recent version of the Existing Vegetation Type (EVT) layer in LANDFIRE (2013) or any updated version. The sagebrush base layer for monitoring sagebrush availability will be based on geospatial vegetation data adjusted for potential threats identified by the Conservation Objective Team (USFWS 2013), including Agriculture, Energy Development, Urbanization, Wildfire, Conifer Encroachment, Treatments and Invasive Species and updated annually by incorporating changes attributable to agriculture, urbanization, and wildfire, as per the commitments made by the federal land management agencies in their revised management plans.

Table 2. BLM’s Sage-Grouse Monitoring Framework - frequency and the spatial scale of reporting for implementation and conservation measures ((BLM 2014). Note that the Conservation Assessment will focus on the range-wide scale, but data collected at other scales may be useful to conservation partners in assessing their individual efforts.

Implementation and conservation measures	Frequency of reporting	Spatial scale of reporting
Tracking and documenting implementation of decisions	Reported annually; summary report every 5 years	Summarized by land use plan with flexibility for reporting by other geographic units
Tracking changes in land cover (sagebrush)	Updated and reported annually; summary report every 5 years	PHMA/IHMA by BSUs with flexibility for reporting by other geographic units
Tracking changes in the amount of anthropogenic disturbance	Updated and reported annually; summary report every 5 years	PHMA/IHMA by BSUs with flexibility for reporting by other geographic units

The BLM will produce a comprehensive program report that covers the three topics in the table which includes metrics on allocations, and changes in sagebrush availability and anthropogenic disturbance since plans were signed in 2015. The CAT will rely on the range-wide habitat availability data sets and comprehensive program reports provided by USFS and BLM during the Conservation Assessment. The information collected through the Monitoring Framework will be able to track changes in sagebrush cover and changes in the amount of anthropogenic disturbance over time. A comparison of sagebrush availability though time will provide a mechanism to provide an aggregate picture of changing quantity of sagebrush across the range of sage-grouse. The configuration of sagebrush on the landscape may also influence the function of the landscape for sage-grouse. Therefore, during the analysis phase the CAT, in coordination with science partners, will assess change landscape metrics, including patch size, amount of edge, etc. As needed, other range-wide datasets will be identified to help evaluate habitat changes over time. Mitigation efforts will be reviewed if included in the CED, and the conservation value assessed relative to the associated disturbance activities.

Population Evaluation

Understanding the current status of sage-grouse population size and trend across the range and within individual populations, states, and management zones is an important component of assessing the conservation status of sage-grouse. A range-wide assessment of sage-grouse population trends will be a component of the Conservation Assessment. In 2015, WAFWA commissioned the completion of the range-wide analysis (Nielson et al. 2015). The 2020 Conservation Assessment will serve as an update of population status within these multiple spatial extents. This action will be led by the state agencies in coordination with other partners who can provide analytical expertise.

A combination of analytical techniques will be employed to estimate sage-grouse population size and trend. This is an active area of research and multiple efforts are being coordinated by WAFWA. The development of integrated population modeling (IPM) and Bayesian statistical approaches are enabling the modeling of population size and trend using lek counts, estimates of survival, nest success, and other demographic parameters. WAFWA is working with researchers from the University of Montana, United States Geological Survey (USGS), USFWS, and state agencies to develop a secure platform where state agencies can estimate sage-grouse population size and trends using the best available data. These tools will provide options for estimating minimum population size and trend within multiple reporting units. These analyses will be coordinated by WAFWA through the Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee.

Spatial Analyses.

Use of multi-agency information on plan implementation efforts and data that can increase a qualitative understanding of effects or effectiveness of those efforts will be critical for the Conservation Assessment. Spatial analyses from the CED will serve as a resource for conservation effort information and the developing SageDAT initiative (a Department of the Interior-funded initiative to create a multi-agency catalog of spatial data and tools) will provide a catalog of other geospatial information and tools for use in the assessment. These tools are complementary to each other and will enhance the development of the Conservation Assessment, and make information used more readily accessible.

Adaptive Management.

The CAT will review conservation actions which have made sufficient progress toward desired outcomes, and if appropriate suggest possible shifts in implementation using adaptive management principles as identified in the 2003 Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 2003). PECE defines adaptive management as “a method for examining alternative strategies for meeting measurable biological goals and objectives, and then, if necessary, adjusting future conservation management actions according to what is learned.” WAFWA adopted these principles in the 2006 Strategy (Stiver et al. 2006).

The Conservation Assessment and the Report:

How the rollup will work

The continued conservation of sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem relies on an intricate web of biotic factors (habitat and demographic) and abiotic factors (threats, conservation efforts, and regulatory mechanisms) (Figure 2). Resilient, or healthy, populations of sage-grouse, as measured by population sizes and trends (demographic factors), and the quality and condition of habitats (habitat factors), are more likely to recover following stochastic events, or natural fluctuations in environmental conditions. Threats may

influence population resiliency by affecting demographic factors directly or indirectly by influencing the quality or quantity of habitats. At the same time, conservation efforts and regulatory mechanisms may improve population resiliency, by influencing threats, habitat factors, or demographic factors. Rolling-up to the species-scale, the greater the number and distribution of resilient, or healthy, populations, and the more diverse (ecological, genetic, behavioral, morphological or physiological diversity) these populations are the better able the species is able to withstand catastrophic events or adapt to environmental change into the future. The combination of resilient populations (resiliency), their number and distribution across the landscape (redundancy), and their diversity (representation) provides a scientifically-based assessment for the condition of the sage-grouse at a range-wide scale. The CAT’s Conservation Assessment report will use this conceptual model to evaluate the current condition of the sage-grouse in 2020.

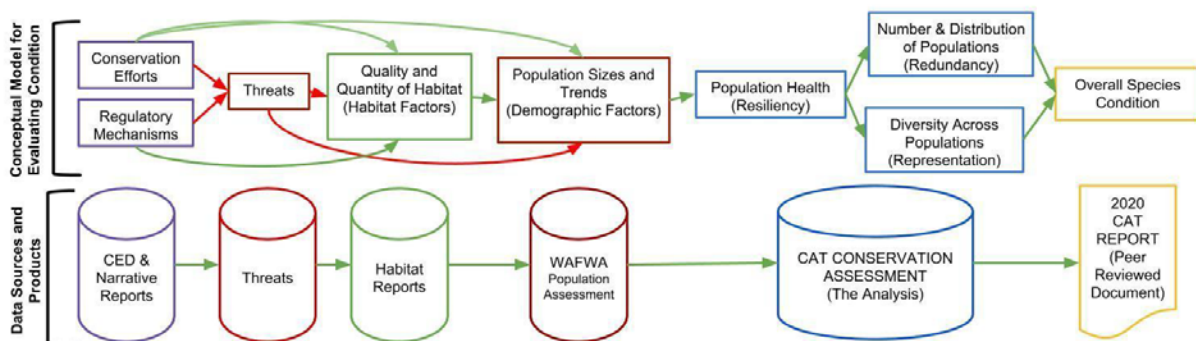


Figure 2. Conceptual model for evaluating the condition of sage-grouse based on relationships between conservation efforts, regulatory mechanisms, threats, habitat factors, and demographic factors. Cylinders represented sources of information that inform each factor of the model.

As described in the Roles and Responsibilities section (Figure 1), the CAT will begin consolidating conservation efforts (from their ongoing review of projects entered into the CED) and comprehensive program reports submitted by all partners in January 2020. The CAT will summarize the results in the Conservation Assessment report. To help inform the Conservation Assessment report, the CAT will review the reports generated by the CED. The CAT will also review the narrative summary reports prepared and submitted by the conservation partners, with particular emphasis on each partner’s self-assessment on the progress of their actions and any recommendations for adaptive management. The CAT will also review and incorporate the population size and trend information prepared by WAFWA. The CAT will then consolidate all of this information to report on the implementation progress of the conservation efforts since 2015 at a range-wide scale. The CAT will prepare the Conservation Assessment report, which will summarize the progress of conservation implementation, as well as population trends to inform the current condition of sage-grouse across the range. The Conservation Assessment report will also provide recommendations for adaptive management into the future.

Publishing and Distributing the CAT Report

The Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment Report (CAT Report) will be published by WAFWA as an independent document and will follow the protocols established by WAFWA when completing the Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Habitats and the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. The document will be reviewed by members of the conservation

community which participated in the development of the document, and peer reviewed by an independent 3rd party. The comments will be evaluated by the CAT and incorporated in to the final draft of the Conservation Assessment. The CAT will ensure that the Conservation Assessment is maintained as a science-based document.

We propose to distribute the document with a limited number of hard-copies and widely on our partners' websites. The release of the document will be announced with a coordinated news release.

Literature Cited

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Appendix A: Conservation Partners

List of partners is in development

Appendix B: Authorities

Collectively, state and federal statutory authorities underpin this collaborative effort in working together to manage and conserve the species and its habitat across private and public land ownership boundaries. Conservation success will be achieved by continued cooperative conservation and partnership in using these authorities

State Authorities.

The states and provinces within the range of the sage-grouse have the authority to manage sage-grouse populations and other wildlife species. This authority derives from state constitutional authority, legislative authority, or both depending on the state. States also use state granted authorities to fund partnering conservation on both public and private land.

Federal Authorities.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) ([43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.](#)) is the primary federal law governing most land uses on BLM-administered lands and directs development and implementation of Resource Management Plans, which direct management at a local level in accordance with the principles of multiple-use and sustained-yield.

Initiated in 2011 and completed in 2015, the BLM, with the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) as a Cooperating Agency, completed eight land use plan amendments and seven land use plan revisions that were developed for the purpose and need to incorporate appropriate conservation measures into the land use plans to conserve, enhance, and restore sage-grouse habitat by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing threats to GRS and its key habitats.

- Nevada/NE California Amendment
- Oregon Amendment
- Idaho/SW Montana Amendment
- Utah Amendment
- NW Colorado Amendment
- Wyoming 9-Plan Amendment (WY)
- Lander Revision (WY)
- Bighorn Basin Revision (WY)
- Buffalo Revision (WY)
- Billings/Pompey's Pillar NM Revision (MT)
- Lewistown Amendment (MT)
- HiLine Revision (MT)
- Miles City Revision (MT)
- South Dakota Revision
- North Dakota Amendment

Further, BLM has defined special status species (including sensitive species) as: “(1) species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and (2) species requiring special management consideration to promote their conservation and reduce the likelihood and need for future listing under the ESA, which are designated as Bureau sensitive by the State Director(s). All federal candidate species, proposed species, and delisted species in the 5 years following delisting will be conserved as Bureau sensitive species.” (BLM Manual 6840 – Special Status Species Management, 2008). Sage-grouse are a designated as a sensitive species in all BLM State Offices where they occur.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

As a non-regulatory USDA agency, NRCS does not have statutory management or regulatory authority, but assists in implementing voluntary private land sage-grouse conservation using programmatic Farm Bill authority to provide conservation funding. Landscape Conservation Initiatives like the Sage-grouse Initiative (SGI) accelerate benefits of Farm Bill conservation programs with private landowners and agricultural producers. NRCS provides eligible private landowners the financial and technical resources necessary to help them voluntarily address sage-grouse threats on their land complementary to other conservation efforts. In providing this assistance NRCS complies with the Farm Bill privacy requirements in Section 1619 and the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. Section 552a.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

The USFWS implements the ESA and responded to multiple petitions received for the sage-grouse. Supporting the conservation framework assists with the commitment made in 2015 to review the status of conservation effort implementation in 5 years (October 2, 2015; 80 FR 59858, 59941-2). Additionally, the USFWS has several programs that support sagebrush conservation including: Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (working with private landowners to benefit federal trust species), managing National Wildlife Refuges, providing technical assistance to tribes on conservation issues, and supporting state wildlife action plans, and conservation of migratory birds.

U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service)

Management of activities on National Forest System lands is guided principally by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1600). Pursuant to the NFMA, the Forest Service is required to establish plans for management and use of the National Forest System lands in accordance with the principles of multiple-use and sustained-yield.

The NFMA provides statutory direction for managing the National Forest System to provide for the diversity of plant and animal communities. The 2012 NFMA implementing regulations at 36 CFR 219 direct the Forest Service to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities and the persistence of native species in the plan area, and to maintain viable populations of each species of conservation concern within the plan area. A species of conservation concern is a species that is known to occur in the plan area and for which the Regional Forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates a substantial concern about the species capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area (36 CFR 219.9 (c)). Sensitive species are those plant and animal species identified by a Regional Forester for which population viability is a concern, as evidenced by significant current or predicted downward trends in population numbers or density, or in habitat capability that would reduce a species’ existing distribution (Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2670.22, FSM 2670.5).

Sage-grouse have been identified as species of conservation concern or as sensitive on multiple Forest Service units. Also, in 2015, 20 National Forests and Grasslands amended their land management plans to provide regulatory mechanisms and conservation measures to facilitate the persistence of sage-grouse. The conservation measures contained in the amended plans will be implemented whether or not sage-grouse were identified as a sensitive species or species of conservation concern.

Private Landowners and Non-Governmental Organizations

Conservation districts, private landowners, ranchers, and non-government organizations (NGO's) do not have statutory management or regulatory authority, however each have played an important role in implementing voluntary private land sage-grouse conservation. Private landowners and ranchers who manage key large intact landscapes that adjoin public land have a vested interest in cross boundary conservation being successful with partners.

Multiple NGO's representing a variety of diverse interests and stakeholders also play an important role in sagebrush ecosystem conservation that benefits sage-grouse by filling gaps, which agency partners are unable due to limitations in mission scope, statute, and programmatic funding use. This includes: advocating for conservation, being a trusted non-agency source of funds and conservation assistance for landowners, providing funds that can be leveraged with agency partners, holding conservation easements, and providing volunteer labor towards conservation implementation and technical assistance.

Appendix C: Suggested outline for narrative Reports

Narrative reports should generally follow this outline:

Background/Introduction

The introduction or background section should describe the purpose of the report and provide a short summary of the conservation program.

Program Overview

This section should describe the program’s legal authorities, funding, expected future implementation if known, participation in the program, and a description of program goals and objectives. This section should also briefly explain how the program functions, where the program operates, and the scope.

Program Implementation Summary

This section should describe the implementation of the program, including program components and implementation actions, project status, number of projects, relationship of those project(s) to priority habitats, monitoring results, and other information considered relevant to reviewing program implementation. These could include data also entered into the CED or any other relevant data or information related to program success. This information will be essential to analyses of progress conducted in 2020 and for future analyses regarding project efficacy for long-term conservation.

Analysis

This section will include an assessment of accomplishments, and provide a summary of adaptive management recommendations based on results and monitoring, if appropriate.

If existing state or federal agency reporting follows a similar format then aggregating annual reports into a 5-year summary could serve as the narrative report.

Optional Tables to Summarize Reporting on Commitments

Subject	Instructions	Answer Here
PLAN OR DOCUMENT	<i>What is the name of the subject State plan or other conservation document?</i>	
KEY POINT RELIED ON IN THE 2015 NOT-WARRANTED FINDING	<i>Briefly summarize the key conservation action from the State plan or conservation document as described in the 2015 not-warranted finding.</i>	
ASSOCIATED STRESSOR OR CONSERVATION PRIORITY	<i>Categorize the issue or topic</i>	
FR CITATION FROM 2015 NOT-WARRANTED FINDING	<i>Citation from the October 2, 2015, not-warranted finding: 80 FR 59858.2015</i>	
FULL 80 FR XXXXX TEXT	<i>Additional text from the October 2, 2015, not-warranted finding, if needed for clarification</i>	
CITATION FOR PLAN OR OTHER DOCUMENT(S)	<i>In-line citations for relevant State plan or other conservation document, in format (AuthorlastName year, p. XX)</i>	
TEXT OR SUMMARY FROM STATE PLAN OR OTHER CONSERVATION DOCUMENT	<i>What does the plan or conservation effort say about this stressor or issues?</i>	

DATA POINT OR NEED	<i>What is the specific data point or need for this issue or topic?</i>
QUESTION	<i>Rephrase the data point or need as a question</i>
OUTCOME AND/OR OUTPUT	<i>Does the data help inform implementation (outputs) and/or biological (outcomes) effectiveness?</i>
METRICS, METHODS, DATA NEEDS	<i>What are the metrics? How is this measured? What underlying data are needed?</i>
COLLECTION	<i>Are these data currently being collected? Yes or No.</i>
IF YES (CURRENTLY COLLECTED), HOW, WHERE, WHEN?	<i>How and when is the data collected, stored, analyzed, and reported. Include citation for a description of monitoring or data collection.</i>
IF NO (NOT CURRENTLY BEING COLLECTED), SHOULD IT BE COLLECTED?	<i>If data should be collected, WHO, HOW, WHERE, WHEN should be responsible for collecting, storing, analyzing, and reporting?</i>
OTHER NOTES	