

Greater Sage-Grouse & Gunnison Sage-Grouse: *The Importance of Proactive Conservation*

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Recent and forthcoming decisions to list two different species of sage-grouse, Greater and Gunnison, as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act raise concern and questions about conservation investments, especially by states and on private lands. There are similarities, but also key differences, between these species that must be considered as management decisions are made.

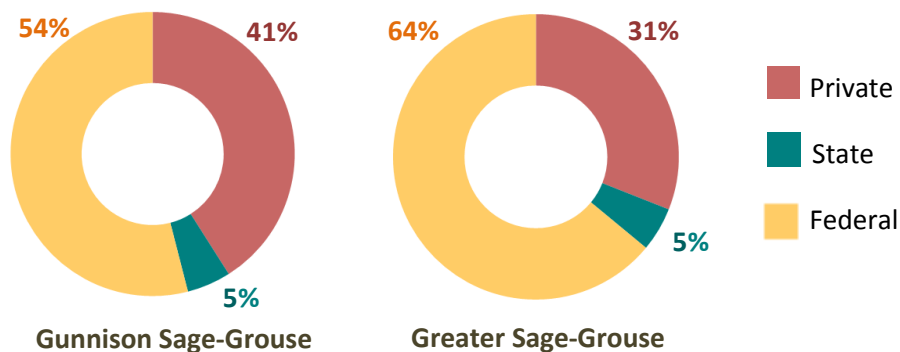


SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE SPECIES

- Recognized for their elaborate spring mating displays of males attracting females on breeding grounds (leks).
- Landscape-scale species, requiring large areas of contiguous suitable habitat.
- Exhibit strong site fidelity and return year-after-year to the same leks and nearby nesting areas, even when habitat has been altered (limits their adaptability to changes in the environment and movement into unfamiliar areas or restored habitats).
- Considered indicator species, as their presence reflects the overall health of the landscape.
- **Both species are impacted by declining quantity and quality of habitat including increased fragmentation, and their populations have declined over the past several decades.**



Current Land Ownership:



Listed as “threatened” by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) on November 12, 2014.



USFWS determined species warranted protection in 2010. Final decision to be made September 30, 2015.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SPECIES:

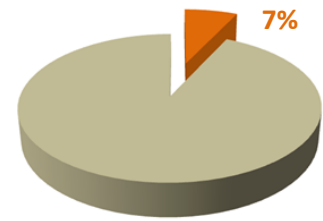
Gunnison Sage-grouse (GUSG): Small populations and limited distributions

- Today, only disparate populations of GUSG exist within a small fraction (7%) of their historic range
- Fewer than 5,000 birds remain across 7 population areas in southwest Colorado and southeast Utah (87% of birds are in Gunnison Basin; the remaining 6 populations number range from 10-200 breeding birds).
- Low gene flow and genetic diversity are of concern within and among populations.

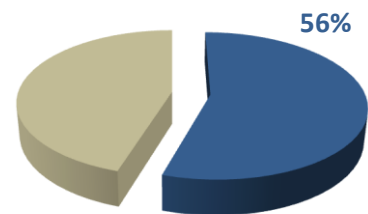
Greater Sage-grouse (GRSG): Larger populations and broader distributions

- GRSG occupy only slightly over half (56%) their original range, which creates more opportunity for conservation than for GUSG.
- Current population estimates range from 200,000-500,000 breeding birds. Found in 11 states and 2 Canadian provinces.
- While GRSG have experienced an estimated 30% decline in population range-wide since 1985, loss of gene flow is not yet a concern for the majority of GRSG populations, and there is time to ensure that this does not become an issue in the future.
- Unlike GUSG, several strongholds have been identified within the range of GRSG. If strongholds are of sufficient size and managed soundly (i.e. managed exclusively for long-term conservation), viable populations can be maintained.

Percent Historic Range Currently Occupied:



Gunnison Sage-Grouse



Greater Sage-Grouse



OPPORTUNITIES GOING FORWARD

Proactive conservation work completed on the ground for Gunnison Sage-Grouse is valuable and must continue in a collaborative manner. Federal and state programs, which facilitate coordination and funding, are working to address the multiple threats to the species' habitats. Unfortunately, both species' populations are significantly compromised. But the foundation for conservation is in place and needs to continue through partnerships and smart, aggressive management efforts. We need continued will and commitment from all participants – landowners, industries, states, federal agencies, local governments and politicians – to enable the recovery of these birds.

Fortunately for Greater Sage-grouse, populations and habitat potentials across the range are stronger. **We do have time to put together strong plans, by states and federal agencies, which can lead to the recovery of Greater Sage-grouse and avoid the need for federal intervention.** We must continue to work together and find solutions that ensure Greater Sage-grouse remain a state-managed species.

The unprecedented partnerships of states, western communities, landowners, developers and interested stakeholders should continue for both species of sage-grouse until populations are recovered. **The health of these iconic species reflects the health of our western landscapes.**

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