

Common Sense Conservation: Wyoming's Sage Grouse Strategy 2023 Plan Amendments



Wyoming Legislature– 20 September
Lander

History of the Issue

- Petitioning under the ESA began in 1998 – eight petitions in five years
- Wyoming state management plan, 2000-2003
- 2005: “Not Warranted”
- 2007: Sage Grouse Summit led to establishment of SGIT
- 2007: December decision to remand 2005 decision for further review
- 2008: Freudenthal Executive Order
- 2010: “Warranted but Precluded”
- 2010: Revised Executive Order

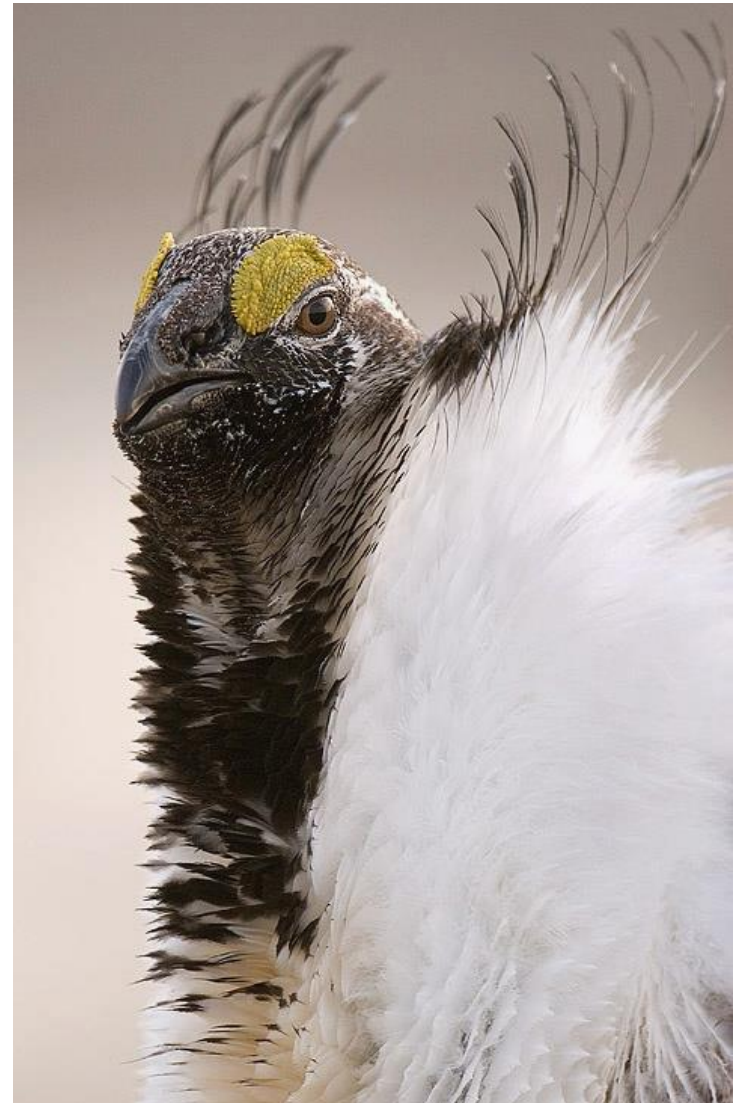


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History of the Issue

- 2011: Mead Executive Order
- 2015: BLM/USFS Plans
- 2015: “Not Warranted”
- 2015: Revised Map
- 2017: Court Challenge to Plans – Judge withheld decision
- 2019: Gordon Executive Order
- 2019: BLM/USFS Plan Revisions

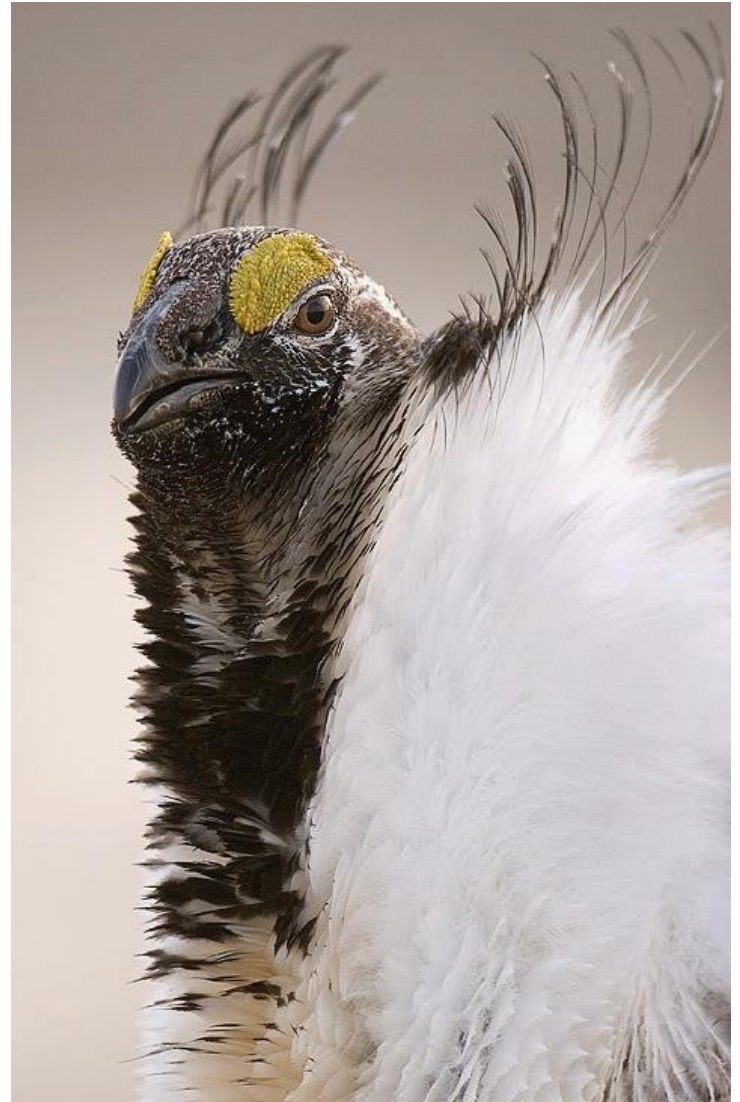


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History of the Issue

- 2021: Court Order to BLM to reassess 2019 Plans – requires strict “conservation” alternatives
- Fall 2021: BLM publishes Notice of Intent to develop new plans
- March 2023: BLM shares initial mapping work with cooperating agencies – deadline for BLM mapping is set for July
- March 2023: SGIT appoints subgroup to evaluate Wyoming core areas and recommend adjustments to 2015 maps
- May 2023: DRAFT revisions to Local Working Groups
- June 2023: Longer timeframe is requested from BLM

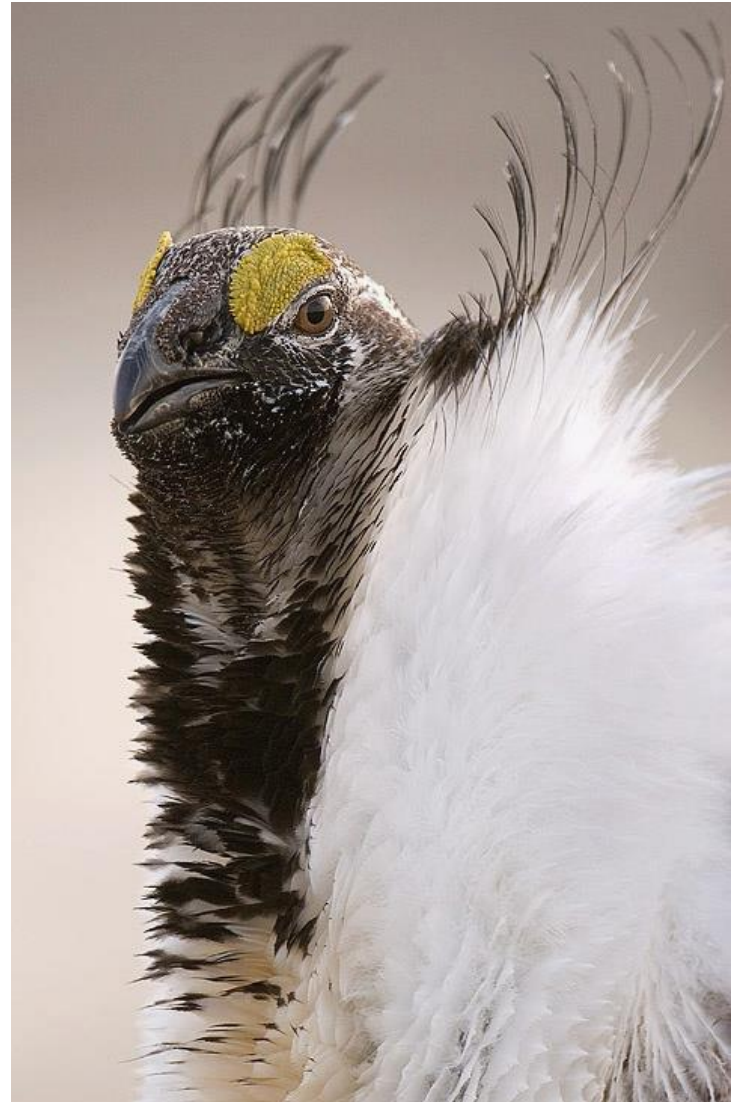


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History of the Issue

- August 2023: Governor Gordon extends comment period
- October 2023: State alternatives and revisions due to BLM to include in DEIS
- January 2024: Tentative release of BLM DEIS

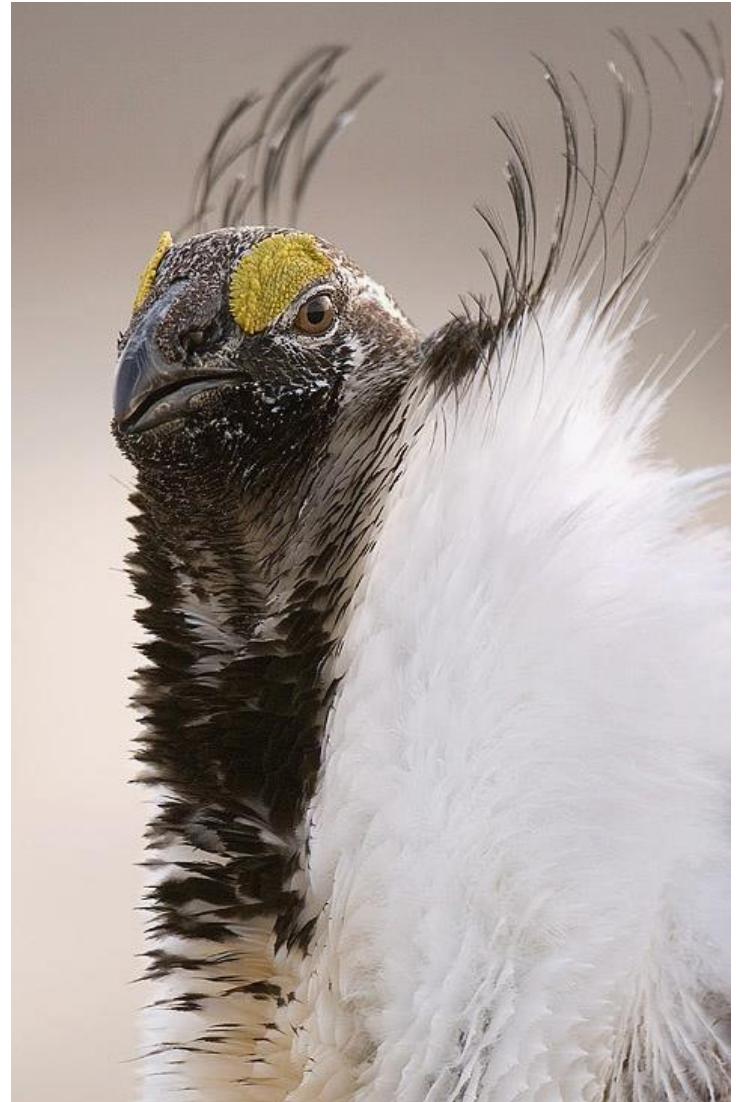
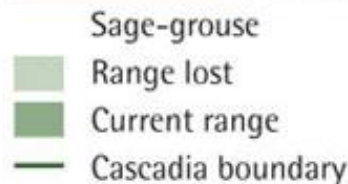


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Scope

- Rangewide – Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Dakotas
- Declining numbers of birds and habitat in most other states
- Loss of habitat from all causes – residential expanse, fire, minerals, invasive species, renewable energy
- Broad distribution of Sage-grouse
- Potentially harsh realities of Endangered Species Act



Endangered Species Act

- Listing standards
- Unprecedented scale of review is range-wide
- Broad distribution of Sage-grouse – historic range
- Diverse threats to the species



Wyoming Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy



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TWO SIMPLE GOALS

- Preclude any need to have Greater Sage-grouse listed as an endangered species
- Maintain economic opportunity for the State of Wyoming

Wyoming Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy



- Conserve populations and habitats where we can have the most effect (core areas)
- Maintain and enhance habitats
- Maintain economic opportunity, particularly where conflicts are minimal
- Build a sound ecological and economic model for conservation
- Include major stakeholders in decision- making process

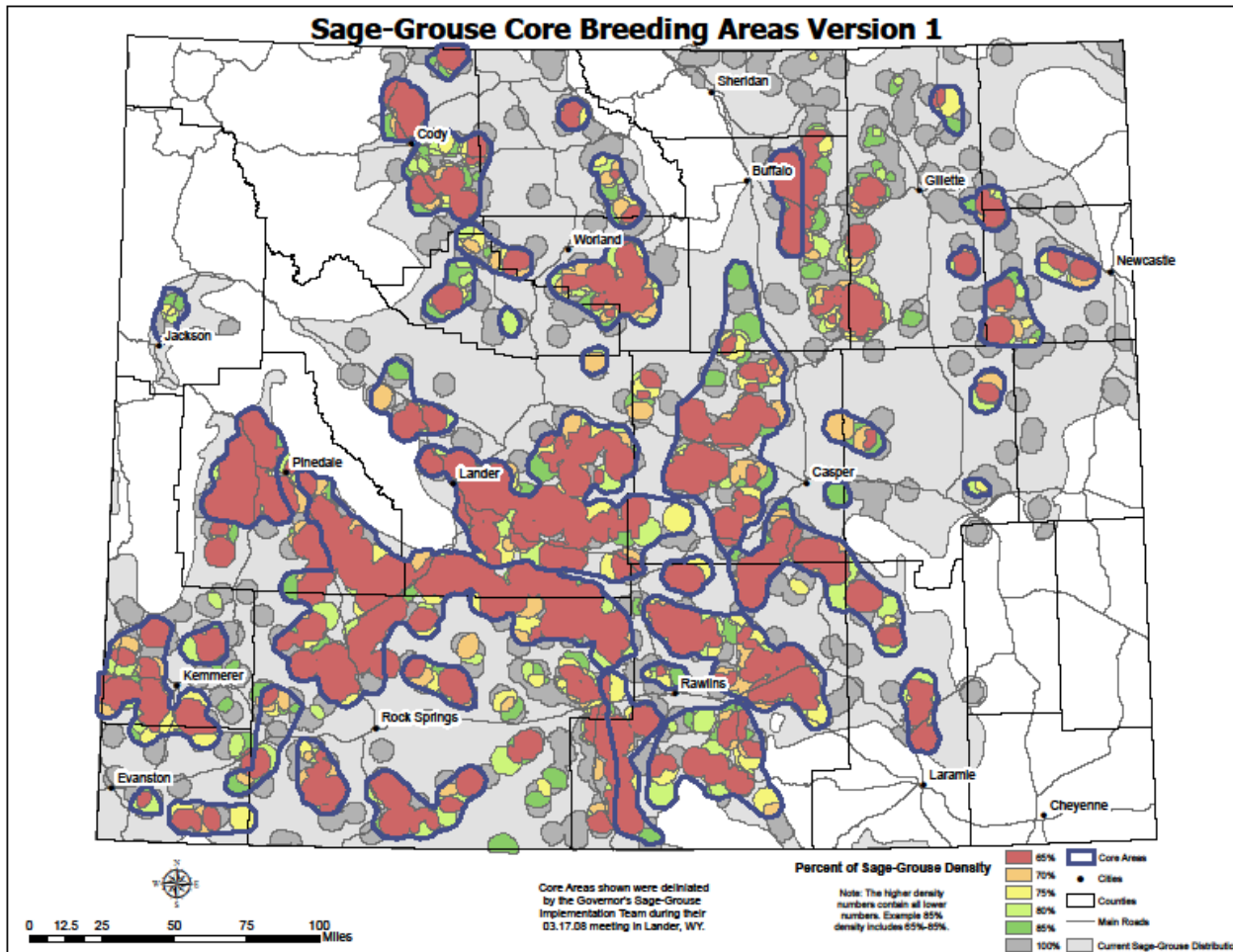
Wyoming Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy



1. REGULATORY MECHANISMS
2. AVOID, MINIMIZE, MITIGATE
3. REMOVE OR AMELIORATE THREATS
 - Biological Base

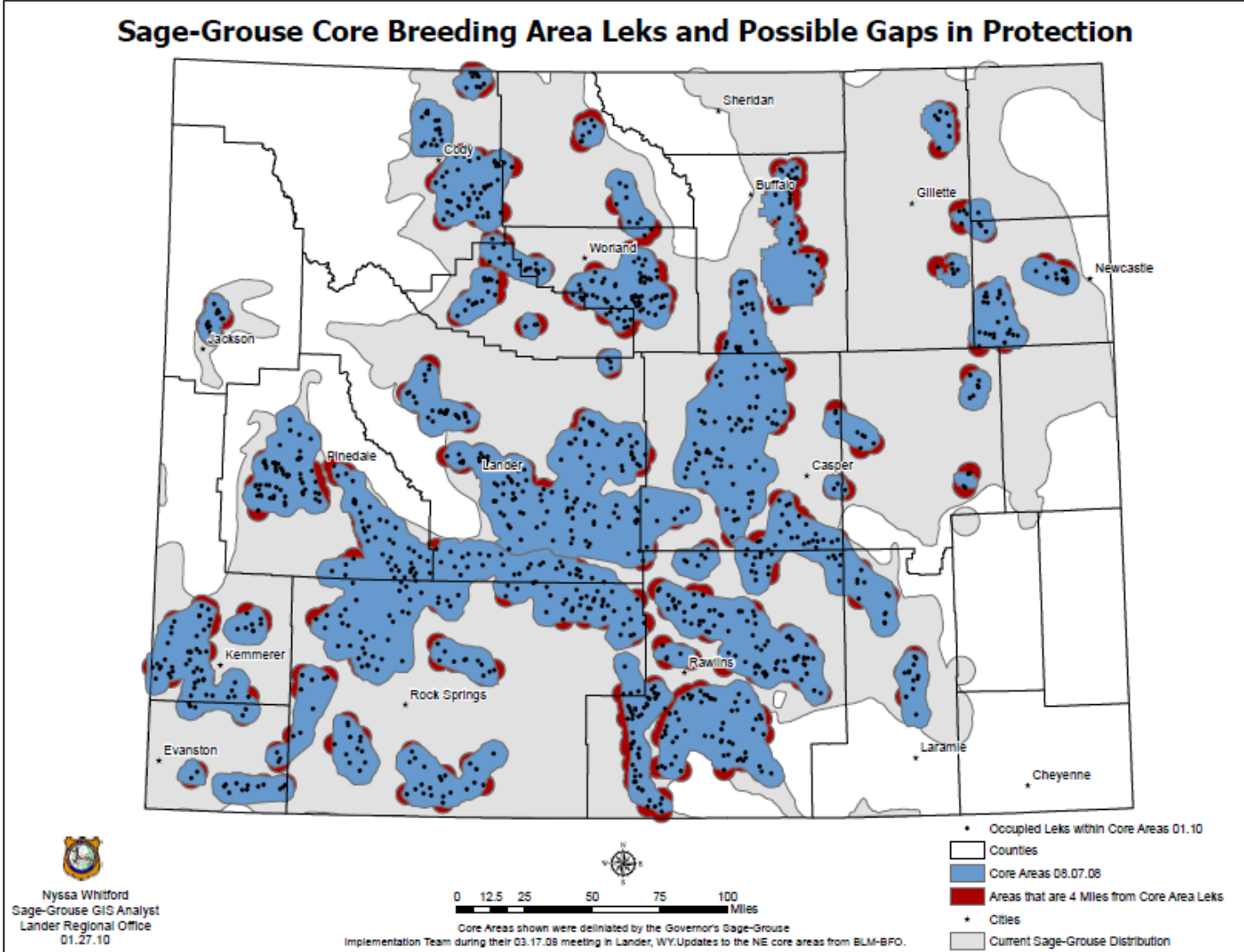


Core Area Strategy - Start With the Birds We Have

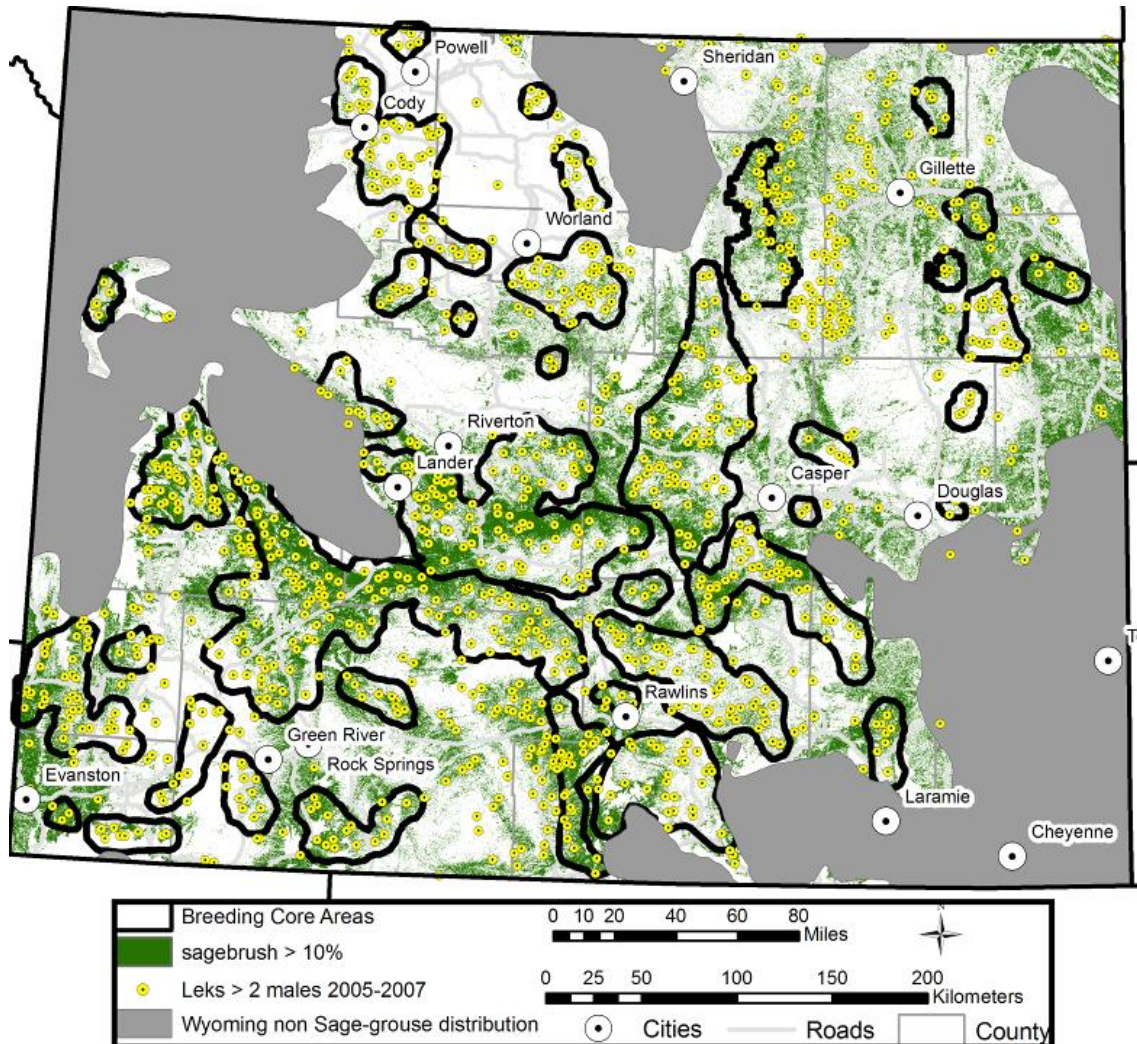


- Lek Driven
- Winter Areas
- Connectivity
- Habitat Quality
- BEST OF BEST
- Other Habitat With Potential For “Lift”

Adjustments Based on Local Knowledge

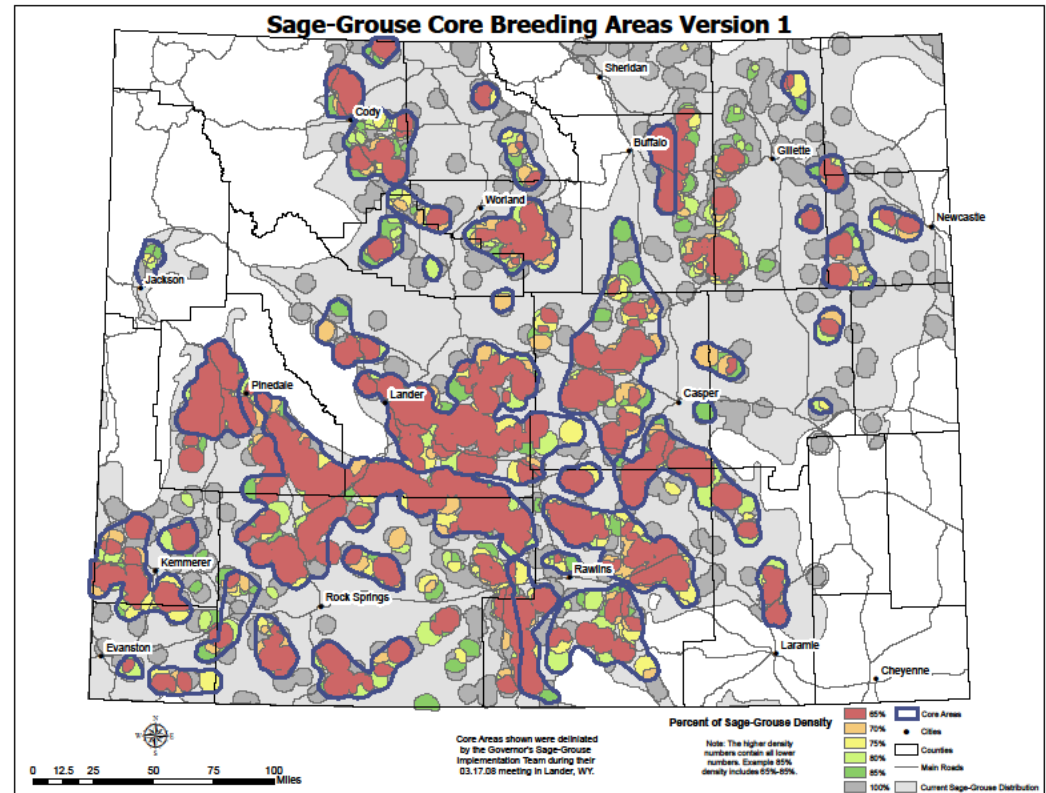


Verification of Assumptions



Core Area Strategy - Start With the Birds We Have

Based on what the birds told us, core areas were developed to include habitats essential to Sage-grouse. Where areas of “high” bird productivity were lost, efforts were made to include more marginal habitat to allow for future expansion of existing Sage-grouse populations. The goal was to assure no less than two-thirds of the population. The result was nearly 86% of the birds in Wyoming.

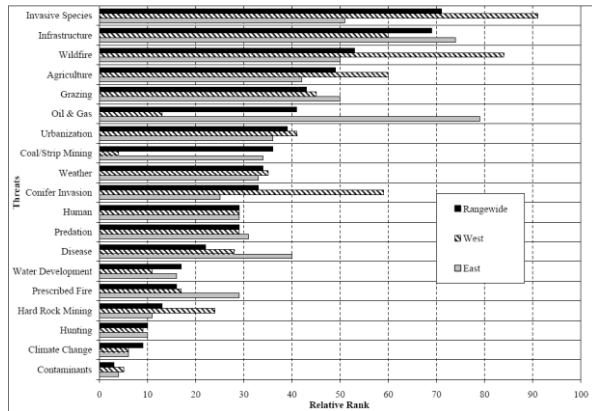


Core Area Strategy – Maintain the Birds We Have First and Foremost

Given the nature of the species, we are better served to maintain and enhance birds where they do well today:

- **TRANSPLANTS HAVE NOT WORKED IF RESIDENT BIRDS ARE NOT PRESENT**
- **HIGHEST EFFECTIVENESS IS MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING POPULATIONS WHERE THEY DO WELL**
- **NOT ALL BIRDS ARE EQUAL – SOME POPULATIONS MAY TAKE MORE TO MAINTAIN THAN WE CAN AFFORD – AND TAKE AWAY FROM OTHER POPULATIONS THAT CAN BE SUSTAINED AND INCREASED**

Addressing Key Threats to Sage Grouse



Key threats were the consensus of a panel of experts – an aggregation of concerns. Threats need to be addressed at a localized scale, by individual states. Overall, they represent the key issues for Sage-grouse across their range. In the Rocky Mountain region, energy development and housing are primary concerns; in the Great Basin, fire and invasives species are most important.

Habitat Fragmentation

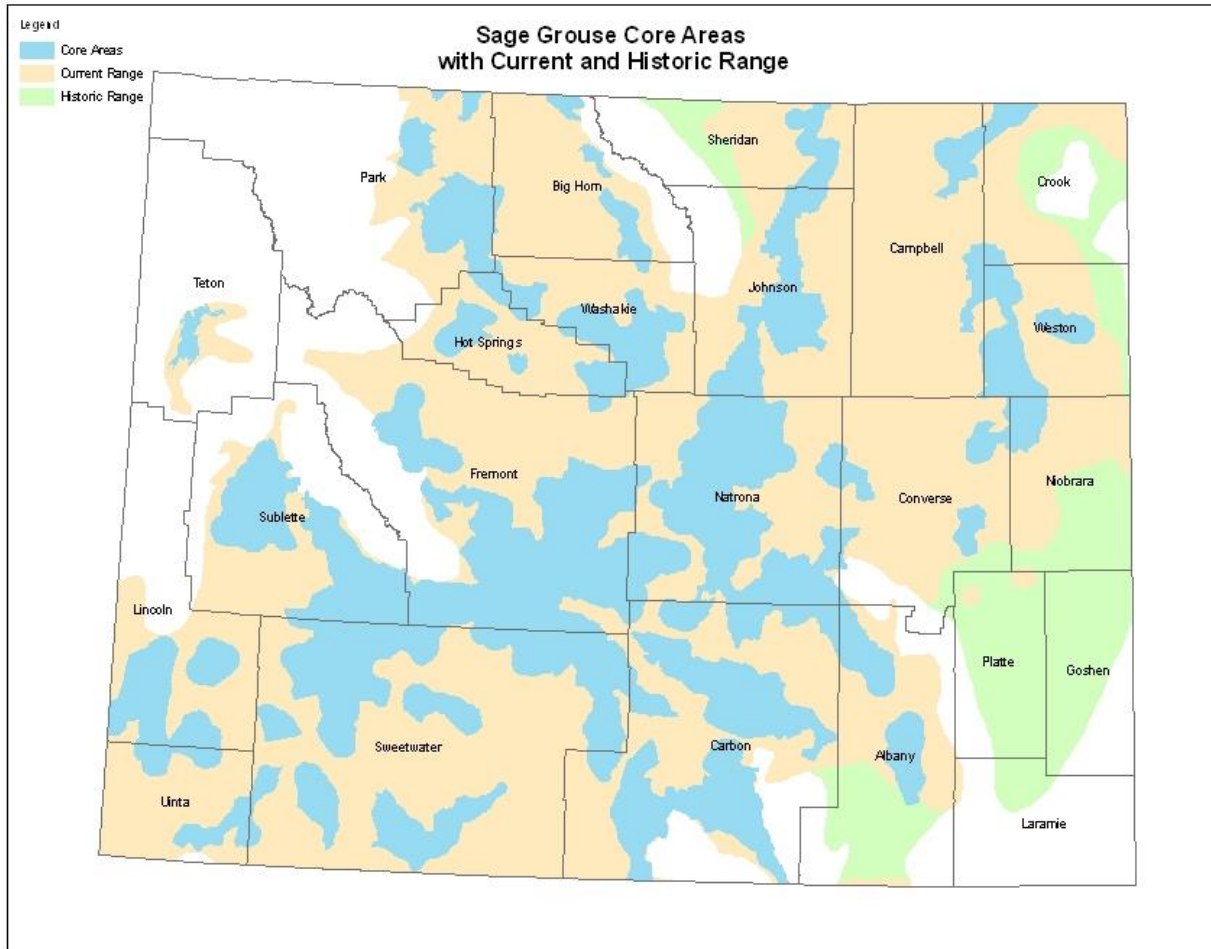
- Allowable disturbance @ 5%
- Distance from leks @ .6 mi
- Seasonal provisions
- Designated corridors
- Habitat enhancement - treatment
- Habitat conservation – easements

Metrics to Measure Success

- Active Leaks – Is the species persisting on the landscape?
- Habitat Availability/Access – Can birds get to quality habitats?
- Habitat Availability/Quality – Net gain or loss in amount of habitat
- Adequate Regulatory Mechanisms
- Populations are NOT the primary indicator of success – cyclic nature means trend lines are more important metric



Realities of Inaction



A listing would apply to ALL lands in pink, blue and green. Wyoming Core-Area strategy addresses 86% of the birds within the blue polygons.

Consequences of Listing

- Every bird – not populations or groups of birds
- Critical habitat review could include all suitable habitat
- Consultation required for all projects with a federal nexus, including USDA programs
- All birds in whatever habitat they occupy
- More restrictive stipulations – NTT or more
- “Take” applies to birds on all lands – private included
- “Take” = “harm” or “harass”
- Five years before review of status

Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy

“The Fish and Wildlife Service believes that the core area strategy...if implemented by all landowners via regulatory mechanisms, would provide adequate protection for sage-grouse and their habitat in that State” (75 FR 13910).

