

Accomplishment Update: 2012-2015

Bi-State Action Plan for Conservation of the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment of Greater Sage-Grouse



In 2004, the first conservation plan for the Bi-State DPS was released. This plan identified conservation actions to be completed and summarized the status of the bird and the relevant threats. This stakeholder-driven plan was developed by members of the Local Area Working Group (LAWG) including; California BLM, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Department of Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada BLM, the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. From 2004 to 2011, members of the LAWG implemented the plan, quietly completing thousands of acres of habitat improvement projects.

An interagency effort in 2011 resulted in an updated Conservation Action Plan that was released in March of 2012. This Action Plan summarized prior conservation activities and provided a roadmap to future conservation of the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of greater sage-grouse. Since publication, many of the conservation actions detailed in the Action Plan have been completed. The purpose of this report is to summarize these conservation actions in a brief manner, prior to a full reporting of all accomplishments.

On October 28, 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposed to list the Bi-State distinct population segment (DPS) of greater sage-grouse as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. At that same time, the FWS proposed to designate 1.8 million acres of critical habitat for the DPS. The FWS will make the final decision regarding listing in April of 2015.

In June of 2014, NRCS, USFS, BLM and other Bi-State partners announced a \$45 million dollar commitment to implement the 2012 Action Plan over a 10 year period. Table 1 provides a summary of the on-the-ground conservation actions that have been implemented to improve habitat for the Bi-State DPS from the Action Plan completion (March 2012) to March of 2015. Table 2 summarizes other actions such as research and monitoring, planning and coordination between agencies.

Table 1. Conservation Actions completed for the Bi-State DPS from 2012 to 2015

RISK ADDRESSED Project Type	ESA Listing Factor¹	# of Projects	Miles (mi) or Acres (ac) Treated	Project Locations²	PMU: High/ Moderate Threat²
PINYON-JUNIPER EXPANSION					ALL PMUs
Pinyon-Juniper removal: mechanical and burning	A, C	33	15,319 acres	PN, DCF, B, MG, SM	
WILDFIRE					ALL PMUs
Wildfire: rehabilitation	A	10	11,639 acres	PN, B, MG, SM	
URBANIZATION					ALL (except MG)
Land exchange, purchase, donation	A	1	40 acres	B	
Conservation easements	A	6	10,168 acres	PN, DCF, B	
INFRASTRUCTURE					ALL (except WM)
Fences: modification, removal, marking	A	16	34.2	PN, DCF, B, MG, SM	
Roads: permanent closures	A, D, E	3	385 miles	DCF, WM, SM	
Powerlines: removal	A, C	1	6.5 miles	B	
GRAZING					
Livestock facilities: wildlife ramps, watering facilities	A	3	8 sites	PN, DCF, B	
Livestock exclusion	A	15	441 acres	DCF, B	

Wild horses: herd gathers and contraception	A	2	2 areas	MG	PN, MG, WM
INVASIVE AND NOXIOUS SPECIES					PN, MG
Invasive and noxious weed control	A	3	103 acres	DCF, MG	
HABITAT-BASED THREATS					DCF
Riparian meadow quality: irrigation	A	2	370 acres	DCF, B, MG	
Riparian meadow quality: prescribed fire	A	3	143 acres	DCF, B, MG	
Riparian meadow quality: mechanical treatments	A	6	634 acres	PN, DCF, B, MG, SM	
Sagebrush quality: restoration	A	1	40 acres	B	

- US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Listing Factors:
Factor A: Present or Threatened Destruction, Modification, or Curtailment of Habitat
Factor C: Disease and Predation
Factor D: Regulatory Mechanisms
Factor E: Other Natural or Manmade Factors Affecting the Species Continued Existence
- Population Management Unit (PMU) abbreviations:
PN – Pine Nut
DCF – Desert Creek-Fales
B – Bodie
MG – Mount Grant
WM – White Mountains
SM – South Mono

Table 2. Action Plan accomplishments not included in Table 1

OTHER ACTION PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS	DESCRIPTION / MEASURES
Coordinated interagency approach (CIA 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service First Agreement enacted (CIA 1-1) • ~\$45 million committed by multiple federal, state and local agencies (CIA 1-2) • Cooperative Funding Agreement for Bi-State DPS conservation work granted to Mono County by the Bishop BLM • Sage-grouse Service Team approach as evidenced by staff working across state and agency boundaries to accomplish shared goals (CIA 1-1).
Science-based adaptive management plan (SAM 1 & 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for Science Advisor has been provided from 2012-2015 (SAM 1) • Conservation Planning Tool has been implemented and continues to be refined (SAM 2)
Improve regulatory mechanisms (IRM 1 & 2)	<p><i>Note: these actions directly address FWS Threat Factor D.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest has prepared the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Record of Decision for the Greater Sage-grouse Bi-state Distinct Population Segment Forest Plan Amendment. The 60 day Forest Service objection period and the 30 day BLM protest period are currently in progress. A final Forest Service decision is expected in May or June 2015 (IRM 1-6). After the 30 day BLM protest period, BLM will issue a Record of Decision and enter a 30 day appeal period. • The Carson BLM Draft RMP and EIS are available for public review. The comment period opened Nov 28, 2014 and closes April 27, 2015. Public meetings to review and comment on the draft EIS are scheduled. (IRM 1-6). • The INF is currently updating its Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and is working on developing alternatives. There are “conceptual” alternatives which were presented to the public in November of 2014. All the alternatives included sage-grouse management, with the statement “Finalize Inyo NF Interim Management Policy for sage-grouse and, where applicable, be consistent with the H-T’s amendment.” The current timeline is to publish a

	<p>draft EIS in April, 2015. At that time, it will be sent it out to all INF partners, cooperating agencies, and interested stakeholders for comment (IRM 1-8).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mono County initiated a General Plan Update with a specific focus of improving regulatory protection for the Bi-State DPS (IRM 2-1).
Small populations (MER 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a translocation plan for the Parker population is in progress. • TAC evaluated and ranked the other populations.
Research and Monitoring (RAM 1 thru 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetation protocol is being standardized by USGS and NDOW spring 2015 • Habitat Assessment for HTNF Marine training lands~15,000 acres • Hired a part-time data manager through Great Basin Institute (Bishop BLM) • Bishop BLM, CDFW, NDOW, USGS have collared 38 birds since 2012 in the Mt. Grant, Bodie, and South Mono PMUs. 32 nest plots have been completed during this period. • USGS continues to monitor birds in the Pine Nut PMU • Scientific literature published: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integrated Population Model published (2014), USGS ○ Tebbencamp thesis completed (2014). Evaluation of genetic structure, connectivity, and vital rates in Mono County, CA. ○ Wiechman thesis completed (2013). Movement patterns and population dynamics of greater sage-grouse in Mono County, CA. ○ Coates, PS, ML Casazza, EJ Blomberg, SC Gardner, SP Espinosa, JL Yee, L Wiechman, BJ Halstead. 2013. Evaluating greater sage-grouse seasonal space use relative to leks: implications for surface use designations in sagebrush ecosystems. <i>The Journal of Wildlife Management</i> 77(8): 1598-1609. doi: 10.1002/jwmg.618 ○ Oyler-McCance, SJ, ML Casazza, JA Fike, PS Coates. 2014. Hierarchical spatial genetic structure in a distinct population segment of greater sage-grouse. <i>Conservation Genetics</i>. doi: 10.1007/s10592-014-0618-8
Maintain and improve stakeholder involvement (MSI 1 & 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 LAWG meetings held • 5 publications showcasing Bi-State work published • 4 volunteer events for fire rehabilitation and fence removal held • 2 conferences held (Society for Range Management and Pinyon-Juniper) • 10 informational talks presented such as open houses, fire trainings and sage-grouse biology • 4 field tours completed • Lek guidelines and brochure completed (Mer 3-10) • Installed 2 interpretive signs in Long Valley
Livestock Grazing (HIR 1-5B, HIR 1-4PN, HIR 2-2PN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock grazing management analysis completed and presented to FWS • Livestock grazing management strategy completed and provide to FWS
Minimize and Eliminate Risks: Wildfire (MER 1-1 thru 1-9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sage-grouse habitat added to WFDSS • Created map books for fire staff including sage-grouse habitat designations and lek locations.