

SAGE-GROUSE UPDATE, No. 11

SAGE-GROUSE UPDATE, NO. 11 JUNE 6, 2014

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE UMBRELLA CCAA FOR WYOMING RANCH MANAGEMENT: A CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT WITH ASSURANCES FOR GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) completed and signed the Greater Sage-Grouse Umbrella Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for Wyoming Ranch Management in November 2013 and has begun implementation. A CCAA is a voluntary agreement between a private landowner and the FWS whereby private landowners agree to manage their lands to remove or reduce threats to species at risk of being listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The CCAA agreement requires that an enrolled landowner develop and implement a property-specific conservation plan, among other commitments, in exchange for assurances against additional regulatory requirements if the sage-grouse is listed under the ESA. Additionally, the landowner receives an Enhancement of Survival permit that allows for incidental take associated with general farm/ranch and recreation activities for an initial 20 years with the potential for renewal up to 40 years.

The CCAA identifies conservation measures that address several threats to sage-grouse. Private landowners work with Participating Agencies to select appropriate conservation measures for the enrolled lands. Participating Agencies

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

SGIT UPDATE	2
DDCT WEB APP UPDATE	4
IN THE LOOP	5
CURRENT WORK	6



include the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Forest Service (FS), Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA), and Conservation Districts throughout the state. Landowners also work with Participating Agencies on establishing baseline data and annual monitoring.

The Wyoming Stock Growers Association (WSGA) received grant money to fund an education and outreach program for the statewide CCAA. CCAA information, application, and landowner resources can be found on the WSGA website: <http://www.wysga.org/>. Interested landowners should contact the FWS Wyoming Field Office at (307) 772-2374.

The BLM and FS are working on complementary Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) for federally managed lands. A CCA does not provide assurances against additional regulatory requirements if the sage-grouse is listed under the ESA. However, landowners with authorizations for use of federal lands in their ranch management may benefit from having these lands enrolled in a CCA to streamline the NEPA and Section 7 ESA Consultation processes that are required for permit renewal.

Interested permittees should contact their local BLM Field Office or FS District Office.

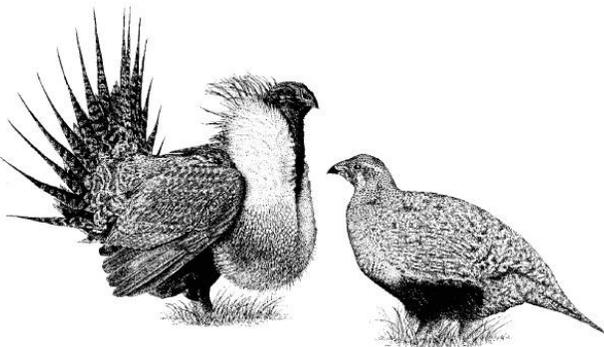


Illustration by Darrell Probst

SGIT UPDATE

SAGE-GROUSE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Last meeting: April 9, 2014 in Cheyenne, WY

Topics of discussion:

- ◆ Winter concentration areas in NPL
- ◆ Adaptive management
- ◆ USFS species viability
- ◆ Samson Resources proposal for year-round drilling
- ◆ WSGA CCAA education program
- ◆ Legislative funding for sage-grouse
- ◆ Core area metrics
- ◆ Mitigation
- ◆ Noise language
- ◆ Agency updates

[4/9/14 Meeting minutes](#) available on the WGFD website on the [Sagebrush/Sage Grouse Management](#) page.

Next meeting: June 24, 2014 in Casper, WY

Topics of discussion: TBA

The Wyoming Legislature passed a bill in the 2014 session to codify membership on the SGIT. Wyoming Statute 9-19-101 establishes the following:

There is created a sage grouse implementation team that shall consist of members appointed by the Governor as provided in this subsection and members of the legislature as provided in subsection (b) of this section. Members of the implementation team appointed pursuant to this subsection shall serve staggered terms of four (4) years. As terms of current implementation team members expire, the governor shall appoint each new member or reappointed

SGIT UPDATE, CONT'D

member to a four (4) year term. The implementation team members appointed by the governor shall consist of the following members:

(i) Not less than two (2) members representing each of the following interests:

- (A) Agriculture;
- (B) Mining;
- (C) Oil and gas industry;
- (D) Conservation or sportsmen's groups.

(ii) Not less than one (1) member representing each of the following interests:

- (A) County government;
- (B) Wind generation and transmission industry.

(iii) Not less than one (1) member representing each of the following agencies:

- (A) Wyoming game and fish commission;
- (B) Wyoming department of agriculture;
- (C) Wyoming department of environmental quality;
- (D) Wyoming wildlife and natural resource trust fund board;
- (E) Wyoming oil and gas conservation commission; and
- (F) Wyoming office of state lands and investments.

(b) The sage grouse implementation team shall include one (1) member of the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of the house and one (1) member of the senate appointed by the president of the senate.

(c) The implementation team shall seek cooperation and participation from the following federal entities in carrying out its duties:

- (i) United States bureau of land management;
- (ii) United States fish and wildlife service;
- (iii) United States forest service;
- (iv) United States natural resource conservation service.

(d) The governor may remove any member appointed pursuant to subsection (a) of this section as provided in W.S. 9-1-202.



SGIT meetings are now being broadcast live via YouTube from meeting locations where internet capabilities are available and sufficient.

If you are interested in receiving YouTube links to view SGIT meetings remotely, please contact:

Mary Flanderka

(307) 777-4587

mary.flanderka@wyo.gov



Can't find your project on the DDCT web application?? The Wyoming Geographic Information Science Center (WyGIS) archives projects on the web application in order to maintain a current and orderly project list. Below are the criteria used when archiving:

Projects in "DDCT Development" phase:

- ◆ After 80 days of inactivity an email is sent to the project proponent advising them the project has become stale.
- ◆ After 90 days the project is archived.

Projects in "Technical Review" phase:

- ◆ Not subject to archiving.

Projects in "Technical Review Complete" phase:

- ◆ After 20 days of inactivity an email is sent to the project proponent reminding them to submit the project for policy review with a completed Executive Order 2011-5 worksheet.
- ◆ After 30 days the project is moved back to the "DDCT Development" phase.

Projects in "Policy Review" phase:

- ◆ Not subject to archiving.

Projects in "Review Complete" phase:

- ◆ After 30 days the projects are archived.

Projects that are archived are not deleted and can be restored upon request.

Additionally, some minor formatting changes have been made to the web application in an effort to help all users understand the required steps in a DDCT. These changes include adding a welcome message containing the basic steps, which will appear when the application is loaded (Figure 1). This message can be turned off by the user. WyGIS has also modified the edit tabs to make the DDCT steps a more logical progression. These changes are a direct result of user feedback. If you have suggestions or questions, please feel free to contact WyGIS using the "Contact Us" feature on the DDCT website.

The DDCT Data and Application Steward at WyGIS is continually maintaining and modifying the online tool as needed. Data accuracy and review efficiency are top priorities.

Questions?

WyGIS DDCT Data and Application Steward

ngraf1@uwyo.edu

(307) 766-4928



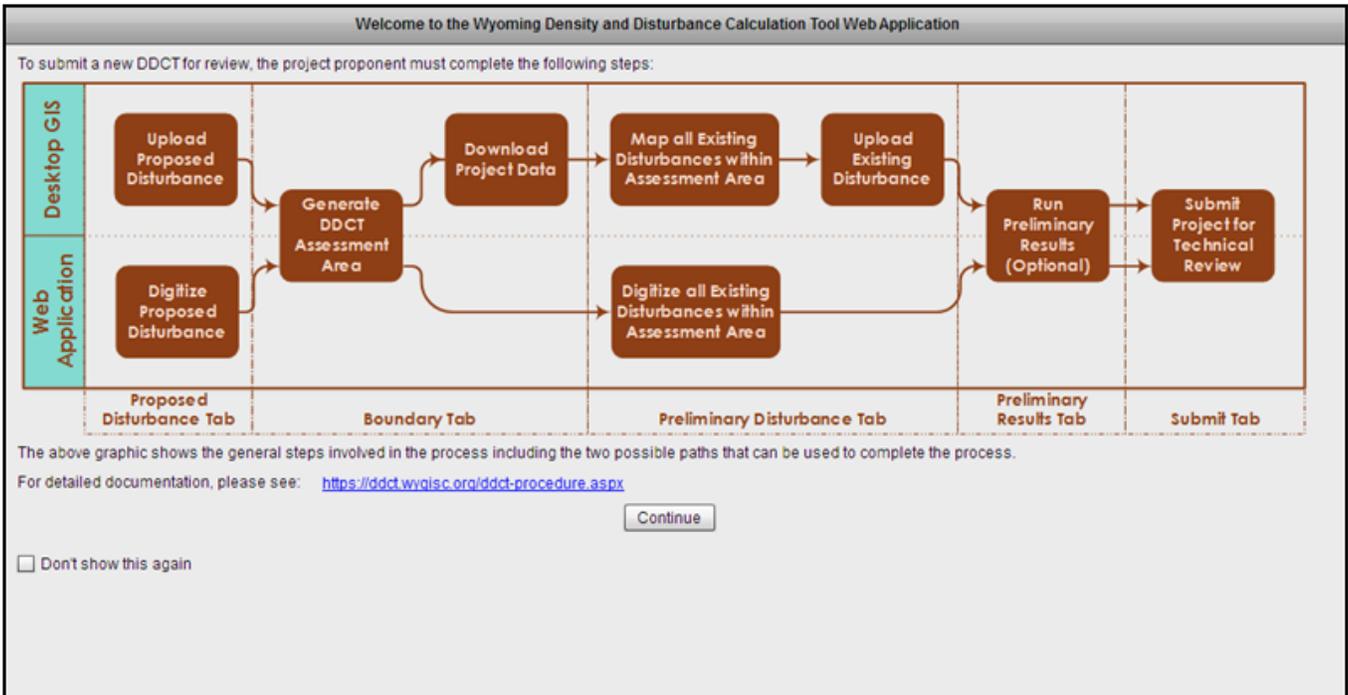


Figure 1—DDCT web application new welcome message with basic steps for completing the DDCT process.

KEEPING YOU IN THE LOOP

◆ In December 2013, the BLM and FS released a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the sage-grouse Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendment for public comment. The agencies hosted a series of public meetings in February 2014, and the comment period closed in March 2014. The agencies are on schedule to complete the proposed amendment, final EIS, and issue a Record of Decision by the end of 2014. For more information on the amendment and timeline, visit the [Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse RMP/LRMP Amendments](#) website.

◆ Check out WISDOM! The Wyoming Interagency Spatial Database & Online Management system is a publically accessible web-based tool for providing a set of natural resource data layers to allow any interested individual to discover, consider, and assess Wyoming's wildlife resources. WISDOM is intended to provide

landscape-level information to facilitate project planning. <http://wisdom.wygisc.org/>

◆ Revised local sage-grouse conservation plans were presented to the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission during their March 27, 2014 meeting in Lander. The local working groups have been active since 2004, completing their original plans in 2007-08. The 2014 revisions incorporate new science and policy, including the Wyoming Sage-grouse Executive Order 2011-5. The revised plans are also intended to better focus conservation efforts toward identified threats rather than “random acts of conservation”. The plans can be viewed on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) sage-grouse webpage: <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/wildlife-1000817.aspx>.

◆ Local Working Groups will be meeting in the coming months to allocate funding to sage-grouse conservation efforts around the state. The Wyoming Legislature appropriated \$1.2 million in General Funds for this purpose during the 2014 legislative session. Persons interested in this funding opportunity can contact WGFD Sage-Grouse Program Coordinator, Tom Christiansen at tom.christiansen@wyo.gov for additional information. The project funding application form can be found on the WGFD sage-grouse webpage.

◆ A second ranking period has been announced for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Working Lands for Wildlife, Greater Sage-grouse Initiative. All applications received by June 20, 2014 focusing on this initiative will be considered for funding in the second ranking period for Fiscal Year 2014. Applications are accepted on a continual basis; applications received after this date will be accepted and considered for funding if additional funds become available. Working Lands for Wildlife, Greater Sage-grouse Initiative provides assistance for ranchers interested in improving habitat for sage-grouse.

WHAT ARE WE WORKING ON NOW?

A working group made up of representatives from Wyoming State and Federal Agencies continues to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues that come up regarding the implementation of the core area strategy. Many of these issues are taken to the Sage Grouse Implementation Team for consideration. They are continuing to hammer out workable solutions to issues brought to their attention from folks in the field, and work to provide clarity on policy and process questions as they arise.

CORE AREA METRICS

As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is preparing for a 2015 biological opinion on whether or not to list the sage-grouse as threatened or endangered, the State of Wyoming has been preparing to fulfill data requests based on their anticipated needs. Measurement of statewide male lek attendance is only one aspect of Wyoming's data collection. The implementation of Executive Order 2011-5 has resulted in the generation of a vast amount of other types of data that may be used to evaluate the success of the core area strategy.

Compiling and organizing these data is also part of Governor Mead's 2013 Action Plan for Energy, Environment, and Economy under the theme of natural resource conservation, reclamation, and mitigation. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is tasked with coordinating the compilation of development and conservation activities for the FWS.

There are numerous efforts (Western Governor's Association, FWS, state agencies) preparing a record for evaluating the success of all sage-grouse conservation efforts. There are three categories of record keeping:

- 1) A measure of state plans in how they identify state threats and how each plan addresses the threats listed in the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report;
- 2) A measure of the success of the implementation of the state plans; and
- 3) A measure of the health of core/priority areas.

Simply put, states identify the threats correctly? Did states put the right measures in place to turn the downward trends for sage-grouse and habitat quality around? Are states doing what they said they would do? And, are sage-grouse responding positively? Wyoming is taking the lead in developing this effort.