

# A Guide to Viewing and Photographing Wyoming's Greater Sage-Grouse Ethically and Responsibly



*Charles W. Schwartz*

**The greater sage-grouse** is the largest species of grouse in North America. Each spring, male sage-grouse perform an elaborate sunrise display on communal breeding grounds known as “leks”. While sage-grouse require sagebrush landscapes to survive, leks are often located in open areas where the males can be better seen and heard by females. The dramatic display makes viewing sage-grouse a popular recreational activity in March and April across much of Wyoming.

Unfortunately, there have been long-term declines in sage-grouse populations and sagebrush habitats across the West. This means additional conservation efforts are needed.

The Wyoming Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan recommends that only a small number of lek viewing sites be publicized along with information on how to minimize viewing disturbance to the grouse. This brochure is designed to implement that recommendation.

When you follow the American Birding Association's Principles of Birding Ethics, you prevent harm to sage-grouse and their habitats. Respect and practice these principles while birding in Wyoming.

Your cooperation is needed to ensure protection and perpetuation of Wyoming's sage-grouse populations.



### LEK VIEWING ETHICS:

- Arrive at lek sites at least one hour before sunrise.
- Don't drive onto the lek. Park away from the edge of the lek.
- Turn off the vehicle lights and engine.
- Use binoculars and spotting scopes to observe birds.
- Stay in your vehicle.
- Do not make loud noises or sudden movements.
- Do not leave until the birds do.
- Keep pets in your vehicle. Better yet, leave them home.
- Do not trespass on private land.
- Postpone your visit if roads are muddy.
- Be especially cautious with viewing activities during late March and early April when breeding activity usually peaks. Late April is a better time to visit because most of the breeding is complete but the males are still actively strutting. The weather is usually better too.
- Erecting a photography blind is not allowed and requires a permit from the land owner, public or private.

### WHAT ELSE YOU CAN DO:

- Respect the birds providing your recreation.
- Always practice ethical and responsible bird watching.
- Keep pets under control and away from all wildlife. Dog training on sage-grouse outside the hunting season is not legal.
- Don't camp on desert springs or wet meadows in late summer.
- Restrict your ORV use in sage-grouse habitats. Stay on established roads and trails. Off-road use in the spring can disturb or destroy nests.
- Visit WGF's sage-grouse web page to learn more about sage-grouse conservation: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Habitat/Sage-Grouse-Management>
- Report harassment of sage-grouse, or any wildlife, to the STOP Poaching Hotline: 1-877-WGFD-TIP (1-877-943-3847) or Text keyword *WGFD* and message 847-477.



*Brian Maxfield*

## LEK VIEWING LOCATIONS:

These lek sites are relatively easy to access by following the instructions. Grouse activity may be affected by weather, predators, or human disturbance so we cannot guarantee the birds will be present every morning.

### BIG PINEY

**Calpet 2 Lek** - Take Hwy 189 south of Big Piney for about 3.25 miles to the Calpet Hwy 235, also known as the Big Piney Calpet Rd, and turn west onto Calpet Hwy 235. Proceed west-southwest about 11 miles to Pinegrove Rd. Turn west onto Pinegrove Rd and go about 0.25 miles. The lek is on the north side of the road.

### CASPER

**County Road Reservoir Lek** – Take Hwy 220 west of Casper for approximately 40 miles. Just west of mile post 73, turn right on Oregon Trail Rd (Natrona County Rd 319). Proceed northeast along Oregon Trail Rd for approximately 9 miles. There is a stock pond on the north side of the road; park there and look south. The lek is on the south side of the road. *This lek is on private property. Use of binoculars or a spotting scope is a must. Public must stay on the county road and not enter private land.*

### CODY

**West Sage Creek Lek** – *Do not drive on roads if muddy.* Drive safely around semi-trucks on haul road. Take Hwy 120 south from Cody for 4.3 miles. Take the first right (west) past the Landfill Road turn-off. From the cattle guard, drive 0.7 miles then turn left (south) at the powerlines. Drive 0.3 miles then turn left (east), turning away from the powerlines. Drive 0.3 miles then veer right (south) at the fork. At the next fork in 0.5 miles, veer right. In 0.3 miles, the road dead-ends at a water reservoir, park here. Sage-grouse should be strutting to your right and across the water.

### JACKSON

**Moulton East Lek** – This lek is in Grand Teton National Park and is generally active in April and May. The Park Service has special viewing regulations to minimize human disturbance. A Park Naturalist leads tours at the site several days a week in the spring. Contact Grand Teton National Park Headquarters for more info at 307-739-3300 or [www.nps.gov/grte](http://www.nps.gov/grte).

### KEMMERER

**BLM Road Lek** – Take Hwy 189 east/northeast from Kemmerer about 19 miles to the Opal Cut-off (Hwy 240). Go right (south) on Hwy 240 about 2 miles. There you will see a sign with directions to the lek. The lek is about 2 miles from the first sign. Travel east about 1 mile to another lek direction sign and then take another left (north) to the parking area.

### LANDER

**Twin Creek Lek** – Take Hwy 287/789 southeast of Lander 8.3 miles to the Rawlins Junction. (Intersection of Hwy 28 and Hwy 287/789). Travel east on Hwy 287/789 about 9.7 miles (1 mile past the Twin Creek Road). Turn left (north) onto a pipeline road through a cattle guard. Stay to the right on a two-track road about 0.4 miles to the edge of a clearing in the sagebrush at the end of a pond dam. The grouse strut in the clearing just to the left of the dam. *Avoid the two-track road if muddy.*

## **PINEDALE**

**Speedway Lek** - At milepost 73 on Hwy 191 (about 27 miles south of Pinedale) turn east onto the Muddy Speedway Rd (County Rd 113). Travel 3 miles and stop. The lek is about 400 yards south.

## **SARATOGA**

**Jack Creek 1** - From Saratoga, turn west on West Bridge Avenue. Continue on West Bridge Avenue and it turns into Jack Creek Rd (CR500). Continue west on Jack Creek Rd (CR500) for approximately 8.5 miles. Lek is approximately 500 yards south of Jack Creek Rd (CR500). *Viewers should observe lek from the County Road. County Road is not maintained so travel with caution and 4x4 vehicles are recommended.*

## **WORLAND**

**Blue Bank Lek** - Go 16 miles east of Worland on Hwy 16. Turn south at the Bluebank Rd sign. Go about 1.5 mi and turn east onto the old Worland/Tensleep Hwy. Go about 0.25 miles and turn south again on the Bluebank Rd and continue south for approximately 4 miles. Birds should be visible close to road.