

## **FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** May 12, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Sharp-tailed Grouse Transplant (R2)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 20 Min

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### **Background**

Sharp-tailed grouse (STGR) west of the Continental Divide in Montana are a species of concern with a state ranking of S1, “at high risk because of extremely limited and/or rapidly declining population numbers, range and/or habitat, making it highly vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state” (MTNHP 2015). However, east of the Continental Divide STGR are doing very well with a state rank of S4, “apparently secure, though it may be quite rare in parts of its range, and/or suspected to be declining” (MTNHP 2015). STGR west of divide became extinct in the early 2000s. STGR west of the divide have remained an FWP priority for 32 years dating back to the Libby Mitigation Plan that quantified habitat and wildlife losses after Koochanusa Reservoir was created. FWP and a number of other partners recently completed an evaluation of potential sharp-tailed grouse habitat in western Montana. The objective of the project was to compare habitat variables important to STGR in occupied areas east of the continental Divide to those in unoccupied areas west of the Divide to determine if suitable habitat exists for a potential reintroduction effort in western Montana. Results show there is high quality habitat that could serve as core areas for the reintroduction of STGR.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

To date FWP has worked with our partners, landowners, and ranch managers to complete the habitat assessment. If endorsed, FWP would write a restoration plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for sharp-tailed grouse in western Montana. The EA encourages public participation and incorporates public comments generated during review. After completion of the plan and EA, FWP would return to the Commission seeking approval to proceed with western Montana sharp-tailed grouse reintroduction.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Under the restoration plan alternative FWP would create a reintroduction plan detailing and analyzing a reintroduction project for sharp-tailed grouse in western Montana. This project would support both the western Montana sharp-tailed plan and the statewide Upland Game Bird Plan. Under a no-action alternative, FWP would not move forward with a restoration plan for sharp-tailed grouse and remove them from being a priority species for its Wildlife Mitigation Program.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission endorse the development of a restoration plan and EA for sharp-tailed grouse in western Montana.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move that the Commission endorse the development of a restoration plan and EA for sharp-tailed grouse in western Montana.