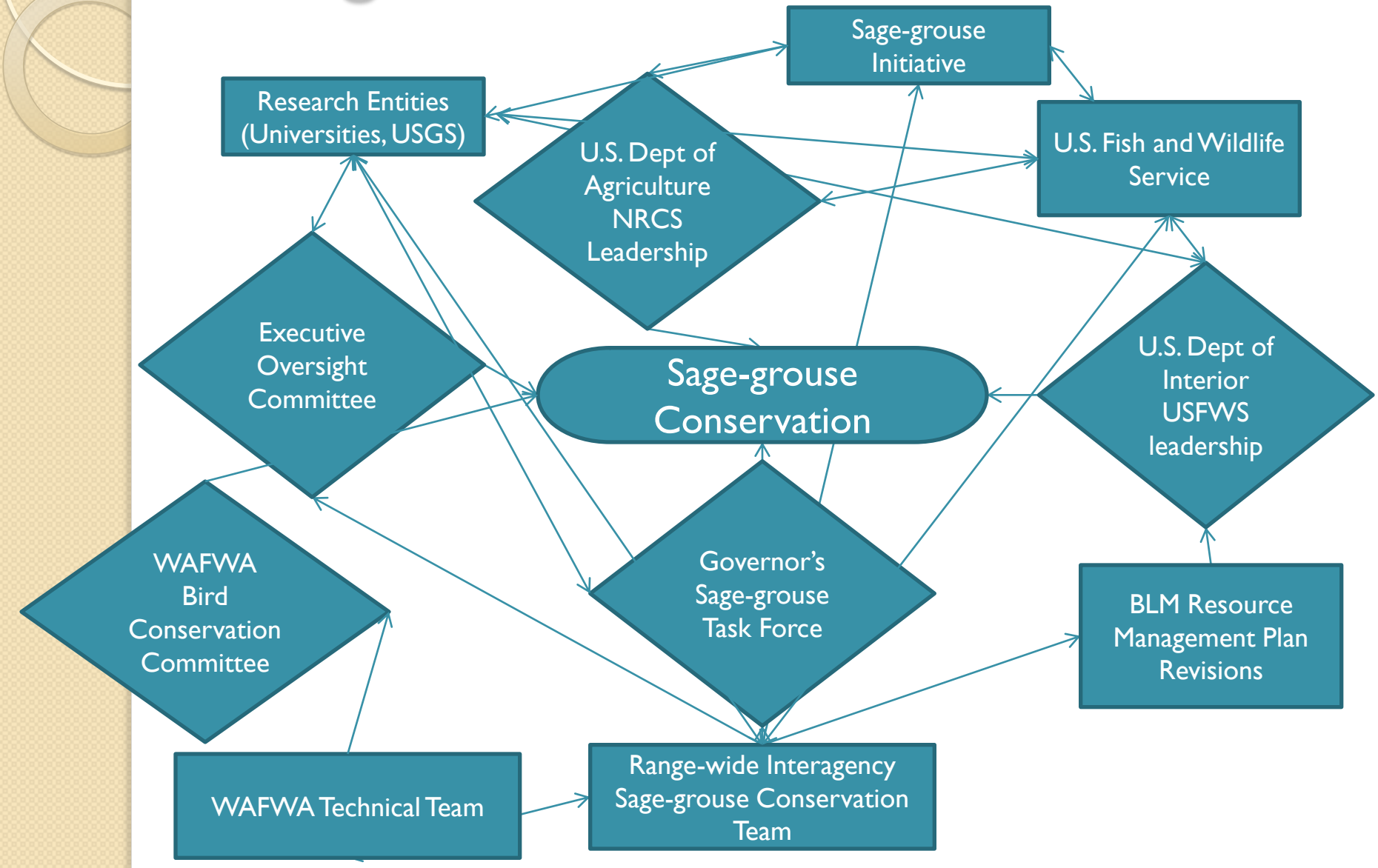
Sage-grouse Conservation Strategies

Governor's Sage-grouse Advisory Council

May 22, 2013

Range-wide Collaborations



Range-wide Collaborations

- Conservation Objectives Report
- National Technical Team Report
- WAFWA Conservation Strategy
  - Near-term conservation actions
- Range-wide genetic connectivity study
- Research prioritization document
- State-led strategies

Range-wide Collaborations

- Conservation strategies in western part of range
  - Wildfire preparedness

Range-wide Collaborations

- Conservation strategies in western part of Range
  - Invasive species management and habitat restoration

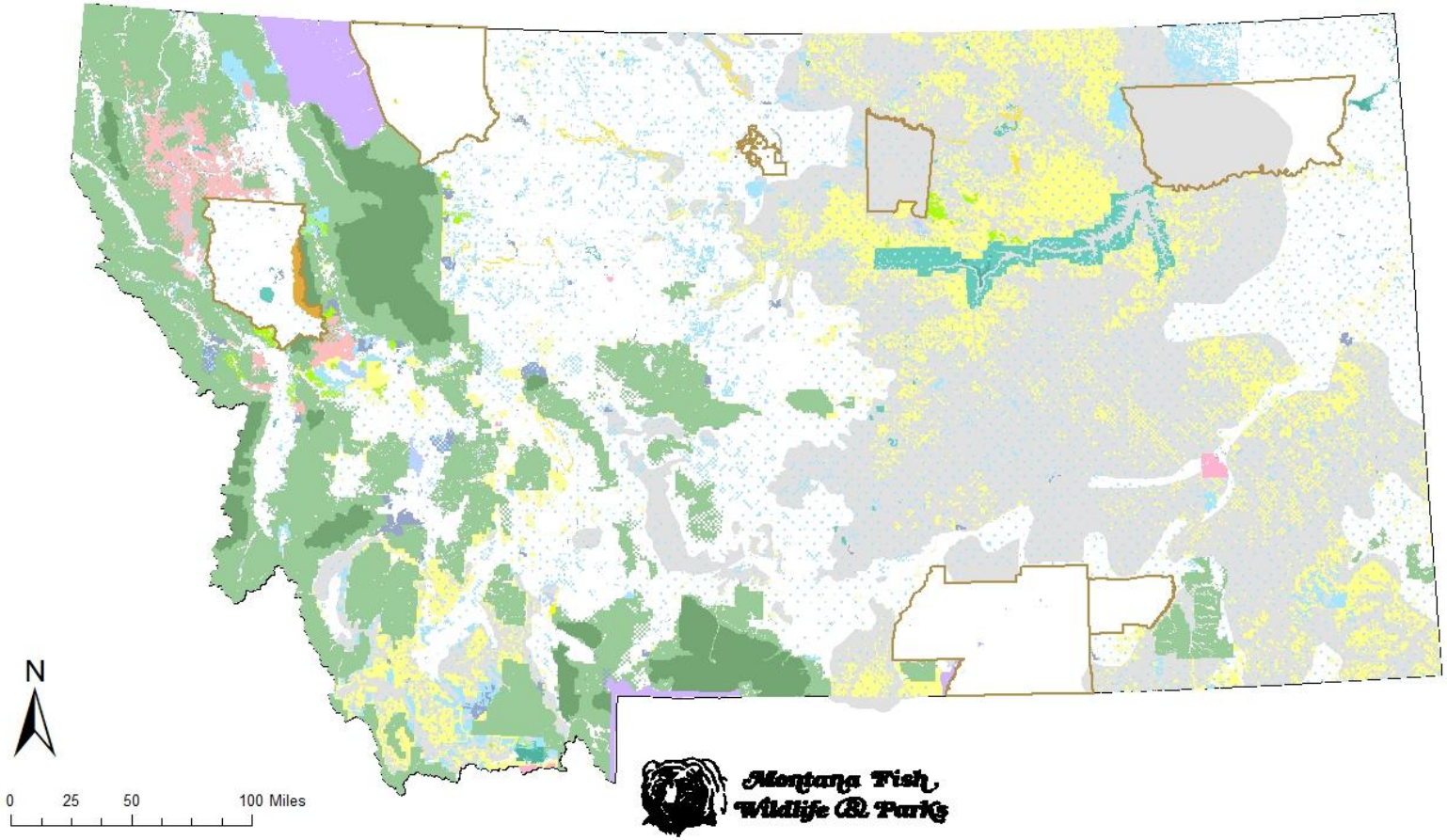
Range-wide Collaborations

- Conservation strategies in western part of Range
  - Conifer removal

Montana's Approach

- Background
- Core areas
- Working lands
- FWP general recommendations
- Population monitoring
- Regulatory mechanisms

Background



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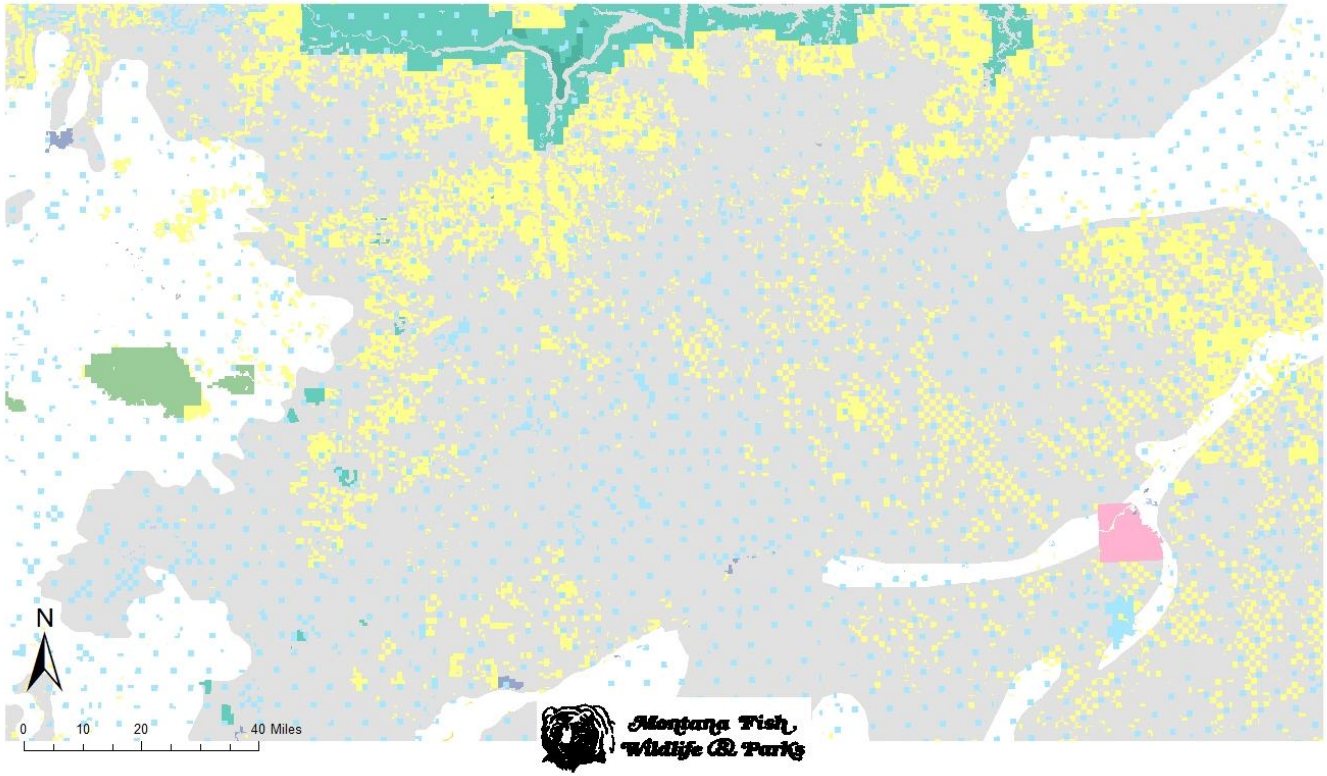
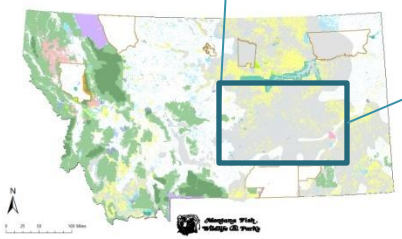




Background

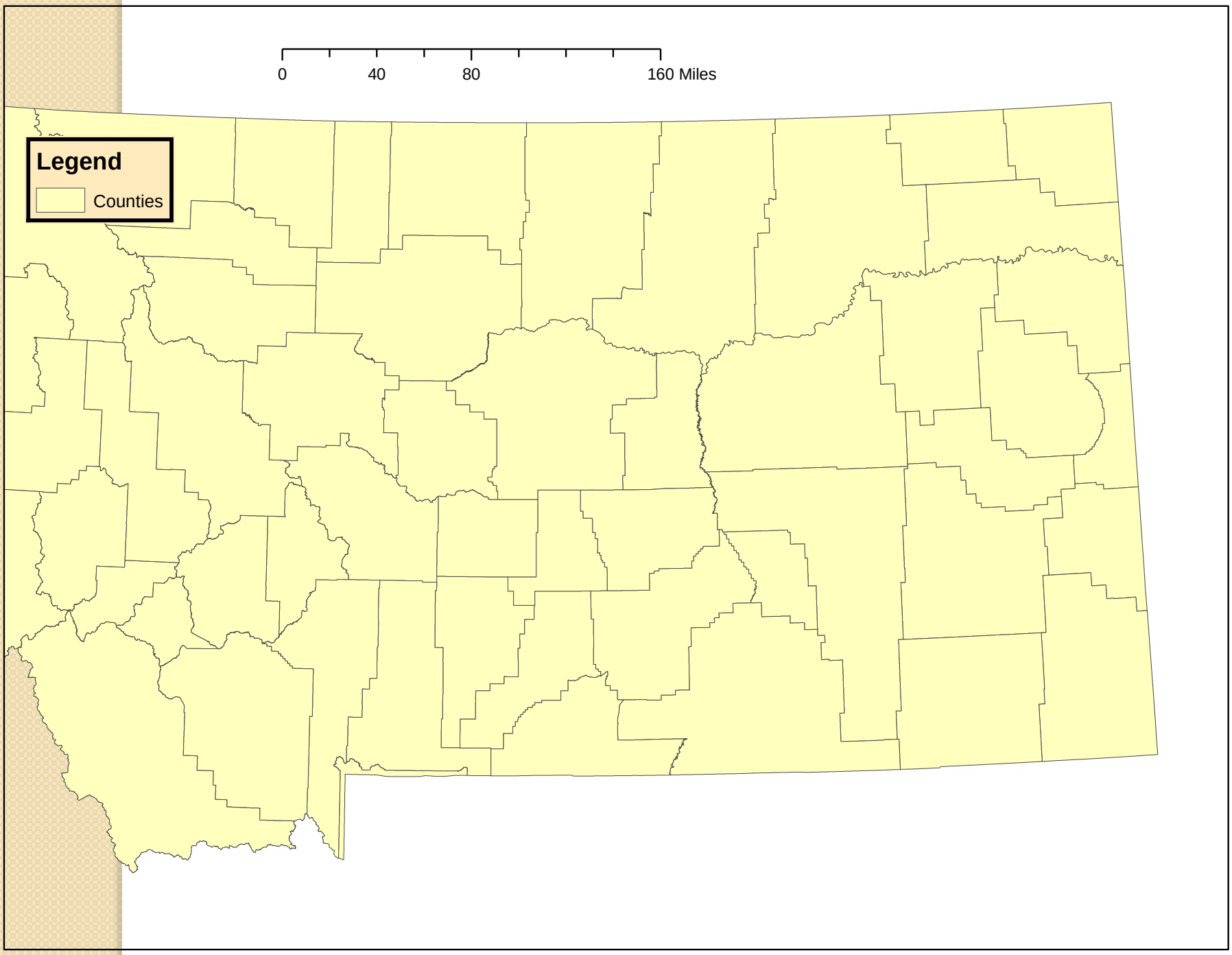
- Landownership patterns
  - BLM RMP revisions
  - NRCS SGI implementation
- Large, intact systems
- Coordinated, focused, landscape approach

Background

- Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana - Final
  - Good reference on sage-grouse biology in Montana
  - Core areas were not yet defined
  - Results from recent energy research not included

Core Areas

- Broad criteria
  - Areas of greatest abundance
  - Areas important for connectivity beyond MT
- Purpose
  - Strategically target conservation and protection
  - Avoid or manage development
  - Secondarily, heightened mitigation requirements (e.g., energy developments)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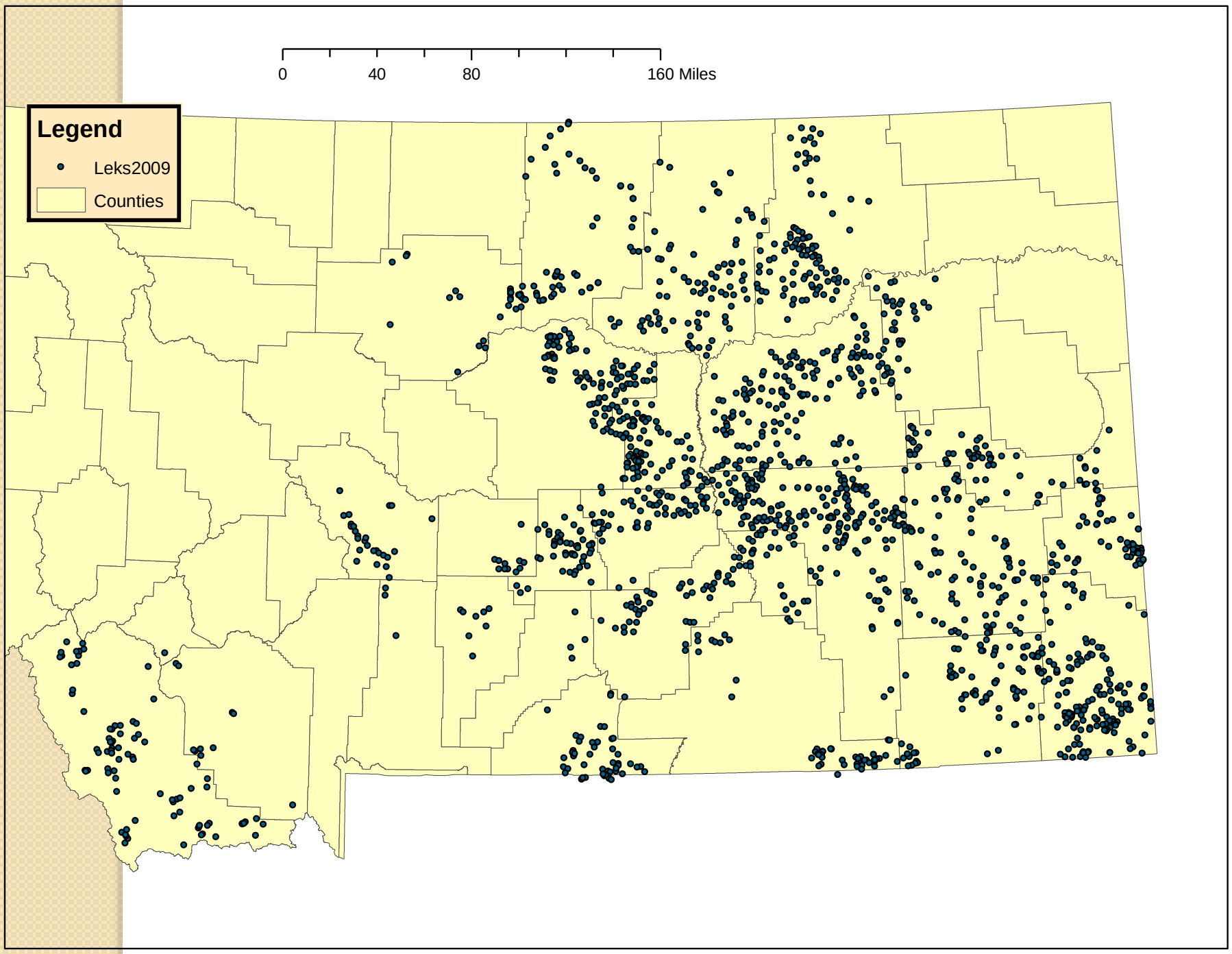
40
80
160 Miles
Legend
Counties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Leks2009
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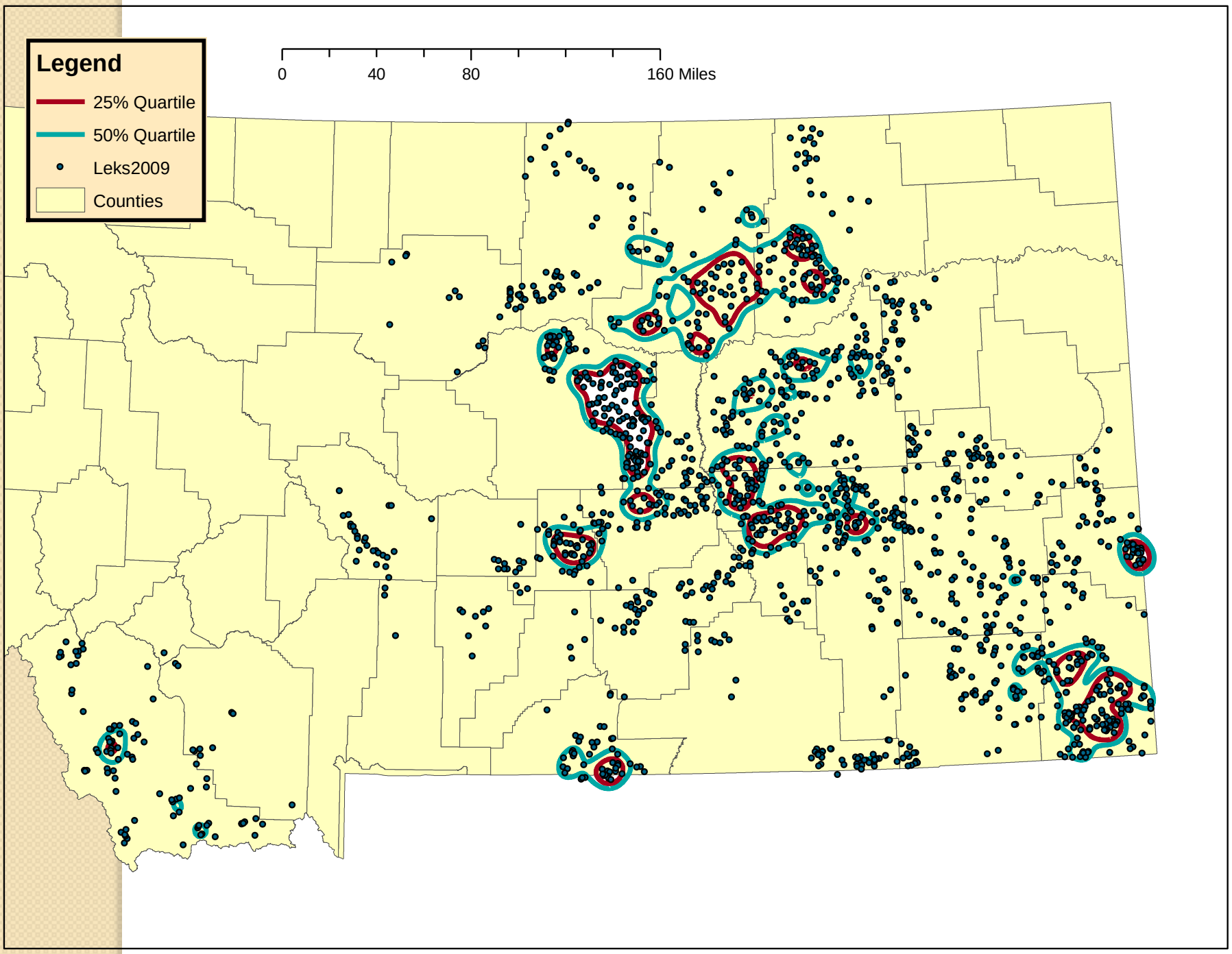
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50% Quartile
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Counties
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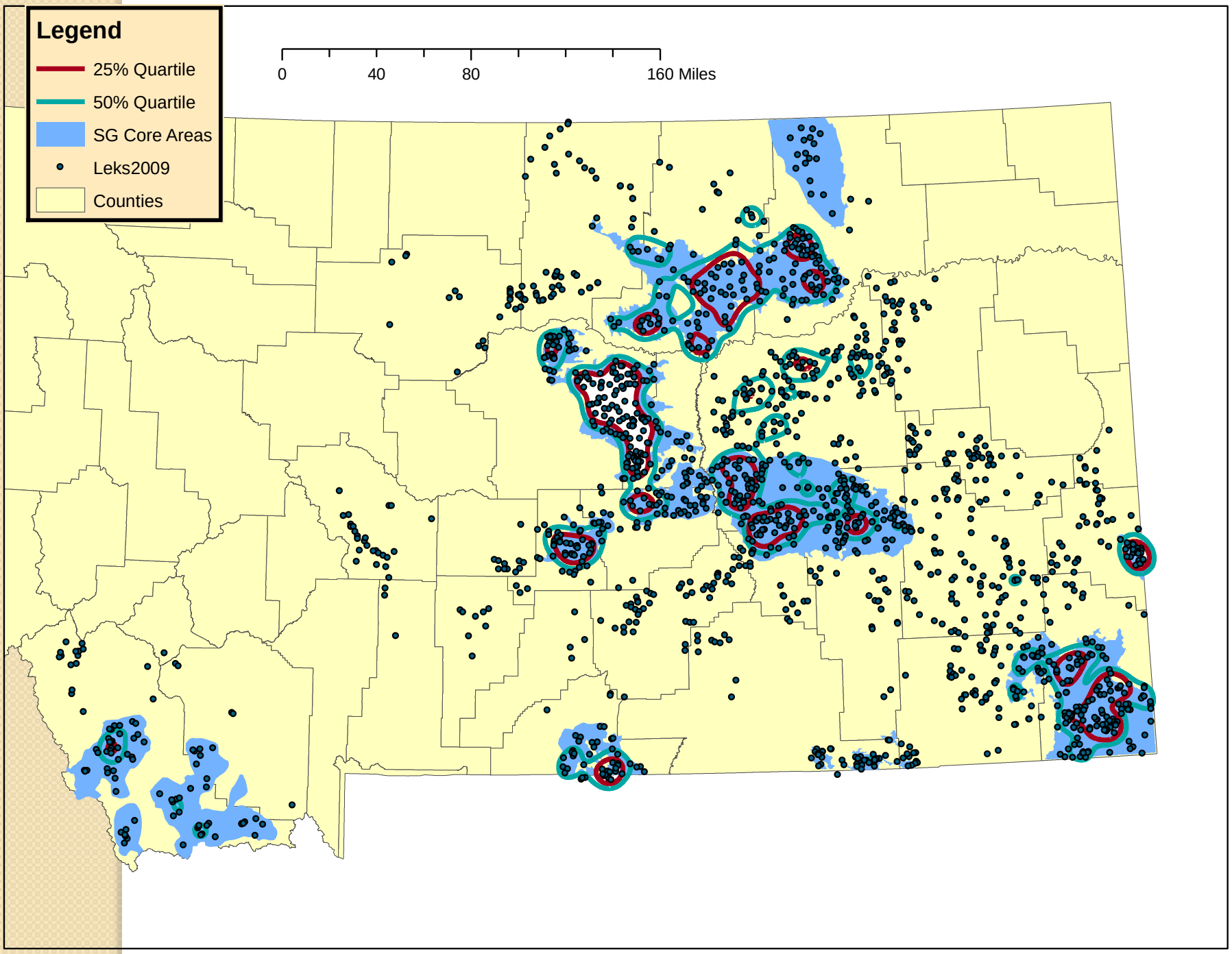
160 Miles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25% Quartile
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SG Core Areas
Leks2009
Counties
0
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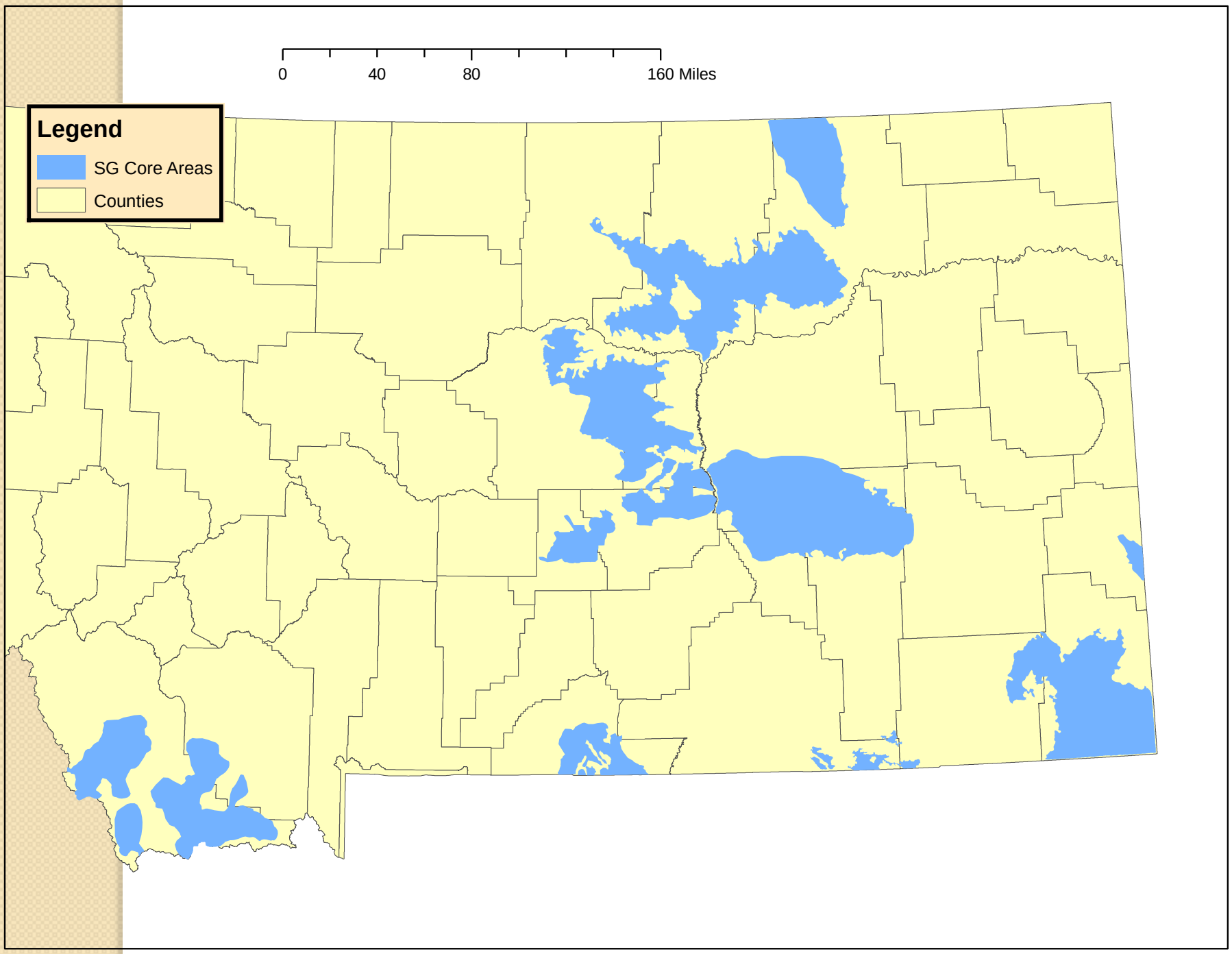
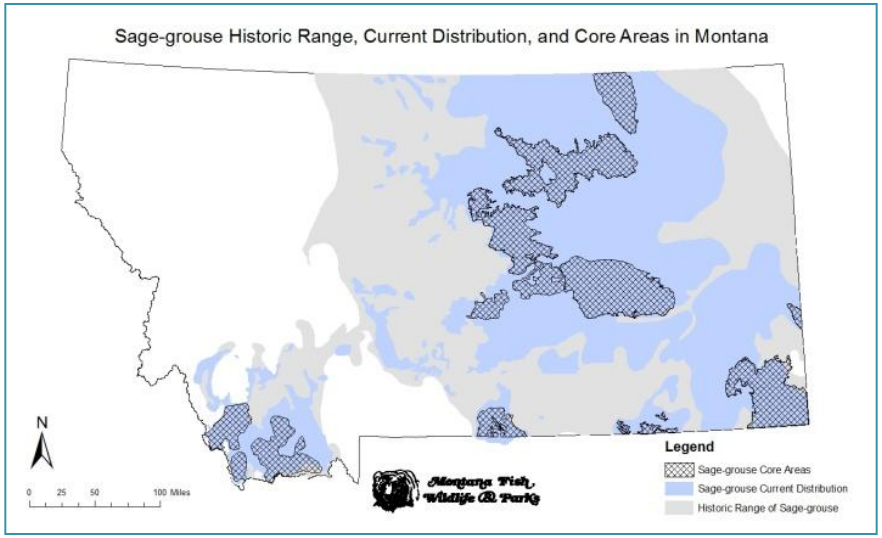

0
40
80
160 Miles
Legend
SG Core Areas
Counties

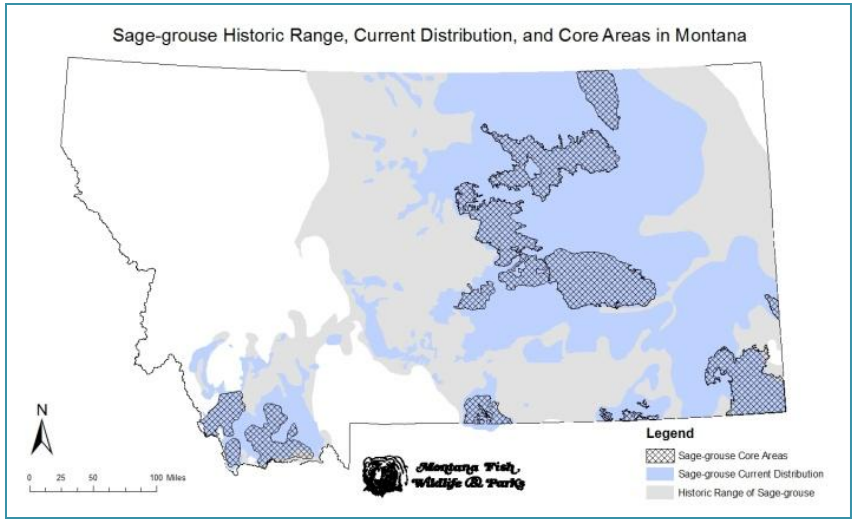
Core Areas

- Completed 2009
- Based on:
  - Lek density
  - Telemetry data
  - Habitat suitability
- Include:
  - 56% of leks in Montana
  - 71% of displaying males

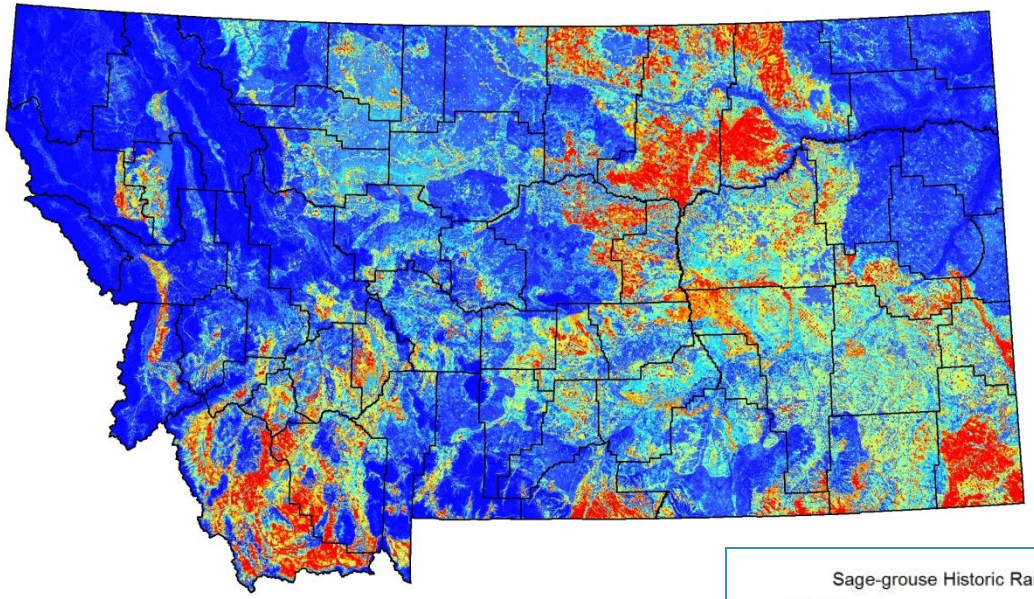


Core Areas

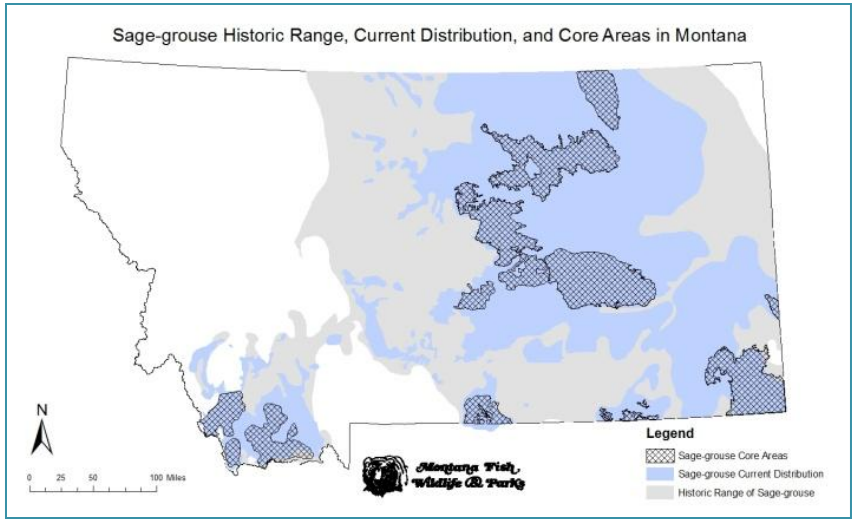
- Conservation Objectives Report
  - Priority Areas for Conservation
- NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative
  - Core areas
- BLM Resource Management Plans
  - Priority habitat



Core Areas



Habitat Suitability Model - Brewer's Sparrow



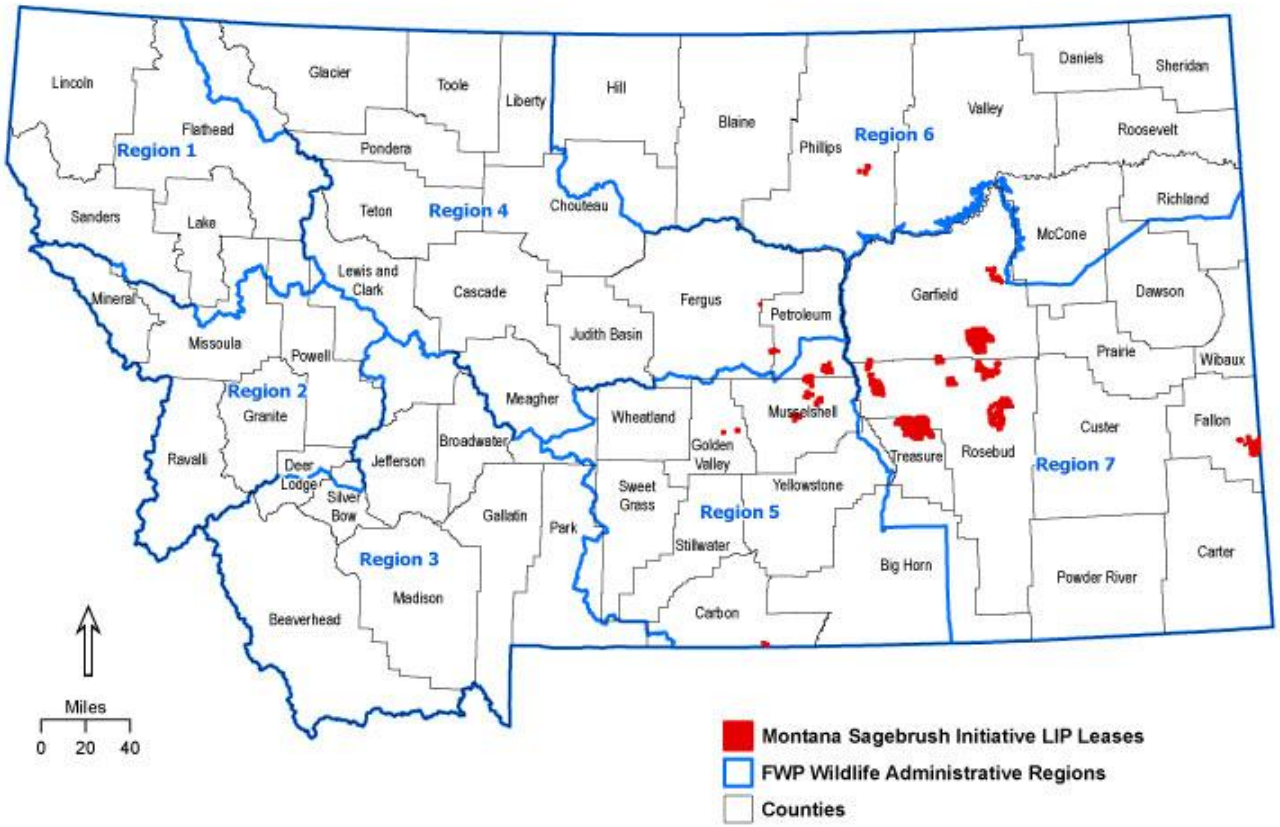
Working Lands

- Sustainable grazing can be an effective conservation tool
  - Helps to keep ranchers ranching
  - Keeps sagebrush habitats intact
  - Limits conversion of rangeland to other habitat types
  - Enhances grasses and forb production

What's good for cows is good for grouse! MACD

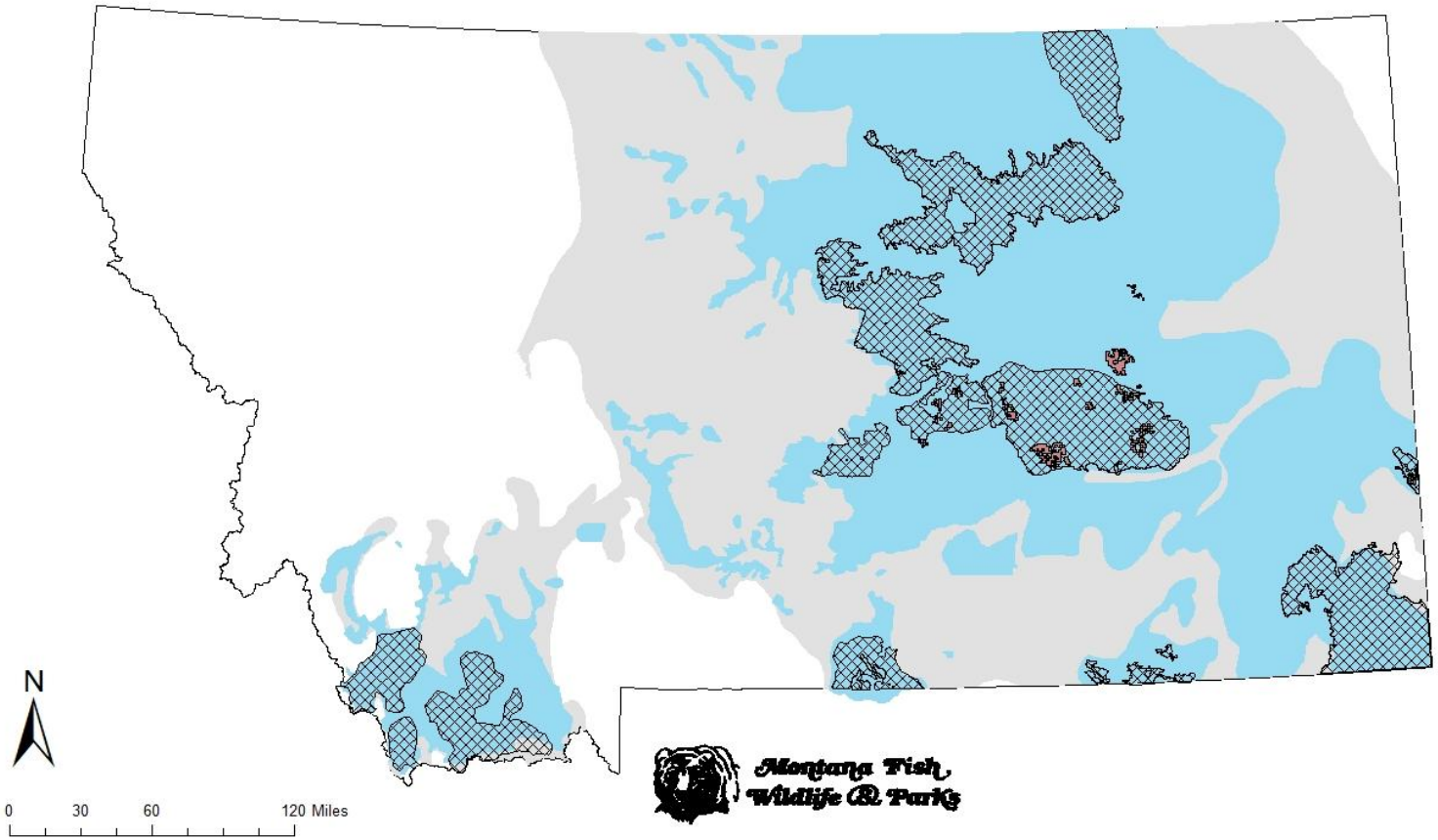
Working Lands

- Montana Sagebrush Initiative



Working Lands

- Montana Sagebrush Initiative

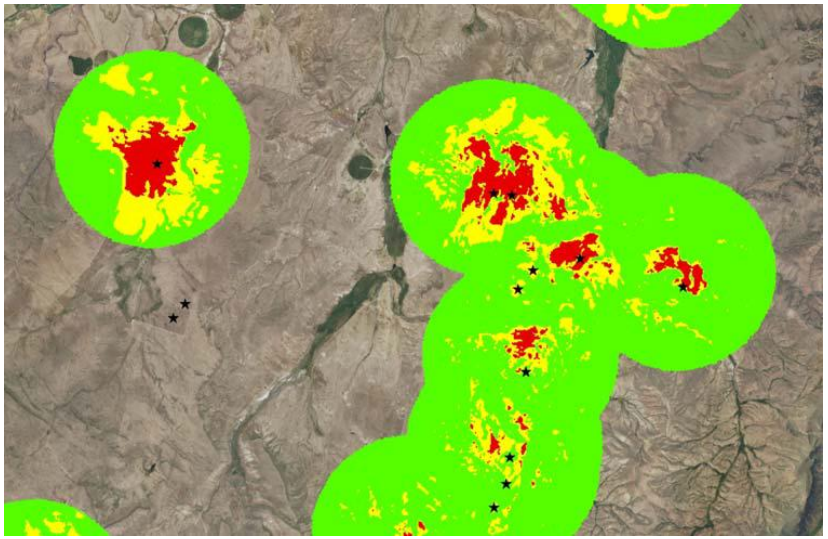


Working Lands

- Grazing management
  - Montana Sagebrush Initiative
  - Grazing plans
  - Financial assistance for grazing management infrastructure (FWP and NRCS)
  - BLM grazing management – RMP Process

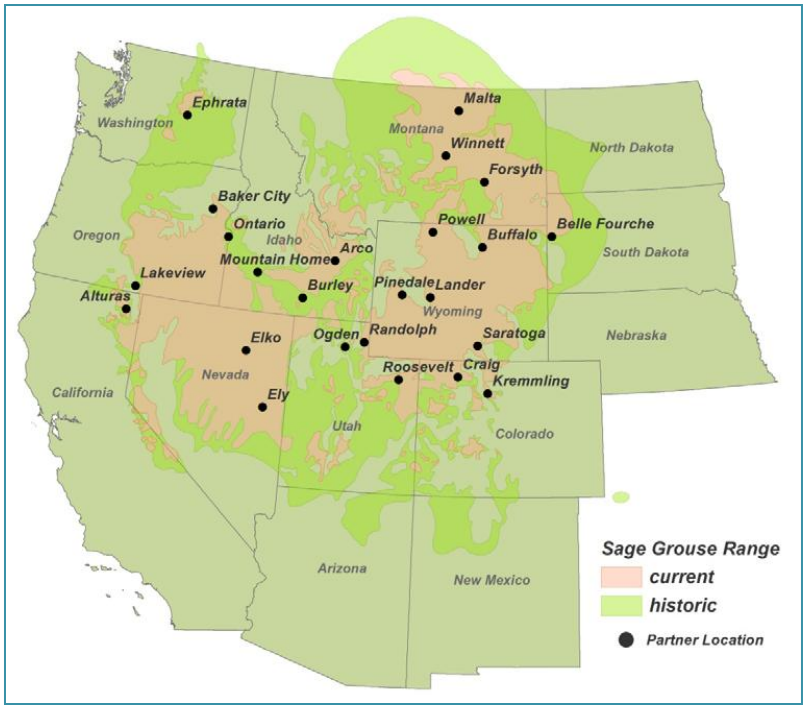
Working Lands

- Grazing management (cont.)
  - Fence marking partnership
    - Prioritize areas of high collision risk in core areas
    - BLM/NRCS/MACD/IWJV/FWP
    - Anticipate population level response



Working Lands

- Farm Bill policy
  - Disincentives for sod-breaking
- Farm Bill Partner Biologists in MT
  - Forsyth
  - Malta
  - Glasgow
  - Dillon



Working Lands

- Research near Roundup
  - Evaluate sage-grouse response to grazing management implemented under SGI

Working Lands

- Conservation Easements
  - Limit habitat conversion

FWP General Recommendations

- Subdivision Development
  - Minimize fragmentation; cluster development
- Energy Development & Infrastructure
  - Oil and gas
    - Minimize disturbance; limit habitat conversion & fragmentation
    - Co-locate development, infrastructure
  - Wind
    - Minimize direct mortalities; limit habitat conversion & fragmentation
    - Co-locate infrastructure

Population Monitoring

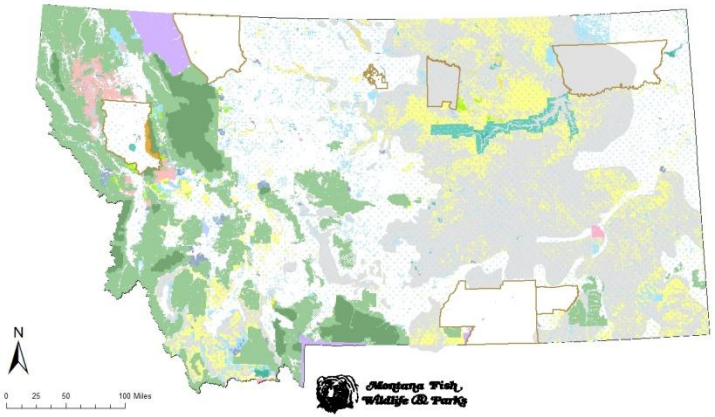
- Count displaying males on leks annually
  - Index of relative lek attendance and trends
  - Not an estimate of abundance or long-term population change
- Adaptive Harvest Management
  - Use lek counts to inform hunting regulations
  - Conservative limits

Regulatory Mechanisms

- BLM Resource Management Plans
- USFWS assurance to landowners applying practices through Sage-grouse Initiative

What's Missing?

- Regulatory nexus with state and private lands conservation (beyond SGI)
- Strategy for sage-grouse conservation across multiple land uses and ownerships (landscape level conservation)



Executive Order

- Governor Bullock's Executive Order
  - Major threats
    - Habitat fragmentation from energy
    - Conversion of habitat for agriculture and subdivisions
    - Lack of regulatory mechanisms
  - Secondary threats
    - WNV
    - Grazing
    - Collisions
    - Prescribed fire
    - Conifer expansion