Summary of COT Report and WAFWA and other State Plans
Topic: Agricultural Conversion and Grazing Management

COT Report (USFWS)

Agricultural Conversion

Conservation Objective: Avoid further loss of sagebrush habitat for agricultural activities (both plant and animal production) and prioritize restoration. In areas where taking agricultural lands out of production has benefited sage-grouse, the programs supporting these actions should be targeted and continued (e.g. CRP/SAFE). Threat amelioration activities should, at a minimum, be prioritized within PACs, but should be considered in all sage-grouse habitats.

Conservation Options:

1. Revise Farm Bill policies and commodity programs that facilitate ongoing conversion of native habitats to marginal croplands (e.g., through the addition of a 'Sodsaver' provision), to support conservation of remaining sagebrush-steppe habitats.
2. Continue and expand incentive programs that encourage the maintenance of sagebrush habitats.
3. Develop criteria for set-aside programs which stop negative habitat impacts and promote the quality and quantity sage-grouse habitat.
4. If lands that provide seasonal habitats for sage-grouse are taken out of a voluntary program, such as CRP or SAFE, precautions should be taken to ensure withdrawal of the lands minimizes the risk of direct take of sage-grouse (e.g., timing to avoid nesting season). Voluntary incentives should be implemented to increase the amount of sage-grouse habitats enrolled in these programs.

Grazing Management

Conservation Objective: Conduct grazing management for all ungulates in a manner consistent with local ecological conditions that maintains or restores healthy sagebrush shrub and native perennial grass and forb communities and conserves the essential habitat components for sage-grouse (e.g. shrub cover, nesting cover). Areas which do not currently meet this standard should be managed to restore these components. Adequate monitoring of grazing strategies and their results, with necessary changes in strategies, is essential to ensuring that desired ecological conditions and sage-grouse response are achieved.

Conservation Options:

1. Ensure that allotments meet ecological potential and wildlife habitat requirements; and, ensure that the health and diversity of the native perennial grass community is consistent with the ecological site.
2. Inform and educate affected grazing permittees regarding sage-grouse habitat needs and conservation measures.
3. Incorporate sage-grouse habitat needs or habitat characteristics into relevant resource and allotment management plans, including the desired conditions with the understanding that these desired conditions may not be fully achievable: (a) due to the existing ecological condition, ecological potential or the existing vegetation; or (b) due to causal events unrelated to existing livestock grazing.
4. Conduct habitat assessments and, where necessary, determine factors causing any failure to achieve the habitat characteristics. Make adjustments as appropriate.
5. Given limited agency resources, priority should be given to PACs and then sage-grouse habitats adjacent to PACs.

Sagebrush Removal and Range Management Structures

Conservation Objective: Avoid sagebrush removal or manipulation in sage-grouse breeding or wintering habitats. Conservation Objective: Avoid or reduce the impact of range management structures on sage-grouse.

Conservation Measures:

1. Range management structures should be designed and placed to be neutral or beneficial to sage-grouse
2. Structures that are currently contributing to negative impacts to either sage-grouse or their habitats should be removed or modified to remove the threat.

Near-term Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Action Plan (WAFWA)

Agricultural Conversion and Grazing Management

Strategy: Three-tiered approach that addresses:

1. Active support for agricultural policy that removes subsidies for conversion of new lands to tillage agriculture and support farm programs such as State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP),
2. Targeting existing easement programs, such as those funded through the NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative, in priority sage-grouse areas where the potential for tillage is greatest, and
3. Implementing sustainable prescribed grazing management systems in priority sage-grouse habitat.

Conservation Actions:

Policy:

A. Lobby for re-attaching conservation measure to federally-funded crop insurance payments
B. Provide political support for 'sodsaver' provisions of the Farm Bill

On-the-ground:

A. Target priority sage-grouse habitat with high potential of tillage for conservation easement programs
B. Implement sustainable prescribed grazing management systems in priority sage-grouse habitats

Federal Alternative for Sage-grouse Management in Idaho (currently recommended for BLM lands only)

Grazing Management

CHZ and IHZ:

- Prioritize permit renewal and land health assessments in allotments with declining sage-grouse populations.
- Incorporate the sage-grouse habitat characteristics in Tables 3-5 and management considerations into relevant resource management plans as desired conditions recognizing that these conditions may not be achievable (1) due to the existing ecological condition, ecological potential, or the existing vegetation; or (2) due to casual events unrelated to existing livestock grazing.
- To the extent practicable, reduce the impacts of fences and livestock management facilities on sage-grouse.
    - Mark fences with permanent flagging in areas of moderate to high fence densities located within 2 kilometers of occupied leks
    - Identify and remove unnecessary fences
    - Placement of new fences and livestock management facilities, should consider their impact on sage-grouse
    - Avoid constructing new fences within 0.6 miles of occupied leks
    - To the extent practicable, place new, taller structures at least 0.6 miles from occupied leks.

GHZ:

- No special application for sage-grouse.
- Identify and remove unnecessary fences.

Wyoming's Greater Sage-grouse Core Area Protection Executive Order

Agricultural Conversion and Grazing Management

- Sagebrush eradication is considered disturbance and will contribute to the 5% disturbance factor.
- See attachment for clarifying language regarding grazing adjustments

Exempt activities:

1. Existing animal husbandry practices (including branding, docking, herding, trailing, etc).
2. Existing fanning practices (excluding conversion of sagebrush/grassland to agricultural lands).
3. Existing grazing operations that utilize recognized rangeland management practices (allotment management plans, NRCS grazing plans, prescribed grazing plans, etc).
4. Construction of agricultural reservoirs and **aquatic** habitat improvements less than 10 surface acres and drilling of agriculture and residential water wells (including installation of tanks, water windmills and solar water pumps) more than 0.6 miles from the perimeter of the lek. Within 0.6 miles from leks no review is required if construction does not occur March 15 to June 30 and construction does not occur on the lek. All water tanks shall have escape ramps. Any **terrestrial** habitat improvements <10 acres will require compliance with the SGEO[SGIT]

5. Agricultural and residential electrical distribution lines more than 0.6 miles from leks. Within 0.6 miles from leks no review is required if construction does not occur March 1 5 to June 30 and construction does not occur on the lek. Raptor perching deterrents shall be installed on all poles within 0.6 miles from leks.
6. Pole fences. Wire fences if fitted with visibility markers where high potential for collisions has been documented[SGIT]
7. Irrigation (excluding the conversion of sagebrush/grassland to new irrigated lands).
8. Spring development if the spring is protected with fencing and enough water remains at the site to provide mesic (wet) vegetation.
9. Herbicide use within existing road, pipeline and power line rights-of-way. Herbicides application using spot treatment. Grasshopper/Mormon cricket control following Reduced Agent-Area Treatments (RAATS) protocol.
10. Existing county road maintenance.
11. Cultural resource pedestrian surveys.
12. Emergency response.

Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-grouse in Utah

Grazing Management

Additional details on grazing practices and greater sage-grouse conservation are found in Appendix 2 of the conservation plan.

- Rangeland habitat treatments to improve grazing should fully consider the impact on sage-grouse seasonal habitat during planning and implementation.
- Address incompatible grazing strategies through established rangeland management practices consistent with the maintenance or enhancement of habitat.
- Allocate funds and effort to the development of grazing strategies that will enhance or improve habitat for the preservation of greater sage-grouse.
- Locate livestock fences away from leks and employ the NRCS fence standards.