



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Beyond Boundaries

# Sage-Grouse Initiative

February 2012



## Background/Purpose

In 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a new and exciting effort to sustain working ranches and conserve Greater sage-grouse populations in the West. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is using popular voluntary conservation programs to assist producers in 11 western states (California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming) to simultaneously improve habitat for sage-grouse, and productivity of native rangelands.

Sage-grouse, a ground-dwelling bird native to the sagebrush steppe ecosystem of the American West, is highly dependent on sagebrush for food and cover. These birds have experienced a significant decline in population over several decades. About 40 percent of sage-grouse habitat that supports populations occurs on privately owned lands. The link with private lands makes NRCS uniquely positioned to focus agency resources to benefit sage-grouse, improve ranch sustainability and maintain livestock grazing as the prevailing land use.

## Goals/Objectives

Healthy, working ranchlands are key to conserving this species. Partnering with ranchers and using win-win conservation solutions that benefit grazing lands and sage-grouse habitat, SGI seeks to proactively conserve the species and keep populations healthy enough to avoid an ESA listing.

NRCS uses scientific evaluations carried out by independent scientists to provide the feedback necessary to adaptively manage SGI, thus maximizing its biological return on conservation investments.

## Conservation Funding/ Practices

NRCS and its conservation partners in the West have worked to improve sage-grouse habitat for some time. NRCS built on these efforts by declaring the Sage-Grouse Initiative a national priority in 2010.

NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to implement the Initiative and targets its efforts within high sage-grouse abundance centers to maintain large and intact grazing lands, resulting in landscape-wide improvements across the species' range. Conservation actions include establishing conservation easements to prevent working ranches from being converted into subdivisions; implementing sustainable grazing systems to improve hiding cover for birds; removing invasive conifers from grasslands to allow birds to re-colonize otherwise suitable habitat; and marking or moving "high-risk" fences near breeding sites to reduce bird collisions.

## Participation/ Partnerships

Partnerships are critical to our success. Ranchers in 11 western states (California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming) are participating in SGI to conserve this at-risk species.

Close collaboration with many stakeholders, including state, local and federal agencies, Tribes, and non-government organizations, ensures that NRCS activities complement efforts already underway. SGI fosters coordination and implementation on a landscape-wide scale while ensuring local input and actions.

*Map depicts sage-grouse population centers or "core areas" across the species range. Warmer colors indicate larger populations and are additive with red areas containing 25 percent of nesting birds, red combined with orange is 50 percent of birds.*

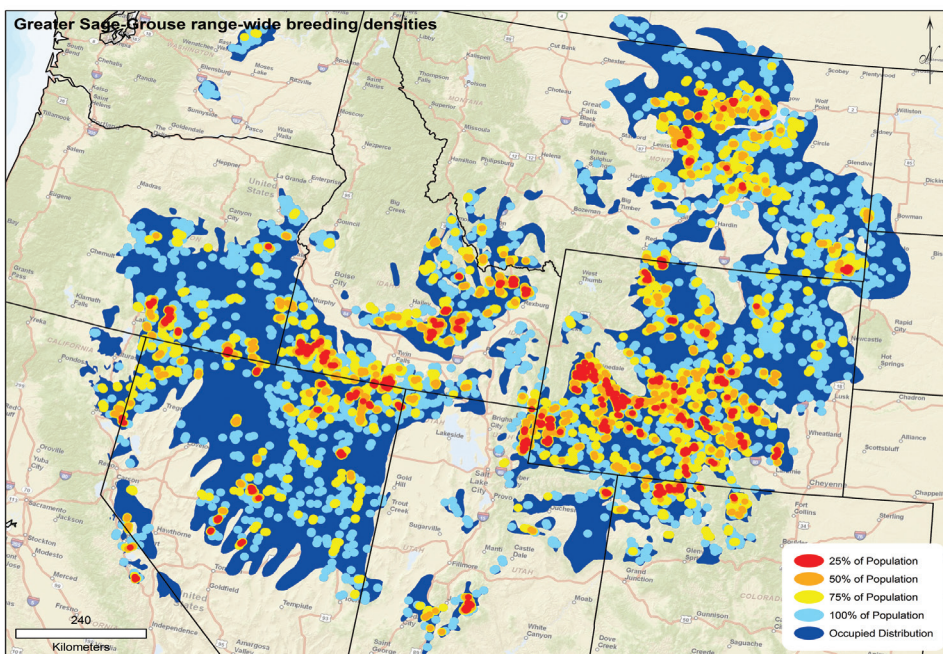
## Benefits to Producers

*What's Good for the Rancher is Good for the Grouse*

By addressing threats common to sage-grouse and sustainable rangelands, ranchers can improve the productivity of their grazing resources with assurances that their actions are viewed as beneficial for the Sage-grouse under the ESA. Healthy sage-grouse habitats also benefit other wildlife species. If an eventual ESA listing takes place, participating ranchers know they can continue implementing their SGI conservation plans without increased restrictions or regulations.

## Benefits to Resources and the Public

SGI is a win-win solution for ranchers and for the grouse. Healthy rangelands that include habitat for sage-grouse and other wildlife will help ensure the viability of western ranching and preserve a rural way of life in the West.



For more information, go to [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) and search "SGI." or contact your local NRCS office.