

General locations of breeding (lek) critical habitat for the greater sage grouse in Alberta and Saskatchewan

The replacement section on critical habitat in the Recovery Strategy also includes examples of activities which can destroy critical habitat. Examples of such activities include (but are not limited to):

- Cultivation and/or conversion of native prairie to annual cropland or non-native pasture;
- Gravel extraction;
- Construction of new oil and gas wells;
- Construction of new permanent fire guards; and
- Infrastructure development (such as roads or buildings).

Activities may have an effect if occurring directly on critical habitat, and may also have negative impacts if they occur some distance away. For example, greater sage grouse are known to be sensitive to loud noises and may abandon critical habitat as the result of an activity.

Only activities that would destroy the critical habitat may need to be modified or restricted. If you have critical habitat on your land, this would not affect your land ownership.

## HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE?

To find out more about what is being done to protect plants and animals that are in danger of disappearing from the wild in Canada including the greater sage grouse, please visit the Species at Risk Public Registry at: [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca)

## HOW CAN I BECOME INVOLVED?

If you have greater sage grouse or greater sage grouse habitat on or near your land, you are an important steward and have an opportunity to play an important role in the recovery of these endangered birds. There are a number of conservation programs available to assist you in developing and implementing conservation plans for wildlife on your land.

The next steps in the recovery planning process for the greater sage grouse will be to identify additional critical habitat, and to work in consultation with landowners and others to determine appropriate protection measures for critical habitat across the Canadian range of the greater sage grouse. You can play an important role in the recovery of the greater sage grouse. Over the next year, we will be seeking your comments and suggestions on the identification of leks, nests and critical habitat and on best possible solutions for the protection of the species and its habitat.

**CONTACT INFO:**  
[sagegrouse@ec.gc.ca](mailto:sagegrouse@ec.gc.ca)  
 Environment Canada **780-951-8743**



Government of Canada

Gouvernement du Canada

# THE GREATER SAGE GROUSE

ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

## WHAT IS A GREATER SAGE GROUSE?

The greater sage grouse is a large ground-dwelling bird that has finely marked brown, black, beige and white upper parts, a black belly, and a long pointed tail. It is the largest species of grouse found in Canada. Within the white breast feathers of the male greater sage grouse, there are two large air sacs that are inflated and deflated as part of a spectacular mating display.

Greater sage grouse are found in Canada's southernmost native prairies where sagebrush grows. Specifically, they are found in southwestern Saskatchewan and southeastern Alberta. There are also populations found in the prairies of the United States.



Gordon Court



En14-3/2009E  
 978-1-100-12091-1

Aussi disponible en français

Canada



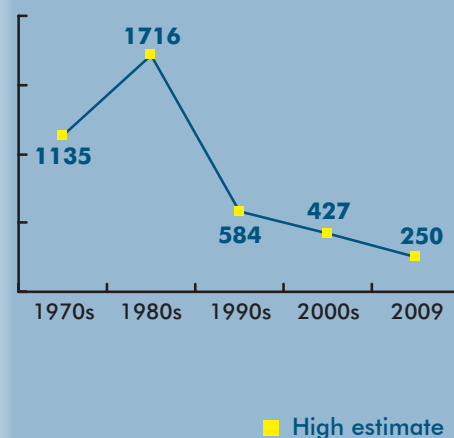


## WHY ARE THEY AT RISK?

Greater sage grouse are listed as endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Sage grouse now occupy only about six percent of their historic range in Canada.

Populations in Canada are threatened by a number of factors, such as habitat loss and degradation, habitat fragmentation, predation, and disease. Habitat changes that reduce or degrade the size and quality of sagebrush vegetation can have negative consequences for the greater sage grouse. Greater sage grouse can survive and reproduce on native mixed grass prairie with livestock production.

Population estimates for greater sage grouse in Alberta



## WHAT IS SARA?

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) is a federal act that takes a collaborative approach to working with landowners and provincial and territorial governments to protect species at risk and their habitats. The purposes of the Act are:

- 1) to prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct or extirpated (gone from the wild in Canada);
- 2) to help recover extirpated, endangered or threatened species; and
- 3) to ensure that species of special concern do not become endangered or threatened.

## HOW DOES SARA PROTECT SAGE GROUSE?

Sage grouse are protected on federal lands from killing, harming, harassing, capturing, taking, possessing, collecting, buying, selling or trading of individuals of the species. The Act also protects their eggs and nests. The provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan have laws that protect sage grouse on provincial and private lands.

SARA also recognizes that protecting the habitat of species at risk is key to their conservation. Critical habitat is defined as the habitat necessary for the survival or recovery of a species at risk. Following the identification of critical habitat within a recovery strategy or action plan, the intent of SARA is to protect the critical habitat. Voluntary actions and stewardship measures are the preferred approaches to conserving habitat. The federal government has established the Habitat Stewardship Program to assist in such actions.

In the event that stewardship does not protect the critical habitat, prohibitions against destruction of critical habitat can come into play. When critical habitat is located on private or provincial lands and is not protected through stewardship arrangements, conservation agreements or provincial laws, the Government of Canada, following consultation with provincial governments, may make it an offence to destroy critical habitat. Under SARA, the Government of Canada is responsible for ensuring critical habitat is protected from destruction.

## WHAT IS RECOVERY PLANNING?

For endangered species, such as the greater sage grouse, SARA requires that a Recovery Strategy be prepared. This Strategy outlines the general approach for supporting the recovery of a species. It also provides background information on a species, and sets goals and objectives to guide recovery efforts. Following the Recovery Strategy, an Action Plan is developed, which outlines the specific actions needed to meet the recovery goals.

## WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR RECOVERY PLANNING FOR GREATER SAGE GROUSE?

As a first step in the recovery planning process under SARA, the *Recovery Strategy for the greater sage grouse in Canada* was completed in January 2008. Critical habitat was not included in the initial document, but outlined how the Government of Canada would identify critical habitat in the future.

The Government of Canada has now made changes to this document to include partial identification of critical habitat, and provide examples of activities that might destroy it. The critical habitat identified in the replacement section of the Recovery Strategy includes active breeding habitat (known as leks or dancing grounds) in Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as important nesting and brood-rearing habitat in part of the current range of greater sage grouse in Alberta. In general, this critical habitat is characterized by areas with patches of sagebrush, relatively little bare ground, and minimal human disturbance.

This is the first step towards a more comprehensive identification of critical habitat across the entire range of the greater sage grouse in Canada. The Government of Canada, in cooperation with provincial governments and in consultation with people who are directly affected, will work to complete the identification of critical habitat (including breeding, nesting, brood-rearing and winter habitat). This will be done in a stepwise fashion with new critical habitat identified as information becomes available or habitat is restored. The amount, location and features of critical habitat are obtained through the scientific analysis of available information, community knowledge and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. The Government of Canada encourages any persons to contribute information that they believe would be useful in this effort. In cooperation with provincial governments, and in consultation with landowners and other people who are directly affected, the Government of Canada will work to ensure appropriate measures are in place to protect critical habitat, including stewardship approaches.

**Endangered:** a wildlife species that is facing imminent risk of extirpation (being lost from the wild) or extinction.



Gordon Court

## HOW MIGHT THE RECOVERY STRATEGY AFFECT ME?

If you are a landowner with greater sage grouse on your land, it means that the activities you are currently carrying out are generally compatible with the greater sage grouse's habitat needs. For example, greater sage grouse have demonstrated that they can survive and reproduce on native mixed grass prairie with livestock production and light to moderate grazing as a primary land use. In some cases current grazing management may not be optimal for sage grouse. In such instances advice, assistance or incentives may be available to assist you in adjusting stocking rates, timing or distribution of livestock.