



2020 Greater Sage-grouse Status Review

Why is the Service reviewing the status of the greater sage-grouse in 2020?

Fulfilling our Commitment

In our 2015 not-warranted finding for greater sage-grouse, we committed to review the status of the species in five years to help monitor threats; response of sage-grouse to those threats; evaluate conservation actions; guide adaptive management; improve management within the sagebrush ecosystem; and finally, identify research needs. Our 2020 review will assess whether our collective efforts to conserve sage-grouse are moving in the right direction since our 2015 finding. In particular, our review will help ground-truth the full and timely implementation of recently-completed sage-grouse conservation plans, which were foundational to our 2015 not warranted finding. Our review will also help inform whether a formal re-visitation of our 2015 finding and the regulatory status of the species is necessary.

Monitoring improves management

The more we know about the status and trends of a species, the better we can manage it. Monitoring provides us this information and is a critical component of strategic habitat conservation. By monitoring the success of our conservation planning and delivery efforts, we can implement adaptive management strategies to help ensure success. Given the frequency of our previous reviews, we believe that five years is a reasonable timeline for evaluating our progress in conserving the greater sage-grouse and its habitats to ensure that we are on the right track (recognizing that actual biological trends will take longer to discern).

Following on our 2015 not warranted finding for greater sage-grouse, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with partners on a “2020 status review” to evaluate the effectiveness of sage-grouse conservation plans and related measures in securing the conservation of the species.

Tatiana Gettelman/USGS

What is the Service looking for when it reviews the status of greater sage-grouse in 2020?

We are looking for any information that will help us and our partners understand what has changed for the greater sage-grouse since the implementation of the range-wide conservation efforts. Building on previous and ongoing work, our review will help evaluate the success of the conservation actions to help ensure that conservation efforts continue to benefit sage-grouse into the future. Some of the questions we will consider include (see Attachment 1):

Implementation of the regulatory plans and other conservation efforts

Were the federal greater sage-grouse plans and other efforts implemented as planned and did they effectively reduce threats to the greater sage-grouse and its habitat?

- Have the rates of disturbance or habitat loss changed?
- Did the conservation efforts direct disturbance away from important areas for sage-grouse?
- Did project proponents first avoid and minimize impacts, and then appropriately offset unavoidable disturbance?

New science

What new information exists regarding the species and its conservation? How have the distribution, abundance, or population trend of sage-grouse changed?

Status of potential threats

How have the magnitude, intensity, and frequency of potential threats to the sage-grouse changed?





What will the 2020 review process entail?

Working with our partners, we will develop an approach based on the following core tenets:



Collaborative

We will collaborate with our partners to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of conservation actions. Our goal is to complete the review in coordination with our partners before the end of calendar year 2020.



Science-based

The review will be informed by the latest and best available science.



Value Added

The 2020 review will inform adaptive management by helping to identify strengths, weaknesses, missing links, and if needed, solutions to conservation delivery efforts.



Transparent

This review will be conducted in coordination with and through assistance from our partners. We will communicate our review process, the information considered, and outcome to the public in an open and transparent manner. This includes developing a summary document that describes our progress on sage-grouse conservation since 2015.



How does the status review fit into our larger goals in the sagebrush ecosystem?

- The rangewide efforts to conserve sage-grouse have highlighted the need for a durable, collaborative effort to conserve the larger sagebrush ecosystem. The Service is actively supporting this effort. Our goal is to maintain a healthy, working sagebrush landscape for wildlife and for people.
- We view the work that underpinned our 2015 not warranted finding as vital not only to greater sage-grouse conservation but as a foundation on which the sagebrush conservation community can build a long-term vision for improving the health of the ecosystem. It follows that the better we understand the status of the conservation efforts, the more successful we will all be in achieving this larger vision.
- The 2020 review will help us achieve this goal by continued collaboration and transparency as we work with our partners to complete a comprehensive evaluation of range-wide conservation efforts since 2015 and consider what has changed for greater sage-grouse over the last five years.
- The status of the greater sage-grouse and the success of larger sagebrush conservation efforts depends on our collective actions between now and 2020.

Appendix

Potential questions to help inform an evaluation of the greater sage-grouse status in calendar year 2020:

The following questions would help us and our partners evaluate the implementation of the federal sage-grouse plans and the status of the greater sage-grouse before the end of calendar year 2020.

As part of adaptive management, continued monitoring of the greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats now and into the future will be needed to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the conservation actions for the 2020 status review and the long-term effectiveness of the federal plans for greater sage-grouse.



Tatiana Gettelman / USGS

Evaluating the implementation of the federal greater sage-grouse plans and other conservation efforts:

- Were the federal greater sage-grouse plans (federal plans) implemented as planned?
- How have the rates of disturbance and habitat loss changed since the 2015 not-warranted finding for greater sage-grouse?
- Did the federal plans move disturbance away from important areas for greater sage-grouse?
- Did the federal plans reduce the extent or magnitude of habitat loss and fragmentation from energy development, infrastructure, grazing, mining, and other regulated activities?
- Were projects relocated, revoked, or denied due to priority habitat management area (PHMA) or general habitat management area (GHMA) delineations for greater sage-grouse?
- Were proposed projects relocated, revoked, or denied due to the disturbance caps and lek buffers for the greater sage-grouse?
- Were projects that proceeded in GHMA and PHMA for greater sage-grouse fully mitigated to a net conservation gain?
- Did priority habitat management area (PHMA) and general habitat management area (GHMA) delineations direct disturbance away from the correct breeding and seasonal greater sage-grouse habitats?
- Did major flaws, failures, or incorrect assumptions hinder the successful implementation of the federal greater sage-grouse plans?
- How did adaptive management procedures help rectify issues or improve implementation?
- Were wildfire suppression and restoration activities prioritized in greater sage-grouse habitat?
- Were livestock and free-roaming equids (horses) managed to achieve habitat objectives in the greater sage-grouse focal areas (SFAs) and then PHMA?
- How many restoration or treatment projects were completed?
- Where treatments were implemented, did habitat conditions generally improve?

Monitoring the greater sage-grouse and reviewing new science:

- In general, what has changed for the greater sage-grouse since the 2015 not-warranted finding?
- Is there significant new scientific information regarding sage-grouse, its potential threats, or management?
- What is the latest information on the distribution, abundance, or population trend for the greater sage-grouse?

Reviewing the status of potential threats:

- In general, how has the magnitude, intensity, and frequency of potential threats to the greater sage-grouse changed since the 2015 not-warranted finding?
- Have any catastrophic events, such as massive wildfire or widespread disease, occurred in major portions of the range of the greater sage-grouse?
- Has the magnitude or frequency of wildfire or spread of invasive weeds changed? How much greater sage-grouse habitat burned from wildfire per year?
- Has the number of free-roaming equids (horses) in greater-sage grouse habitats changed?
- Has the percentage of grazing allotments that meet or do not meet land health assessment (LHA) standards changed since 2015?