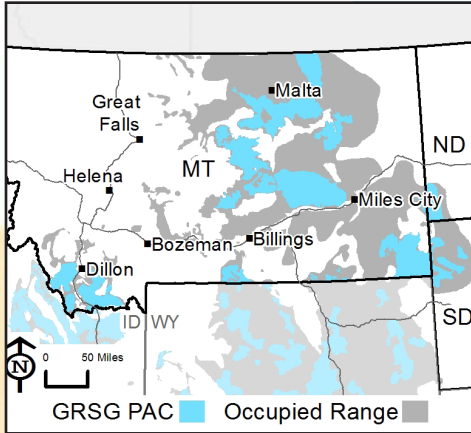
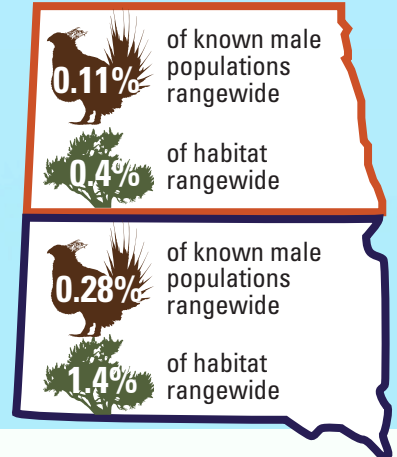




Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation in North and South Dakota



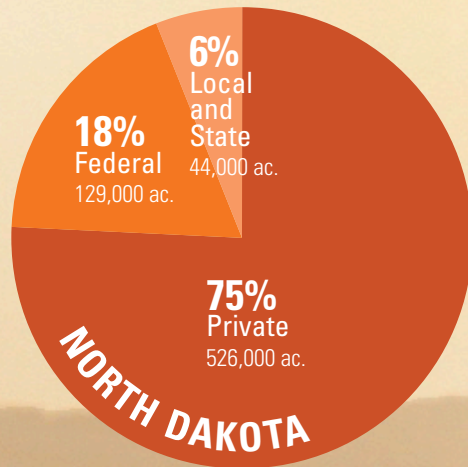
North and South Dakota have been active partners in the collaborative, science-based conservation campaign to protect the greater sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem. Due to the collective efforts of federal, state and private partners across the range, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has found that the greater sage-grouse does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act. Greater sage-grouse will continue to be managed by North Dakota Game and Fish and South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.



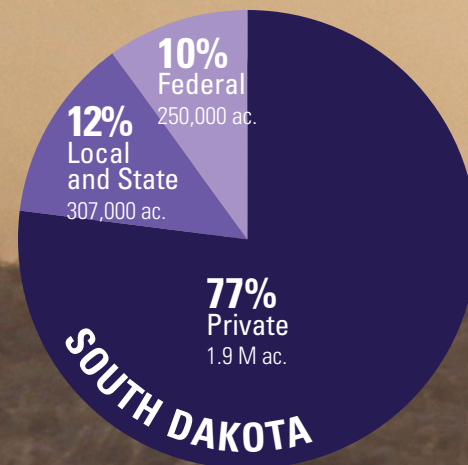
Important Conservation Areas and Occupied Range for Greater Sage-Grouse in North and South Dakota

Land Ownership

Total Occupied Range: 704,000 acres



Total Occupied Range: 2.5 million acres



Greater Sage-Grouse in the Dakotas

The Dakotas are on the far eastern edge of greater sage-grouse range and the two states' populations are considered at high risk of extirpation because of their small numbers and isolation.

In 2014, only 31 males were counted on North Dakota leks and 67 males were counted on South Dakota leks (across 21 leks, which represent the vast majority of known leks in South Dakota). Populations this small could be vulnerable to a single calamitous event, such as a disease outbreak or severe drought.

Energy development, disease and fragmentation are seen as the predominant threats in the few counties where they persist. Greater sage-grouse in the Dakotas were historically connected with populations in eastern Montana, though it is unclear how many birds move between the states.

Primary Threats

Loss of fragmentation of sagebrush caused by:

- energy development,
- wildfire,
- disease,
- fragmentation, and
- small populations.

Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy in ND/SD

FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS



STATE AND PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION

Overview of State Actions

- State management plans in North and South Dakota emphasize working cooperatively with private landowners due to the relatively large acreages of private lands in those states.
- North and South Dakota are continuing greater sage-grouse research efforts to prioritize the best sagebrush habitat for conservation, to expand core areas and improve their understanding of the impacts of West Nile virus. Both states have also closed greater sage-grouse hunting seasons.
- North Dakota completed its state conservation plan for greater sage-grouse in March 2015. It applies to approximately 416,000 acres of all landownership types in the state. The plan is voluntary and its implementation relies on partner-led efforts. North Dakota's plan focuses on translocating greater sage-grouse to supplement isolated subpopulations in an effort to slow a downward population trend.
- South Dakota has provided additional firefighting resources and in the past has restricted off-road travel if drought conditions may elevate fire danger during hunting seasons.
- The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks works with the South Dakota School and Public Lands Office, Public Utilities Commission, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to provide comments and input if oil and gas development, wind development or other proposed projects may impact sage-grouse core areas.

NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) has been a catalyst for sagebrush conservation across the West. SGI's vision of wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching provides win-win solutions for ranchers, greater sage-grouse and 350 other species. With more than 1,120 participating ranches in 11 western states, SGI and its partners have invested \$424.5 million in greater sage-grouse conservation on 4.4 million acres of private rangelands.

North Dakota has enhanced rangeland health with 20,000 acres of grazing systems and by revegetating 2,500 acres of former rangeland with sagebrush and perennial grasses.

On the fringe of the species range, South Dakota is a leader in sustainable grazing with 312,000 applied acres inside of sage-grouse priority areas.

RANGELAND FIRE STRATEGY

The plans for the Dakotas incorporate recommendations on addressing the threats of rangeland fire and invasive species prepared in collaboration with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

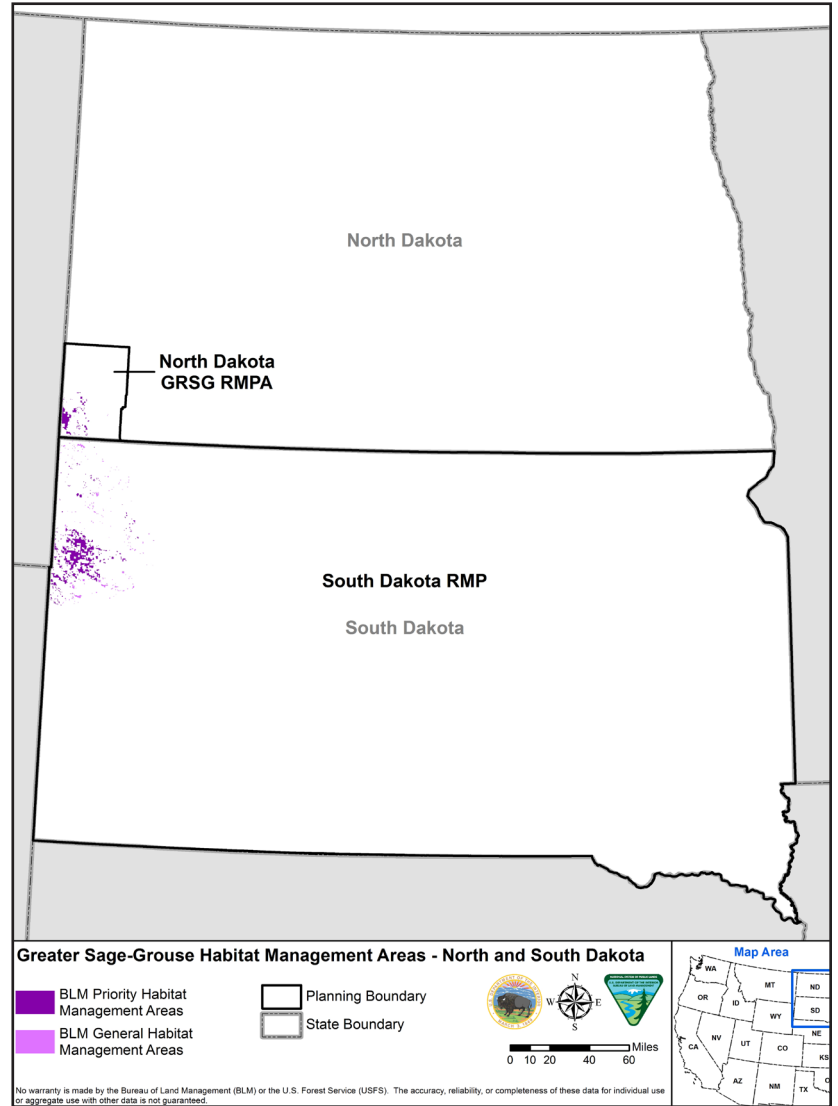
The Bureau of Land Management in the Dakotas will ensure that Priority Habitat Management Areas get preference for native seeds during rehabilitation following fire activity.



Greater sage-grouse in flight

BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plans in ND/SD

- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is instituting conservation measures for greater sage-grouse through an amendment to the resource management plan for North Dakota and in the resource management plan revision for South Dakota.
- The South Dakota Resource Management Plan Revision also outlines a comprehensive framework to guide future management decisions for all resource values and program areas.
- The BLM amended the land-use plan in the Dakotas to address threats to the greater sage-grouse. The BLM plans provide a layered management approach that focus protections on the areas of highest importance to the species:
 - Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA), equivalent to Core Areas, are managed to avoid and minimize further disturbance. Surface energy and mineral development is limited in these areas. Development is capped with limits on the amount and density of disturbance allowed. No lands in the Dakotas have been identified as Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFA).
 - General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA) provide greater flexibility for land use activities. Mitigation and required design features ensure that impacts from development are avoided, minimized and mitigated in GHMA.
- The plans respect valid, existing rights, including those for oil and gas development, renewable energy, rights-of-way, locatable minerals, and other permitted projects.
- Grazing in the Dakotas is not widely identified as a threat to the greater sage-grouse. Locally developed management objectives related to greater sage-grouse and rangeland health standards and will be utilized in permit modifications and renewals, consistent with ecological site potential.

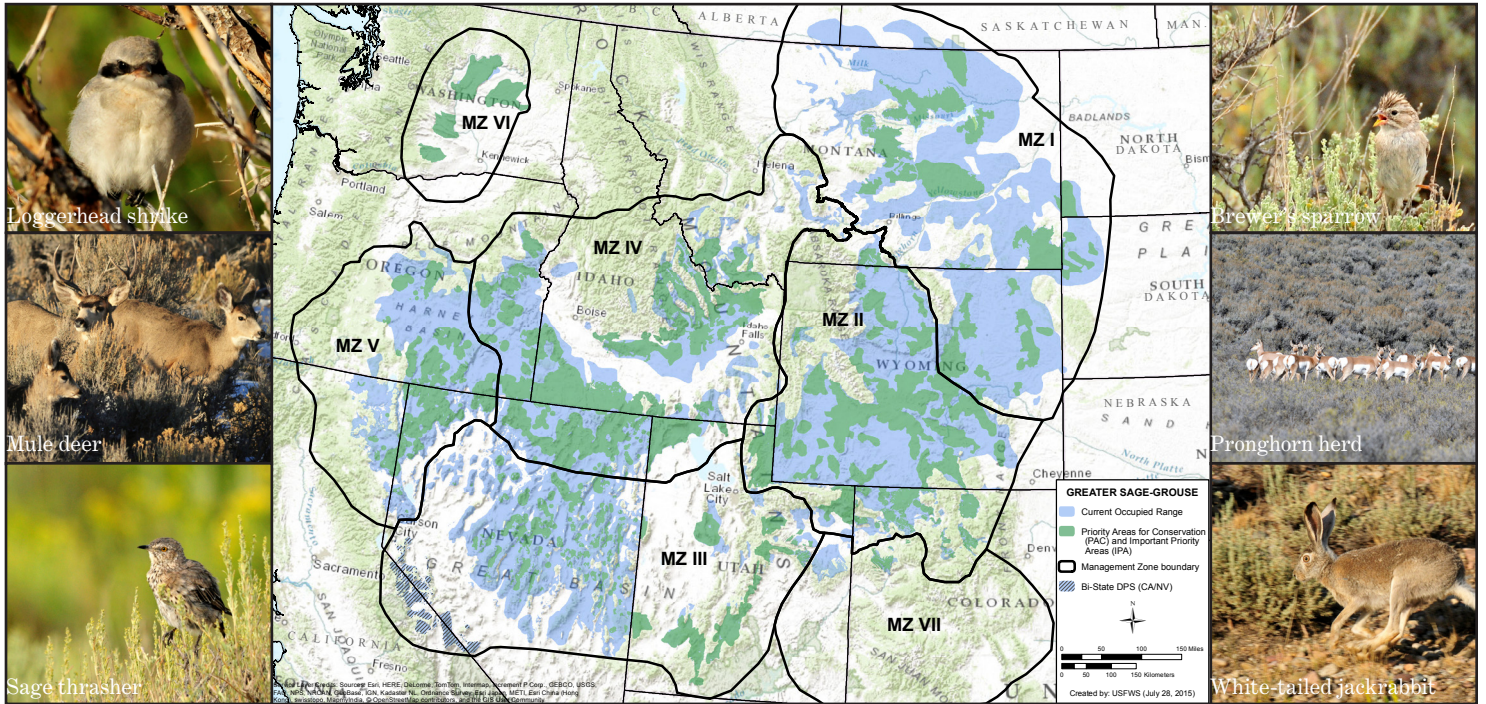


SFA Acres in ND and SD	PHMA Acres in SD	PHMA Acres in ND	GHMA Acres in SD
None	127,000 acres	32,900 acres	23,700 acres

About 92 percent of federal lands with high and medium oil potential in the Dakotas are outside of federally managed priority conservation areas. There is no high and medium gas potential in the Dakotas.

Acres of High & Medium Oil and Gas Potential and Lease Status on Federal Lands and Minerals within PHMA								
State	High/Medium Oil Potential				High/Medium Gas Potential			
	Within PHMA Already Leased	Within PHMA Subject to BLM/USFS RMP Decisions for Priority Habitat	Outside of PHMAs	Total High/Medium Oil Potential	Within PHMA Already Leased	Within PHMA Subject to BLM/USFS RMP Decisions for Priority Habitat	Outside of PHMAs	Total High/Medium Gas Potential
North Dakota	49,000	27,000	4,630,000	4,706,000	0	0	0	0
South Dakota	30,000	28,000	364,000	422,000	0	0	0	0

The Future for Greater Sage-Grouse in ND/SD



Redefining the Future of Conservation

FWS is confident that the unparalleled conservation effort by federal, state, and private partners has addressed the major threats to greater sage-grouse by putting the right protections in the most important places. A sustained commitment to sagebrush conservation is needed to ensure effective conservation for greater sage-grouse and the hundreds of other wildlife that depend on sagebrush habitat.

Implementation

Partners will now begin to implement their commitments whether under state and federal plans, individual conservation agreements, or the Rangeland Fire Strategy. The BLM and USFS plans will be implemented in close coordination with state and local partners, as well as through continued collaboration with the Sage Grouse Task Force and local working groups. FWS will remain an active partner in the sagebrush conservation effort, funding new research, providing on-the-ground support for private landowners, as well as federal, state, industry and conservation partners.

Enduring Benefits for All

Restoring the greater sage-grouse will benefit hundreds of other native plants and animals and communities across the West. What's more, these conservation efforts are led and strengthened by effective partnerships – ensuring that the gains we make for the greater sage-grouse will endure.



Sagebrush in the Dakotas

All photos credit to and courtesy of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service unless specified otherwise.

Sage Grouse Initiative 2.0

Since 2010, SGI has focused on arresting habitat loss in the highest priority areas for conservation from ex-urban development and conifer encroachment, and on reducing greater sage-grouse collisions with high-risk fences.

NRCS has committed to invest another \$211 million in SGI 2.0, with an expanded mission of addressing the synergistic problems of invasive weeds and wildfires, on slowing the loss of sagebrush to agricultural conversion and on protecting wet meadow habitat critical for brood-rearing. The program's goal is to bring the total amount of private land under conservation to 8 million acres.

New for the Dakotas in 2015, SGI 2.0 will complete one-third of a \$146 million easement goal by 2018, a campaign that when finished in a decade, will reduce bird losses to cultivation by 87 percent.