
Greater Sage–Grouse

Centrocercus urophasianus

Aves — Galliformes — Phasianidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Apparently secure (G4)
Statewide: Imperiled (S2)
ESA: No Status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: Sensitive
BLM: Rangewide /Globally imperiled (Type 2)
IDFG: Game bird

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Habitat degradation; regional threats and population declines.

TAXONOMY

Although Aldrich (1946) described an eastern and western subspecies, recent genetics analysis (Benedict et al. 2003) did not support the subspecific delineation. The significantly smaller Gunnison sage–grouse is a separate species.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The greater sage–grouse occurs in 11 states and 2 Canadian provinces including: Alberta, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. This bird is widely distributed throughout sagebrush–dominated habitats of southern Idaho (Schroeder et al. 1999).

POPULATION TREND

Recent analysis of breeding population data indicates that 11 of 13 (85%) states and provinces showed significant long–term declines in size of active leks. Greater sage–grouse populations declined at an overall rate of 2.0% per year from 1965–2003. From 1965–1985, the sage–grouse population declined at an average of 3.5% per year. However, from 1986–2003 the population declined at a much lower overall rate of 0.4%. In Idaho, sage–grouse populations declined at an overall rate of 1.5% per year from 1965–2003. In Idaho, sage–grouse populations declined at an overall rate of 1.5% per year from 1965–2003. From 1965–1984, the population declined an average of 3.0% per year but from 1985–2003 the population had an annual change of only 0.1% per year (Connelly et al. 2004).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Greater sage–grouse are totally dependent on sagebrush–dominated habitats. Breeding habitat (areas used for breeding, nesting, and early brood rearing) is characterized by sagebrush canopy coverage of 15–25% with a healthy grass and forb understory (Connelly et al. 2000). During summer, sage–grouse may use a variety of habitats but are generally found in areas with succulent forbs and insects. Winter

habitat consists of relatively large areas of sagebrush with 10–25% canopy cover. In early spring the diet consists largely of sagebrush and some forbs. During later spring and summer, the bird's diet includes insects and forbs. Sage–grouse feed exclusively on sagebrush during winter. Clutch varies from 6–9 eggs and incubation time ranges from 25–29 days. Chicks are precocial and grow rapidly. Breeding is common for yearling hens and yearlings often have smaller clutches than adults (Schroeder et al. 1999). Sage–grouse are typically long–lived with low reproductive rates compared to other game birds. Survival differs among age and gender groups and adult females tend to have higher survival rates than males or juvenile females.

ISSUES

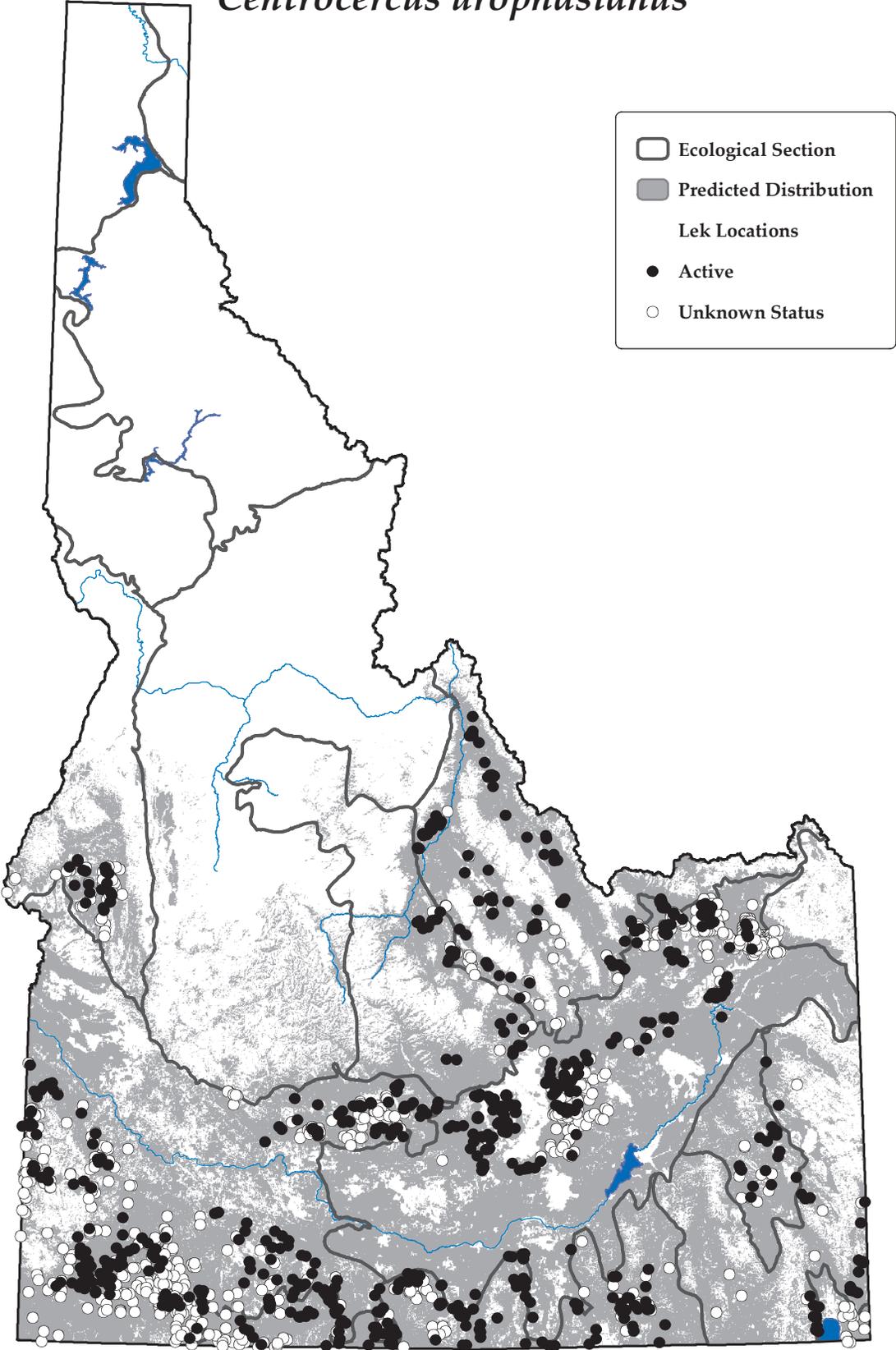
In general, the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat are the major threats to the greater sage–grouse in Idaho (Connelly et al. 2004). Factors contributing to habitat degradation include alteration of historical fire regimes, conversion of land to farming or intensive livestock forage production, water developments, use of herbicides and pesticides, establishment of invasive species, urbanization, energy development, mineral extraction, and recreation (Connelly et al. 2004).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Identify, protect, and maintain existing sagebrush seasonal habitats giving highest priority to breeding and winter habitats. Reclaim damaged and lost habitats through rangeland rehabilitation projects. Plan projects to significantly reduce fragmentation of existing sagebrush habitats and to reduce human disturbance. “The Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage–Grouse in Idaho” (in prep.) will provide considerable information to aid in the conservation of sage–grouse in Idaho, including status by Sage–grouse Planning Area.

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Map created on September 22, 2005 and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center. Sources: Point data are from Idaho Conservation Data Center, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (2005). Predicted distribution is from the Wildlife Habitat Relationships Models (WHR), A Gap Analysis of Idaho: Final Report. Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Moscow, ID (Scott et al. 2002). Predicted distribution is approximate (for more information, go to http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp).

