

### 3.0 NEVADA CONSERVATION GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Committee recommends a strategy for Nevada that builds upon past successful efforts, expands a multi-disciplinary approach to greater sage-grouse management under the Executive Branch to include all appropriate State Agencies, and encourages closer coordination with local working groups, BLM, USFS and USFWS, and industry and interest groups.

The Committee recommends the State of Nevada work to achieve conservation through a policy of “no net loss” for activities that can be controlled such as a planned disturbance or development. For natural disasters and acts of God such as wildland fire, the Committee recommends that the State of Nevada aggressively pursue presuppression, initial attack and restoration of affected areas but believes that the State, together with its citizens and industries, should be held harmless for such occurrences that are beyond their control.

***The committee recommends that the overriding objective for all management actions in Sage-grouse Management Areas is to “avoid, minimize and mitigate” impacts to sage-grouse habitat.***

This is a fundamental hierarchical decision process that seeks to:

**Avoid** – Where ever possible, eliminate conflicts by relocating disturbance activities in order to conserve sage-grouse and their habitat.

**Minimize** – Modify proposed actions and develop permit conditions to include measures that lessen adverse effects to sage-grouse and their habitat to the furthest extent practical such as reducing the activity footprint, seasonal avoidance, co-location of structures, etc.

**Mitigate** – Only after all appropriate and practicable avoidance and minimization measures have been taken, offset residual adverse effects in occupied and suitable sage-grouse habitat by implementing additional actions that will result in replacement of an asset (mainly habitat) that will be lost as a result of a development action.

Three general conservation policies provide the foundation and vision for a coordinated and cooperative management approach for conservation of greater sage-grouse in Nevada:

1. Conserve greater sage-grouse and their habitat in Nevada consistent with maintaining economic vitality of the State.
2. In areas of proposed disturbance, project proponents should first expend all means to avoid, then minimize and finally mitigate disturbance of occupied, suitable, or potential sage-grouse habitat.
3. Due to the broad reach of sage-grouse habitat, effective management and implementation of sage-grouse conservation actions must be conducted through a collaborative, interagency approach that engages local, private, non-governmental, state, Tribal and federal stakeholders to achieve sufficient conservation of the greater sage-grouse.

The mitigation strategy recognizes impacts and threats and creates the best possible outcome for sage grouse. This includes active efforts to use mitigation funding in areas where sage-grouse will derive the

most benefit, even if those areas are not adjacent to or in the vicinity of impacted populations. Within Sage-grouse Management Areas, confirmation of actual conditions must be completed to understand if a proposed activity or disturbance will occur in occupied, suitable, or potential sage-grouse habitat.

Sage-grouse are known to be an “umbrella species” for many sagebrush habitat-obligate and associated species. Therefore, enhancement and restoration measures that bring resiliency and restore ecological functions to sagebrush-perennial grass habitats also serve to ensure quality habitat for sage thrasher, sage sparrow, Brewer’s sparrow, sagebrush vole, pygmy rabbit, pronghorn antelope, mule deer and many other species.

### **3.1 Management Strategy In Occupied Habitat**

1. Manage to avoid surface disturbance and habitat alteration to the greatest extent possible. If avoidance is not possible, disturbances greater than or equal to five percent of 640 acres (32 acres) within occupied habitat will trigger habitat evaluations and consultation with the Sage-grouse Technical Team (see Section 4.2). This consultation will occur within the administrative framework of overseeing this Strategic Plan. New activities at any level of disturbance should minimize impacts to sage-grouse and their habitat.
2. Limit habitat treatments in winter ranges to actions that maintain or expand current levels of sagebrush available in winter.
3. Proactively monitor habitat and manage to ensure that it retains the attributes necessary to support viable bird populations.
4. Adequately fund aggressive documentation of habitat used by sage-grouse.

### **3.2 Management Strategy In Potential Habitat**

1. Potential habitat should be used for habitat enhancement and restoration to expand or restore sage-grouse habitat that has been adversely impacted either by acts of nature (wildfire, PJ encroachment) or by human activities.
2. Limit habitat disturbance, including habitat improvement projects, in potential sage-grouse habitat to not more than twenty percent per year, per Sage-grouse Management Area, unless habitat treatments show credible positive results (Connelly, et al. 2000). This limit does not apply to removal of invasive or encroaching vegetation where such removal actually creates habitat.
3. Potential habitat should be prioritized for enhancement, restoration, and mitigation opportunities based on data-driven models that incorporate ecological site potential where the highest priority sites have the greatest potential for successful results.

### **3.3 Management Strategy In Non-Habitat**

1. Use areas designated as non-habitat within Sage-grouse Management Areas to site activities that are not geographically restricted to specific resources and to avoid investing habitat enhancement, restoration, or mitigation funds in areas with little or no potential for effective results.

2. No additional management provisions are proposed for non-habitat areas within Sage-grouse Management Areas.

### **3.4 Interim Strategy**

1. Direct relevant State Agencies to adopt and implement the strategies and maps, and propose the policies as an interim policy for the BLM and USFS to adopt in place of their Interim Memorandum Guidance as well as an Alternative in their Land Use Plan updates and USFS Resource Management Plan updates
2. Allow ongoing projects or previously authorized activities to move forward without delay.
3. Allow mitigation activities to occur and be accounted for without delay.
4. Designate NDOW as the primary agency for making habitat determinations consistent with this Strategic Plan, in consultation with the BLM, USFS and USFWS.
5. Request federal land management agencies to work with NDOW and incorporate habitat determinations in land use decisions based on timely and complete reviews of existing information.
6. Adequately fund NDOW activities to ensure compliance with the policies established in this Strategic Plan.
7. Deliver a formal request to the BLM and USFS to coordinate their interim management policies in a manner consistent with the policies proposed in this Strategic Plan.
8. As soon as possible, take all steps necessary to establish a functioning Sage-grouse Advisory Council and Technical Team identified in Section 4.0 of this Strategic Plan.
9. Advocate for additional federal allocations for sage-grouse conservation and restoration activities.