



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Greater Sage-Grouse (sage-grouse; *Centrocercus urophasianus*) were once found throughout most sagebrush habitats east of the Cascade Mountains but by the early 1900s sage-grouse were extirpated in the Columbia Basin as a result of European settlement and conversion of sagebrush steppe to agriculture. Sage-grouse currently occupy sagebrush habitats within Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur and Union Counties of Oregon. Similar declines in sage-grouse distribution and population abundance have occurred across their range in western North America.

Over the past 75 years, many regulatory and management actions have been enacted to address these concerning sage-grouse population trends and declines in habitat quantity and quality in Oregon. Conservation efforts were accelerated in 2005 with the establishment of ODFW's 1st edition of the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (CAAS) and again in 2011 with the updated 2nd edition of the CAAS. The scope of sage-grouse conservation in Oregon was broadened in 2015 with the publication of the Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan (Action Plan), which was adopted by the Governor's Executive Order 15-18, serving as the overarching plan for Oregon. The Action Plan specifies the roles and responsibilities of conservation partners and agencies.

The 3rd edition of the CAAS will define, clarify, and update how the Department will meet its obligations under the Action Plan. Upon adoption, the revised CAAS will provide the most specific guidance to date on ODFW's roles and responsibilities related to sage-grouse management in the context of the vast sage-grouse partnership landscape. The CAAS is underpinned by the best available science in the framework of adaptive management, understanding that knowledge and situations are dynamic. This approach involves adaptation and a well-informed prioritization of work.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The department used several approaches to gather input on the CAAS:

- The department formed an external advisory team with representatives from state and federal agencies, universities, non-profit organizations, counties, and private citizens.
- Staff published updates on a website, including draft chapters for review by the general public where comments could be either emailed directly to the authors or via an upload from the website.
- Staff hosted an internal webinar for ODFW staff and a public webinar for any interested parties that was preceded by a news release and the availability of the draft chapters.

- Staff also provided an update to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission at the August Commission meeting.

In anticipation of the Commission consideration, the department published notice of the proposed rulemaking (Attachment 2). Additionally, the public has an opportunity to provide comment prior to (in writing) or (orally) during the hearing that occurs at the September Commission meeting.

ISSUE 1

Approve amendment to OAR 635-140-0000 and adopt the updated Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon.

ANALYSIS

The updated CAAS provides guidance on the responsibilities of the department specific to the management of Oregon’s greater sage-grouse populations. The authors utilized an external advisory team of experts to guide the process and contracted with USGS to develop a new population model. The updated document contains hundreds of new references to scientific research that helped guide the department’s management approach.

Key updates in the revised CAAS include:

- Clarifying the relationship between this document and the 2015 *Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan*, including defining roles and responsibilities of ODFW.
- Highlighting relevant research advancements that inform our understanding of threats to sage-grouse populations and their habitats. This includes threats of wildfire, invasive annual grasses, and conifer encroachment, and includes strategies to prioritize conservation efforts based on protecting core habitat.
- Describing advancements in how ODFW monitors sage-grouse, including development of a new population model, standardizing definitions of leks, and providing population trend data at the Priority Area for Conservation (PAC) level.
- Incorporating the updated sage-grouse core and low-density habitat maps approved by the Commission in December 2023.
- Assessing sage-grouse habitat using remote-sensed “Threat-Based Ecostates” which will allow more rapid assessment of habitat quality. The CAAS establishes objectives for statewide and PAC-scale habitat Ecostates to meet life history needs of sage-grouse.
- Updating collaborative partnerships working to conserve sage-grouse and their habitats in Oregon, including clarifying roles of ODFW, the Sage-Grouse Conservation Partnership, and Sage-grouse Local Implementation Teams within the structure of the CAAS and the 2015 *Oregon Sage-grouse Action Plan*.

- Outlining regulatory mechanisms for sage-grouse habitat protection, including an overview of the Sage-grouse Mitigation Program and associated protocols, which was not yet established when the 2011 CAAS was authored.
- Describing protocols and best management practices associated with sage-grouse harvest, conservation translocation, and trapping and marking, and providing a position statement on captive rearing.

The proposed amendments to the Oregon Administrative Rules reflect updates to population and habitat goals and objectives which represent the best available knowledge and science as described in the CAAS revision. These amendments reflect the shift to Ecostate-based habitat goals and objectives, population management at the statewide and PAC scale, and updates references to the Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Mitigation Program Operation and Administration Manual.

The updated CAAS and associated administrative rules have been subject to an extensive review process and provide improved clarity to how the department manages the state's sage-grouse populations.

OPTIONS

1. Amend OAR Chapter 635, Division 140 as recommended by staff.
2. Modify staff recommendations

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt staff recommendations

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to amend OAR Chapter 635, Division 140 as proposed by staff and shown in Attachment 3.

Effective Date: *Upon Filing*