



WYOMING GREATER SAGE-GROUSE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Doug McWhirter, Chairman
Jackson Hole Sage-grouse Technical Team

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

Dear Doug,

The Statewide Wyoming Adaptive Management Working Group (S-AMWG) has reviewed your observations and recommendations pursuant to a “soft trigger” response for the Jackson Core Area based on the declining population trend. We found your report to be thorough, thoughtful, and well-intentioned, and agree with your assessment of the situation (i.e. the causal factors) and generally concur with your recommendations to conserve, restore, and enhance habitat, and re-establish connectivity. We do, however, find that there should be additional time and considerations before beginning any translocation efforts to allow for habitat assessments, historical information gathering, securing a source population, and a well-developed translocation methodology.

The S-AMWG did not feel it was prudent to accelerate relocation of birds from another core area in 2020. It is unclear if the habitat in the relocation area is adequate to support new birds. While there are indications that the area has supported more birds in the past, the most recent habitat assessments indicate that there may not be an adequate amount of suitable habitat at this point in time. We applaud your efforts and those of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), National Park Service (NPS), US Forest Service and others to conduct an in-depth habitat evaluation in the coming season to help to understand habitat limitations or other issues that could influence the success of any translocation efforts. This evaluation would also allow the NPS time to conduct an environmental assessment, which would be necessary before translocated birds can be moved into their jurisdiction. We would also like to see additional information regarding the history of the Gros Ventre population. There are some indications that this population was the result of transplanted birds more than 60 years ago, while other indications hold that this is a resident population. Until we better understand the history of the population and how it has evolved, we would recommend waiting to transplant grouse. We are appreciative that genetics were a consideration during your assessment and while we agree with your suggestion that the translocation source should be as geographically and genetically close as possible (i.e. Sublette County), lek counts from that area are also declining and there are concerns that

removal of birds could have unforeseen consequences. This issue should be openly discussed with the local working group (LWG) in the source area to gain their concurrence for the translocation birds. We have additional concerns about the methodology that would be used to translocate birds. At this time, it is unclear whether the best method is translocation of hens with chicks, hens and males without chicks, chicks alone, or other options that may arise. We understand the WGFD is developing protocols that will outline this process, and those will be available in the 2021 season. As a result, we agree that it is better to wait for any translocation until such guidance is available.

In addition to the above concerns, the issue of predator control was raised by our group. Generally, translocations in the West have been augmented with predator control to increase success; in this case that may be a much higher bar to meet given the multiple land ownership jurisdictions in the area. This aspect of any translocation should be well-understood and where appropriate, managed ahead of any translocation.

Finally, we recognize that any determination to conduct a translocation is the jurisdiction of the WGFD, and their recommendations relative to timing, source population, methodology and other requirements is essential. We will share our recommendations with them to assure that everyone remains advised and aware of the issue.

Thanks to you and your team for a very comprehensive look at this issue. We look forward to working with you as we move into the coming year and beyond.

Sincerely,

Bob Budd, Chairman

Wyoming Sage-grouse Implementation Team