

Protocol Efforts: Sage Grouse
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The sage grouse is a species almost exclusively dependent on sagebrush habitat. It is declining in numbers throughout most of its range and has been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act (1973) (ESA). The US Fish and Wildlife Service is now conducting a status review as part of the listing process under ESA. The Chief of the Forest Service and Directors of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management have agreed to do all possible to avoid the listing of the sage grouse. Previous funding levels have proved inadequate to obtain sufficient status and trend information to address management issues related to this species.

An effort is underway to develop state-wide approach to inventory sage grouse. The umbrella approach will likely be that developed by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and published through the University of Idaho Press. This approach, however, does not provide for the identification of Distinction Population units [(DPS), the unit by which the US Fish and Wildlife Service lists species under ESA, and it has been challenged at a recent west-wide and agency/university workshop on estimating sage grouse numbers.

An approach outlined in the Forest Service Multispecies Inventory and Monitoring Technical Guide is to use DNA. The Rocky Mountain Research Station will conduct an evaluation of DNA as an approach to estimate sage grouse numbers. This approach could serve to 1) accurately estimate sage grouse numbers on or near a lek, 2) evaluate the tradition approach, 3) provide important information on DPSs, i.e., how the Forest Service lands fit into the conservation of sage grouse, and 4) overcome sampling problems evident in current methods. The work also will be coordinated with state-wide inventory efforts as a means to validate existing methods.

This work will begin in the spring of 2004 with an evaluation report due by December 2004.