



ALBERTA'S GREATER SAGE-GROUSE - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) Does AWA support grazing of private and public lands?

AWA has a long history of recognizing the incredible contribution southeastern Alberta landholders have made in conserving critical habitat for sage-grouse and other native prairie species through responsible stewardship. Grazing regimes ensuring light to moderate utilization (25 to 40% of current annual production with some heavily grazed areas for at risk species like Mountain Plover) and the implementation of techniques known to produce a patchy mosaic of good cover and bare ground have helped to protect remaining parcels of habitat. Adjustment of grazing pressures during times of drought, the avoidance of concentrated grazing or supplemental feeding in sagebrush communities and voluntary restrictions to the placement of salt, minerals, supplements or fences within 0.8 km of lek sites minimize impacts to sage-grouse populations in Canada. It is AWA's position that designation of critical habitat for sage grouse must continue to recognize the important role that grazing plays in maintaining habitats for a diversity of grassland species, including those at risk. AWA looks forward to partnering with landholders in their efforts towards ensuring native species' conservation.

2) Does AWA support reintroduction programs for sage-grouse in Alberta?

AWA applauds the Alberta government's acknowledgement of the urgency needed in preventing further sage-grouse population decline. However, augmentation through translocation does not address the underlying issues related to species' collapse provincially and nationally. Habitat loss, disturbance and degradation as a result of industrial development, increased human traffic and extensive human infrastructure on the landscape remain key factors in the loss of many of Alberta's species and are predominant influences affecting sage-grouse recovery. At this stage, AWA encourages governments to prioritize and pursue endeavors focused on securement of critical sage-grouse habitat through deindustrialization and restoration initiatives rather than continuance of population augmentation schemes.

3) How does AWA support current and future habitat protection measures?

Just 4,000 km² of sage-grouse habitat is estimated to remain in Alberta. AWA recognizes the importance of working with landowners and lease holders, oil and gas developers and government groups to expand designated critical habitat areas and rehabilitate currently protected lands. Through initiatives such as the Sage-grouse Partnership, AWA aims to create an open forum between stakeholders that will allow direct and meaningful discussions regarding current barriers to the species' recovery. AWA believes





identification of commonalities between such groups is inherent to prioritizing recovery strategies that can be implemented in the short-term while being sustained in the long-term. AWA will continue to advocate cooperative efforts aimed at further designation and protection of critical habitat within the Milk River-Sage Creek and Pakowki Lake areas of southeastern Alberta. Thanks to a dedicated group of landholders, managers and targeted conservation initiatives this area hosts the last remaining sage-grouse habitat and leks in the province! AWA works to ensure recovery and expansion of this preeminent habitat is championed and supported.

4) How does AWA view motorized vehicle use in critical habitat?

Road development and use in critical habitat areas remains a primary cause of habitat fragmentation, hindering recovery efforts. AWA supports speed restrictions and prohibition of all motorized vehicles activity in critical habitat during breeding and nesting season and within 15 km of active sage-grouse leks. Until sage-grouse populations have fully recuperated a moratorium on new developments, including roads, should be considered within critical habitat.

5) How has AWA addressed federal response to the sage-grouse crisis?

In 2009, AWA and other environmental organizations won a successful court case to compel the federal minister to recognize critical habitat for sage-grouse. Following release of 2011 population tallies indicting only 13 males were observed on leks in Alberta and 35 in Saskatchewan; AWA hosted an emergency summit attended by leading sage-grouse scientists, landowners, conservationists and environmental organizations. As a product of the Summit, a communiqué outlining the actions required by both provincial and federal governments to prevent the extirpation of the Greater Sage-grouse and protect its habitat in both Alberta and Canada was produced.

In November 2012, Ecojustice submitted a legal petition on behalf of AWA and 11 other environmental groups requesting the federal Environment Minister, Peter Kent issue an *emergency protection order* under the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*. Failure of the Minister to address the petition was interpreted as delinquency in upholding his duties under SARA, resulting in subsequent legal action through Ecojustice. In March 2012 a Minister's Certification and Objection was issued claiming "Cabinet Confidence" prevented the Minister from disclosing whether he has made a decision regarding the issuance of an emergency order.

AWA remains vigilant in its advocacy for an emergency protection order through the appeals process and continues to petition for additional allocation of critical habitat.

