



## What We Heard About the Amended Recovery Strategy for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Canada

### Background

Environment Canada is developing an *Amended Recovery Strategy for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Canada*. This document will update the original Recovery Strategy for the Greater Sage-Grouse in Canada, which was first written in 2008, then updated in 2009. Valuable input to the amended strategy was provided by landowners, stakeholders, and other interested parties at information sessions in Eastend, and Val Marie, Saskatchewan, and Manyberries, Alberta, held between June 24 and June 27, 2013. About 87 people attended these sessions. We have incorporated what we heard at those meetings into the amended Recovery Strategy, wherever possible



Consultation meeting, Manyberries, AB, June 25, 2013 © Amy Proven

### What we heard, and how input was addressed

Participants commented on a number of topics. The main comments, and how they were addressed, were as follows:

#### **Predation is the main problem; especially from coyotes but also other species.**

**What we did:** The *Threats* section of the recovery strategy called “Increased Predator Pressure” now states that several people who attended Sage-Grouse consultation meetings said that populations of predators, especially coyotes and swift fox, have increased substantially and these increases are the main reason for the decline in Sage-Grouse numbers. Predation pressure is rated as a medium threat in the recovery strategy.

#### **The absence of grazing in parts of Grasslands National Park may be part of the reason for the Sage-Grouse decline within the park.**

**What we did:** The section of the recovery strategy dealing with degradation of vegetative cover has been changed to show that a conservative amount of grazing is likely good for Sage-Grouse. This threat was also updated to clarify that light grazing, compared to no grazing, is preferable. The recovery strategy refers to the necessity of grazing to maintain healthy and diverse grassland ecosystems. It also states that to effectively manage livestock grazing, it is necessary to operate and maintain infrastructure such as fencing, water sources, and salting locations to maintain healthy rangelands.

**The landscape hasn't changed in a very long time, so that can't be the cause of the Sage-Grouse decline.**

**What we did:** The *Threats* section called "Habitat Conversion to Crop and Forage Production" now indicates that some individuals believe that land use in the remaining Canadian range of the Sage-Grouse has changed very little, if at all, over the past several decades.

**Maps showing the location of the leks were too precise, and shouldn't be shared because they are so sensitive. Biologists and birders are disturbing the birds.**

**What we did:** Precise lek locations were removed from a map in the recovery strategy and replaced by a less precise map that summarizes the number of leks at a scale of 10 x 10 km. Using a less precise map is a compromise between the need to protect leks from disturbance by the public and the need to provide land managers with general locational information so they can carry out their activities in ways that protect leks from disturbance.

**West Nile virus, 'natural cycles', severe winters, wet springs and climate change are also factors.**

**What we did:** Severe weather, drought and West Nile virus are rated as high level threats in the recovery strategy. The effects of some of these threats are worsened by low population size.

**It seems contradictory that some activities that are necessary to carry out ranching activities have also been identified as activities that can be harmful to Sage-Grouse.**

**What we did:** The recovery strategy acknowledges the importance of light to moderate grazing in creating and maintaining habitat for Sage-Grouse; overgrazing can be harmful. The section dealing with the installation of water pumps and water wells has been removed as an example of an activity that could result in destruction of critical habitat.

**Voluntary approaches will work better than regulatory ones for Sage-Grouse recovery.**

**What we did:** In the recovery strategy, we acknowledged that it will be necessary to develop and implement habitat-protection and stewardship plans, emphasizing voluntary approaches.

**It is unfair to burden local people with the socio-economic consequences of implementing this strategy.**

**What we did:** The *Species at Risk Act* recognizes the importance of stewardship approaches that can support voluntary actions to protect species at risk. Developing locally-acceptable measures for supporting Sage-Grouse recovery efforts will be a focus of action plans for the species. An evaluation of the socio-economic costs and the benefits will be done at the action planning stage.

## **Next Steps**

The proposed *Amended Recovery Strategy for Greater Sage-Grouse* in Canada was posted on the Species at Risk (SAR) Public Registry for a 60-day public comment period on December 20, 2013: [http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default\\_e.cfm?documentID=1458](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/document/default_e.cfm?documentID=1458). You are invited to provide comments on the SAR Public Registry by February 17, 2014.

Thank you for sharing your views. Environment Canada appreciates your time and participation as we work together to recover this species.