



Alberta Wilderness Association
"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

Sept 29, 2022

The Honourable Whitney Issik
Minister of Environment and Parks Alberta
323 Legislature Building 10800 - 97 Avenue Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
By Email: aep.minister@gov.ab.ca

RE: Greater sage-grouse population decline

Dear Minister Issik,

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is writing to request further habitat protection measures to save Alberta's endangered greater sage-grouse. Recent conservation and reclamation efforts have slowed their decline yet have proven insufficient to recover sage-grouse populations. Nationally, only an estimated 250 individuals remain, and Alberta counted just 22 males on leks in 2022. The population and range declined by 90% in the past decades and have shown little to no signs of recovery.

Sage-grouse are an iconic prairie bird, best known for their elaborate mating displays. Importantly, sage-grouse are considered an indicator species for the sagebrush ecosystem, an ecosystem that supports over 350 species throughout the North American Great Plains. Sage-grouse are a priority At Risk species that Alberta has committed to restoring through the provincial recovery program for species at risk. The critically low sage-grouse populations, despite translocation efforts and captive breeding programs, indicates worsening conditions, and more must be done to address the health of the ecosystem.

The destruction of essential sage-grouse habitat persists. While conversion to cropland has slowed, overgrazing and water management, both related to agriculture, are still threats. Other development, including oil and gas and infrastructure expansion, as well as rising interest in helium exploration and renewable energy, also encroaches on the surviving sagebrush landscape. Protection of this habitat is vital to conserving sage-grouse populations and many other species at risk.

We ask your Ministry to extend the current protective notations covering 42 townships to the range necessary for a sustainable sage-grouse population, and enhance protections around important sagebrush habitat to prohibit new surface disturbances. We also request AEP strengthens support for policies and incentives to cease the loss of native prairie and valuable habitat, and to accelerate reclamation and habitat improvement.

A primer on the history, conservation and ongoing threats to greater sage-grouse is in AWA's attached August 2022 article, "Greater Sage-grouse: A Symbol of the Prairies".

We look forward to your response to this urgent request at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruiping Luo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ruiping Luo
Conservation Specialist