

# The Greater Sage-Grouse:

Hunter opinions regarding potential conservation strategies in eleven western states

For:  
National Wildlife Federation

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## Overview

Greater sage-grouse are a native game bird providing hunting and viewing opportunities in the Western U.S. They depend on sagebrush ecosystems and these lands also support many other fish and game species. Habitat loss, invasive species, fire and other impacts have led to significant sage-grouse declines and lost hunting opportunities. As a result, the bird may become listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). State and federal wildlife agencies are considering plans to conserve sage-grouse habitat in a way that may prevent ESA listing and avoid hunting restrictions on public lands.

Between September 23rd and October 3rd, 2014, an online survey was conducted by Southwick Associates and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) to gauge the opinions of hunters regarding potential sage-grouse conservation strategies. Residents of eleven states within the range of the greater sage-grouse were randomly selected for participation in the survey<sup>1</sup>. Screener questions in the survey were used to identify persons who held a valid hunting license in their home state within the past three years. In total, 1,335 surveys were completed by hunters. The sample was stratified to provide an oversampling of hunters in Colorado, Montana and Nevada to provide statistically valid results for those individual states<sup>2</sup>. The disproportionate number of responses from those states was addressed with weighting factors for the overall region-wide analysis.

Within the NWF survey, a set of demographic questions was included in order to test for potential bias between the survey respondents and the hunter population. A rake weighting procedure was applied to the NWF survey results to correct for any observed differences between the respondents and the hunter population<sup>3</sup>.

## Survey Sample

Respondents: 1,335

Maximum Margin of Error (95% Confidence): 2.7%

## Results

In the following pages, we present the text of the questions as they appeared in the survey followed by a summary of the responses.

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<sup>1</sup> States surveyed include Northern California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

<sup>2</sup> The relatively small hunter population in Nevada limited the total numbers of respondents in that state to fewer than needed for high statistical reliability for that individual state.

<sup>3</sup> Hunter population demographics were estimated using data from the USFWS 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Watching ([http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/2011\\_Survey.htm](http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/2011_Survey.htm)).

## Summary Observations

Nearly four out of five hunters in the West have hunted or fished on public lands and the results of this large survey show clearly that they appreciate and understand the importance of protecting wildlife habitat on federal lands. While recognizing the competing demands for federal lands, the responses to the survey make plain that hunters favor conservation efforts that are aimed at preserving wildlife habitat and maintaining opportunities to fish and hunt on those lands. With the greater sage-grouse as a specific case, large majorities of hunters favor steps to limit activities that might jeopardize the quality of sage-grouse habitat or hinder the public's enjoyment of the natural environment on those lands.

- From a list of eleven different uses of federal lands, the two that ranked highest in importance are providing habitat for fish and wildlife, and providing hunting and fishing opportunities. Over 90% of hunters identified those uses as somewhat or very important and they were deemed as “very important” by 64% and 55% of hunters, respectively.
- The least important uses of federal lands, according to hunters, are providing opportunities for motorized recreation and providing minerals and metals from mining operations (47% and 40% of hunters, respectively, are neutral or view those uses as unimportant).
- Nine out of ten hunters believe it is important to take action to protect sage-grouse habitat within their state. Moreover, 84% of hunters support steps by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to protect critical sage-grouse habitat even if it means limiting energy development, grazing rights or access for motorized recreation on those lands.
- Nearly 81% of hunters see value in providing state agencies with a greater role in protecting and restoring sage-grouse habitat on state-owned and private lands if it part of a broader strategy to prevent the bird from being listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.
- Hunters generally link protection of sage-grouse habitat with maintaining healthy populations of other wildlife species. Over 81% of hunters are at least somewhat convinced that steps taken to protect the sage-grouse, such as maintaining large tracts of undisturbed lands or limiting resource extraction activities, also benefits other game species that share the same habitat (e.g., elk, mule deer, pronghorn) and preserves hunting traditions that have been long associated with the American West.

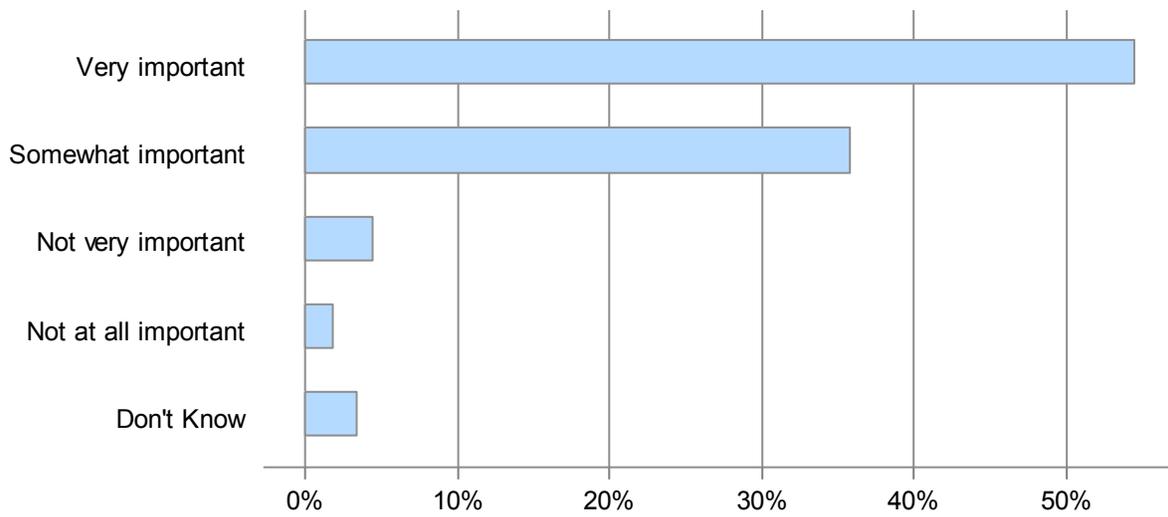
**1. There are many uses of Federal lands in your state that benefit people, the economy and wildlife. Please rate the importance of each activity on public lands in your state.**

Percentage of Respondents in Each Category

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Not at all important</i>	<i>Somewhat unimportant</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Somewhat important</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Total</i>
Provide water for agriculture, municipal drinking supplies and industrial needs	1.3%	3.4%	9.0%	36.3%	50.1%	100.0%
Provide hunting and fishing opportunities	1.0%	2.1%	6.5%	35.8%	54.5%	100.0%
Provide motorized recreation (ATVs, motorcycles, and other off-road vehicles)	7.4%	12.6%	26.7%	31.3%	22.1%	100.0%
Provide non-motorized recreational opportunities (camping, hiking, rock climbing, etc.)	1.8%	3.0%	11.9%	38.6%	44.7%	100.0%
Provide timber	3.4%	5.9%	20.4%	37.4%	32.9%	100.0%
Provide minerals and metals from mining operations	4.6%	10.3%	25.3%	33.9%	25.9%	100.0%
Provide refuge for rare and threatened wildlife and plants	1.8%	5.6%	13.2%	33.3%	46.0%	100.0%
Provide places for people to experience solitude in a natural setting	1.4%	4.3%	12.7%	38.8%	42.9%	100.0%
Provide energy (oil, gas, coal, wind, solar)	4.5%	9.0%	22.1%	34.7%	29.8%	100.0%
Provide habitat for fish and wildlife	1.1%	1.7%	5.7%	27.5%	64.0%	100.0%
Provide grazing for cattle and other livestock	3.4%	8.4%	18.8%	36.3%	33.2%	100.0%

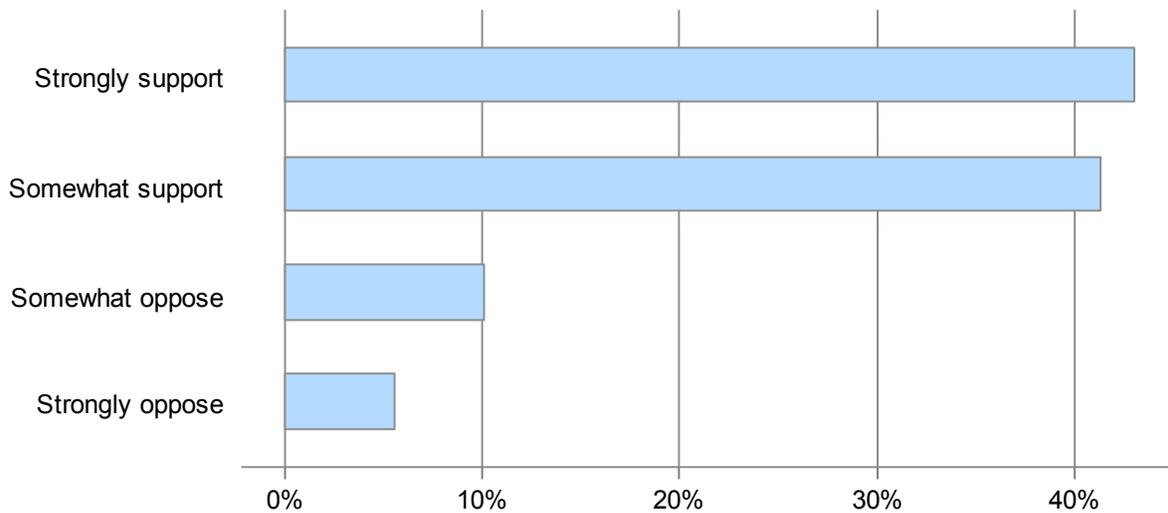
**2. Overall, how important is it to take action in your state to protect the habitat where the sage-grouse and other wildlife live?**

<i>Response</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Very important	54.6	742
Somewhat important	35.8	472
Not very important	4.4	59
Not at all important	1.8	25
Don't Know	3.4	37
Total	100.0	1335



**3. Most remaining sage-grouse habitat is on public lands. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the largest land manager of sage-grouse habitat. To restore sage-grouse populations and keep these lands available for quality hunting and recreational opportunities, the BLM may impose some limits on energy development, grazing and off-road vehicle use in areas determined to be critical for sage-grouse populations. Which level of support would you give to this approach?**

<i>Response</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Strongly support	43.0	574
Somewhat support	41.3	554
Somewhat oppose	10.1	132
Strongly oppose	5.6	74
Total	100.0	1334



**4. Governors and state wildlife management agencies across the West are developing plans that will protect the sage-grouse, other wildlife, and their habitat on state and private lands. Ranchers and other landowners are involved in this process to help restore sage-grouse on their lands, maintain state control of wildlife decisions, and allow for responsible development and multiple uses on public and private lands, including energy, grazing, hunting and other recreation. Without this option, the Greater sage-grouse may be listed under the Endangered Species Act and Federal agencies will be more engaged in wildlife management and land use decisions. Considering this alternative, do you support or oppose governors and state agencies having greater control of sage-grouse on non-federal lands in your state?**

<i>Response</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Strongly support	36.2	498
Somewhat support	44.4	585
Somewhat oppose	13.0	167
Strongly oppose	6.3	82
Total	100.0	1332

