



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

Revised Oregon Sage-grouse Core and Low-Density Map December 15, 2023

BACKGROUND

The Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (2011) (Strategy and Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) Chapter 635 Division 140) defines and governs the Department's approach to sage-grouse conservation and management in Oregon. The approach relies on identification of the most productive sage-grouse populations and habitats (core areas) associated with meeting all sage-grouse life history needs to ensure population viability in Oregon. Core area habitats are those areas necessary to conserve 90% of Oregon's current sage-grouse populations, including areas with the highest densities of sage-grouse and areas that provide for breeding, wintering, and connectivity corridors for that 90%. Low-density habitats are those areas outside of designated core areas that provide breeding, summer, and migratory habitats for sage-grouse. These designations are used by the Department and other entities to guide habitat protection, restoration, mitigation, and land use decisions.

As sage-grouse populations and habitats change over time, sage-grouse core areas and low-density habitats may change. OAR Chapter 635 Division 140 establishes a process for developing, revising, and maintaining the maps that identify sage-grouse core area habitat and low-density habitat. The sage-grouse core area and low-density habitat map was last updated in 2011. Since 2011, over 150 new sage-grouse leks (breeding locations) have been discovered, while other known leks have become unoccupied, and the coordinates of over one million sage-grouse locations from GPS- or radio-marked birds have been documented. In recognition of this new information, the Department began a process to revise the core area and low-density habitat maps in 2022. This update and revision are necessary to ensure the map incorporates the best available science to identify areas that currently provide breeding, brood-rearing and summering, wintering, and migratory habitats for greater sage-grouse in Oregon.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Staff held public meetings in the six counties with sage-grouse core area and low-density habitat: Lake, Deschutes, Crook, Harney, Malheur, and Baker. Staff presented proposed revisions to The Oregon Sage-grouse Core and Low-Density Map to elected county officials or their appointees, Sage-grouse Local Implementation Teams, and members of the public. Additionally, the map was published on the SageCon website, where they were digitally accessible for anyone to view and compare changes between the old and new maps. Department district offices within sage-grouse range kept large paper maps on hand to review the updated map with landowners or other stakeholders in-person. Public comment was received through multiple pathways including an online submission portal, in person, and via email to department staff.

ISSUE 1

Revision to the Oregon Sage-grouse Core and Low-Density Habitat Map.

ANALYSIS

Consistent with the direction provided in OAR 635-140-0015, staff updated and revised the Oregon Sage-grouse Core and Low-Density Habitat Map (2023) to include new data and knowledge about Oregon's sage-grouse, including new lek locations, abandoned lek locations, and over one million new locations from GPS- or radio-marked sage-grouse from various research projects. The first phase in this extensive revision process involved inputting all these new data into the accepted model for delineating core and low-density sage-grouse habitat in Oregon, as defined in the Strategy. The next phase involved revising the model boundaries based on input from professional biologists with the department and cooperating agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Oregon Department of State Lands. Once the boundaries were refined based on local knowledge, staff presented the draft revised map to county elected officials or their appointees, Sage-grouse Local Implementation Teams, and members of the public in each of the six counties affected by the sage-grouse habitat maps. During the final phase of this project, further refinements were made to the map based on this input, resulting in an improved representation of those habitats occupied and utilized by sage-grouse in Oregon. Once approved, these maps will be used to define sage-grouse core, low-density, and general habitats as referenced in OAR 635-140-0025 Mitigation Hierarchy of Impacts in Sage-grouse Core, Low Density, and General Habitats.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt staff recommendations
2. Modify staff recommendations

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: ISSUE 1

1. Option 1

DRAFT MOTION:

I move to approve the revised Oregon Sage-grouse Core and Low-Density Habitat Map (2023) as shown in Attachment 3 and amend OAR Chapter 635 Division 140 as proposed by staff and shown in Attachment 4.

Effective Date: *Upon Filing*