

Guidance for Developing Greater Sage-Grouse & Range Management
Candidate Conservation Agreements
on National Forests and Grasslands, Rocky Mountain Region, Wyoming

Developed cooperatively by:

USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region
US Fish and Wildlife Service - Wyoming Ecological Services Office

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Background

The Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) is an agreement between the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, and the participating permittee. It provides a framework for participating permittees to voluntarily implement conservation measures for sage-grouse beyond those that they are required to implement by regulation, such as those measures required as a condition of a grazing permit. Allotment-level CCAs are agreements to implement, monitor, and report the effectiveness of conservation measures to benefit sage-grouse on their respective allotments.

Allotment-level CCAs are intended to facilitate consistent implementation of conservation measures across public and private lands where a participating permittee also has enrolled their private lands in the Greater Sage-Grouse Umbrella Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for Wyoming Ranch Management (CCAA).

Purpose

The primary purpose of the CCA is to promote grazing practices that reduce or eliminate threats to sage-grouse on enrolled allotments and to ensure that existing, neutral or beneficial grazing practices are likely to continue unaffected if the species is listed in the future. The Allotment CCA cannot be used as an instrument to bring an allotment into compliance with Forest Service regulations and policies.

The goals of the CCA are to:

- Reduce or eliminate negative impacts of rangeland management practices to sage-grouse and to support practices that are beneficial or neutral to sage-grouse on enrolled allotments;
- Provide a level of predictability for the types of activities and practices Federal land permittees are most likely to encounter if a species is listed; and
- Streamline and support the process of landowner enrollment of their private lands under the umbrella CCAA program.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service each recognize that every allotment is somewhat unique, and that the appropriate conservation measures will be site-dependent. The Fish and Wildlife Service and Forest Service will work with each participating permittee to identify the specific threats to sage-grouse on allotments and select conservation measures that remove or reduce the threats. Some conservation measures may be implemented independently by participating permittees, while others may require coordination with the agencies. There is no minimum number of conservation measures that must be implemented to qualify for a CCA, and not all threats have to be fully addressed. However, the allotment must have appropriate conservation measures that address identified threats in such a way that an overall conservation benefit to sage-grouse is achieved. If the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service cannot reach this conclusion for any specific Allotment CCA, then the agencies will not execute the Allotment CCA in question. Regardless of whether a permittee participates in a CCA, the

management actions selected in the sage-grouse RMP amendments will be applied to all activities requiring Federal authorization within the amended RMP planning area. The voluntary conservation measures included in any finalized CCA are described and communicated within the Greater Sage-Grouse Umbrella CCAA for Wyoming Ranch Management. The implementation of these measures is intended to require no additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis to implement.

Prioritization of CCA Proposals

It is recognized that Forest Service has finite resources available to process these voluntary agreements that go beyond requirements of the agency. Consequently, it is a pre-requisite that the voluntary measures being proposed must be within scope of the existing permit or lease.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office will assist the Forest Service to prioritize allotments for enrollment, but the Forest Service has full discretion to prioritize any Allotment-level CCA proposal it receives and to determine if it is in the best interest of the Forest Service to proceed with developing an Allotment CCA. In the event that more applications for enrollment in a CCA are received than the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service can process simultaneously, the following considerations may be used to help Forest Service prioritize the applications:

- Permittee has, or has made application for, a CCAA for his or her private lands that are associated with their Forest Service permitted or leased allotments.
- Allotment occurs within occupied sage-grouse core area habitat.
- Allotment has a significant component of sage-grouse core area habitat.
- Allotment provides connectivity among core area habitats or other occupied habitat.
- Allotment has an approved Allotment Management Plan (AMP).
- Allotment meets or exceeds all rangeland health standards.

Typical Responsibilities of Partners in Development and Implementation of the CCA

The Forest Service will:

- Lead the assisted preparation of any Allotment-level CCA(s).
- Ensure actions proposed in an Allotment-level CCA(s) are consistent with RMP and appropriate authorizations.
- Provide technical assistance to permittees to implement the voluntary conservation measures.
- Collect and interpret monitoring data, as agreed to in the Allotment-level CCA.
- Work with participating permittees and partner agencies (e.g., agriculture extension agents) to facilitate any rangeland monitoring required to maintain the Allotment CCA.
- Assist permittees with preparing the annual reports (CCA Outline Appendices X and Y).
- Help to compile the compliance and monitoring information received through the Allotment CCAs for an annual report for all CCAs in the Field Office/State.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will:

- Assist with preparation of Allotment CCAs.
- Assist Forest Service and Permittee/Lessee to ensure adequate baseline habitat assessment.
- Advise the Forest Service on whether conservation measures and the Allotment CCA adequately address the identified threats.
- Provide technical assistance to aid participating permittees in implementing the conservation measures.
- Review monitoring data for consistency with CCA objectives to determine if conservation measures are providing the desired benefit to sage-grouse.
- Assist permittees with preparing annual reports as needed (Appendix A and C).
- Assist the Forest Service with preparing its annual report as needed (Appendix B).
- Conduct outreach and public education to promote the conservation of sage-grouse through implementation of the Programmatic CCAA and allotment-level CCAs.

The Permittee will:

- Assist with initial assessment and preparation of Allotment-level CCA.
- Work with participating agencies to facilitate any rangeland (biological) monitoring as required to maintain the Allotment-level CCA.
- Work with Forest Service and FWS to collect or provide information and in preparation of annual reports.
- Work with Forest Service to compile compliance and monitoring information received through the Allotment-level CCA(s) as an annual report.

The Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and participating permittees agree to seek technical expertise from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in the development and implementation of Allotment CCAs, as needed and appropriate.