

**USFWS Greater Sage-Grouse CCAA for Wyoming Ranch Management
Individual CCAA Conservation Plan**

Name / Ranch: _____

Date: _____

Background

Private landowners within the State of Wyoming have an opportunity to participate in a statewide Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*; sage-grouse). Under a CCAA, property owners voluntarily commit to implementing specific conservation measures on non-Federal lands for species covered by the CCAA. In exchange, they receive assurances from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) that, if the species is listed in the future, additional conservation measures will not be required and additional land, water, or resource use restrictions under the Endangered Species Act will not be imposed on them, provided the CCAA is being properly implemented. These assurances provide considerable certainty to participating property owners regarding their activities on non-Federal lands covered by the CCAA.

Two fundamental commitments associated with implementing conservation measures for the benefit of sage-grouse include: (1) implement a conservation management plan—part of which includes grazing management—within 12 months following approval of their individual CCAA; and (2) cooperate and assist with monitoring activities and other reporting requirements identified in site-specific plans. The purpose of the present document is to provide a framework and guidance regarding fundamental components of the CCAA Conservation Plan (Plan). The information contained within this Plan will serve as the basis for developing annual monitoring activities on the enrolled property, which will be conducted by the CCAA participant (i.e., landowner). Information gathered during annual monitoring will then be used by the participant to complete the Annual Report submitted to FWS.

The Plan contains basic information concerning wildlife resources and habitat on the enrolled property in the context of farm and ranch operations currently under implementation. Guidance on Plan contents described below provides the basic information needed for Plan completion; the Plan may include additional information and be more extensive, such as plans already in place that were developed in coordination with Conservation Districts or the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The FWS recognizes that some of the basic elements of the Plan outlined below may not apply to particular properties; in that case, please make note that that element is inapplicable.

Conservation Plan Components

1. Description of Enrolled Land. Provide a description and map of the enrolled land (i.e., legal description, acres, elevation, precipitation zone, ecological site description). Map the major plant community types, other attributes, and existing sage-grouse habitat baseline conditions:

(a) *Major Plant Community Types:* provide an illustration or visual depiction of major categories of vegetation types present. Appropriate categories include: (1) sage-brush (if known, distinguish lowland and Wyoming big sage); (2) shrub/scrub/brush; (3) wetland and/or riparian; (4) grassland; (5) forested; (6) open/sparsely vegetated; (7) cultivated fields (include crop type).

(b) *Attributes (as applicable):*

- Roads
- Fences

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- Corrals, Working Pens, and Other Ranch Structures
- Unit/Pasture Names/Acres
- Livestock Watering Facilities
- Salt and Feeding Areas
- Significant Livestock Trailing and/or Bedding Areas

(c) *Existing Sage-Grouse Habitat Baseline Conditions:*

- Core Habitat
- Connectivity Habitat
- Other known habitat (leks, nesting, brood-rearing, or winter)

NOTE: The FWS recognizes that there is substantial variation across the state of Wyoming regarding sage-grouse habitat presence on private lands. While some enrolled properties will have all sage-grouse habitat types present, other properties may have very little sage-grouse habitat.

2. Grazing Management. Document livestock grazing and forage management strategies used on the operation. If a planned grazing strategy is currently in use, the plan may be incorporated by reference and attached. If no plan is currently in place, describe basic elements of livestock grazing operation including:

(a) *Pasture/Unit Use Information:* Use Table 1 and include the following: (1) species of livestock, (2) season (on and off dates), (3) number of animals; (4) dominant vegetation types (relative presence of grass, forbs, shrubs).

(b) *Management Actions:* Identify and briefly describe historic, current, and planned on-the-ground actions such as pasture brush and weed control; prescribed burning, mechanical and/or chemical treatment; wildfire prevention/control/revegetation; any other actions that are relevant to enrolled property.

3. Objectives for Enrolled Properties. The CCAA states that ranch management and grazing practices currently implemented by landowners likely result in one of two general conditions, each of which will directly inform objectives and subsequent monitoring for that property. An initial baseline assessment of known sage-grouse habitat on the property will be evaluated by the FWS based on information provided by the landowner or a Participating Agency specialist (or other agreed upon technical specialist familiar with the property), and/or information gathered during an on-site visit to determine which of the two conditions applies, or which conditions apply to specific portions of the enrolled lands:

(a) *Property contains suitable habitat currently being maintained.* In this case, the objective will be to maintain current conditions within those areas used by sage-grouse (i.e., those areas that provide some biological and/or physical needs of sage-grouse, defined as *habitat*) and, as opportunities are identified, improve those conditions for sage-grouse use. Annual reporting will provide data and information that will be used to better understand the relationship between management of the operation and the resulting utility of the habitat to sage-grouse. Management may impact (either positively or negatively) sage-grouse habitat, so as our understanding of the relationship between operation management and habitat conservation increases over time, there may be opportunities to adaptively manage operations

for sage-grouse habitat conservation through implementation of voluntary conservation measures (CMs).

(b) Property contains potentially suitable habitat not currently being maintained, but for which there exists substantial opportunity to restore, improve, and enhance through the implementation of CMs included in this CCAA. In this case, the objective will be to exploit habitat potential through implementation of a range of CM's. Grazing management CM's will have as a goal those rangeland conditions suitable for sage-grouse. Progress toward objectives will be evaluated based on compliance and biological monitoring.

4. Sage-Grouse Habitat Use. Develop a narrative describing general information concerning sage-grouse and their use of the enrolled lands. Landowners may work with a Participating Agency specialist or other agreed upon technical specialist familiar with the property. Include general information such as approximate numbers of birds observed seasonally within general locations or within plant community types identified in the Description of the Enrolled Lands section (Component #1).

5. Ranch Operations Affecting Sage-Grouse. Identify conditions and general ranch operations which have the potential to influence (either positively or negatively) greater sage-grouse or their habitats. Specifically, describe conditions and/or operations for which CMs were agreed to during the application process in order to address potential effects.

For example, identify locations that are currently being managed to maintain high quality sage-grouse habitat, such as riparian areas, leks, known nesting areas, or others, and conservation measures being implemented in order to maintain them. Alternatively, identify locations or portions of the operation for which conservation measures will be implemented in order to avoid and minimize potential impacts to sage-grouse or habitat, such as: dense stands of invasive species, livestock concentration areas in close proximity to nesting or brood-rearing habitat, salt or mineral block locations within riparian habitats, fences known or suspected of being collision risks for sage-grouse, or any other conditions or operations not listed above.

6. Wildlife. To the extent known based on observations made over the years, provide general information concerning presence of predators or other wildlife that may prey on sage-grouse present on enrolled lands including coyotes, foxes, skunks, raccoons, badgers, ravens, and crows. It is not necessary to provide detailed counts of individuals. If known, please identify localized areas used more frequently by predators and other species that prey on sage-grouse to the extent possible.

