



WYOMING AND THE GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

Sitting at the headwaters of the Missouri, Columbia, and Colorado River systems, Wyoming is a state with wide basins including sage and grasslands, striking mountain ranges, and spectacular wildlands including Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. With significant coal, oil and gas, uranium, and wind resources, Wyoming is also the nation's second largest producer of energy.

The greater sage-grouse is a large, ground-dwelling bird, found in Wyoming and ten other western states. Occupying approximately 56 percent of its historical range, evidence suggests that habitat loss and fragmentation across much of the species' range has contributed to significant population declines over the past century. Today, some of the most important remaining habitat for the greater sage-grouse is found in Wyoming, with roughly 37 percent of the remaining range-wide population located in the state.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the greater sage-grouse as a candidate species in 2010. The FWS is scheduled to decide whether to list the species as threatened or endangered in September 2015. The scheduled listing decision presents many challenges to Wyoming, but it also presents an opportunity for us to work together to protect this species, enhance agricultural operations, and simultaneously advance responsible energy development.

CREATING A WIN FOR PEOPLE, WILDLIFE AND THE ECONOMY

The Wyoming Conservation Exchange will provide incentives to landowners to conserve the greater sage-grouse and eventually other species and habitats. The Wyoming Conservation Exchange is a pro-active, collaborative solution to help steer the greater sage-grouse toward recovery, while also enabling energy development and agricultural activities.

For landowners, the Wyoming Conservation Exchange will offer the ability to earn new income by voluntarily creating and/or maintaining habitat critical to greater sage-grouse. For industry, the Wyoming Conservation Exchange will offer mitigation opportunities that are quantifiable and that can streamline regulatory approvals. For all, the Wyoming Conservation Exchange will mean continued economic development and job creation, scientifically robust, long-term conservation of habitat and wildlife.

Ranchers and farmers, conservationists, and developers from energy and other industry sectors are critical allies in building the Wyoming Conservation Exchange and helping to balance environmental and economic needs.

“By using tools that encourage collaboration and forward thinking like conservation exchanges, everyone — including the greater sage grouse — wins. That's a great outcome for ranchers, industry, and Wyoming.”

– Eric Peterson, District Manager, Sublette County Conservation District

The Wyoming Conservation Exchange is designed to achieve landscape-scale conservation through incentivized participation from landowners and industry. It builds on an evolution of existing conservation programs and works in concert with other tools, such as conservation banking.

When habitat impacts cannot be avoided or minimized, the Wyoming Conservation Exchange allows energy companies and industries to offset these impacts by purchasing credits from landowners who create, maintain, or improve habitat.

DEVELOPING, IMPLEMENTING AND OPERATING THE CONSERVATION EXCHANGE

The Wyoming Conservation Exchange grew out of a multi-year collaborative process in the Upper Green River Basin in Wyoming involving a wide-range of stakeholders. On May 22nd, 2014 the participants in this process submitted documents to state and federal wildlife agencies outlining the model and plans for the Wyoming Conservation Exchange.

The Wyoming Conservation Exchange will be operated by an Administrator who will facilitate transactions directly or through qualified third-parties; will arrange monitoring on projects on participating lands; and will track and report on progress. A statewide board of directors will select and oversee the Exchange Administrator. This board will be made up of landowners, industry representatives, conservation organizations, and academic, scientific and technical experts. State and federal wildlife experts will be invited to engage with this board once it is established.

An independent science team is developing metrics to quantify impacts (debits) and benefits (credits) to habitat generated by participants in the Exchange.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Wyoming Conservation Exchange will help prevent further habitat fragmentation and will conserve and expand habitat for the greater sage-grouse. In addition, the Exchange will help energy companies, agricultural producers, and other resource users comply with current and future regulations. By emphasizing quantifiable conservation outcomes, the Exchange will make conservation investments more effective and efficient, and result in more meaningful and long-lasting benefits.



SUPPORT FOR THE WYOMING CONSERVATION EXCHANGE

With support and engagement from ranchers, farmers, energy companies, policymakers and conservation scientists, the Wyoming Conservation Exchange will create benefits for people, wildlife, and the economy.

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Additional details relating to the Wyoming Conservation Exchange may be found on-line at:

<http://www.wyomingconservationexchange.org>