

# Greater Sage-Grouse

## Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for Ranch Management

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### Next Month's Issue

Do Ranchers Receive Credit for Removing Predators?

What are Conservation Measures?

What is a Take Permit?

What Information Does the Public Have Regarding a Ranch with a CCAA?

What is a Federal Nexus?

### How Does a Rancher Apply for CCAA?

Once a landowner decides to apply for a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurance (CCAA), they need to contact the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in Cheyenne. The Service will provide the landowner with a "pre-application" form to complete, consisting of the landowner's name(s), contact information, and other information such as legal description of property location, identification of structures, fences, pastures, and a description of land use and management.

After the pre-application process, the Service and Participating Agencies will gather maps of property boundaries, soils, ecological site information, existing shrub cover, known leks, and topographical features.

The final application stage is for the landowner to assist Participating Agencies in identifying current sage-grouse habitat conditions, potential threats from ranch management practices, and potential monitoring sites.

Approval of applications will occur about four times per year. The Service will consider high priority applications first, which include those within "core area" and properties with potential for habitat fragmentation in the near future due to development or loss of sagebrush.

### What "Assurances" Do Ranchers Receive with a CCAA?

An enrolled landowner with a completed CCAA prior to a species' listing is assured by the Service to continue their private land operations as agreed and will not require them to implement any additional conservation measures if the sage-grouse is listed on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) list.

In addition, if sage-grouse are listed, CCAA participants receive a permit allowing for incidental take of the bird. For example, if a sage-grouse is accidentally hit by a ranch vehicle or caught in a swather, the Service could not charge the landowner with the "take" of a listed species.

Unfortunately, implementation of conservation measures identified in a CCAA will not always preclude the need to list the species, as other, unrelated events or threats may still be occurring (for example, large wildfires).





## What are the Negative Impacts to a Rancher who Chooses Not To

It is important for a rancher to understand the CCAA is a voluntary agreement, but there are several disadvantages for not signing up if the bird is listed as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Some disadvantages are:

- If there is a federal nexus (e.g., federal funds used on a project) on the property, and the species is listed, the Service will require conservation measures with little opportunity for landowner input.
- Landowners do not receive assurances or a section 10a(1)(A) "Take Permit."
- Landowners lose the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive strategy to conserve sage-grouse.

*Be sure to read next month's issue to learn more about conservation measures, take permits and Federal Nexus.*

## Development of CCAA

Work with Partners to Develop Umbrella CCAA



Seek Public Comment on Umbrella CCAA



Address Public Comments and Finalize Umbrella CCAA

## Who Has Access to a Rancher's Land After a CCAA Contact is Complete?

An understandable and common fear for many ranchers is the government automatically and freely gaining access to their private land. Private landowners have the legal right to decide who has access to their property. The listing of a wildlife species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) does not create an open door for governmental intervention and access. Examples of exception may include access to investigate poaching or large wildfires.

Ranchers interested in participating in a CCAA for sage-grouse must provide access to the Service or other Participating Agency to complete compliance evaluations and provide assistance throughout the stages of the CCAA. Again, the rancher has the ability to select which individual staff will have access and are given "reasonable prior notice," which is identified in the CCAA as not less than two weeks in advance of a visit. Ranchers concerned about access should develop a list of questions to ask the Service prior to applying for a CCAA.



## Contacts

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