
RESTORATION PLAN FOR SHARP-TAILED GROUSE RECOVERY IN WESTERN MONTANA (POSTER)

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Sharp-tailed grouse are abundant east of the continental divide in Montana, however western populations were extirpated during the last century. Previous translocations of sharp-tailed grouse to prevent the collapse of western populations were unsuccessful. Interest in restoring sharp-tailed grouse to western Montana has persisted and spurred preliminary habitat evaluations of potential restoration sites. However, information is needed to inform recovery goals and develop a restoration program for the species in western Montana. At the request of Montana FWP, we developed a restoration plan that 1) evaluates the potential of identified restoration sites to support a reintroduced population of sharp-tailed grouse, and 2) describe actions needed to establish and manage a successful reintroduction of populations in western Montana. Our analyses of ecological and demographic requirements, suitability of available and potential habitat conditions, and population viability of sharp-tailed grouse indicated that a viable population of sharp-tailed grouse is likely not possible at identified recovery sites under current habitat conditions. However, population restoration in western Montana is possible with a concerted and sustained effort by multiple entities, and that the most suitable site for initial recovery efforts is within the Blackfoot Valley. We identified habitat limitations that should be addressed prior to reintroductions and developed prescriptions for population translocations and recovery, including protocols that minimize translocation-related mortalities, reduce movements away from the initial release sites, facilitate the quick establishments of leks, and assure sufficient genetic variation of founders to prevent genetic bottlenecks and inbreeding.