



Greater sage grouse
(*Centrocercus urophasianus*)

PREFACE

Carl L. Wambolt, Department of Animal and Range Sciences, Montana State University,
Bozeman MT 59717

Michael R. Frisina, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1330 West Gold Street, Butte MT
59701

The landscape of the western United States is typified by diverse sagebrush flora. Many sagebrush taxa are habitat type dominants strongly associated with native fauna. No wildlife species illustrates this association better than the sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), an important upland game bird species that is almost totally dependent on sagebrush for food and cover. The sage grouse and other native fauna associated with sagebrush plant communities have become a concern due to declining numbers in many areas. A range-wide petition has been filed for listing sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. The black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), often associated with sagebrush-grass types, also has been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Although the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service ruled that listing may be warranted, it has thus far been rejected to accommodate more immediate priorities with its status the subject of an annual review. The pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) is another species associated with sagebrush that is in decline and a petition for its listing also has been submitted. The trend indicates, as time goes on, that we should expect other indigenous wildlife that depend on sagebrush habitats to become candidates for listing. Even a relatively abundant species like the mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) has been the subject of concern for some with evidence indicating this sagebrush-associated ungulate has experienced a slow, but steady decline over portions of its range for many years. Why the decline? Part of the reason is a long-standing attitude in the West that takes sagebrush plant communities for granted or even considers them a hindrance to agricultural uses. The result has been burning, spraying, plowing, and other altering of sagebrush communities on a large scale. Some experts believe we have lost half of our original sagebrush communities, and much of that which remains has been altered by man. The growing concern over wildlife associated with sagebrush reflects the status of our existing habitats and points to a need to finally recognize sagebrush communities for their uniqueness, diversity, and intrinsic values. Only through management based on an informed understanding of the ecology of sagebrush and associated wildlife can effective conservation occur. In that vein this issue of the *Intermountain Journal of Sciences* is dedicated to a series of papers on sagebrush and sage grouse.