

HISTORY OF COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE IN THE TOBACCO VALLEY, MONTANA

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The first written records of sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) in the Tobacco Valley in northwest Montana appear in 1861 with a gap until the 1920's. Long-time local residents have memories of abundant sharp-tails in the first half of the 1900's. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks records begin in 1960. Lek surveys documented a steady decline from 1976-1987 when only three males danced on one lek. Beginning in 1987, restoration efforts began as a cooperative effort among local interested individuals, The Nature Conservancy, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, and USDA Forest Service. Between 1987 and 1997, 139 sharp-tails were transplanted to the Tobacco Valley from two locations in British Columbia and 1 in Idaho. Capture, transport, and release techniques are presented. Transplanted birds from British Columbia had satisfactory survival rates and resulted in higher counts on leks. A variety of reasons led to the cessation of transplant efforts. The last lek activity was observed in 2000 although birds were occasionally reported over the next few years. Habitat conservation efforts have been limited.