

SAGE GROUSE MOVEMENTS IN SOUTHWESTERN MONTANA™

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Sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) populations have declined throughout the western United States and in southwestern Montana since the 1970s. Conservation efforts rely on knowledge of seasonal habitat distribution and sage grouse movement patterns between these habitats. Both of these factors are poorly understood and undocumented in southwestern Montana. An ongoing, cooperative study was initiated in 1999 to radio-track sage grouse in southwestern Montana. The objective is to identify resident and migratory populations, key habitat areas, and movement patterns that would be relevant to local sagebrush and sage grouse conservation. Thirty-six sage grouse have been fitted with radio-transmitters and individually tracked for up to 24 months in the Horse Prairie/Bannack area, Sweetwater Basin, and Big Sheep Creek Basin, in Beaverhead and Madison County, near Dillon, Montana. Monitoring has been conducted aurally, with some ground locations made between flights. Relocations indicate that some groups of sage grouse are basically resident within a particular habitat complex, while others are traveling significantly greater distances to utilize suitable breeding, summer, and winter habitat. Interstate movement of sage grouse between southeastern Idaho and southwestern Montana has been confirmed. Some locally important brood rearing and summer habitats have been identified through this study. Mortality of radio-tracked birds has averaged 40-60 percent over three years. This study will also serve as a basis for expanded research.