

## **\*\*Reintroducing Sharp-Tailed Grouse to Western Montana - First Year of Translocations**

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Sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) historically occupied intermountain Grasslands west of the Continental Divide in Montana but were likely extirpated by the early 2000s. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks recently began efforts to reintroduce sharp-tailed grouse to two sites in western Montana. For prairie grouse, translocation failure rates are high, so monitoring is essential to evaluate translocation success and inform future reintroduction efforts. We monitored the dispersal movements and demography of sharp-tailed grouse captured in east-central Montana and translocated to the Blackfoot and Bitterroot Valleys in April – May 2023. We tracked 75 female grouse fitted with GPS-PTT (25 grouse), VHF (26), or Motus transmitters (24) and monitored 20 nesting attempts and 9 broods. Some PTT-tagged females made long exploratory movements following release, traveling up to 75 km from the release site. However, many birds remained within 1–5 km of the release sites or moved to properties 11–17 km from the release sites where new leks had been established. Survival was relatively low following translocation, and 100-d post-release survival was 0.28 (95% C.I.: 0.18 - 0.44). Survival increased following this initial period, and 200-d post-release survival was 0.22 (0.13 - 0.39). The nest initiation rate was high for surviving birds (0.75 for PTT-tagged females), and nests were often located near newly established lek sites. Apparent nest survival (0.45) and brood survival (0.56) were similar to resident populations of sharp-tailed grouse. Translocations and monitoring will continue through 2026, and our results will inform ongoing sharp-tailed grouse reintroduction efforts in western Montana.