Restoring Western Montana's Sharp-Tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus Phasianellus*): 2026 Progress Report

Kristina Gunderson*, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Missoula, MT
Mikel Newberg, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena, MT
Laura Dykstra, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT
Ty Smucker, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena, MT
Beau Larkin, MPG Ranch, Missoula, MT
Chris Hammond, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Kalispell, MT
Lance McNew, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT

*Indicates Presenter

**Indicates Student Presentation

Sharp-tailed grouse have been a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks priority for 35 years. Through the second half of the 1900s, sharp-tailed grouse populations west of the Continental Divide were considered isolated and extremely small, becoming extirpated by the early 2000s. Sharp-tailed grouse translocations from eastern Montana to the Bitterroot, Blackfoot and Drummond Valleys began in the fall of 2021 with 75 males. Spring 2022 our efforts were shortened due to avian influenza with 22 birds translocated. In 2023 and 2024, 144 and 212 birds were translocated respectively to the Blackfoot and Bitterroot Valleys. In 2025, 199 translocated birds were released in all three western Montana valleys. Translocated females were fitted with GPS or VHF transmitters and monitored during the summer nesting seasons to assess demography and population viability of the reintroduced populations. Most female mortalities occurred in the first 3–4 weeks following release, and survival during the 100 days following translocation was an average 0.48 (95% CI = 0.41 – 0.56) in the Blackfoot and 0.27 (0.19 – 0.40) in the Bitterroot. Survival in Drummond 0.47 (95% CI = 0.35 – 0.65) was comparable to the average survival in the Blackfoot. Nest survival across all years and sites was 0.34 (95% CI = 0.28 – 0.44), similar to established sharp-tailed grouse populations. Brood success at 45 days post-hatch was 56% in 2023, 53% in 2024 and 23% in 2025. We observed 7 newly established leks since 2021 with 79 grouse in 2025. Translocations will occur through 2026 with monitoring continuing 5-years post-translocation.