

Guidelines for Viewing Greater Sage-grouse Leks in Central Oregon

These guidelines were developed specifically for the Central Oregon sage-grouse population and are much more conservative than one might find for more robust sage-grouse populations.

When to Visit:

- The ***first two weeks of May*** tend to be the least impactful time to visit sage-grouse leks in Central Oregon. Not only has most breeding been completed, weather tends to be better for viewing during early May and many males still remain very active at lek sites. March 15-April 30 is peak breeding, we recommend you not visit prior to or during this time.
- In order to avoid resource damage, postpone viewing if roads are muddy.
- Do not visit near a full moon as birds sometimes display all night due to the additional light.
- Arrive at the lek at least one hour before sunrise. Arriving late will likely disturb birds.

Viewing Etiquette:

- If you have multiple people visiting the lek, please carpool, limit the number of vehicles visible from the lek.
- Stop more than one mile away from lek, empty bladders, organize gloves, cameras, binoculars, and clothing.
- **Don't get out of your vehicle, use it as a blind.** Lower windows and turn off cell phones, radios, etc. Then proceed to your viewing location.
- Talk in whispers or low voices. Turn off vehicle lights and engine. Do not turn on engine to warm up. Come dressed warmly.
- Leave pets at home.
- Do not make loud noises or sudden movements, including opening and shutting vehicle doors and trunk lids. Since you are not getting out of your vehicle these should not be an issue.
- Watch the lek from as far away as possible, and at least 100 yards from the edge of lek. The further you are from the lek the less likely it will be disturbed by your visit.
- Use binoculars and spotting scopes to watch birds from your vehicle.
- Do not leave until birds leave. Sometimes this can be several hours after sunrise, so be prepared.
- Never use electronic playback of calls.
- Do not use photo flashes, artificial lights, or flashlights. Arrive with car lights off or only running/parking lights if needed.
- No camping or off-road vehicle use near a lek.

Important reminders:

- **Report any and all wildlife disturbance or harassment to ODFW at 541-388-6363, or Oregon State Police Game Division at 541-617-0617.**
- **Do not trespass on private lands.**
- Behavioral cues that indicate you are disturbing grouse include: males stop displaying, birds flushing from lek, crouching down, or looking at you.
- Understand that even though males keep displaying, it **DOES NOT** justify moving closer.
- Uninterrupted display behavior is closely linked to successful breeding and a future brood of chicks.
- Do not report or post the location of any lek via the internet or to any electronic site or online birding sites (e.g. ebird.com) without agency or owner agreement.
- Do not post photos that indicate the GPS location of a lek in metadata.
- Always practice ethical and responsible wildlife viewing (see American Birding Association site: <http://listing.aba.org/ethics/>) and only from designated distances or established viewing areas.

Other viewing opportunities:

- A lek camera will be up and running, visit this link for updates.

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/oregon/our-priorities/sage-grouse-lek-cam.xml>

Rationale for the Guidelines for Viewing Greater Sage-Grouse Leks in Central Oregon

When considering whether or not to view greater sage-grouse (sage-grouse) leks it is important to remember that sage-grouse numbers have greatly declined across their range. Threats to sage-grouse vary, but in general, in the Rocky Mountain portion of the range, sagebrush habitats have become increasingly degraded and fragmented from infrastructure, energy, agricultural, and urban developments. In the Great Basin, numerous disturbances including invasive plants, wildfire, conifer encroachment, improper grazing, and drought have eliminated or degraded the value of large areas of sagebrush habitat for sage-grouse.

Sage-grouse have a strong affinity to their leks, which are spots where males and females gather in the spring for breeding. Both males and females are sensitive to disturbance. Males may stop displaying or leave the lek entirely if disturbed. Females are prone to leave the lek for the day and possibly for the season, and therefore may be lost to the breeding cycle

Because of the complexity and degree of threats affecting sage-grouse in Central Oregon, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) **strongly discourage lek visitation by the public**. However, we understand that simply asking folks not to view sage-grouse leks has not been very effective. Therefore, East Cascades Audubon Society, ODFW, BLM and USFWS collaboratively developed these guidelines. These guidelines were developed specifically for the Central Oregon sage-grouse populations given their size and somewhat fragile nature. We are hopeful that if these guidelines are adhered to, disturbance will be minimized thus limiting the chance that sage-grouse will abandon their leks due to human disturbance associated with viewing.

The rationale for the conservative nature of these guidelines is as follows:

- Sage-grouse populations in the Prineville BLM District are estimated to have declined by 32% since 2005 (Figure 1). Furthermore, populations in the Paulina and Brothers Priority Areas for Conservation (PAC), have dropped below management objectives for population.
- ODFW (2011) indicated that sage-grouse populations in the Prineville District may be geographically isolated thus increasing the potential for population-limiting impacts related to isolation. The Central Oregon population (Figure 2) is affected by a large amount of habitat loss due to numerous disturbances and developments (like those listed above). Over the past 20 years, 3 leks in this area have become un-occupied. This abandonment was likely influenced by various disturbances, but birders do need to be very cautious and be sure that their activity will not negatively impact the species.

Online Viewing Opportunities:

Beginning in 2015 the USFWS in partnership with The Nature Conservancy placed a remote streaming camera on an active lek to offer wildlife enthusiasts the opportunity to view displaying grouse from the comfort of their own homes. The camera is monitored each morning to ensure that the birds are in focus, it also has audio which picks up the amazing sounds of the air sacs and feathers during the males display. The lek camera will be up and running again in 2017, visit this link for updates.

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/oregon/our-priorities/sage-grouse-lek-cam.xml>

So, if you must visit a lek, we strongly encourage you to abide by the *“Guidelines for Viewing Greater Sage-Grouse Leks in Central Oregon”*.

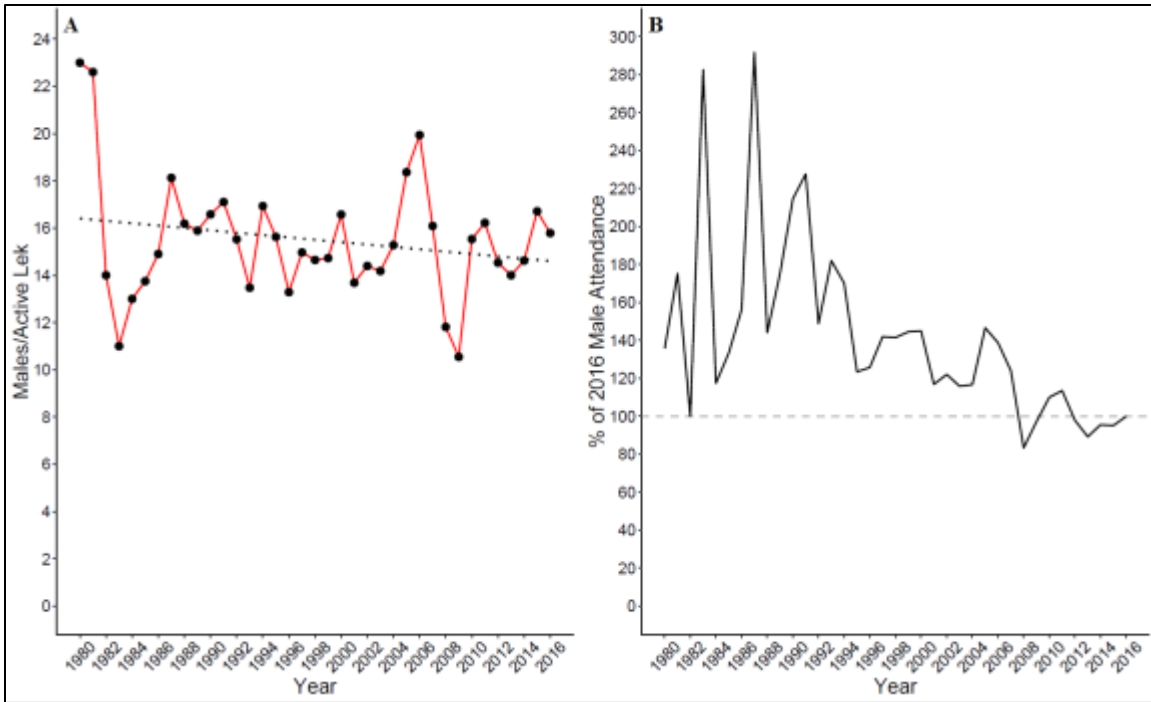
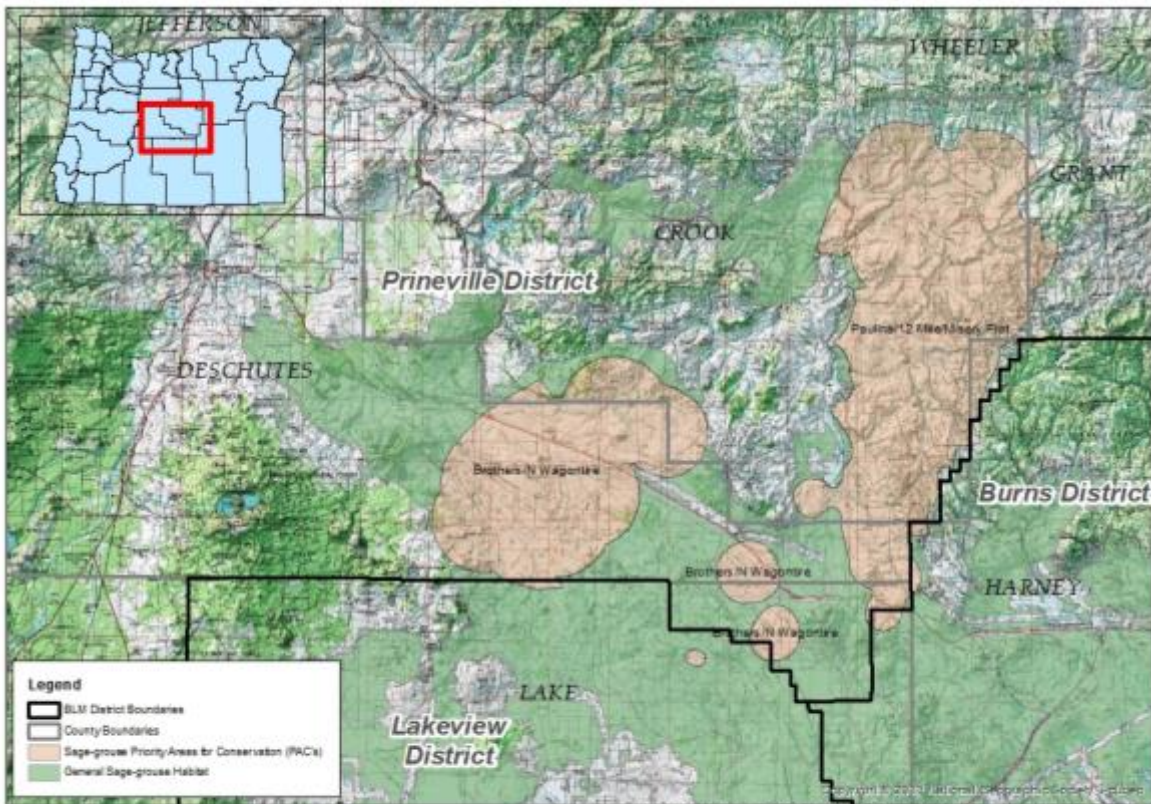


Figure 1: Greater sage-grouse population trend in the Prineville BLM District, 1980 – 2016. Change in average Greater sage-grouse lek complex size (males per active lek). B - Annual rate of change in male lek complex attendance reported as percentage of 2016 male attendance.



Map Created by: Angela Sitz, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Figure 2: Central Oregon sage-grouse population by BLM district.

References:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2011. Greater sage-grouse conservation assessment and strategy for Oregon: a plan to maintain and enhance populations and habitat. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Salem, Oregon, USA

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) conservation objectives draft report. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Denver, Colorado, USA