



SAGE SENSE

January 2004

Volume 2, Issue 1

INTRODUCTION

By Dwight Bunnell

Welcome to the third issue of our electronic newsletter. This edition features the Range-wide Conservation Assessment for Greater Sage Grouse. With events moving very swiftly and 2004 being a critical year for sage-grouse conservation, the Team thought that an update on the assessment would answer a lot of questions about what is happening and when it will happen. Be sure to look at the attachments at the end of the newsletter.

All of us are aware that our situation relative to sage-grouse and the ESA will change due to FWS decisions, court actions, lawsuits, and etc. However, our basic need, to nurture and conserve sage-grouse and their habitats, will remain constant. We must remain focused on this long-term priority and at the same time respond and adjust to short term events. At the Mid-winter Meeting, the WAFWA Directors and the agency representatives who attended all expressed continuing strong support for local, state and national efforts to conserve sage-grouse and their habitats and expressed their thanks for all of you who make conservation of sage-grouse and their habitats a high priority, ongoing part of their work.

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Conservation Assessment for Greater Sage-Grouse and Their Habitats

SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

Cooperating as per MOU signed in 2000

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
USDI Bureau of Land Management
USDI Fish and Wildlife Service
USDA Forest Service

Phase 1

The Status of Sage Grouse and Their Habitats

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION

Sage-Grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team (SG TEAM)

State Representatives

- **Joe Bohne – Chairman**
- **Tony Apa**
- **Scott Gardner**
- **Jack Connelly**

Agency Representatives

- **Pat Deibert – USFWS**
- **Mark Hilliard – BLM Vice Chair**
- **Clint McCarthy - USFS**
- **Dwight Bunnell - Coordinator**

CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT TEAM

Sage Grouse Coordinator **Dwight Bunnell (Working for the SG TEAM)**

- Overall responsibility for coordination and facilitation
- Oversees budget and expenditures
- Prepares progress reports and media information
- Interacts with WAFWA and Agencies
- Supervises writer/editor

Greater Sage Grouse Species Analysis **Jack Connelly & Mike Schroeder**

- Lead responsibility for sage-grouse data analysis
- Organize & lead “Grouse Science Team” as needed
- Lead responsibility for writing sage-grouse portions of assessment

Sage Grouse Habitat Analysis **Steve Knick**

- Lead responsibility for habitat data analysis
- Organize and lead “Grouse Habitat Team” as needed
- Lead responsibility for writing sage-grouse habitat portions of assessment

Writer / Editor San Stiver

- Responsible for overall editing of Phase I
- Will write portions of the assessment
- Disease specialist
- Assists State and Local planning

NBII Data Technician Lisa Langs (GIS Lab at Utah State University)

- Will assemble data and metadata for both grouse & habitat for Sagemap and the Conservation Assessment
- Will coordinate with & assist both grouse & habitat leaders in data gathering, presentation, and archiving

History, Function, and Status of the Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team

January, 2004

Prepared by: Dwight Bunnell, Jack Connelly and San Stiver

The following is a brief chronological summary of the events leading to the formation of the National Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team (SG Team), an update of the current status of the Team, and a review of the activities and products of the Team. The Team's Policies and Procedures are available in a separate manuscript which is available upon request to the Team Coordinator.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1996

The Western States Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee (Tech. Committee) reports to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) that sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitats across the entire range are declining at an unprecedented and alarming rate. The Tech. Committee recommends that WAFWA should act quickly to conserve sage-grouse and their habitats

WAFWA responds by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that suggests that the sage-grouse states begin conservation planning, develop a population viability model and evaluate the genetics of sage-grouse across their range.

1999

WAFWA Directors sign an MOU re-affirming the responsibility of each individual state to conserve resident species and the commitment of each state to conserve sage-grouse.

The MOU asserts the states' role, responsibility and commitment to lead coordinated and cooperative inter and intra-state actions to conserve sage-grouse and their habitats. The Western States Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee prepared the MOU.

On May 14, sage-grouse in the state of Washington are petitioned for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

2000

The Gunnison sage-grouse is petitioned for protection under the Endangered Species Act on January 25.

WAFWA is joined by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service (FS), and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in an interagency agreement enlisting the federal agencies as partners with WAFWA in sage-grouse planning and conservation. (2000 MOU)

The 2000 MOU creates the National Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team consisting of 4 state representatives and 1 representative from each of the three signatory federal agencies.

The MOU directs the Team to produce a range-wide conservation assessment for sage grouse and to assist the states and agencies in their individual planning and conservation efforts, as requested.

The Sage Grouse Conservation Planning Framework team is assembled, holds its initial meeting, selects a chair, begins work on a statement of roles and responsibilities, begins discussions on preparing a conservation assessment and begins work on grant proposals.

Guidelines to manage sage-grouse populations and their habitats are published in the Wildlife Society Bulletin.

2001

The Team submits a multi-state grant proposal to the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies outlining the creation of a full time Team Coordinator position and requesting funding for the position.

The grant is funded for three years and the Team outlines its own work program and one for the Coordinator.

The Team prepares and distributes a request for applications for the coordinator position.

Team members continue work on various projects including the distribution map, and a manual for monitoring sage grouse populations and their habitats.

A petition is filed on December 28, 2001 requesting an emergency listing of sage-grouse populations in the Mono Basin of California and Nevada.

2002

Four qualified applicants are interviewed and a Coordinator is selected and begins full time work on April 1.

FWS provides a grant to WAFWA in the amount of \$ 80,000 which allows WAFWA and partners to formally begin the planning process.

The Coordinator works with the team to prepare and present to WAFWA a proposal for completing a range-wide conservation assessment. The assessment to be completed as Phase I The Status of Greater Sage-grouse and Sage-grouse Habitats and Phase II Conservation Action Plan.

WAFWA accepts the proposal, in principal, and directs the Team to bring an updated proposal and budget back to the winter meeting for review.

The Team is directed to address questions arising from the Draft Sage Grouse Distribution Map being prepared for the assessment.

The Coordinator visits several sage grouse states and meets with state biologists, agency personnel, commissions and boards, volunteers and media representatives.

Three ESA petitions are filed to protect the Western Sage-grouse, all Greater Sage grouse and the Eastern Sage-grouse. These petitions are filed on January 24, 2002, June 18, 2002 and July 3, 2002, respectively.

2003

The Coordinator, under the direction of the Team Chairman, seeks funding to complete Phase I of the assessment and organizes a Mapping Team to assist in reviewing and updating the distribution map and manuscript.

A finalized proposal and estimated budget for completing the conservation assessment is accepted by WAFWA at the winter meeting.

The Team produces several educational and teaching products and distributes them to assist biologists and state and local sage grouse working groups.

The revised distribution map and manuscript are reviewed by the directors prior to submission to a peer review journal.

Scientists are recruited and accept the responsibility for producing an independent range-wide conservation assessment of sage grouse based on the best science available. The final draft of Phase I (The Status of Grouse and Their Habitats) is to be completed during the spring of 2004.

The Team is successful in obtaining funding sufficient for completing Phase I and initiating work on Phase II of the assessment.

A new petition is filed with the FWS requesting that all Greater Sage Grouse be listed for protection under ESA

2004

FWS announces that the 90-day Finding on the Eastern sub-species the Greater Sage Grouse determined that the petition was without merit due in part to the fact that recent genetic studies indicate that the Eastern and Western sub-species are genetically identical.

FWS announces that it will issue a 90-day Finding on the new petition requesting listing of all Greater Sage Grouse. The finding will be released at the end of March, 2004.

HISTORY OF TEAM MEMBERSHIP-CURRENT TEAM MEMBERS

<u>Original Team Members</u>	<u>Reason for Change</u>	<u>Current members</u>
STATE REPRESENTATIVES		
Joe Bohne (WY)		Joe Bohne (Chairman for 04)
Jack Connelly (ID)		Jack Connelly
John McCarthy (MT)	Retired	Tony Apa (CO)
San Stiver (NV)	Retired	Scott Gardner (CA)
BLM		
Terry Rich	Left BLM	Mark Hilliard (Vice-chair for 04)

USFS

Colleen Madrid

Job change

Clint McCarthy

FWS

Pat Deibert

Pat Deibert

PRODUCTS PRODUCED BY THE TEAM TO AID SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION

Since its inception the Team has concentrated on:

- producing a range-wide conservation assessment for sage-grouse,
- producing tangible and significant products to aid sage-grouse conservation efforts,
- aiding in the transfer and dissemination of information, and
- assisting state and local planning efforts as requested by the states.

The following products have been produced and distributed by the Team:

1. An ongoing series of “FACT SHEETS” (most of which are produced in cooperation with the United States Geological Survey). The Fact Sheets are designed to be brief, visually attractive, peer reviewed summaries of important subjects dealing with sage-grouse and their habitats. Fact sheets are produced in large numbers and are available for state and local distribution free of cost. At present, fact sheets are available covering the following subjects:

- Range-wide Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats
- The Human Footprint in the West
- SAGEMAP: a Web-Based Spatial Dataset for Sage Grouse and Sagebrush Steppe Management in the Intermountain West
- Guidelines to Manage Sage-Grouse Populations and their Habitats (In preparation)

2. A continuing series of power point presentations that can be used for informational and training/ education presentations at the national, state, and local levels. The presentations currently available include:

- Sage Grouse Lek Routes
- Sage Grouse- Managing Populations and Habitats
- Range-wide Conservation Assessment for Sage Grouse

3. A field manual “Monitoring of Greater Sage-grouse Habitats and Populations (Produced in Cooperation with the University of Idaho College of Natural Resources Experiment Station).

3. Several articles in GROUSE PARTNERSHIP NEWS

4. The Team directed the Coordinator to initiate and produce a newsletter for those involved with Sage-grouse conservation and planning. The newsletter will be published electronically 6 times per year with additional issues or updates as needed. The newsletter is entitled “Sage Sense”. Primary distribution will be through state Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee members and through agency representatives. The states and agencies are encouraged To include local and/or internal updates when they distribute the newsletter.

West Nile Virus and Greater Sage-Grouse

By: David Naugle and Brett Walker

Wildlife Biology Program, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812

Since 1999, West Nile virus (WNV) has rapidly spread west across North America, infecting and killing humans, horses, and at least 208 species of birds. The virus has reached 48 U.S. states, seven Canadian provinces, Mexico, and the Caribbean, and it continues to spread. Surprisingly, the impact of WNV on survival in native, wild bird populations is virtually unknown. Following discovery of the first case of WNV mortality in greater sage-grouse on 24 July 2003, we directed a rapid, coordinated effort between U.S. and Canadian biologists and land managers to assess the impact of WNV on sage-grouse in the eastern half of their range. We observed mortalities caused by WNV infection among radio-marked female greater sage-grouse from four studies in Alberta, Montana, and Wyoming between 1 July-31 August 2003. Of 22 testable carcasses from across 4 studies, WNV was confirmed as the cause of death in 18 cases. Although we cannot release specific numbers from survival analyses without confirmation from the scientific peer-review process, we do know that if our marked samples are representative of broader impacts of WNV, the virus may be an important new stressor on sage-grouse populations. Of immediate concern are the potentially devastating consequences of WNV for small populations of Gunnison sage-grouse (*C. minimus*) in Colorado and Utah and greater sage-grouse in California, Utah, Washington, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. In our survey of birds from Alberta, Montana, and Wyoming this past fall from areas with confirmed WNV deaths, no live greater sage-grouse tested seropositive for neutralizing antibodies against WNV, indicating that birds have little or no innate immunity to the infection. Our mosquito trapping in the Powder River Basin in Wyoming indicated that the mosquito *Culex tarsalis*, a highly competent vector of WNV, was the most common mosquito breeding in ponds throughout our study sites, and many were infected with the virus. The emergence of WNV will undoubtedly intensify biological and political debates over how to best maintain large areas of high-quality sage-grouse habitat needed to support robust, genetically diverse populations capable of withstanding stochastic disease events. The impetus for WNV work is from a study to evaluate potential impacts of coal-bed methane development on greater sage-grouse in the Powder River Basin of Wyoming and Montana. This work is through the University of Montana's Wildlife Biology Program and is currently funded by the Bureau of Land Management. We plan to continue our research in the Powder River Basin to investigate impacts of WNV and coal-bed methane development on greater sage-grouse. Plans include trapping and marking >100 more birds this spring for study into the year 2006. There are so many people and organizations that made this effort possible. Following are acknowledgments of the organizations that people work for: University of Alberta, Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory, Boone and Crockett Wildlife Conservation Program, University of Montana, University of Wyoming, Montana State University, USDA-Arthropod-borne Animal Diseases Research Laboratory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and the Bureau of Land Management.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

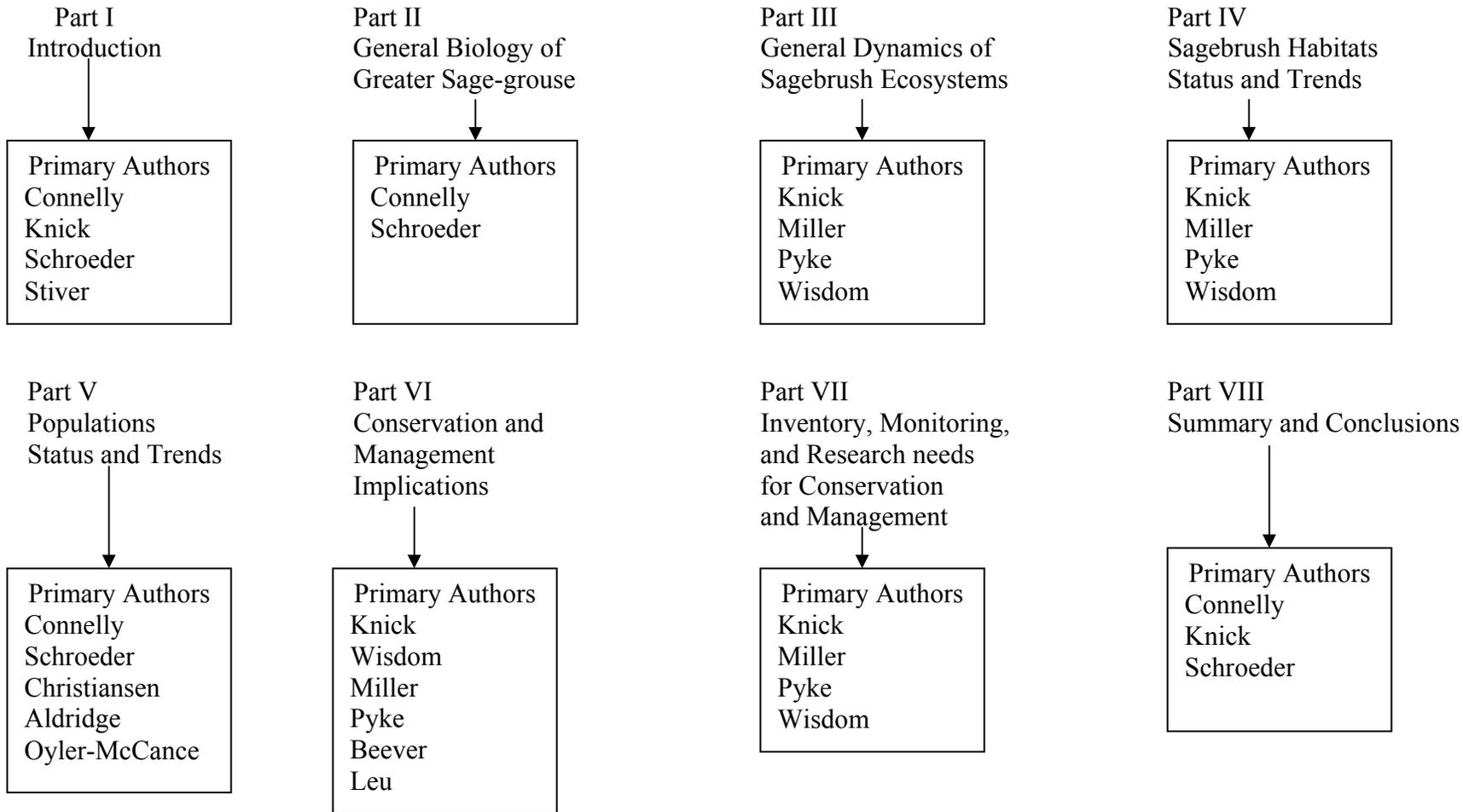
The 69th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference
March 16 – 20 2004
Spokane, Washington

The Western Agencies Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Conference
June 29 – July 1 2004
Wenatchee, Washington

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 2004 Summer Meeting
July 24 – July 29 2004
Sun Valley, Idaho

Conservation Assessment Project

Primary Chapters & Authors



Contributing Section Authors

Aldridge, Beevers, Christiansen, Commons-Kemner, Finn, Gregg, Hanser, Leu, Oyler-McCance, Meinke, Naugle, Reese, Rinkes, Schuck

Summary of Sage Grouse Petitions Submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)¹
(as of January 8, 2004)

Petition Date: May 14, 1999 (74 pages)	Petition Date: January 25, 2000 (254 pages)	Petition Date: December 28, 2001 (493 pages)
Species: Washington population of the Western Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus phaios</i>	Species: Gunnison Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus minimus</i>	Species: Mono Basin population of the Greater Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus phaios</i>
Petition Request: List as threatened or endangered	Petition Request: List as endangered or threatened, emergency listing, and designation of critical habitat	Petition Request: Emergency list as endangered
Petitioners: Northwest Ecosystem Alliance and Biodiversity Legal Foundation	Petitioners: Mark Salvo, American Lands Alliance, Dr. Randy Webb, Net Work Associates, Andy Kerr, The Larch Company, Jasper Carlton, Biodiversity Legal Foundation, Susan Ash, Wild Utah Forest Campaign, Rob Edwards, Sinapu	Petitioners: Donald Randy Webb, Institute for Wildlife Protection
Legal Action: No NOI** to date	Legal Action: Court complaint dated September 29, 2000 from the American Lands Alliance et al. In summer 2003 the Court rules in the USFWS's favor. The ruling is that USFWS candidate process and the determination by USFWS that a species should be on the candidate list is equivalent to a 12-month finding.	Legal Action: A court complaint dated July 3, 2002 was received from the Institute for Wildlife Protection. On December 1, 2003 U.S. District Court judge issued an order in favor of the Service and dismissing the plaintiffs case. Another NOI, dated January 9, 2003, was filed by the plaintiffs regarding the merits of the USFWS's 90-day finding itself.
USFWS Determination: Both a 90-day finding (August 24, 2000) and a 12-month finding (May 7, 2001) published in the <u>Federal Register</u> . Outcome was that the petition presents substantial information and listing is warranted but precluded for the Columbia Basin Distinct Population Segment (occurs in WA and n. OR); became a candidate by default under USFWS policy.	USFWS Determination: The species was designated as a candidate by USFWS prior to receipt of the petition. It has a listing priority number of 5.	USFWS Determination: Initial review indicated that the situation does not warrant an emergency listing. A 90-day finding was initiated August 1, 2002. The 90-day finding was published in the <u>Federal Register</u> December 26, 2002 with an outcome that the information presented in the petition is not substantial.
Lead USFWS Office: Upper Columbia Fish and Wildlife Office, Spokane, Washington (509) 891-6839	Lead USFWS Office: Western Colorado Field Office, Grand Junction, Colorado (970) 243-2778	Lead USFWS Office: Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, Reno, Nevada (775) 861-6300
USFWS Contact: Chris Warren	USFWS Contact: Terry Ireland	USFWS Contact: Kevin Kritz

Petition Date: January 24, 2002 (468 pages)	Petition Date: June 18, 2002 (7 pages)	Petition Date: July 3, 2002 (524 pages)
Species: Western subspecies of the Greater Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus phaios</i>	Species: Greater Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Species: Eastern subspecies of the Greater Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus urophasianus</i>
Petition Request: List the subspecies	Petition Request: List as endangered	Petition Request: List as endangered
Petitioners: Donald Randy Webb, Institute for Wildlife Protection	Petitioners: Craig Dremann	Petitioners: Donald Randy Webb, Institute for Wildlife Protection
Legal Action: NOI dated February 7, 2003 from the Institute for Wildlife Protection regarding the 90-day finding. Court complaint dated June 6, 2003 from the Institute for Wildlife Protection challenging the merits of the 90-day finding.	Legal Action: No legal action to date	Legal Action: Court complaint dated January 10, 2003 filed in the Western District Court of Washington by the Institute for Wildlife Protection for failure to do a 90-day finding. On October 3, 2003 the District Court judge ordered the USFWS to make a 90-day finding which is due by January 3, 2004.
USFWS Determination: A 90-day finding was initiated October 30, 2002. The 90-day finding was published in the <u>Federal Register</u> on February 7, 2003 with an outcome that the information presented in the petition is not substantial.	USFWS Determination: 90-day finding initiated December, 2003. The Service intends to address this petition by March 29, 2004.	USFWS Determination: 90-day finding initiated on October 3, 2003 as per court order. The 90-day finding was published in the <u>Federal Register</u> on January 7, 2004 with an outcome that the information presented in the petition is not substantial.
Lead USFWS Office: Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, Portland, Oregon (503) 231-6179	Lead USFWS Office: Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming (307) 772-2374	Lead USFWS Office: Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming (307) 772-2374
USFWS Contact: Jeff Dillon	USFWS Contact: Pat Deibert	USFWS Contact: Pat Deibert

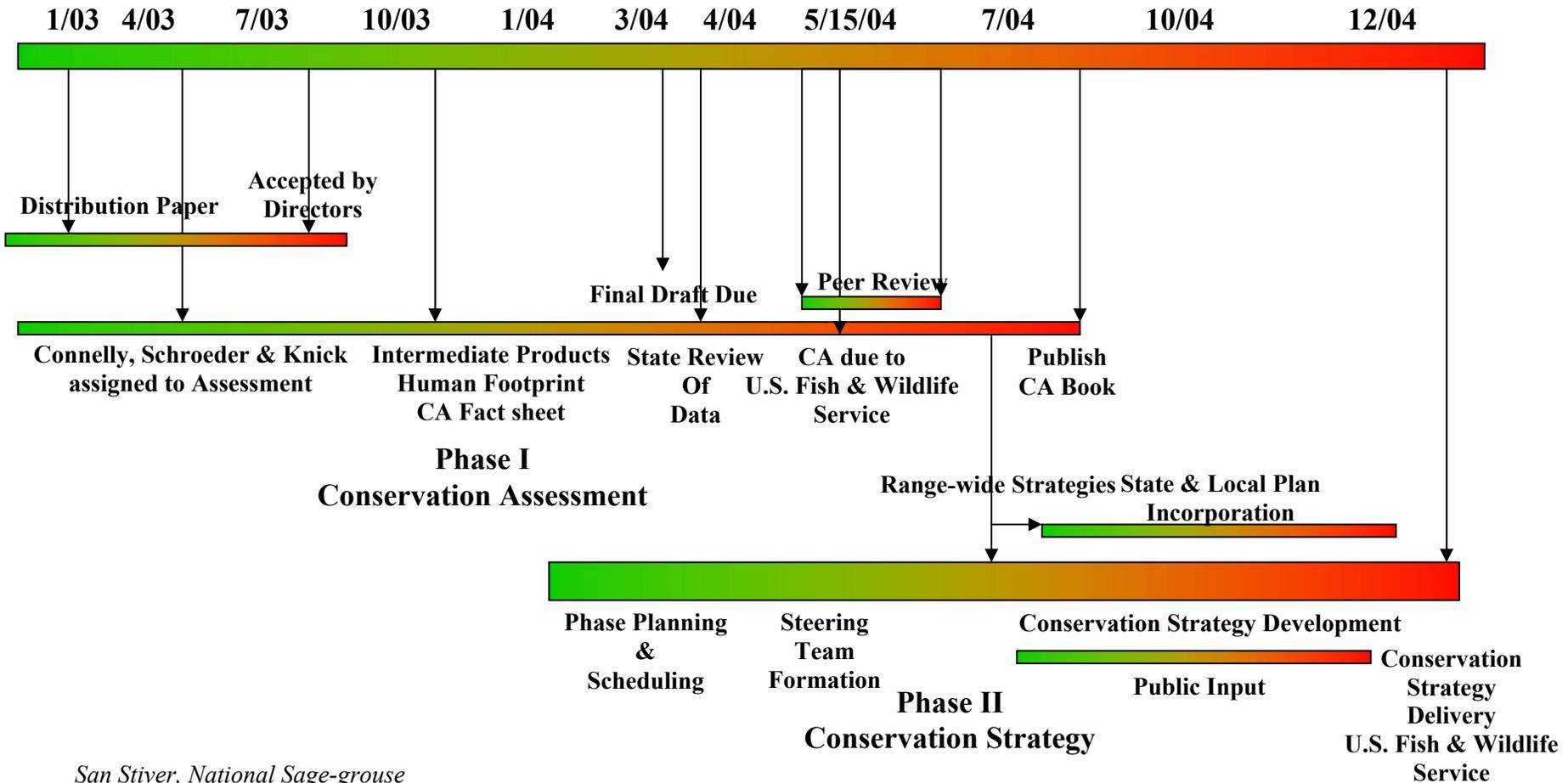
Petition Date: March 19, 2003 (992 pages; combination of previous petitions for Western and Eastern subspecies)	Petition Date: December 22, 2003 (218 pages)
Species: Greater Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Species: Greater Sage Grouse <i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>
Petition Request: List as endangered	Petition Request: List as threatened or endangered
Petitioners: Donald Randy Webb, Institute for Wildlife Protection	Petitioners: Mark Salvo American Lands Alliance, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Forest Guardians, The Fund for Animals, Gallatin Wildlife Association, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, The Larch Company, Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, Northwest Council for Alternatives to Pesticides, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Oregon Natural Resources Council, Predator Defense Institute, Sierra Club, Sinapu, Western Fire Ecology Center, Western Watersheds Project, Wild Utah Project, and Wildlands CPR
Legal Action: No legal action to date	Legal Action: No legal action to date
USFWS Determination: 90-day finding initiated December, 2003. The Service intends to address this petition by March 29, 2004.	USFWS Determination: 90-day finding initiated December, 2003. The Service intends to address this petition by March 29, 2004.
Lead USFWS Office: Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming (307) 772-2374	Lead USFWS Office: Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming (307) 772-2374
USFWS Contact: Pat Deibert	USFWS Contact: Pat Deibert

¹ Table compiled by Kevin Kritz, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Blvd. Suite #234 , Reno, NV 89502-7147 (775) 861-6300

**** 60-day Notice of Intent to Sue (NOI)**

Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment Strategy

Timeline



*San Stiver, National Sage-grouse
Conservation Planning Framework Team*