



Photo: Matt Patrias

ON MONTANA'S COMMON GROUND

“The sagebrush covered public lands I hunt in Eastern Montana provide critical habitat not only for sage-grouse but also for mule deer, elk and pronghorn. If we can protect the bird, we’ll save the herds.”

-Kathy Hadley, Artemis Founder



CRUCIAL COMPANIONS: THE HERDS AND THE BIRD

MONTANA'S GOT GAME:




What is important habitat for big game?
In Montana it is a combination of habitat for pronghorn, elk, moose, mule deer and white-tailed deer. Identified and mapped for Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

What is overlapping habitat?
These are areas where sage-grouse and big game share the same sagebrush lands.

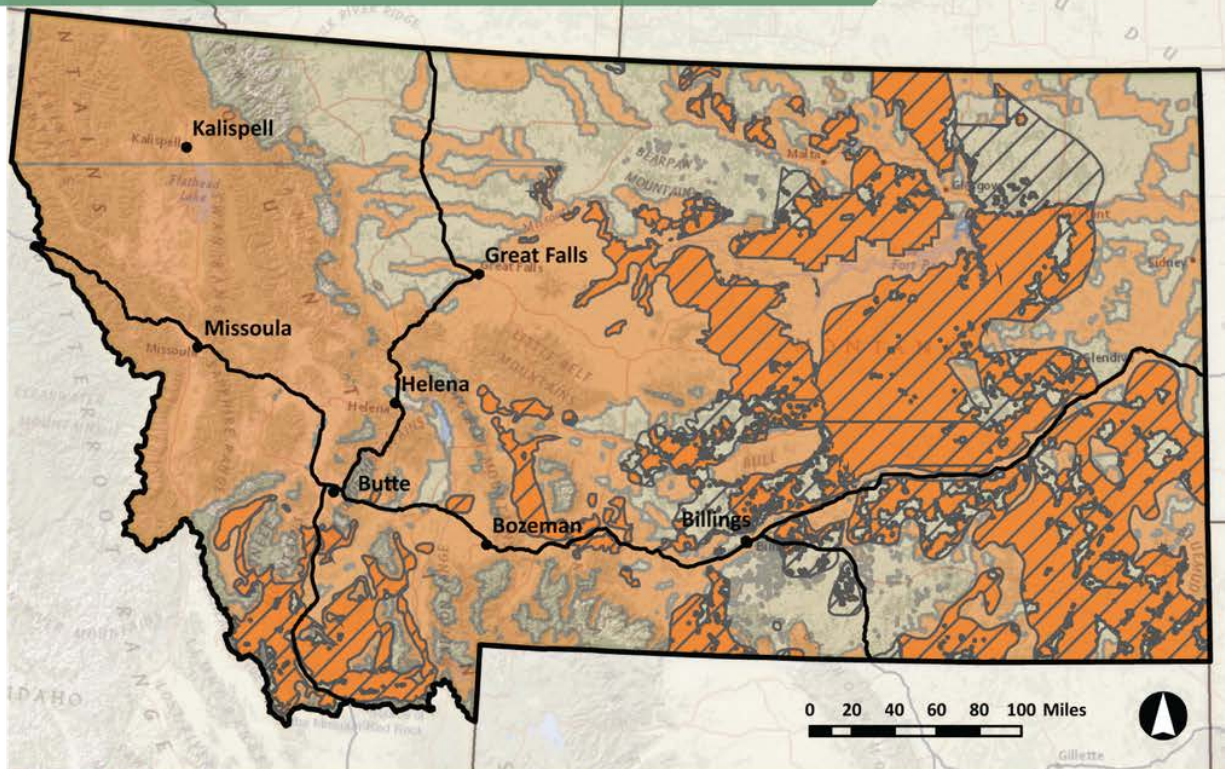
Data Sources:
BLM, MT FWP, Esri, WAFWA

Map Prepared by: Alison Gallensky
Rocky Mountain Wild

 **GREATER SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT**

 **IMPORTANT BIG GAME HABITAT**

 **OVERLAPPING HABITAT**



Big Game and Sage-Grouse What's the connection?

When snow blankets vegetation in the foothills and mountains, big game animals like mule deer, elk and pronghorn depend on sagebrush lands, the same habitat that sustains greater sage-grouse. Wildlife biologists point out that healthy habitat is key for healthy wildlife populations.

For sportsmen and women who roam sagebrush country each fall, the connection between sage-grouse and other wildlife is clear. They know what's good for the bird is good for the herd. That's why they want to conserve sage-grouse and their habitat.

Sage-grouse used to number in the tens of millions across the West, but now number an estimated 200,000 to a half-million. Sage-grouse are seen as a bellwether species for the health of sagebrush lands. And sage-grouse conservation plans developed by the states, Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service with input from locals on the ground are the way forward for Western big game.

Westerners forge a path forward

The Montana Wildlife Federation is one of the many organizations supporting the sage-grouse conservation strategies shaped by the sporting community, landowners and elected officials, including most Western governors. The plans include safeguards for sage-grouse habitat that will benefit hundreds of other plant and wildlife species, including mule deer, elk and pronghorn.

Montana by the numbers: Almost 80% of sage-grouse habitat is also important to big game - 22.9 million acres of sagebrush lands.

Common ground

The overlap between sage-grouse and big game habitat means an order by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to improve big game winter range and migration corridors can't be achieved if the bird's needs are ignored.

An Uncertain future

But the fate of the bird and all the work to save it are uncertain as the Trump administration considers major changes to the plans. These plans helped convince the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that sage-grouse didn't need to be added to the endangered species list. Failure to move forward with the conservation efforts could lead to the very outcome the plans were intended to avoid – a listing of the bird and the restrictions that come with it.

Governor Bullock and other Western governors have said wholesale changes to the conservation plans aren't needed and have voiced support for focusing on sage-grouse habitat to rebuild the bird's population.

Hunters 'get it' - You can help too

For hunters, conservation of habitat is a priority, because they know it sustains strong wildlife herds. Sportsmen and women were also integral in developing these plans.

For more information contact: Aaron Kindle at kindlea@nwf.org