

FACT SHEET: PRAIRIE GROUSE AND SAGE GROUSE

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CHARACTERISTICS OF PRAIRIE GROUSE AND SAGE GROUSE

Prairie grouse and sage grouse are birds that require large areas of grassland, shrubland, or even cropland vegetation to breed and survive. In North America, two species are considered prairie grouse (Greater Prairie Chicken, with subspecies Attwater's Prairie Chicken, and Lesser Prairie Chicken). These species are found predominantly in central North American grasslands. North America also has two species of sage grouse (Greater Sage-Grouse and Gunnison Sage-Grouse), which live in shrubby, sage areas farther west than the prairie grouse. Prairie grouse and sage grouse are known for their dramatic group courtship displays called "leks," where males gather together in the early spring months to vocalize, "dance," and scrimmage with one another. Their vocalizations and other auditory signals are audible for miles. Drawn to the lek areas, female grouse select mates based on their displays.

IMPACTS OF COMMUNICATIONS TOWERS ON PRAIRIE GROUSE AND SAGE GROUSE

Many wildlife species are negatively affected by interruptions or breaks in otherwise large areas of continuous habitat. When development such as roads, wind turbines, oil drilling, power lines, communications towers, and other tall structures fragments grassland and shrublands (link to fragmentation fact sheet), prairie grouse and sage grouse often abandon those areas and move to more contiguously open areas that lack these visual obstructions and development. As contiguously open areas become less available, prairie grouse and sage grouse populations decrease.

CHOICES THAT CAN MINIMIZE ADVERSE IMPACTS TO PRAIRIE GROUSE AND SAGE GROUSE

Tower developers have many opportunities to reduce or prevent adverse impacts to prairie grouse and sage grouse.

- Where possible, develop already disturbed sites such as those in urbanized areas or near powerlines, wind turbines, and existing communications towers, instead of changing natural, native vegetation.
- Use existing roads when available, instead of creating new roads. Where a new road is necessary, minimize its impact.
- Construct towers that are no taller than functionally necessary. Taller towers are typically more visible from greater distances.
- Contact regional and local natural resource agencies, as they may have additional information regarding the presence of prairie grouse, sage grouse, and lek areas near the

proposed construction site. The agencies may also have additional suggestions and information on reducing the impact of a project.

- Complete construction during the late summer, fall, and winter months to avoid the lek and nesting seasons. Prairie grouse and sage grouse are particularly sensitive to disturbances in their environment during the lek and nesting seasons.

Sources of additional information:

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Greater_Prairie-Chicken/id

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/lesser_prairie-chicken/id

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/greater_sage-grouse/id

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Gunnison_sage-grouse/id

<http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov/>

<http://prairiegrouse.org/STCP.html>

KEY WORDS: prairie grouse, sage grouse, prairie chicken, lek, grassland, shrubland, power line, vegetation removal, habitat, habitat loss, vegetation, roads, project planning, construction timing