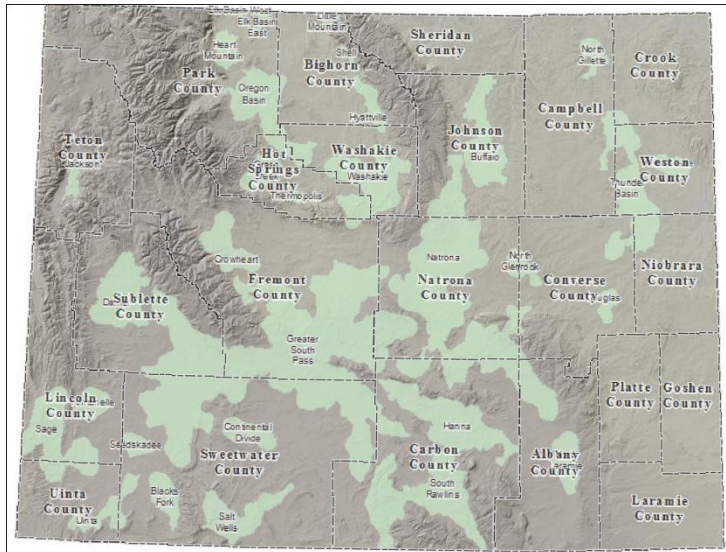


Wyoming's approach to Sage Grouse conservation



Wyoming's Sage Grouse core areas

No one in the West wants to see the Sage Grouse listed as an endangered species. Wyoming is home to 40% of these birds and they are taking definite steps to keep this from happening. Such a listing would be devastating to the state's economy, which is heavily funded by mining along with the oil and gas industry.

Wyoming biologists and local working groups defined state areas containing critical habitat for Sage Grouse habitat. They produced maps showing these areas of core habitat comprising roughly 16 million acres or 25% of the state. Then the state instigated restrictions for what could take place within these core areas. All of this became official through an executive order from Governor Dave Freudenthal. Wyoming sees this approach as something worthy of being offered to other states. Colorado and Montana are also looking at defining their own sage grouse core habitat areas.

The restrictions in core areas reduce the presence of oil, gas and mining activities. Wind energy development is completely banned inside the areas. Ranching and farming activities are not restricted but individual ranches or farms obviously cannot lease out their land to wind energy projects.

The oil and gas industry is going along with the restrictions since they know that heavier restrictions would be created if the sage grouse becomes listed. Conservation groups such as Wyoming's largest, the Wyoming Outdoor Council, also endorse the actions. The BLM manages much of the state's federal land and has no obligation to go along with state policy, but they are also supporting the idea. Obviously, the wind energy industry is not happy with the concept.

All this made me wonder if Nevada is looking at this concept so I contacted Sandra Brewer, Natural Resources Specialist with the BLM state office. Last week, she attended an information session with people from Wyoming on how that state set up their core areas. Next week she is scheduled to brief Nevada's state director about the concept. Our state office is also waiting for the Washington office to issue a statement on how to proceed on this investigation. Sandra stated Nevada will look at the process but has no idea if it will be adopted. One problem is a difference in threats to Sage Grouse. In Wyoming the greatest threat is energy development, but in Nevada it is wildfire destroying their habitat. This threat is difficult to reduce by merely setting restrictions within core areas.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 1/14/2010
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