



January 25, 2022

Dear Grouse Enthusiasts,

The mission of the North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) is to conserve grouse and their habitats in North America. We currently focus on prairie grouse because prairies are the most threatened and least protected ecosystems in North America. As a result, the grouse they support are at great risk.

Prairie grouse are excellent flagship species for conservation of prairies because they require large areas of high-quality habitat to support their populations. Landscapes healthy enough to host these grouse species also support good soil and water quality, and numerous other prairie-dependent wildlife including important pollinators. Plus they sequester carbon to combat climate change at rates greater than many forests.

Prairie grouse are iconic in the landscapes they occupy. Their springtime mating rituals are spectacular to those who make the effort to view them. Their presence, persistence, and beauty have inspired people for millennia, from native Americans to current-day birders, to landowners fortunate enough to host them on their property. Grouse are also prized for the hunting opportunities they provide.

NAGP has prioritized its current efforts on four prairie grouse species. The southwestern Great Plains prairies once hosted what was probably millions of **lesser prairie-chickens**. Conversion to row-crop agriculture and energy development have fragmented the once expansive southern Great Plains into ever-smaller parcels. This species has been proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The north-central Great Plains still host areas with fair but declining numbers of **greater prairie-chickens**. But they are also gone or nearly gone from many places where they once occurred. Likewise, many places in the central and northern Great Plains still have **sharp-tailed grouse** in abundance. They too however have declined from historic numbers. The sagebrush sea that was once considered vast and unending is also threatened today, primarily by invasive annual grasses like cheatgrass, incompatible grazing systems, invasion by woody vegetation, and development. **Sage grouse** are sagebrush obligates - as healthy sagebrush ecosystems vanish, so do they.

The vast majority of prairie grouse habitat today is privately owned. Federal Farm Bill programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Environmental Quality Incentive Program, include practices shown to stop and even reverse some grouse population declines. For example, CRP has provided important habitat for lesser prairie-chickens in western Kansas. But Farm Bill program implementation has been fragmented and sporadic in its application, failing to deliver large blocks of high-quality prairies. Thus the decline of prairie grouse continues.



Photo by Marissa Jensen

Interest in conserving prairies is growing, including by private landowners. When armed with appropriate programs to ensure their economic viability, landowners can help provide prairie grouse habitat. Recent movement has occurred to revitalize Farm Bill programs. Some private conservation groups are proposing a North American Grasslands Conservation Act (NAGCA). Other groups are organizing to increase advocacy for prairies.

NAGP is leading efforts to conserve prairie grouse and their habitats by highlighting the need for prairie conservation through the lens of these charismatic, landscape-scale birds. If we conserve habitats adequate for these umbrella species, most other prairie species will also fare well. Some grassland birds have declined by 40% - more than any other ecosystem type. Their declines will be addressed by conserving grouse. NAGP advocates for effective prairie conservation policies and actions.

For lesser prairie-chickens, NAGP has led the effort to form a lesser prairie-chicken coordinating group. It will better promote, coordinate, and strategically direct needed conservation programs, actions, and policies.

For greater prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, NAGP has been the coordinator of a multi-state working group developing an action plan for their conservation. We will continue its leadership to complete this plan and begin its implementation in a coordinated and strategic manner.

For sage grouse, NAGP has provided sound scientific review of on-going conservation efforts. We will continue in this role to ensure implementation of effective science-based sage grouse policies and conservation actions. In all of these efforts, we seek collaborative solutions by working with federal and state agencies, conservation organizations, landowners, conservation bankers, and industries.

We need your support! Prairie grouse rely on the voice and actions of NAGP to advance their conservation needs. Our staff's ability to meet these needs is limited by availability of funds. Your contributions will help us continue and expand our critical conservation programs. They will support time and expenses to lead establishment of a lesser prairie-chicken coordinating group. We need support to meet with agency leadership, particularly in Washington, D.C., to influence its policies. We also are working to launch on-the-ground conservation projects for lesser prairie-chickens and demonstrate a model for successful conservation that agencies can follow.

Please join NAGP in our mission and contribute today. Prairie grouse are in great need of NAGP and your assistance! Contact Ted Koch, NAGP Executive Director (Ted@grousepartners.org, 208-912-5233) to discuss how you can help and/or show your support by joining our conservation community and donating at www.grousepartners.org.

Sincerely yours in grouse conservation,



Ted Koch, Executive Director

North American Grouse Partnership

