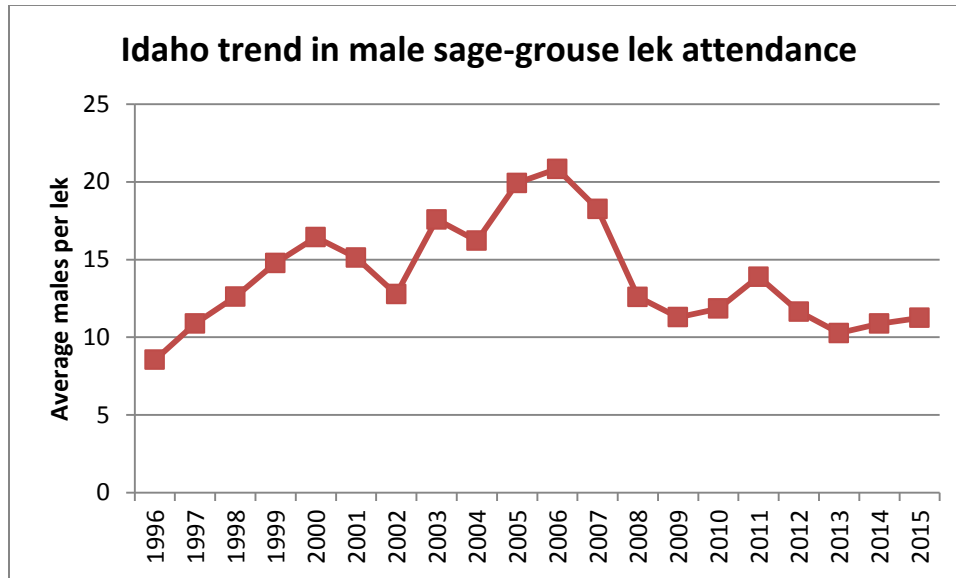




Idaho Department of Fish and Game Sage-Grouse Update
Natural Resources Interim Committee
October 16, 2015

Sage-Grouse Status

- Statewide sage-grouse **LEK COUNTS** in 2015 were up 3% from 2014 and up 9% from the lows in 2013.
 - Slightly higher proportion counted than past 5 years average (50%).
- We counted 1,245 leks in 2015, which is 58% of the leks in the Idaho lek database.
 - Slightly higher proportion counted than past 5 years average (50%).
 - Initiated a more strategic and statistical approach to support trigger analysis.
 - Of all leks counted, 597 were active in 2015, 511 were inactive, 115 had an unknown status, and 22 were newly discovered leks. Leks with an unknown status were either surveyed only once by helicopter with no birds detected or a survey was conducted during inclement weather (i.e., 1 survey was insufficient to determine status).
 - We spent just under \$50K of the \$75K of general fund money passed through OSC on lek monitoring in 2015.
 - First year logistical hiccups applying improved statistical approach; effectiveness and efficiency will improve.
- Sage-grouse **SEASON**
 - 7-day season in Area 2.
 - We checked 321 sage-grouse at standard check stations on opening weekend 2015, compared to 313 birds in 2014.
 - Harvest results available in January 2016.
- Only one major **WILDFIRE** impacting sage-grouse in 2015. In Idaho, the Soda Fire burned about 37,500 acres of Priority habitat and 191,000 acres of Important Habitat.
 - Burned acres are only 3% of the Priority sage-grouse habitat in the West Owyhee conservation area.
 - IDFG, IDL, and OSC are working together on fire rehabilitation on the 12,896 acres of state endowment land in the fire.



Raven Control and Associated Monitoring (2013 Legislative Intent)

- In 2015, IDFG received permission to use DRC-1339 through a Special Local Need Label from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture; federal Wildlife Services is not authorized to control ravens to benefit sage-grouse in Idaho.
- 3 IDFG staff certified to use DRC-1339.
- Only able to work on private and state lands; federal NEPA compliance was not complete for 2015 control actions on federal lands.
- Focused control work on **2 STUDY AREAS – GREATER CURLEW VALLEY AND WEST CENTRAL** – with each study area divided into a treatment and non-treatment area.
- Using the approved egg-bait ratio of 4 eggs equals 1 raven take:
 - 530 ravens were removed by DRC-1339 in the Greater Curlew Valley; also 5 adults shot,
 - 102 ravens removed from West Central.
- 44 raven eggs were destroyed in the Curlew and 13 in West Central.
- Conducted raven surveys statewide in association with sage-grouse lek routes.
- In 2016, we will evaluate the potential benefits to sage-grouse by comparing lek trends in the treatment and non-treatment areas in the 2 study areas. We also plan to conduct raven surveys in the Greater Curlew Valley and West Central in 2016, to evaluate the potential change in raven densities.
- Wildlife Services is reviewing and responding to public comments on their predator control Environmental Assessment, which includes raven control to benefit sage-grouse. They expect to decide in December if they can issue a Finding of No Significant Impact or whether additional NEPA process is required.

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Sage-Grouse Update Idaho Legislature - Natural Resources Interim Committee October 16, 2015

- Governor Otter's plan for sage-grouse conservation was a product of years of negotiation and collaboration between the Governor's Sage-Grouse Task Force, the state and federal agencies.
- Unfortunately, the collaborative process came to a halt in early 2015 when federal officials in Washington, D.C. mandated additional land-use restrictions for secondary threats and a new habitat zone (Sagebrush Focal Areas) be incorporated into the land use plans.
- These new restrictions and habitat zone were developed by the Interior Department (Department) outside of the collaborative process that we had previously been working under.
- While many attempts were made by the State to convince the Department to work openly with us to find a mutually agreeable solution to these last minute restrictions, the Department failed to cooperate.
- Unfortunately the Department included these restrictions and new habitat zone in their Final EIS and land-use plan amendments for sage-grouse in May 2015.
- The State and the Governor exercised their procedural rights and submitted protest points and a consistency review, expressing concern over the new management restrictions and habitat zone. The Governor also provided a suite of recommendations aimed at reaching a mutually agreeable solution.
- The federal agencies were unwilling to adopt any of the Governor's recommendations in the consistency review.
- Based in part on the new land use plan amendments, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined the species did not warrant listing under the ESA in September.
- While this determination is the desired outcome, the last-minute, internal process used by the Department to develop and incorporate additional restrictions into the federal land use plans violates federal law.
- On September 25, 2015, Governor Otter and the Idaho State Legislature filed suit against the federal agencies challenging the land-use plan amendments.
- The objective of the lawsuit is to require the Department to go back and analyze these last minute restrictions and include the states and public as partners.