

# Findings and Recommendations

## *Final Report of the Greater Sage-grouse Range-wide Issues Forum*



*Photo by Mark Gocke at markgocke.com*

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## Preface

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The Greater Sage-grouse Range-wide Issues Forum (Forum), sponsored by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies,<sup>1</sup> is one of several important processes contributing to development of the *Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy*<sup>2</sup>. The *Final Forum Report* presents the findings and recommendations from the collaborative work of this 35-member working group.

Significant cooperative conservation planning began in July 1995 with the signing of the WAFWA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), designed to sustain and enhance the distribution and abundance of greater sage-grouse through responsible, collaborative management programs. Cooperative conservation was further confirmed through the MOU of August 2000, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Forest Service) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (Bureau of Land Management and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) joined with WAFWA to conserve and manage sagebrush ecosystems to benefit greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush dependent species.

In August 2002, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service contracted with WAFWA to prepare a scientific assessment of greater sage-grouse and their related sagebrush habitat, followed by development of a comprehensive conservation strategy. Accordingly, the *Conservation assessment of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats*<sup>3</sup> was completed in 2004. In 2005, WAFWA began work on a conservation strategy.

WAFWA envisioned the use of a group of diverse stakeholders to contribute towards development of the comprehensive conservation strategy. The Forum, sponsored by WAFWA, was convened in November 2005 and managed through a facilitated process. The goal of the Forum was to contribute to the development of a range-wide conservation strategy that would *maintain or, where possible, increase the present distribution and abundance of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat*. The Final Forum Report describes the integration and coordination of management approaches to range-wide issues that can provide a reference for Local Working Groups (LWG), state/provincial, tribal, and agency conservation planning processes. Forum participants worked to develop a flexible and dynamic strategy to guide planning processes into the future, acknowledging LWG, state/provincial, tribal, and agency plans and their importance to the implementation phase of greater sage-grouse conservation.

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<sup>1</sup> WAFWA is the association of fish and wildlife agency directors from the western United States and Canada. WAFWA contracted with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to prepare and deliver, with assistance from the Framework Team, the *Greater-Sage Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy* to conserve greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. WAFWA was the primary funding source for the Forum.

<sup>2</sup> The *Comprehensive Strategy* will describe approaches to funding, communication, monitoring, implementation, research and conservation for the greater sage-grouse at the range-wide scale.

<sup>3</sup> Connelly, J. W., S. T. Knick, M. A. Schroeder, and S. J. Stiver. 2004. Conservation assessment of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Unpublished Report. Cheyenne, Wyoming, USA.

The Forum process identified the natural complexity of the sagebrush steppe ecosystem and the complicating factors associated with past and current land use. Participants recognized that, without increased conservation efforts, the increasing human population and uses in greater sage-grouse landscapes would continue to compromise greater sage-grouse abundance and distribution. Forum participants also agreed there are immense challenges involved in fostering successful cooperative conservation. A multitude of resources - social, economic, and scientific/environmental - will be needed to achieve reconciliation of the range of issues associated with balancing human needs with values of the natural system.

The approach to conservation of greater sage-grouse within a collaborative and comprehensive vision is an encouraging step, but much work remains to be done because of the human and ecological uncertainties involved. The history and success of managing sagebrush ecosystems has, at best, been mixed. Federal, state and provincial land and resource management agencies have often failed to sufficiently and meaningfully involve citizens in an integrated planning process. Even in those instances when citizen involvement has occurred, there is often insufficient resolve by the agencies to bring about any real change that benefits greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. A cooperative conservation approach will require individual and collective integrity, and dedication of time, funds, shared responsibilities, and continued learning using adaptive management.

The Forum challenges all readers to become engaged in the process at the appropriate scale to accomplish the shared vision to *maintain or, where possible, increase the present distribution and abundance of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat.*

## Table of Contents

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Preface.....	i
Introduction .....	1
Background .....	1
Forum Principles and Values .....	3
Range-wide Issues.....	4
Methods .....	4
Defining Range-wide Issues.....	5
Critical Needs.....	7
Methods.....	7
Defining Critical Needs.....	8
Other Perspectives/Remaining Concerns .....	9
Implementation/Next Steps.....	11
Forum Communication Strategy.....	12

### **Appendices:**

1. Forum Participants
2. Forum Strategies
3. Consolidated Goals and Objectives Table
4. Synthesized Goals Rating Table

## Introduction

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### *Background*

The Greater Sage-grouse Range-wide Issues Forum (Forum) was convened in November 2005 to facilitate the collaborative development of approaches to address issues, needs, opportunities, and partnerships related to the conservation of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats at the range-wide scale. The Forum was sponsored by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA<sup>4</sup>).

The Forum deliberations addressed greater sage-grouse and related sagebrush habitat issues at the range-wide scale (which, by definition for this process, also includes sub-population, population, and eco-regional scales) that cannot be adequately addressed at local, state, and provincial scales. The range-wide component will be integrated with approaches already developed at the local working group, state/province, tribal, and agency levels to form the *Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Sub-strategy*. This component, along with six other sub-strategies, will form *the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (Comprehensive Strategy)*. The Forum's work at the range-wide scale will be integrated with other sub-strategy components (Figure 1) by the National Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Planning Framework Team<sup>5</sup> (Framework Team), enlisted by WAFWA to coordinate preparation of the *Comprehensive Strategy*.

In an effort to ensure the Forum was neutral and impartial, and to facilitate effective interaction among a diverse representation of stakeholder interests, WAFWA asked the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute) to organize and convene the Forum. The U.S. Institute is an independent federal agency that assists parties in resolving environmental, natural resource, and public lands conflicts through assisted negotiation and mediation. A Forum Facilitation Team – comprised of the U.S. Institute's Larry Fisher and Susan Hayman, of North Country Resources, Inc. – worked to design, facilitate, and document the Forum process.

Thirty-five people participated in the Forum process (Appendix 1). The Facilitation Team selected participants to represent the broad array of perspectives related to greater sage-grouse conservation. Forum participants were chosen based on their experience, background, and knowledge of greater sage-grouse conservation issues, their interest and willingness to participate in this intense process, and their ability to work collaboratively and constructively on development of strategies to address range-wide issues. Participants were not viewed as formal

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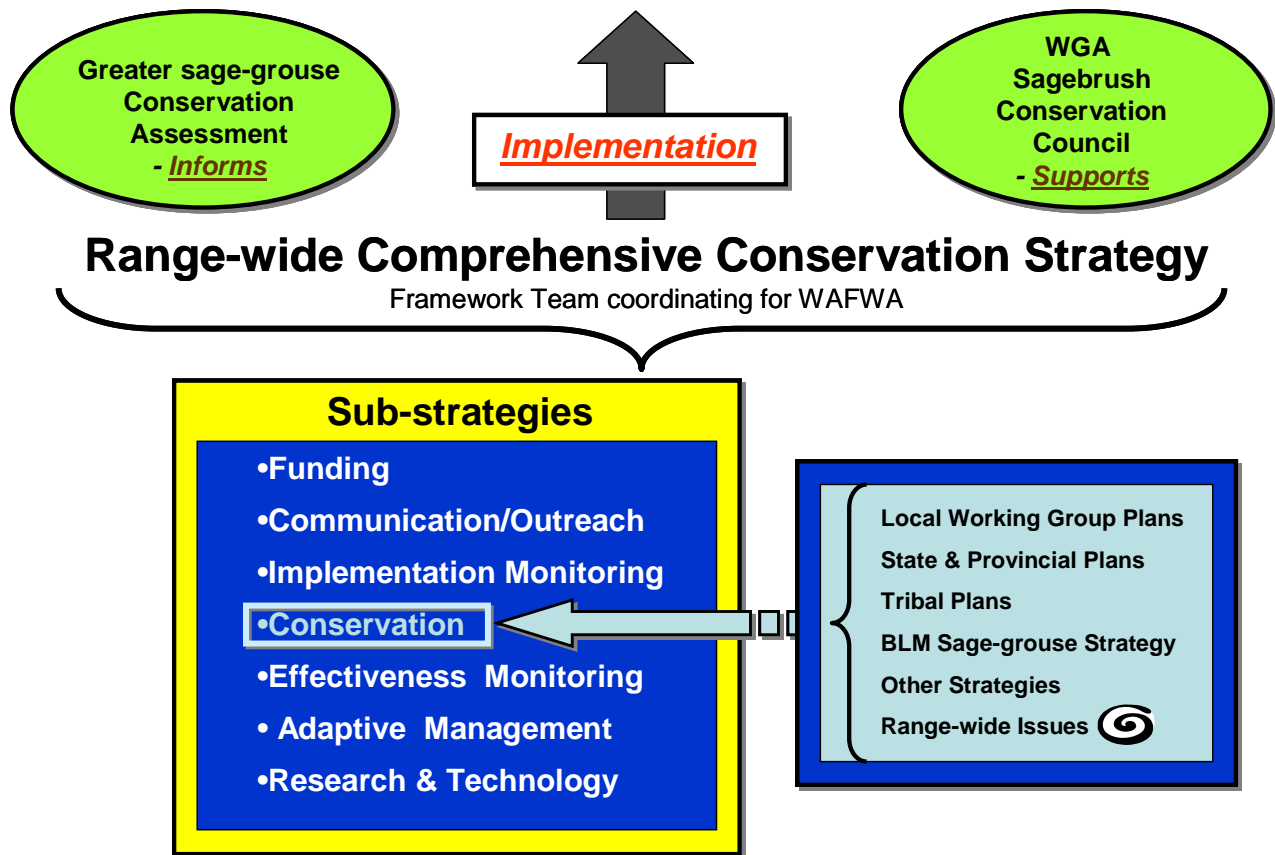
<sup>4</sup> WAFWA is the association of fish and wildlife agency directors from the western United States and Canada. Its role in this process is that of a contractor with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to prepare and deliver, with assistance from the Framework Team, the *Greater-Sage Grouse Comprehensive Strategy* to conserve Greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. WAFWA was the primary funding source for the Forum

<sup>5</sup> The Framework Team is comprised of four state wildlife agency representatives, two WAFWA staff, and a representative from each of the following federal agencies: Bureau of Land Management, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Their role is to prepare and deliver, in coordination with WAFWA, a comprehensive strategy to conserve greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. They are the primary technical experts responsible for developing the *Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy*.

representatives of individual organizations or constituencies, and they were not expected to be official signatories to the Forum’s report or recommendations. It was understood, however, that participants would provide ongoing communication and exchange with people or groups that share similar interests throughout the Forum process.

**Figure 1: Comprehensive Conservation Strategy Flow-chart**

## Maintain & enhance sage-grouse & their habitats



= Symbol denoting the Greater Sage-grouse Range-wide Issues Forum Process

Over the five months of deliberations, three formal workshops were held:

- Workshop #1: Salt Lake City, UT, November 29 – December 1, 2005
- Workshop #2: Boise, ID, January 30 – February 1, 2006
- Workshop #3: Phoenix, AZ, February 27 – March 1, 2006

In addition to these three face-to-face workshops, participants continued to work in between the meetings individually and via conference calls and e-mail exchanges. Periodic electronic questionnaires administered by the Facilitation Team helped augment the discussion by providing important feedback to the dialogue. A dedicated website, accessible to the public, offered regular access to background materials about the Forum.

This report was compiled by Susan Hayman and Larry Fisher. It is based on Forum discussions and written products of Forum work groups. A six-member “integration team,” composed of a diverse set of volunteers from the Forum helped synthesize the extensive output from the work groups and identify highest priority actions.

An initial draft of the report was shared with Forum participants for their review and comment. This final version of the report has sought to incorporate, as far as practicable, comments from participant reviewers. The authors have tried to reconcile occasional contradictory comments to reflect the overall perspective of Forum participants.

### *Forum Principles and Values*

Forum participants identified conservation issues significant throughout the range of greater sage-grouse, and cooperatively developed conservation strategies to address these issues. In the process of doing so, they identified and articulated a set of shared principles and values regarding the conservation of greater sage-grouse and their habitat:

- Greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats have intrinsic cultural, ecological and symbolic values emblematic of the Western lifestyle and environment.
- Greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats are currently in decline due to expanding human population and human uses in greater sage-grouse landscapes.
- There are many persons, agencies and policies responsible for the decline. Therefore, a cooperative effort is necessary for the recovery and sustainability of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat.
- Greater sage-grouse persistence is dependent on the presence of quality sagebrush habitat. Thus, we should protect and enhance what we have and recover what we can.
- Principles of adaptive management should be used to document actions, evaluate impacts/benefits, adjust practices, and integrate human needs and values to achieve success.
- The best available science (with a commitment to continually add to the science base) should be used to plan and implement conservation actions and evaluate the effects of conservation actions.

- Successful conservation of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat will require identification of responsibilities for implementing the *Comprehensive Strategy*, and establishment of measures of accountability to insure that conservation goals are achieved.

Forum participants recognized the value of existing federal, tribal, state/provincial and local plans and conservation agreements, and their importance to cooperative conservation of greater sage-grouse and their habitat. They also agreed on the importance of informing the public about ways to conserve and enhance greater sage-grouse populations and sagebrush habitats.

## **Range-wide Issues**

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Forum participants generally defined “range-wide issues” as those that:

- exist at the range-wide, ecoregion, population or sub-population scale;
- are characterized by factors or situations that may adversely affect the ability to implement effective conservation actions or achieve conservation success at one or more scales, and;
- either cannot be addressed at the state/provincial or local scale, or are most efficiently addressed at the range-wide scale.

## ***Methods***

Following this general agreement on a definition, participants identified the issues critical to the conservation and enhancement of populations of greater sage-grouse and their habitats by:

- reviewing the issues summarized from the *Conservation Assessment* and the *12-Month Finding*<sup>6</sup>;
- brainstorming additions or deletions from this initial set of range-wide conservation issues ( Workshop Summary #1 ), and
- grouping the remaining issues into five broad categories: Integration and coordination across range and jurisdictions, regulatory mechanisms, habitat restoration, habitat conservation and land use, and science/data management/information.

The individual issues nested within these five categories became the “sub-issues” addressed in strategy development. The issue categories and sub-issues are listed below.

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<sup>6</sup> 12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the Greater sage-grouse; Federal Register / Vol. 70 / No. 8 / Wednesday, January 12, 2005



## *Defining Range-wide Issues*

Once the issue categories (and the sub-issues within them) were identified, work groups for each issue category were established. Forum participants self-selected the work group in which they wished to participate. In several instances, people participated in more than one work group. Work groups were provided breakout time at each workshop. In addition, most work group participants continued to work individually and through e-mail or conference call conversations between workshops.

Forum work groups developed problem statements for each subissue that helped define the scope of the issue for strategy development. Range-wide strategies developed by work groups included, to the extent possible, desired conditions, goals, objectives, implementation, and monitoring information. Preliminary draft strategies were vetted with all Forum participants and refined as appropriate within the allotted time. A summary of the issues addressed by the work groups is presented below. Appendix 2 (a separate document to this Report) contains the complete text of the Forum Strategies presented to the Framework Team for further refinement and integration into the *Comprehensive Strategy*.

*Habitat Conservation and Land Use:* Greater sage-grouse currently occupy approximately 56 percent of the historically occupied range of the species<sup>7</sup>. The loss of 44 percent of greater sage-grouse range and the fragmentation/habitat degradation of remaining range poses great challenges for the perpetuation of the species.

### *Sub-issues:*

- Conservation and protection of habitats.
- Invasive plant species.
- Livestock grazing.
- Agricultural lands.
- Fences.
- Surface hydrology.
- Energy corridors.
- Roads and railroads.
- Tall structures.
- Urban/exurban development.
- Dispersed recreation.
- Non-renewable energy.

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<sup>7</sup> Connelly, J. W., S. T. Knick, M. A. Schroeder, and S. J. Stiver. 2004. Conservation assessment of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Unpublished Report. Cheyenne, Wyoming, USA.

*Habitat Restoration:* Critical elements of the effort to ensure continued existence of greater sage-grouse are the conservation of important habitat and the technical capability of reliably restoring degraded habitat. This capability includes not only ecologically sound treatment techniques and management practices, but also the production and availability of genetically appropriate plant materials.

*Sub-issues:*

- Conifer encroachment.
- Range-wide habitat restoration assessment and planning.
- Native seed availability.
- Planting expertise.
- Fire.

*Science, Data Management, and Information:* The *Conservation Assessment* and the *12-Month Finding* identified numerous instances where lack of definitions, data and metrics pose great difficulties for identifying greater sage-grouse needs and ways to recover their habitat and populations. In addition to the lack of data and information, there is currently no mechanism for efficiently housing and distributing information among the many agencies, organizations, and individuals involved in greater sage-grouse conservation.

*Sub-issues:*

- Standardized vegetation and other data layer base map and access system.
- Definition of success for greater sage-grouse conservation.
- Evaluating social and economic effects of human activities on greater sage-grouse and habitat persistence.
- Ability to predict population outcomes/habitat as a result of vegetation change.
- Range-wide research and monitoring collaboration and coordination.

*Regulatory Mechanisms:* It may be difficult to effectively implement conservation actions for greater sage-grouse due to inconsistent and inadequate application of regulations within and among agencies. Emerging science also suggests that some regulations result in unforeseen or unwanted impacts on greater sage-grouse and their habitat (e.g., regulations that address specific habitat desired conditions or methods to achieve them). Incentive-based conservation solutions are limited.

*Sub-issues:*

- Inconsistent and inadequate application of existing regulations and policies.
- Adequacy of regulations.

*Integration and Coordination across Range and Jurisdictions:* Lack of coordination of policies, programs and regulations to address issues related to greater sage-grouse within and among agencies at national, regional, state, and local levels has adversely affected greater sage-grouse conservation. Current approaches do not facilitate coordinated planning, and implementation and evaluation of plans that integrate the issues and address cumulative effects. There are currently insufficient opportunities to share scientific findings, management information, and lessons learned among local working groups and other greater sage-grouse stakeholders. This condition could impede implementation of actions that benefit greater sage-grouse.

*Sub-issues:*

- Current approaches.
- Insufficient opportunities to share scientific and management information and learning among local working groups and other sage-grouse stakeholders.
- Inconsistency in policy and coordination across jurisdictional boundaries.

## **Critical Needs**

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### ***Methods***

A six-member “Integration Team” comprised of a diverse set of volunteers from the Forum helped synthesize the extensive output from the working groups and identify highest priority actions.

The first task of the Integration Team was to refine decision criteria synthesized from the Phoenix workshop, and apply these to the goals synthesized from the Forum Strategies (Appendices 3 and 4). Based on discussion, the Integration Team concluded it was best to rate the goals spatially according to geography; i.e. one set of ratings for the western portion of the range, and one set of ratings for the eastern portion of the range<sup>8</sup> (as mapped in the *12-Month Finding*, pg. 2250, Federal Register, Jan 12, 2005).

They then applied a three-point scale (with ‘3’ being high) reflecting the Forum’s key principles.

- Protect what we have (3)
- Retain what we’re losing (2)
- Restore what has been lost (1)

(For goals that stated both ‘retain’ and ‘restore’, they assumed the highest and best use.)

Finally, they applied a three-point ‘intuitive’ cost-effectiveness rating:

- High (3)
- Medium (2)
- Low (1)

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix 4 contains the synthesized, rated goals and an explanation of the rating process. It is important to note that the purpose of the rating by the Integration Team was simply to identify those goals that most Forum participants felt an immediate need to address. The rating was not intended to create an absolute ranking of the goals.

The Integration Team noted that geography would have a critical role in ultimately integrating range-wide strategies with strategies at the state and local levels. While they agreed that a set of criteria used to identify geographic priorities would be useful, they were uncomfortable developing the criteria to be used in making these choices. A Forum recommendation to the Framework Team is to consider convening an expert panel to develop these criteria and/or identify priority locations to implement conservation actions that benefit greater sage-grouse and its habitat.

### ***Defining Critical Needs***

Each of the goals and subsequent strategies identified by the Forum participants make an important contribution to *maintain or, where possible, increase the present distribution and abundance of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat* across the range. Forum participants realized, however, that some goals were essential to address impending needs for greater sage-grouse and its habitat. The Integration Team identified seven goals as high priority/critical needs for the immediate investment of resources range-wide:

- Create long-term shared leadership and commitment resulting in implementation and evaluation of plans that integrate greater sage-grouse conservation actions throughout the range.
- Locate and protect important and/or intact greater sage-grouse habitats (“save the best”)
- Identify locations of priority areas on which to focus conservation actions to maintain the function of sagebrush ecosystems (“retain what we’re losing”).
- Institutionalize and expand long term existing natural resource information portals (e.g., SAGEMAP) for greater sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems to provide easy and dependable access to useful information. The information should include vegetation, land cover, land-use, infrastructure, habitat change, wildlife habitat, greater sage-grouse information, surface geology and hydrology data, guidelines, techniques, best management practices, and other critical data and information for greater sage-grouse and sagebrush conservation through an accessible central repository.
- Develop and implement a coordinated program of research and monitoring projects integrated within the context of the landscape. Monitoring efforts should address the effects of human activities and natural events on greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat. Monitoring results can then provide the foundation for adaptive management.
- Develop and implement grazing systems and management practices that maintain the soil quality and ecological processes necessary for a properly functioning sagebrush community to address long-term needs of greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush associated species.
- Create a mechanism for sharing information among LWGs and all levels of those involved in sage-grouse conservation to enable measurement of cumulative effects on sage-grouse habitats.

Additional goals were identified as regionally important for the western and eastern regions of the range, respectively.

#### *West*

- Contain and suppress wildfires in important greater sage-grouse habitats.
- Manage dispersed recreational activities to avoid, reduce and, where possible, eliminate displacement of greater sage-grouse or negative impacts to greater sage-grouse habitat.
- Identify known locations, and areas of future risk, for the top priority invasive plant species.

#### *East*

- Provide for non-renewable resource development and utilization with the assurance of 'no net loss' of sagebrush habitat or greater sage-grouse populations at appropriate spatial and temporal scales.
- Develop and use consistent criteria and management guidelines to locate/site, energy corridors, and operate and maintain new and existing facilities within energy corridors in a manner that minimizes impacts to greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat.
- Develop and implement technologies and practices that offset, reduce and/or minimize disturbance to greater sage-grouse and their habitat associated with non-renewable resource recovery activities.
- Develop and implement best management practices and appropriate mitigation measures that can be implemented for siting and operation and maintenance activities associated with energy corridors.

Forum participants strongly recommend the *Comprehensive Strategy* emphasize these range-wide and regional goals in the short term, and integrate accomplishment of the remaining identified goals according to their identified relative importance as additional resources become available. A number of the identified goals may also be more appropriately included in other sub-strategies (e.g., monitoring, funding, communication, science) as they are integrated into the *Comprehensive Strategy*.

### **Other Perspectives / Remaining Concerns**

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Despite the variety of perspectives and interests represented by Forum participants, there was considerable agreement about core values, preliminary strategies and critical, priority actions.

Nevertheless, given the Forum's broad, range-wide mandate and somewhat limited time frame, there remain differing perspectives and concerns that deserve acknowledgement and, in some cases, further follow up action. Most prominent among these concerns are those related to livestock grazing and energy development, as well as concerns regarding implementation of regulatory mechanisms. The Facilitation Team recommends that WAFWA undertakes steps to

continue discussions on these concerns as the Framework Team develops the *Comprehensive Strategy*.

The following summarizes the unresolved issues either noted by Forum participants during the Forum process, or highlighted in comments received on the initial draft of this Final Report:

#### *Forum Principles and Values*

Some expressed concern- over the emphasis on adaptive management in the Forum strategies, including its identification as a Forum principle and value. This concern is based on the perceived lack of demonstrated success of adaptive management, and uncertainty about agencies' commitment to follow through with the monitoring and associated response that would be required under a truly adaptive management approach.

#### *Critical Needs*

Although the concurrence among the Integration Team in synthesizing and prioritizing critical issues reflected a broad diversity of perspectives, some Forum participants disagreed with their conclusions. In particular, some participants felt that strategies related to energy development should be a range-wide priority, not just a priority for the eastern region of the range. Other participants felt that expansion of pinyon-pine/juniper woodlands into historic sagebrush habitats should be a priority in the western region of the range.

Some participants expressed concern that goals related to regulatory mechanisms did not surface as critical needs. Some participants also felt that regulatory mechanisms were more of a tool than goals unto themselves.

Since not all Forum participants were involved in the final determination of the critical, high priority needs, there was no opportunity to achieve full support for these priorities.

#### *Livestock-Grazing*

The management of livestock grazing on greater sage-grouse habitat areas was a concern for several Forum participants. Some felt that the strategies reflected a presumption that grazing would occur, rather than defining where, when and how grazing could be compatible with the habitat needs of greater sage-grouse.

It was noted that Forum strategies could have included a voluntary federal grazing permit buy-out program, providing livestock grazing permittees the opportunity to sell their federal grazing permits rather than incur the socio-economic impacts of agency actions to conserve sage-grouse.

#### *Non-Renewable Resources*

Some participants felt the Forum strategies did not adequately address the increasing intensity and extent of impacts to greater sage-grouse and their habitats due to exploration and development of non-renewable resources. Others felt that the 'no net loss' principle should not apply solely to non-renewable energy development; it should be applied equally to all authorized resource uses range-wide. Further, some participants requested that the strategies include language that a *de-minimus* level of development or impact to habitat would be allowed to occur without application of 'no net-loss'.

Disappointment was expressed that the non-renewable resources strategies failed to identify the creation of sagebrush reserves as a means to mitigate the negative impacts of energy development on sage-grouse populations.

#### *Sage-grouse and other sagebrush obligate species*

A concern was noted about the lack of strategies for identifying distinct population segments of greater sage-grouse to help inform better management decisions for sage-grouse. It was also suggested that the public interest would have been better served had the Forum addressed other sagebrush obligate/dependent species rather than the greater sage-grouse alone, especially in terms of additional research, monitoring and protections.

#### *Other Plans*

A concern was raised about existing federal, state/provincial and local plans and conservation agreements, and the need was reiterated to analyze the accomplishments of these plans under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agencies Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts, rather than allowing groups to self-report their progress.

#### *Appendix 2 – General*

Several participants were unsatisfied with portions of Appendix 2. Some would like to have had more time to further clarify or consolidate goals and objectives, and articulate the strategies in a more compelling way. Some wanted additional time to make further progress in identifying implementation actions, critical players, monitoring and projected costs.

While participants understood and accepted the time constraints that prevented additional work on Appendix 2, those with this particular concern suggested that strategies listed in Appendix 2 would benefit from additional fine-tuning as the Framework Team integrates them into the *Comprehensive Strategy*.

### **Implementation/Next Steps**

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Forum participants identified three essential resources needed to take this work forward: (1) funding, (2) leadership committed to organizing, supporting and guiding a long-term effort, and (3) the appropriate organizational structure to sustain it.

Forum participants agreed the first critical step is notifying the Western Governor's Association and appropriate federal, state, and local agency heads with budget authority to include significant funding for greater sage-grouse strategy implementation in their 2008 budgets. Deadlines for submitting budget requests are quickly approaching, and it is critical to identify and set aside funding for this purpose. Forum participants have taken responsibility for this action by preparing a letter for concurrence by the Forum that will be delivered to the Western Governor's Association and other appropriate federal, state and local agency heads.

Forum participants agreed the second critical step toward successful implementation of a range-wide strategy for greater sage-grouse is to establish an executive committee of federal, state, and local agency heads who have the authority to make decisions regarding allocation of resources (such as funding, personnel, work priorities, etc.) for strategy implementation. The executive

committee would include a designated lead person who would be responsible for the maintenance, facilitation, and institutional memory of the executive committee.

The Forum participants agreed the third critical step would be to convene a group of people representing diverse interests on a regular basis to provide counsel and advice to the executive committee regarding strategy implementation. One suggestion by Forum participants was to maintain the Forum as a continuing structure to retain the strong relationships, collective knowledge, and collegiality developed throughout the Forum process. Whatever its structure, such a group would also be useful to support and ensure accountability for strategy implementation, and to be a vehicle to communicate key messages regarding greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat to their constituents. The group would require a structural mechanism to be convened, as well as resources to support their ongoing work.

### **Forum Communication Strategy**

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Forum participants recognize the interest of their constituents and the general public in the strategies they developed during the workshop process, critical needs they identified, unresolved concerns, and implementation suggestions. While the recommendations from the Forum will be incorporated to the fullest extent possible in the *Comprehensive Strategy*, participants advise the Framework Team and WAFWA of the importance to provide a mechanism to broadly share the Final Forum Report with interested persons, organizations, and agencies. To the extent it is individually possible, Forum participants agreed to share the Forum findings and recommendations with their colleagues, agency leadership and elected officials.