

Additional guidance for photographers and others wishing to be closer than 100 yards:

- Set up a blind adjacent to but off of the lek at least a day in advance of observations (setting the blind up after the birds have left for the day).
- Arrive at least one hour before sunrise on the day you of viewing the birds.
- Do not leave the blind until after the birds have left.
- If it is obvious your activities are influencing sage-grouse activity, remove the blind.

After viewing a lek, you may want to contact the area biologist to confirm a count of birds and lek location for future surveillance and monitoring.



Fish, Wildlife and Parks Regional Offices:

Region 3
1400 South 19th Ave, Bozeman, MT 59718
406-994-4042

Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT 59406
406-454-5840

Region 5
2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings, MT 59105
406-247-2940

Region 6
54078 U.S. Highway 2 W, Glasgow, MT 59230
406-228-3700

Region 7
352 I-94 Business Loop, PO Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301
406-234-0900

Bureau of Land Management Field Offices:

Dillon Field Office
1005 Selway Drive, Dillon, MT 59725
406-683-800

Lewistown Field Office
920 NE Main Street, Lewistown, MT 59457
406-538-1900

Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive, Billings, MT 59101
406-896-5013

Glasgow Field Office
5 Lasar Drive, Glasgow, MT 59230
406-228-3750

Malta Field Office
501 South 2nd Street East, Malta, MT 59538
406-654-5100

Miles City Field Office
111 Garryowen Road, Miles City, MT 59301
406-233-2800

Greater Sage-grouse Lek Recreational Viewing Guidelines - Montana -



Greater sage-grouse are native to Montana's sagebrush steppe ecosystems. Early each spring, sage-grouse congregate at strutting grounds or "leks" for breeding activity. Leks are typically open clearings surrounded by sagebrush cover where males engage in elaborate courtship displays to attract female attention. Some leks can provide a great opportunity for recreational viewing. However, viewing may disturb sage-grouse breeding activity and could ultimately reduce reproductive success.



Photo's by: John Carlson

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has recently listed the Greater Sage-grouse as warranted for protection under the Endangered Species Act but precluded by higher priorities because of range-wide habitat loss and lack of regulatory mechanisms to protect the species. Declines in numbers of sage-grouse and their habitat have been documented across the west. The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana – Final (2005) identifies multiple goals for sage-grouse conservation; one is to minimize the impacts of recreational viewing of sage-grouse at leks. To address this goal, public notice of lek locations is limited to avoid heavy visitation that might negatively impact sage grouse. Some land management agencies (BLM, USFWS) may have leks previously identified and well suited to public viewing. If those opportunities are not available, the following guidelines are offered to assist the public in finding and enjoying individual leks for viewing.

LEK GUIDELINES

FINDING A LEK AND PLANNING YOUR VISIT

- Plan your visit for late April.
- Do not trespass on private land.
 - It is your responsibility to ensure that you are on public lands and roads or have permission to cross private lands.
- Search for leks before your planned observation.
 - The best areas to find leks are characterized by large blocks of suitable sage grouse habitat. These can be identified by consulting sage grouse distribution maps. When searching for leks in a specific area, finding a relatively high vantage point that commands a good view of the local area can be helpful. Position yourself before daylight and search the surrounding area with binoculars or spotting scopes. The best mornings for finding and observing leks are mild, clear and calm. It is not uncommon to hear the sage grouse on leks before you see them.
- Limit your viewing to leks you can observe from county roads whenever possible.
 - This minimizes disturbance to the birds and alleviates the need for requesting permission for access from landowners.
- Located your viewing location at least 100 yards from the edge of lek on established roads before your planned observation.
 - You will be arriving in the dark on the day of your observation and could unintentionally disturb displaying birds if you are unsure of where to park.



VIEWING A LEK

- Once you've found a lek and identified a viewing location, arrive at least one hour before sunrise.
 - Arriving any later may disturb birds. Most birds leave the lek within an hour or so of sunrise, but during the peak of breeding, some may stay for several hours.
- Park at least 100 yards from the closest displaying male or edge of lek on established roads.
- Turn off the vehicle lights and engine.
- Stay in your vehicle.
- Use binoculars and spotting scopes to observe birds.
- Do not make loud noises or sudden movements.
- Do not leave until the birds do.
 - Starting your vehicle and driving off can disturb the birds. Most birds leave about an hour to hour and half after sunrise.
- Leave pets at home.
- Postpone your visit if roads are muddy.
- Do not visit the same lek for multiple days unless you can do so without disturbing the birds.
- Behavioral cues that indicate you are disturbing sage-grouse can include: males stop displaying, flush from the lek, crouch down and become still, or exhibit other predator-avoidance behavior in response to your presence.

