

OAR 660-023-0115
Greater Sage-Grouse

(1) Introduction. Greater Sage-Grouse (hereafter “sage-grouse”) habitat is a unique wildlife resource subject to a variety of threats across a broad, multi-state region. Oregon’s sage-grouse habitat is comprised of a combination of public land managed by the federal government and nonfederal land generally in private ownership. Managing private and other nonfederal land for the best possible outcomes requires partnership and cooperation among many stakeholders. Accordingly, private and other nonfederal lands are strongly encouraged to participate in a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances program. Voluntary conservation efforts of this nature are recognized by the State of Oregon as a critical part in recovering the breeding population targeted by Oregon’s Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon. Beyond voluntary efforts it remains necessary to provide a regulatory framework that offers fairness, predictability and certainty for all involved parties. Engagement on the part of county government is critical to Oregon’s efforts to address possible impacts from future development.

(2) Exempt activities.

(a) Those activities that do not require governmental approval, including farm use as defined in ORS 215.203(2), are exempt from the provisions of this rule. State agency permits necessary to facilitate a farm use, including granting of new water right permits by the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), are also exempt from the provisions of this rule.

(b) Any energy facility that submitted a preliminary application for site certificate pursuant to ORS 469.300 *et seq.* on or before the effective date of this rule is exempt from the provisions of this rule. Notwithstanding ORS 197.646(3), this rule shall not be directly applicable to any land use decision regarding that facility unless the applicant chooses otherwise. Similarly, any changes to a local government’s acknowledged comprehensive plan or land use ordinances developed to achieve consistency with this rule shall not constitute “applicable substantive criteria” pursuant to OAR 345-022-0030(3), unless they are in effect on the date the applicant submits a preliminary application for site certificate, unless the applicant chooses otherwise.

(c) Private and other nonfederal lands are strongly encouraged to participate in a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCA) program. Voluntary conservation efforts of this nature are recognized by the State of Oregon as a critical part in recovering the breeding population targeted by the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon. Uses identified in CCA agreements are relieved from the provisions of this rule except that conflicting uses identified in section (7) will be subject to sections (9) to (11) in all instances regardless of enrollment status.

(3) Definitions. For purposes of this rule, the definitions in OAR 635-140-0002 and in the glossary of the “Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon”

adopted by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 22, 2011 (copies of the plan are available through the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)) shall apply. In addition, the following definitions shall apply:

(a) "Areas of High Population Richness" means mapped areas of breeding and nesting habitat within core habitat that support the 75th percentile of breeding bird densities (i.e. the top 25 percent). Please see Exhibit A.

(b) "Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances" means a formal agreement between the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and one or more parties to address the conservation needs of proposed or candidate species, or species likely to become candidates, before they become listed as endangered or threatened. Landowners voluntarily commit to conservation actions that will help stabilize or restore the species with the goal that listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act will become unnecessary.

(c) "Core areas" means mapped sagebrush types or other habitats that support sage-grouse annual life history requirements that are encompassed by areas:

(A) Of very high, high, and moderate lek density strata;

(B) Where low lek density strata overlap local connectivity corridors; or

(C) Where winter habitat use polygons overlap with either low lek density strata, connectivity corridors, or occupied habitat. Core area maps are maintained by ODFW.

(d) "Development action" means any human activity subject to regulation by local, state, or federal agencies that could result in the loss of significant sage-grouse habitat. Development actions may include but are not limited to, construction and operational activities of local, state, and federal agencies. Development actions also include subsequent repermitting of existing activities proposing new impacts beyond current conditions.

(e) "Direct impact" means an adverse effect of a development action upon significant sage-grouse habitat which is proximal to the development action in time and place.

(f) "Disturbance" includes natural threats to sage-grouse habitat such as: wildfire, juniper infestation and the spread of noxious weeds or human activities that can negatively affect sage-grouse use of habitat either through changing the vegetation type or condition, or displacement of sage-grouse use of an area. For purposes of this rule only disturbance from human activities are considered.

(g) "General habitat" means occupied (seasonal or year-round) sage-grouse habitat outside core and low density habitats.

(h) “Indirect impacts” means adverse effects to significant sage-grouse habitat that are caused by or will ultimately result from an affected development activity. Indirect impacts usually occur later in time or are removed in distance compared to direct effects.

(i) “Large-scale development” means uses that are: over 50 feet in height; have a direct impact in excess of five acres; generate more than 50 vehicle trips per day; or create noise levels of at least 70 dB at zero meters for sustained periods of time. Uses that constitute large-scale development also require review by county decision makers and are listed in one of the following categories identified in the table attached to OAR 660-033-0120.

(A) Commercial Uses.

(B) Mineral, Aggregate, Oil and Gas Uses.

(C) Transportation Uses.

(D) Utility/Solid Waste Disposal Facilities.

(E) Parks/Public/Quasi-Public.

(j) “Lek” means an area where male sage-grouse display during the breeding season to attract females (also referred to as strutting-ground).

(k) “Low density areas” means mapped sagebrush types or other habitats that support sage-grouse that are encompassed by areas where:

(A) Low lek density strata overlapped with seasonal connectivity corridors;

(B) Local corridors occur outside of all lek density strata;

(C) Low lek density strata occur outside of connectivity corridors; or

(D) Seasonal connectivity corridors occur outside of all lek density strata.

Low density area maps are maintained by ODFW.

(l) “Mitigation hierarchy” means an approach used by decision makers to consider development proposals and is ordinarily comprised of a three step process:

(A) “Avoidance” is the first step in the mitigation hierarchy and is accomplished by not taking a certain development action or parts of that action.

(B) “Minimization” is the second step in the mitigation hierarchy and is accomplished by limiting the degree or magnitude of the development action and its implementation.

(C) “Compensatory mitigation” is the third step in the mitigation hierarchy and means the replacement or enhancement of the function of habitat capable of supporting sage-grouse in greater numbers than predicted to be impacted by a development.

(m) "Occupied Lek" means a lek that has been regularly visited by ODFW and has had one or more male sage-grouse counted in one or more of the last seven years.

(n) "Occupied Pending Lek" means a lek that has not been counted regularly by ODFW in the last seven years, but sage-grouse were present at ODFW's last visit.

(o) "Priority Areas for Conservation" (PACs) means key habitats identified by state sage-grouse conservation plans or through other sage-grouse conservation efforts (e.g., BLM Planning). In Oregon, core area habitats are PACs.

(4) Local program development and direct applicability of rule. Local governments may develop a program to achieve consistency with this rule by following the standard process in OAR 660-023-0030, 660-023-0040 and 660-023-0050 and submitting the amendment to the commission in the manner provided for periodic review under ORS 197.628 to 197.650 and OAR 660-025-0175. Until the commission has acknowledged a county amendment to its comprehensive plan and land use regulations to be in compliance with Goal 5 and equivalent to this rule with regard to protecting sage-grouse habitat, sections (5) to (12) shall apply directly to county land use decisions affecting significant sage-grouse habitat. Once the commission has acknowledged a local government program under this section, that program becomes the controlling county land use document and sections (5) to (12) of this rule no longer apply directly.

(5) Quality, Quantity and Location. For purposes of this rule, sage-grouse habitat is only present in Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Harney, Lake, Malheur and Union Counties. The location of sage-grouse habitat within these counties shall be determined by following the map produced by ODFW included as Exhibit B.

(6) Determination of Significance. Significant sage-grouse habitat includes only lands protected under Statewide Planning Goals 3 or 4 as of July 1, 2015 that are identified as:

(a) Core areas;

(b) Low density areas; and

(c) Lands within a general habitat area located within 3.1 miles of an occupied or occupied-pending lek.

(d) The exact location of sage-grouse habitat may be refined during consideration of specific projects but must be done in consultation with ODFW.

(7) Conflicting uses. For purposes of protecting significant sage-grouse habitat, conflicting uses are:

(a) Large-scale development; and

(b) Other activities, which require review by county decision makers pursuant to OAR 660-033-0120 table and are proposed:

(A) In a core area within 4.0 miles of an occupied or occupied-pending lek;

(B) In a low density area within 3.1 miles of an occupied or occupied-pending lek; or

(C) In general habitat within 3.1 miles of an occupied or occupied-pending lek.

(8) Pre-Application Conference. A county should convene a pre-application conference prior to accepting an application for a conflicting use in significant sage-grouse habitat. The pre-application conference should include, at a minimum, the applicant, county planning staff and local ODFW staff.

(9) Program to achieve the goal of protecting significant sage grouse habitat in a core area.

(a) A county may consider a large-scale development in a core area upon applying disturbance thresholds and the mitigation hierarchy as follows:

(A) A county may consider a large-scale development that does not cause the one-percent metering threshold described in section (16) or the three-percent disturbance threshold described in section (17) to be exceeded.

(B) Avoidance. Before proceeding with large-scale development activity that impacts a core area, the proponent must demonstrate that reasonable alternatives have been considered and that the activity or other action cannot avoid impacts within core area habitat. If the proposed large-scale development can occur in another location that avoids both direct and indirect impacts within core area habitat, then the proposal must not be allowed unless it can satisfy the following criteria.

(i) It is not technically feasible to locate the proposed large-scale development outside of a core area based on accepted engineering practices, regulatory standards or some combination thereof. Costs associated with technical feasibility may be considered, but cost alone may not be the only consideration in determining that development must be located such that it will have direct or indirect impacts on significant sage-grouse areas; or

(ii) The proposed large-scale development is dependent on a unique geographic or other physical feature(s) that cannot be found on other lands; and

(iii) If either subparagraph (9)(a)(B)(i) or (9)(a)(B)(ii) is found to be satisfied the county must also find that the large-scale development will provide important economic opportunity,

needed infrastructure, public safety benefits or public health benefits for local citizens or the entire region.

(C) Minimization. If the proposed use cannot be sited by avoiding a core area altogether, including direct and indirect impacts, it shall be located to minimize the amount of such habitat directly or indirectly disturbed, and to minimize fragmentation of the core area(s) in question by locating the development adjacent to existing development and at the edge of the core area when possible. Uses should minimize impacts through micro-siting, limitations on the timing of construction or use, or both, and methods of construction. Minimizing impacts from large-scale development in core habitat shall also ensure direct and indirect impacts do not occur in known areas of high population richness within a given core area, unless a project proponent demonstrates, by a preponderance of the evidence, that such an approach is not feasible. Costs associated with minimization may be considered, but cost alone may not be the only consideration in determining that location of development cannot further minimize direct or indirect impacts to core areas.

(D) Compensatory Mitigation. To the extent that a proposed large-scale development will have direct or indirect impacts on a core area after application of the avoidance and minimization standards and criteria, above, the permit must be conditioned to fully offset the direct and indirect impacts of the development to any core area. The required compensatory mitigation must comply with OAR chapter 635, division 140.

(b) A county may approve a conflicting use as identified at subsection (7)(b) above upon either:

(A) Receiving confirmation from ODFW that the proposed conflicting use does not pose a threat to significant sage-grouse habitat or the way sage-grouse use that habitat; or

(B) Conditioning the approval based on ODFW recommendations, including minimization techniques and compensatory mitigation, if necessary, to resolve threats to significant sage-grouse habitat.

(10) Program to achieve the goal of protecting significant sage-grouse habitat in a low density area.

(a) A county may approve a large-scale development in a low density area upon applying the mitigation hierarchy as follows:

(A) Avoidance. Before proceeding with large-scale development activity that impacts a low density area, the proponent must demonstrate that reasonable alternatives have been considered and that the activity or other action cannot avoid impacts within a low density area. If the proposed large-scale development can occur in another location that avoids both direct and indirect impacts within a low density area, then the proposal must not be allowed unless it can satisfy the following criteria:

(i) It is not technically or financially feasible to locate the proposed large-scale development outside of a low density area based on accepted engineering practices, regulatory standards, proximity to necessary infrastructure or some combination thereof; or

(ii) The proposed large-scale development is dependent on geographic or other physical feature(s) found in low density habitat areas that are less common at other locations, or it is a linear use that must cross significant sage-grouse habitat in order to achieve a reasonably direct route.

(B) Minimization. If the proposed use cannot be sited by avoiding a low density area altogether, including direct and indirect impacts, it shall be located to minimize the amount of such habitat directly or indirectly disturbed, and to minimize fragmentation of the low density area(s) in question by locating the development adjacent to existing development and at the edge of the low density area when possible. Uses should minimize impacts through micro-siting, limitations on the timing of construction or use, or both, and methods of construction.

(C) Compensatory Mitigation. Required consistent with the provisions of paragraph (9)(a)(D)above.

(b) A county may approve a conflicting use as identified at subsection (7)(b) above when found to be consistent with the provisions of subsection (9)(b).

(11) Program to achieve the goal of protecting significant sage-grouse habitat on general habitat.

(a) A county may approve a large-scale development on significant sage-grouse habitat in general habitat upon requiring:

(A) General Habitat Consultation. Minimizing impacts from development actions in general habitat shall include consultation between the development proponent and ODFW that considers and results in recommendations on how to best locate, construct or operate the development action so as to avoid or minimize direct and indirect impacts on significant sage-grouse habitat within the area of general habitat. A county shall attach ODFW recommendations as a condition of approval; and

(B) Compensatory Mitigation. Required consistent with the provisions of paragraph (9)(a)(D)above.

(b) A county may approve a conflicting use identified in subsection (7)(b) above when found to be consistent with the provisions of subsection (9)(b).

(12) Especially Unique Local Economic Opportunity. A county may approve a large-scale development proposal that does not meet the avoidance test for significant sage-grouse habitat if the county determines that the overall public benefits of the proposal outweigh the damage to significant sage-grouse habitat. Requirements for minimization and compensatory mitigation continue to apply and attempts should be made to avoid areas of high population richness, if possible. The county shall make this balancing determination only when the proposal involves an economic opportunity that will provide a number of permanent, full-time jobs, not including construction activities, paying at least 150 percent of average county wages sufficient to increase the amount of total private nonfarm payroll employment by at least 0.5 percent over the figure included in the most recent data available from the Oregon Department of Employment rounded down to the nearest whole number. The applicant has the burden to show that the overall public benefits outweigh the damage to the significant sage-grouse habitat. This provision may be exercised by each effected county once during every ten-year period beginning on the effective date of this rule. A county is also free not to approve a proposal submitted under this section.

(13) A proposal to up-zone lands containing significant sage-grouse habitat to a greater development potential than otherwise allowed under Goals 3 and 4 shall follow the ordinary Goal 5 process at OAR 660-023-0030 to 660-023-0050. Furthermore, up-zoning lands in a core area shall be considered a direct impact and count towards the three percent disturbance threshold pursuant to section (17) below.

(14) Landscape-Level Consideration. The standards in sections (9), (10) and (11) above, are designed to minimize the amount of future impacts from human sources to significant sage-grouse habitat areas. Consistent with available science concerning the relation between human activities and sage-grouse population levels, the department will monitor direct impacts in core areas in each of the PACs shown in Exhibit (C).

(15) Central Registry. The department will work with the counties identified in section (5), ODFW, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and USFWS to maintain a central registry, tracking human disturbance from existing (baseline) and all new development affecting core areas. In addition to serving as partners in maintaining the central registry, counties must report all development land use permits for all uses within a core area to the department. The registry will include baseline calculations of direct impact levels consistent with the approach identified by the BLM. Counties may establish more refined, project specific data to replace the baseline figures so long as all counties utilize a common methodology. Each year the department shall report to the commission the amount of new direct impacts in each PAC. The report shall be coordinated with and made available to all affected counties.

(16) Metering. This rule is intended to ensure that the area of direct impact levels in any PAC, including energy facilities exempted under subsection (2)(b), does not increase by an amount greater than 1.0 percent of the total area of the PAC in any ten-year period. The initial period shall commence upon the effective date of this rule and continue for ten consecutive years, where upon the process shall be successively repeated. The commission will consider

revisions to this rule if the department's yearly reports required by section (15) indicate that the development trends in any PAC indicate that the 1.0 percent direct impact threshold is in jeopardy of being exceeded before the ten-year period has expired. Any proposal to amend this rule undertaken by the department shall be developed in coordination with all affected counties and other stakeholders.

(17) Disturbance Threshold. This rule is intended to ensure that direct impact level, including energy facilities exempted under subsection (2)(b), does not exceed three percent of the total area in any PAC. If this three-percent threshold is approached, then the department must report that situation to the commission along with a proposal to amend this rule to adapt the standards and criteria such that the threshold is not exceeded.

(18) State agency coordination programs. All state agencies that carry out or that permit conflicting uses in core area, low density area, or significant general habitat including but not limited to OWRD, Oregon Department of Transportation, Department of State Lands, Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, Oregon Department of Energy and the Energy Facility Siting Council, and Department of Environmental Quality must report the proposed development to the department, along with an estimate of the direct impact of the development. In addition, to the extent not regulated by a county, such development, other than the issuance of water rights, the expansion of cultivation, and other farm uses under ORS 215.203(2), must meet the requirements of paragraph (9)(a)(D) of this rule.

(19) Scheduled Review. The department shall commence a review of these rules no later than June 30, 2020 and, if determined to be necessary, recommend revisions to achieve the policy objectives found herein. Furthermore, should the species become listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act, the commission shall consider whether continued application of this rule is necessary. Should the rule remain applicable and the species is de-listed the commission shall consider whether continued application of this rule is necessary.

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Stats. Implemented: ORS 197.040

Hist.: LCDC 7-2015; f. 8-04-15, cert. ef. 8-13-15