

ISSUES SUBMITTAL FORM

Date: 6/7/2021

ISSUE:	Should the hunting season for greater sage-grouse in GMU 10 be closed in 2021?
DISCUSSION (FACTS AND FIGURES, EXPLANATION OF ISSUE):	

Greater sage-grouse hunting in northwestern Colorado has been conducted for many years in concert with recommendations in local conservation plans developed by CPW and a variety of local stakeholders. Carefully regulated sage-grouse hunting, as it has been conducted in Colorado and other western states, has been evaluated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and has been found not to increase the risk that the species could become Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The Service made this determination, in large part, due to the annual diligence exhibited by the states in regulating sport harvest of greater sage-grouse. In September 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a finding that the greater sage-grouse is not warranted for listing under the Act.

The Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan (completed by the Northwest Colorado Local Working Group in 2008) includes recommended thresholds for the management of sage-grouse hunting based on a 3-year average of the number of male grouse counted on leks during annual spring monitoring. The conservation plan states “Maintain open hunting seasons by...Management Zone only if the previous 3 year running average (as monitored by spring lek surveys) meets a 100 male minimum.” CPW Game Management Unit (GMU) 10 aligns with Management Zone 6 as designated by the NWCO GRSG Conservation Plan.

The total number of male sage-grouse counted at leks in Northwest Colorado Management Zone 6 (located in western Moffat County and reaching to the Utah border) has declined by 87% over the past five years from an all-time high count of 726 in 2016 (when the Northwest Colorado Population as a whole was at a recent high) to 95 in 2021. This decline has been observed despite consistent inventory effort during spring lek counts. This management zone is also currently at the lowest percent of long-term (1998 to present) average of any zone in the Northwest Colorado population. Management Zone 6 is currently at 32% of long-term average while the population as a whole is at approximately 68% of long-term average. Lastly, the current 3-year average high male count for this management zone is 79, well below the 100 male minimum stipulated in the NWCO GRSG Conservation Plan.

GMU 10 is a traditional sage-grouse hunting destination, particularly the area known as Blue Mountain – a high sagebrush plateau that encompasses the northern portion of the unit where the vast majority of sage-grouse habitat exists in the GMU. The number of wings received at long-term wing barrels that serve Blue Mountain has declined since 2015 as follows, consistent with our observed decline in lek counts:

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GMU 10 Wing Receipts:	61	31	33	16	n/a	18

In addition to resident small game hunters, GMU 10 also attracts a fair number of sage-grouse hunters from Utah each year, as sage-grouse hunter participation in adjacent areas of Utah is limited by a permit system and this is the portion of Colorado with sage-grouse hunting closest to populated areas of the Uintah Basin in Utah.

STATE LAW REQUIRES CPW TO SOLICIT INPUT FROM STAKEHOLDERS THAT MAY BE AFFECTED POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY BY THE PROPOSED RULES. THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS HAVE BEEN ADVISED OF AND INVITED TO PROVIDE INPUT ON THE REGULATORY CHANGES PROPOSED IN THIS ISSUE PAPER:

***IT IS ASSUMED THAT ALL NECESSARY INTERNAL PARTIES HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED*.**

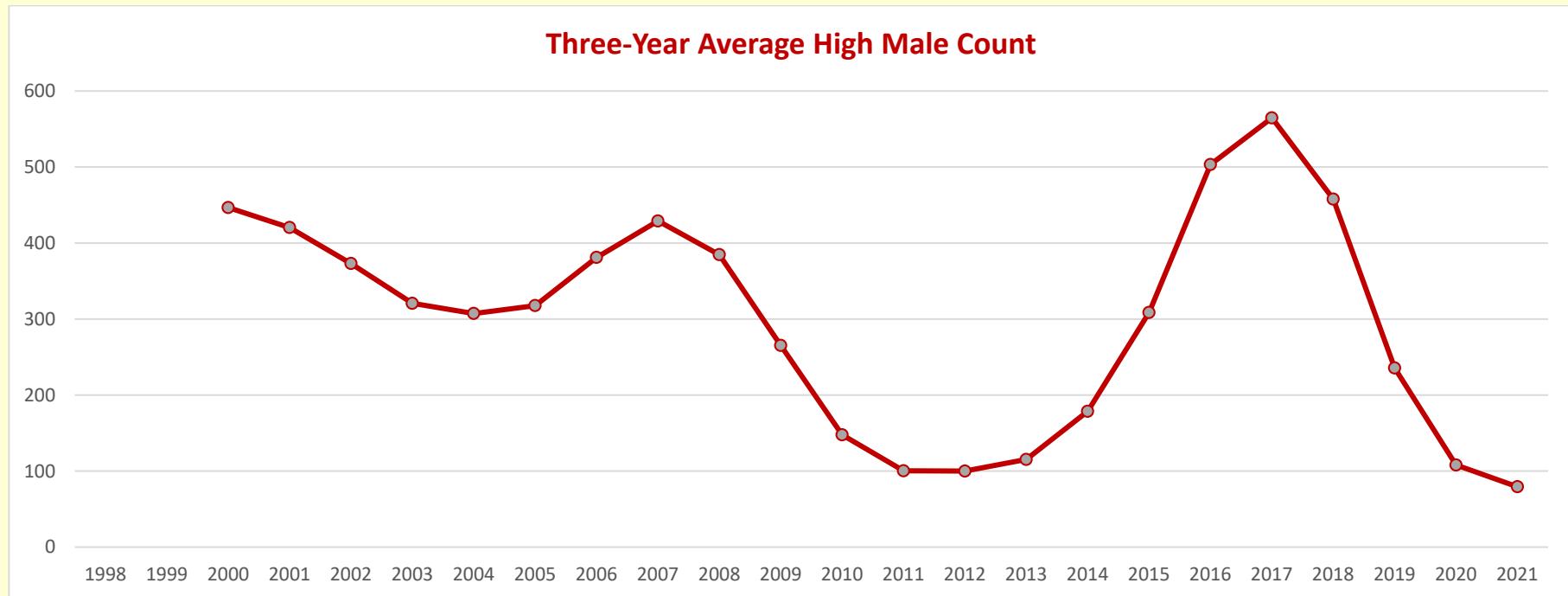
The hunting thresholds in the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan were developed through an extensive public process with the Northwest Colorado Local Working Group. Although the conservation plan was not finalized until 2008, CPW has managed greater sage-grouse hunting annually under the terms of the conservation plan since the late 1990s. In general, stakeholders impacted by this proposal will include traditional sage-grouse hunters and members of the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Local Working Group. Given that annual spring inventory data show a decline well below the threshold of a 3-year average of 100 males, there will be strong urging by members of the Working Group (that represent local government, federal government, agriculture, energy, and conservation interests) to close this GMU to hunting until lek data support re-opening the unit. CPW staff will notify Local Working Group members of the proposed change.

ALTERNATIVES: (POSSIBLE OUTCOMES or POSSIBLE REGULATIONS):

1. *Preferred Alternative*: Close GMU 10 in northwest Colorado to greater sage-grouse hunting in 2021 pursuant to thresholds set forth in the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan. GMU 10 would remain temporarily closed until lek counts result in a 3-year average of male lek attendance that exceeds 100.
2. Maintain the status quo – keep GMU 10 open to sage-grouse hunting even though sage-grouse lek counts in the affected Management Zone have fallen below the threshold of 100 males set forth in the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan.

Issue Raised by:	NW Terrestrial staff, SCON staff
Author of the issue paper (if different than person raising the issue):	Brian Holmes
CC:	J.T. Romatzke, Garrett Watson, Bill de Vergie, Brad Banulis, Kathy Griffin, Ed Gorman, Garrett Smith
APPROVED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY:	JT Romatzke and Brian Dreher
REQUIRES NEW SPACE IN THE BROCHURE?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO
ARE ADEQUATE STAFF AND FUNDING RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
REGION, BRANCH, OR SECTION LEADING IMPLEMENTATION	Terrestrial
RECOMMENDED FOR CONSENT AGENDA?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO

Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Population, Management Zone 6 - Lek Count Trend 1998 to 2021



Map of Game Management Units that overlap the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Population Area

