



## Featured Research

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**Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies New Report:  
Key Strategies for Managing Invasive Plants in Sage Grouse Habitat**

A new report from the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies assesses the threat of invasive weeds to sage grouse habitat, the barriers to overcoming it, and recommends 11 key strategies to address the serious threat that is exacerbated by wildfires.

Across sage grouse range in 11 western states, invasive plants are challenging managers to come up with effective ways to control their spread and impacts on the sagebrush ecosystem. Cheatgrass and medusahead are considered the top contenders for causing problems. Cheatgrass now dominates 17 million acres in the Great Basin and is part of plant communities on another 62 million acres. The annual exotic grass promotes hot, large wildfires that wipe out native plants. Medusahead crowds out and replaces native grasses. As more invasive plant species alter the ecosystems sage grouse and many wildlife depend upon, managers are taking the issue seriously.

“The report was truly a collaborative effort at every level, from local, state, and federal weed organizations to universities and agencies,” said Ken Mayer, WAFWA Fire & Invasives Team leader. “I believe it will help move the needle in a positive direction for weed management in the west.”

The report, *Invasive Plant Management and Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation: A Review and Status Report With Strategic Recommendations for Improvement*, complements prior publications targeting fire and fuels. How well is current management working? What activities are taking place now to address invasive plants? And what can be more effective? The report answers all three questions through the lens of conserving the habitat for sage grouse as a landscape-level bird being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The new publication results from a request of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that WAFWA address the conservation challenges of fire and invasive plants as two primary threats to sustaining

sage grouse in the western portion of the species range. The request led to a series of reports (this is the fourth in the series).

While wildfire can take center stage in the news, the effects of fire on sage grouse are closely linked to invasive annual grasses and forbs that affect the wildfire cycle and directly impact grouse habitat.

The authors conclude on a positive note, encouraging a prioritization of controlling invasive plant infestations and touting successful efforts that have treated thousands of invasive plant outbreaks across the west. Those successes demonstrate that investing in multi-landowner collaboration and broad scale control can have high returns.