



Losing Sage Grouse through Farm Subsidies

The Farm Bill is \$800 billion in federal legislation that governs every part of food and farm policy in the U.S. and has major impacts for wildlife habitat on private and working lands. Congress is currently working on approving a new Farm Bill because the current law is set to expire in September 2012.

America's wildlife benefit from what has been more than \$5 billion in annual conservation support through the Farm Bill, but these investments in our natural heritage are threatened by crop insurance subsidies from the same bill that encourage farmers to plow grassland, wetland and forest – valuable habitat for species such as the sage grouse.

Sage Grouse in Decline

Sage grouse are dependent on sage brush habitat for nesting and food sources and much of this sage brush habitat overlaps with farmland in the western U.S. – 31 percent of sage grouse range is privately owned.ⁱ

Populations of sage grouse have declined significantly, driven by habitat loss and fragmentation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service predicts that if these losses continue, many populations of sage grouse could disappear, leaving small fragmented populations that are more susceptible to extinction.ⁱⁱ

Crop Production Leading to Habitat Loss

New analysis from the Environmental Working Group shows that increased crop production is leading to grassland (and wetland) loss in parts of the sage grouse range. Between 45,000 and 70,000 acres of habitat has been plowed under in some counties in southeastern Montana in just three years.ⁱⁱⁱ High commodity prices also play a role, but the federal government has long concluded that generous crop insurance subsidies lead farmers to plow up millions of acres of previously unplowed habitat.

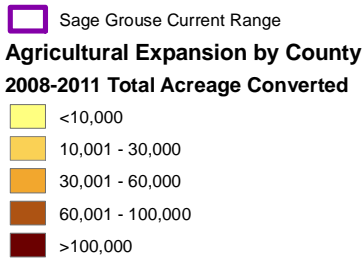


Courtesy U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

“Conservation compliance was enacted as part of the 1985 farm bill and contributed almost single-handedly to three decades of progress in limiting erosion, cleaning up waterways and protecting wetlands.”

Senator Saxby Chambliss (R – GA), June 20, 2012

Agricultural Expansion* in Grassland and Wetland Habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region in the Current Range of Sage Grouse

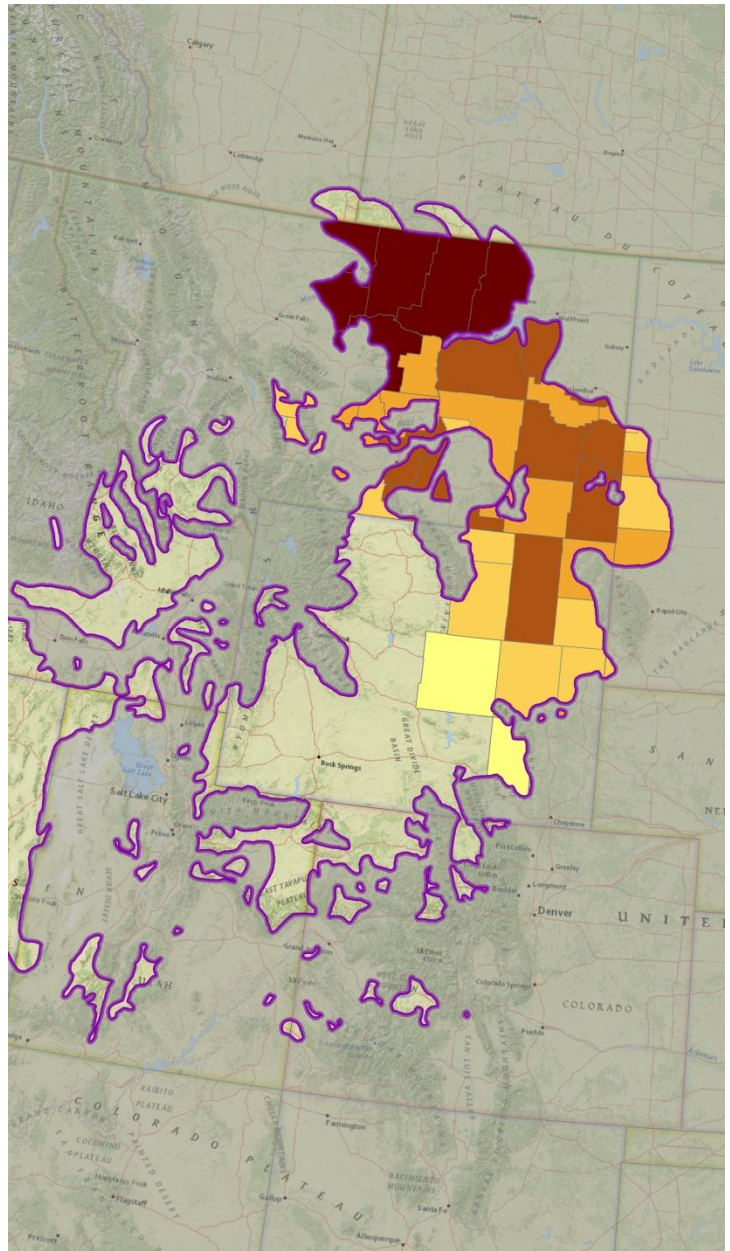


* Agricultural expansion was calculated by the Environmental Working Group using the USDA NASS (National Agricultural Statistics Service) Cropland Data Layer (CDL) for crop years 2008 (56m), 2009 (56m), 2010 (30m), & 2011 (30m).

The Senate Farm Bill continues to subsidize 60% of crop insurance premiums, further incentivizing production on unproductive and often environmentally sensitive lands. In the past, farmers receiving crop insurance subsidies were required to take basic conservation measures to protect soil, water and wildlife but these requirements were removed in the 1996 Farm Bill and were still missing in the draft Senate bill until an amendment restored these requirements. The conservation compliance amendment passed and is now included in the Senate’s version of the Farm Bill.

These conservation requirements have been proven to protect clean water, prevent soil erosion and preserve wildlife on millions of acres of America's farmland. In order to protect vital habitat for sage grouse and other species that depend on grasslands and wetlands, the House should take similar action to the Senate and add conservation compliance requirements back into crop insurance subsidies in their version of the Farm Bill.

More Information on the Farm Bill
 Contact: Dr. Timothy Male, Vice President for Conservation Science & Policy
 Email: tmale@defenders.org
 phone: (202) 772-3227



i U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2010. Beginner’s Guide to Greater Sage-Grouse. Accessed at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse/Primer1-SGBeginnersGuide.pdf> on May 31, 2012.

ii U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Greater Sage-Grouse. Accessed at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse/> on May 31, 2012.

iii Environmental Working Group. 2012. Unlimited Subsidies, High Prices Threaten “Prairie Potholes.” Accessed at <http://www.ewg.org/agmag/2012/04/subsidized-sodbusting-unlimited-subsidies-high-prices-threaten-%E2%80%9Cprairie-potholes%E2%80%9D/> on April 25, 2012.



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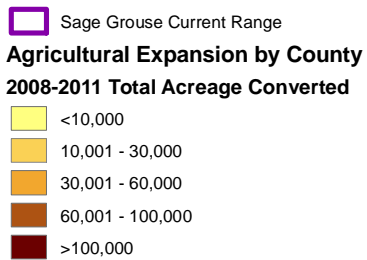


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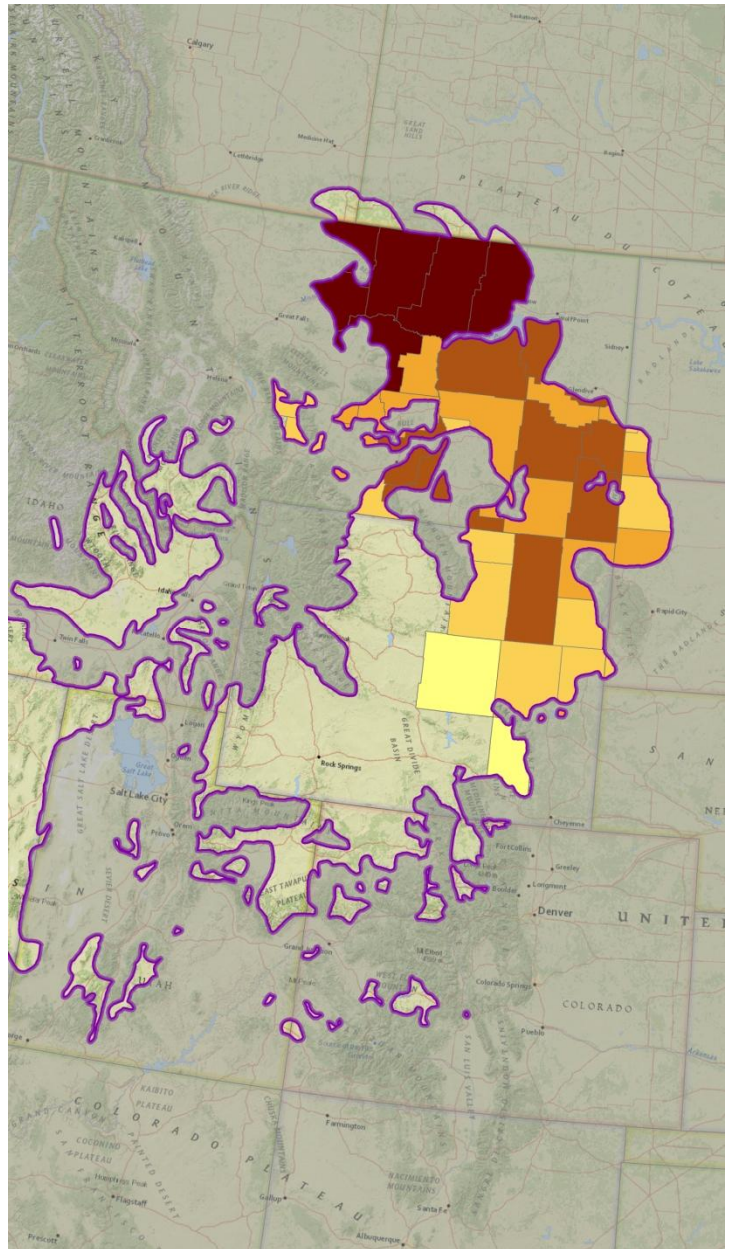
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