

Ethical and responsible guidelines for Viewing Greater Sage-grouse Leks

The mission of the Utah Division of Wildlife is to serve the people of Utah as a trustee and guardian for the wildlife of this state. By protecting critical habitats and encouraging responsible recreation by the citizens of this state, we will continue to see healthy populations of wildlife for generations to come.

This document is to help guide the citizens and its visitors to help in this effort. Ethical and responsible recreation within this states unique and valuable resource is important to understand to achieve long-term conservation.

The greater sage-grouse is an icon of the western United States and large viable populations can be found in Utah. It is the largest native species of grouse found in North America living among sagebrush ecosystems. Each spring starting in March and extending into May, these magnificent birds gather at a communal location known as a lek. On the lek, male birds compete in a hierarchal system for breeding rights for those female birds that visit the lek. This only happens once a year and breeding success is critical for survival and reproduction for these birds. As with other species of birds, the male bird has an elaborate mating display to convince the females that he is a worthy mate. It is also a display to try and ward off other males. Leks will typically have several males displaying for female attention and is a wonder to watch.

A popular recreational event is to visit these lek sites, photograph, and watch Mother Nature at its finest. The guidelines below are a request for your help in The Divisions effort to protect and help perpetuate greater sage-grouse. Reducing your impact by choosing to follow these guidelines, you are doing your part in an ethical and responsible way to help this species survive for generations to come.

Visiting leks

Please schedule your lek visit in late April to early May

- The first of the lekking season is peak breeding time. By visiting after the peak, most females will have mated ensuring chances of producing a successful nest and chicks are highest
- Weather can be better for viewing and photographing later in the season and males will still be in full display
- Impacts to dirt roads will be less
- DO NOT TRESSPASS onto private property

Arrive at lek sites about an hour BEFORE sunrise

- Before arriving at the lek, stop your vehicle at least a mile away and organize your gear, bathroom break, silence phones and so forth

Keep a conservative distance from the lek

- The closer to the lek you get the greater the chance you have to disturb the process
- Stay at least 50 yards from the lek within a blind or vehicle
- Use binoculars and spotting scopes to observe

Turn off your vehicle and stay inside

- Dress warm and do not turn on your vehicle for warmth
- Turn off all lights
- Leave pets home

Stay at the lek until birds leave

- By leaving before the birds, you will impact their survival
- Birds can occupy a lek up to an hour and half after sunrise
- Some males will continue to display at the lek if the majority of the birds leave
- Do not move closer

You are too close and causing a disturbance if you notice birds crouching to the ground, looking at you and/or males stop displaying. Remember successful breeding at the lek is dependent on the amount of disturbance to the birds occupying the lek. Be respectful to wildlife by minimizing your activity, movements and noise.

Beyond the lek season, there are other impacts to sage-grouse that you can help minimize. Nesting and chick rearing come next. Stay on designated trails and roads within sagebrush ecosystems. Do not let pets run wild. Please keep them on a leash while recreating.