

1. Rep. Lieser– Study status of sharp-tailed grouse .

Background: The sharp-tailed grouse is an upland game bird in Montana, generally hunted from September to January. According to the Montana Field Guide, their habitat is primarily grasslands interspersed with shrub and brush-filled coulees. They prefer stands of inter-mixed tree and shrub grasslands. With high population, they spread into islands of native grassland, usually along drainages surrounded by grain fields. Sharp-tailed Grouse persist only on native bunchgrass-shrub stands.

Until recently, sharp-tailed grouse in Montana were found west of the Continental Divide in larger mountain valleys with extensive native bunchgrass-shrub stands. However, they have now apparently been extirpated, or nearly extirpated, from this historic range. In western Montana, housing developments and agriculture have eliminated large portions of habitat required for shelter, protection from predators, night roosting and spring nesting; dense trees and shrubs are needed for food, rest, escape, cover, and winter survival.

East of the divide, the field guide lists the population as apparently secure and not a Species of Concern.

Member objective: The EQC should study the status of the sharp-tailed grouse, including the effects of oil and gas development on habitat. A study at the University of North Dakota is evaluating the impacts of gas and oil development on the sharp-tailed grouse by monitoring grouse nests with miniature cameras to determine nest success, identify changes in predators responsible for destroying nests, and quantify grouse nesting behaviors inside and outside of areas associated with gas and oil development in the 2012 and 2013 breeding seasons.

The EQC should also study the effect of power lines on bird populations.

Study Approach: Staff would compile basic background about the sharp-tailed grouse. Meeting presentations could include the DFWP, North Dakota researchers and other scientists, and stakeholders. Follow up research may include options for state level action.

Estimated Staff Time: The range could be from .02 FTE (60 hours) to .1 FTE (272 hours).

Estimated EQC meeting time: This could possibly be accomplished as an agenda item at one to three meetings.