# Fence Considerations in Sage-Grouse Habitat

Livestock fences are very important tools used in the management of rangelands but they can pose problems for wildlife, such as, sage-grouse. Although the vast majority of fences do not present hazards for sage-grouse, some sections of fence located in areas where the birds concentrate can result in fence collisions and wooden fence posts can increase perching opportunities for hawks and eagles.

Sage-grouse fence collisions have been documented in several states. In Utah, at least 36 sage-grouse were killed the first winter after a barbed wire fence was installed at a winter habitat site. Similarly, installation of a two-mile length of fence in Wyoming resulted in the deaths of 21 sage-grouse. A study conducted on the Deseret Ranch in Utah concluded the second highest cause of death there for sage-grouse involved fence collisions. Researchers in Oklahoma studying prairie chickens documented significant mortality due to fence strikes. However, after marking over 100 miles of fence to make them easier for prairie chickens to see, there have not been any collisions along the marked fences.

Even though the extent of problematic fences in Oregon remains unknown, ranchers can be vigilant of the potential issues and take steps where needed to alleviate them. If you observe a fence collision, find feathers on wires, or discover a sage-grouse carcass within 30 yards of a fence, that might be indicative of a more frequent hazard for grouse in that area. To learn more about potential fence issues for grouse, and what to do about them, please refer to the recommendations below.

**DEAD BIRD**
***Dead birds found near fences may indicate a problem with fence collisions***
***Photo by: Jason Tack.***

**Issue:** New fences in prime sage-grouse areas can result in collision problems.

**Solution:** New fences should be marked or flagged to allow local wildlife, including sage-grouse, to become accustom to their presence and avoid them.

**Issue**: Fences that go through or near leks, or grouse dancing grounds, can result in collisions. As grouse fly to leks before sunrise, they are vulnerable to fence collisions and are more susceptible to being flushed into the fence by predators patrolling leks.

**Solution:** Within ½ mile of leks, avoid new fencing and/or relocate existing fences if possible. If that is not feasible, mark fence wires to make them more visible.

**Issue:** Abandoned fences are problematic for sage-grouse and other wildlife. Woven wire fences are particularly hazardous.

**Solution:** Remove fences from the landscape that are no longer needed whenever possible.

**Issue:** Fences located in areas where sage-grouse concentrate or where the daily flight patterns routinely cross fences can be a collision hazard. Examples might be regular movement to and from an alfalfa field, or wet seep to feed, or an important wintering area or lek.

**Solution:** Fences should be marked or flagged to increase wire visibility and allow sage-grouse to avoid them. When selecting fence markers, elements to consider are: expense, durability, ease-of-attachment, size/weight, and effectiveness of the product. A suggested fence marker design that has been effective for grouse is shown below.

**Issue**: Fence posts are frequently used as perches for hawks, eagles, and ravens.

**Solution:** Use steel posts instead of wooden posts on new fences. On existing fences with wooden posts or on bracing, drive nails or other spikes into top of post to deter perching.

NRCS offers financial assistance to landowners willing to modify fences to make them friendlier for sage-grouse and other wildlife. Through the Oregon Sage-Grouse Habitat Improvement Initiative, NRCS will pay up to 75% of the average cost to implement these conservation practices in certain areas. Landowners can apply for program assistance at their local NRCS office. Eligible applications will be ranked and will compete against other projects for funding. Higher preference will be given for projects located within high priority sage-grouse habitat.

NRCS Field Offices located within High Priority Sage-Grouse Habitat:

**Deschutes & Crook Counties..... 541-923-4358**

**Lake County..... 541-947-2367**

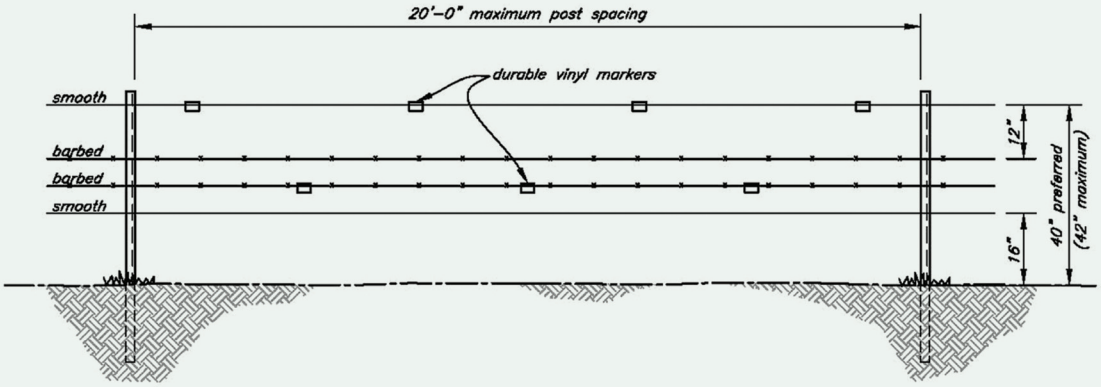
**Harney County..... 541-573-6446**

**Malheur County..... 541-889-7637**

**Baker County..... 541-523-7121**

# Fence Considerations

## "WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY" FENCE DESIGN




## "Do-It-Yourself" Easy Design for Fence Markers

This method developed by Sutton Avian Research Center uses the "undersill" trim-strips of vinyl house siding.

These undersill strips have a "lip" that will allow them to simply snap onto barbed wire fences.

Material can be easily cut into 3-inch segments with a pair of trim snips or a miter saw with a blade made for cutting vinyl.

The suggested placement is as shown here: 4 feet spacing between markers; top and middle wires marked.

Nail on top of wooden post discourages perching.

## KEY FEATURES OF FENCE:

1) Not too tall
2) Adequate spacing between the top 2 wires to prevent deer/elk from becoming entangled,
3) Smooth bottom wire with sufficient space to the ground to allow pronghorn and deer fawns to pass under,
4) Metal posts that reduce perching opportunities, and
5) Durable markers that increase wire visibility.

**FENCE MARKER**

*Added visibility in the winter is provided by adhering reflective tape or by alternating black and white markers.*

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
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