

Fact Sheet on HB 271 – game bird farms – greater sage grouse

What the original bill would do:

- Set up a licensing structure with tight controls for commercial captive breeding of the greater sage-grouse (as an authorized bird farm under Wyoming laws)
- Address disease control, enclosures, parameters for release and limitations on collection of eggs and other factors
- Set a limit of 250 eggs that could be collected from the wild annually by a licensee

Committee action

- The House strengthened language in the bill to ensure the Game and Fish Department could set rules to control the scope of such operations so that wild sage-grouse populations are not put at risk. Game and Fish officials testified that the limit of 250 eggs was a biological acceptable range based on past analysis (the agency conducted preliminary rule-making on this same topic in 2008 but due to *overall public opposition* did not promulgate final rules).
- The Senate changed the 250 egg gathering limit to 1,000, appearing to base this on the needs of a prospective company, thereby putting commercial gain over scientific wildlife management

An uncertain purpose and a risky business

- There is a lot of uncertainty regarding the purposes of this commercial activity: is it for controlled hunting in enclosures? Why or how would the birds be eventually released—for conservation purposes for the species? How do we measure the success of the venture if we don't know its purpose?
- The science is clear: releasing animals bred in captivity for conservation gains is a last resort for very small populations of conservation-reliant species and is best done by a university or a state or federal wildlife management agency.
- No one knows if large-scale captive breeding and release of greater sage-grouse can be successful – it is scientifically unproven.
- If this enterprise is aimed at release for conservation purposes, it is unneeded and risky. The greater sage-grouse has a habitat problem, which recent state and federal policies are addressing. Though the bill has language about disease control, it is always risky to release captive animals back into the wild.
- If this enterprise is not aimed at release, it is not in the best interests of Wyoming citizens and our wildlife to allow a private company access to commercialize a public resource like grouse.

Why HB 217 Should be Opposed

The 1,000 egg limit for annual collection in the wild by each licensee threatens local populations of greater sage-grouse, and is not based on wildlife science, but on commercial business needs. This bill is a distraction from conservation measures that are proven to work for the sage-grouse. And it sets a bad precedent for privatization of publicly owned wildlife.