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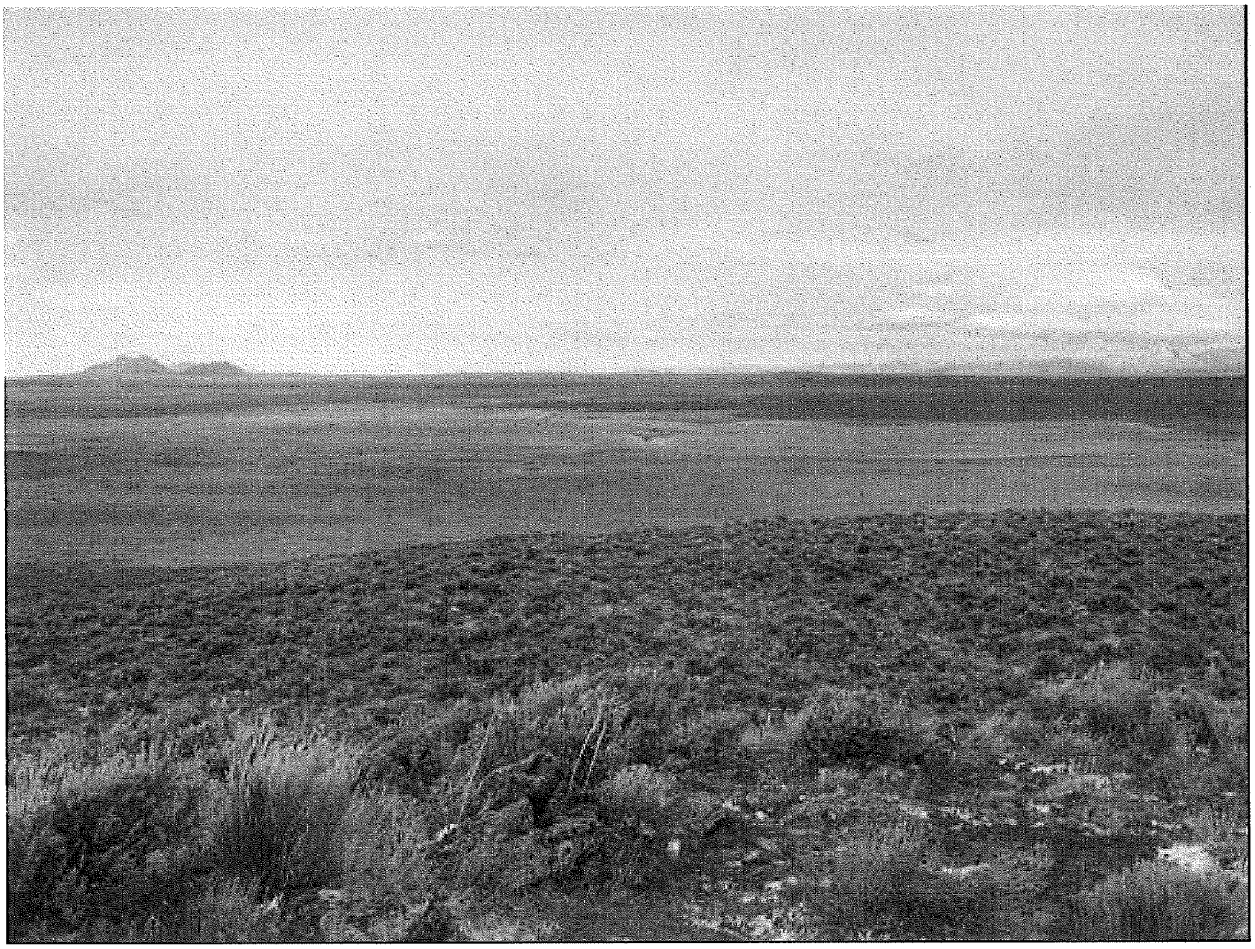
Sage Grouse Survey Report
Eagle Rock Enrichment Facility



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Introduction

North Wind, Inc. was contracted by AREVA Enrichment Services LLC (AES) to conduct supplemental Greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) lek searches within the proposed Eagle Rock Enrichment Facility (EREF) located in Bonneville County, Idaho. These supplemental sage grouse surveys complemented initial lek searches that were conducted during the first week of May 2008 by MWH. No greater sage grouse were observed on the EREF property during the May 2008 field survey, or during subsequent surveys conducted by MWH in June 2008, October 2008, January 2009 and April 2009. The purpose of these supplemental surveys was to conduct surveys during a time-frame closer to the sage grouse peak breeding period than the previous study. The goal of these searches was to locate any sage grouse leks within the EREF and along the proposed transmission line route and to quantify sage grouse habitat potential within these locations. Surrounding areas were also searched to investigate potential sage grouse lekking areas outside of the proposed facility that could also be impacted.

Methods

North Wind Wildlife Biologist, John Michalak, conducted sage grouse lek searches within the EREF property, surrounding areas, and a proposed transmission line right-of-way from the Rocky Mountain Power Bonneville substation to the EREF property. Searches were conducted in the early morning hours of April 28 and 29, 2010. The ground lek searching method that was utilized follows that described in Connelly et al. (2003), *Monitoring of Greater Sage-grouse Habitats and Populations.* This protocol describes the Idaho Department of Fish and Game approved method for searching for sage grouse leks. Established roads within suitable habitats and areas where sage grouse sign had been previously documented were driven to search and listen for male breeding calls. Protocol dictates that the biologist stops every kilometer and turns off the automobile to listen for sage grouse "popping" vocalizations. Where roads were not established, the biologist performed foot surveys that transected the EREF at sufficient spacing distance to assure identification of possible leks. Searches began at 5:30 a.m. both mornings (approximately one-half hour before sunrise) and lasted until two hours after sunrise. Leks were sought along the proposed power line road on April 29, 2010 and stops were made every kilometer to listen for grouse. Prior to morning searches, day and evening foot surveys for potential lekking areas were conducted across the EREF and transmission line route to look for signs left by displaying birds. The breeding areas will usually have caecal casts, a deposit from the caecum of the sage grouse, and feathers lost from competing male birds. This sign gives the biologist an idea of the areas to focus on during the morning searches. While conducting grouse surveys, potential sage grouse habitats were also quantified using the parameters described in Connelly et al. (2003).

Survey Results

There were no breeding birds heard at any of the search points on the EREF property (Figure 1). The power line survey also did not yield any lek locations, nor were any birds seen during the survey (Figure 2). While conducting foot surveys, the only sage grouse signs found were at points 1, 2, and 8 (Figure 1). Old grouse pellets were found at these sites and photos were taken (see Figures 3-5). No breeding birds were heard or seen during morning surveys.

The habitat of the EREF property is comprised of Wyoming big sage (*Artemisia tridentata wyomingensis*) and crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*), with the majority of the eastern part of the property developed for agriculture. The western and northern portions of the property appeared to possess the characteristics outlined in Connelly et al. (2003) for grouse nesting habitat, but no signs were found to indicate that it is being utilized by sage grouse for nesting. The North Wind biologist's familiarity with vegetation studies in sagebrush habitats lead him to estimate that the sage cover is approximately 10-15 percent, lower than the cover of 15-25 percent range outlined in Connelly et al. (2003). The 10-15 percent cover was consistent in areas surveyed outside of the property line to the north and east. Bare ground for all areas was high and could be a factor in preventing nesting sage grouse looking for cover.

Reference

Connelly, J.W., Reese, K.P., Schroeder, M.A. 2003. *Monitoring of Greater Sage-grouse Habitats and Populations*. College of Natural Resources Experiment Station, College of Natural Resources, University of Idaho.

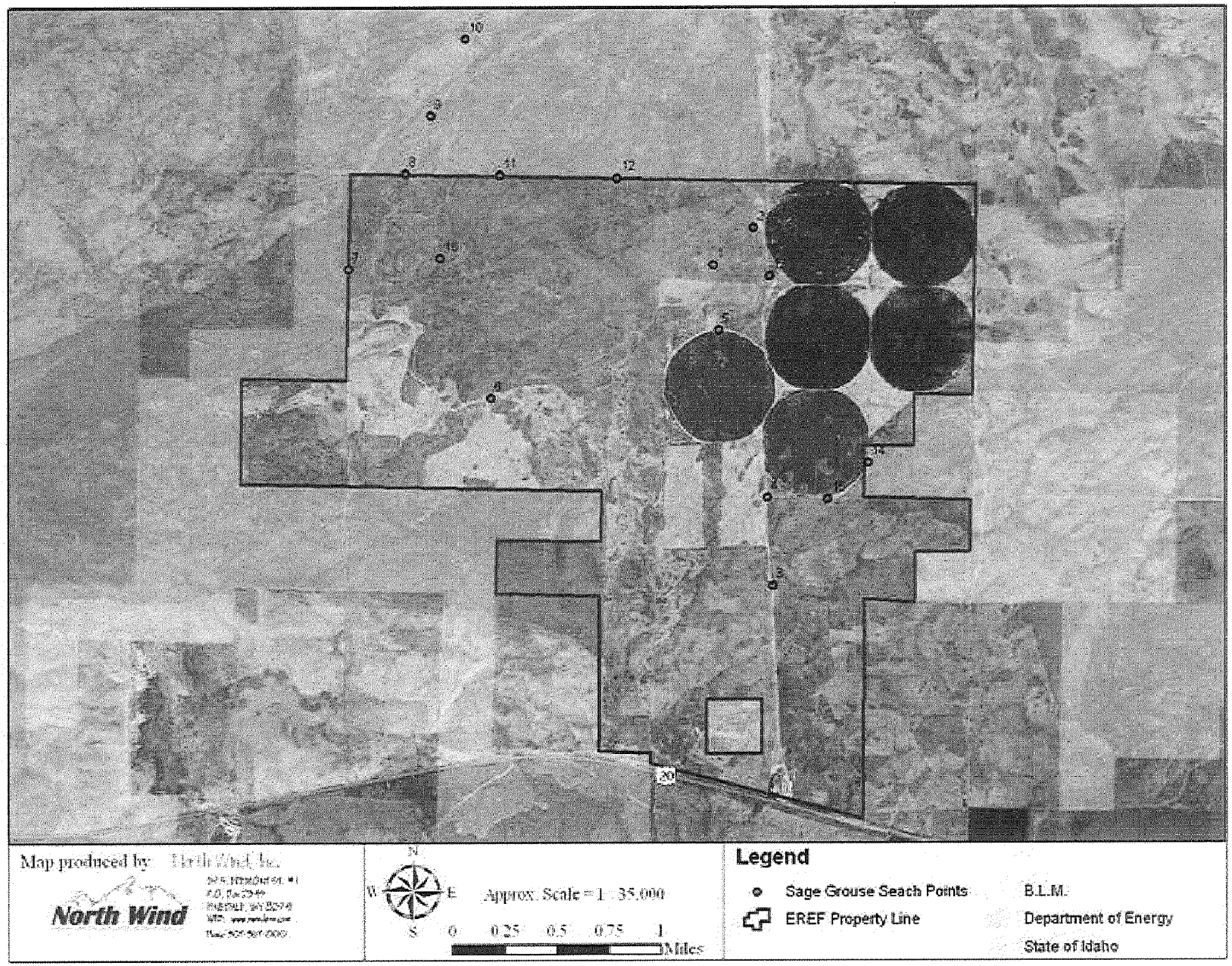

Figure 1. Sage grouse survey points within the project area and surrounding areas.