

Dusky Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*)

Conservation Status Rank Summary

October 16, 2025

For details on assessment and ranking methodology, see: [Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species](#)

Rarity and Trends

Rank Factor	Date Assessed	Value	Score	Data Source	Comments
Rarity					
Range Extent	2025-03-11	Y: 218756.7 km ²	4.710	MTNHP Range Maps	None
Area of Occupancy	2025-03-11	16222 4km ² cells	5.500	MTNHP Modeling	None
Number of Occurrences			-		Factor not used in ranking.
Population Size			-		Factor not used in ranking.
# of Occurrences in Good Condition			-		Factor not used in ranking.
% of Area Occupied in Good Condition			-		Factor not used in ranking.
Environmental Specificity	2008-09-15	Moderate	-	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	Factor not used in ranking. Drier conifer forests. Methodology: NS (2003) Original Score: C
Rarity is calculated by averaging weighted factor scores: $((4.71 \times 1) + (5.50 \times 2)) / 3 = 5.24$					
Trends					
Short-term Trend	2023-12-20	-5.4%	0.000	IMBCR	IMBCR trend in population estimates for Montana. "-Point Estimate"
Long-term Trend	2008-09-15		0.000	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	Historic cover types largely still in place. Methodology: NS (2003) Original Score: E
Trends score is calculated by summing weighted short and long-term trend scores: $((0.00 \times 2) + (0.00 \times 1)) = 0.00$					

Threats

Rank Factor	Date Assessed	Value	Score	Data Source	Comments
Threats					
Overall Threat Impact		High	1.830		Fire, Canopy removal, harvest
Intrinsic Vulnerability	2008-09-15	Moderately vulnerable	-	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	Factor not used in ranking. Methodology: NS (2003) Original Score: B
Threat score is calculated from Overall Threat Impact when available or Intrinsic Vulnerability if not: (1.83) = 1.83					

Individual Threats Data

Threat Category	Date Assessed	Impact Score	Scope	Severity	Immediacy	Comments
Biological Resource Use	2025-10-16	Low	Restricted	Moderate	High	Regeneration of even-aged stands after forestry have long-term impacts on habitat suitability.
Natural System Modifications	2025-03-11	Low	Restricted	Moderate	High	Impacts of fire appears poorly defined for this species. Although it is cited as a threat (Youtz et al. 2022). Assessment of specific impacts on abundance and habitat of low, moderate, and severe fire are not defined within Montana or similar ecosystems.
Invasive & Other Problematic Species, Genes & Diseases	2026-03-17	Low	Restricted	Moderate	High	Large scale habitat loss / degradation due to beetle kill: Dusky grouse in the Rocky Mountains occupy mountain habitats characterize as open fir-spruce conifer forests. While they use areas dominated by shrubs/steppe and grassland to forage in summer months, they rely on conifer forests as breeding and winter habitats. Dusky grouse are almost entirely forest obligates in winter due to the dependence on consuming needles and utilizing large conifers as roosting sites. These habitats are affected by natural and anthropogenic factors such as timber harvest, beetle kill, wildfire, and climate change.
Climate Change & Severe Weather	2025-03-11	Medium	Large	Moderate	Moderate	Species is cold adapted and Audubon Survival by Degrees project predicts decline in suitable habitat in low elevation and isolated mountain ranges in central Montana
Threat Tally: 0 - Very High, 0 - High, 1 - Medium, 3 - Low Overall Threat Impact* = High						

*See [Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species](#) for calculation of Overall Threat Impact based on the number and impact of individual threats.

Conservation Status Rank Calculation

Raw score

Rarity: $(5.24 \times 70\%)$ + Threats: $(1.83 \times 30\%)$ + Trends: $(0.00) = 4.22$

Calculated Rank: S4

Accepted Rank	S4
Date Approved	Date Unknown
Approval Authority	Legacy Assessment: MTNHP Staff
Rank Justification	Species is found in motane forests across western and central Montana. Populations are generally stable. Threats include fire, impacts of forest management practices that create even-aged stands, and impacts of warming average temperatures.

Supplementary Information

Montana Natural Heritage Program. 2021. Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species. 18 p.

https://mtnhp.mt.gov/docs/Montana_State_Rank_Criteria_20211201.pdf

Montana Field Guide Species Account:

<https://fieldguide.mt.gov/speciesDetail.aspx?elcode=ABNLC09020>

Predicted Suitable Habitat Model:

<https://mtnhp.mt.gov/resources/models/?elcode=ABNLC09020>

Information Needs

Information needs are assessed by considering the availability of factors used to assess species status as well as the quality of these assessments. Current information availability and quality to inform Conservation Status Rank for this species are highlighted.

Rank Factor	Assessment Category	Value	Criteria
General Status	Status Quality	Adequate	Calculated rank has low uncertainty and is represented by a single rank (e.g. S3); accepted rank may be adjusted to a range rank (e.g. S2S3)
		Poor	Rank assessed as SU or calculated rank has notable uncertainty and corresponds to a range rank with 2 or more values (e.g. S2?, S1S3, or S4S5)
Rarity	Range Quality	Adequate	Range polygon adequately represents area of probable occupancy and does not include substantial unoccupied areas; range may be adequately defined and still include areas of unsuitable habitat (e.g. mountain ranges for plains species)
		Marginal	Range polygon defined, but may include or exclude notable areas where the species may or may not occur on the landscape
		Poor	Range polygon not defined
	Habitat Quality	Adequate	Species-habitat relationship is well-defined (e.g. relevant literature or robust habitat model available)
		Marginal	Understanding of species-habitat relationship is adequate among some but not all habitats (e.g. literature covers similar habitats outside of Montana or habitat model performance is only somewhat adequate)
		Poor	Species-habitat relationship is not well understood
Threats	Threat Quality	Adequate	Threat Impact is a single value (including "Unthreatened")
		Marginal	Threat Impact assessed at more than one value (e.g. "High - Medium")
		Poor	Threat Impact is Unknown but Intrinsic Vulnerability is assessed
		Unknown	Threat Impact is Unknown and Intrinsic Vulnerability is not assessed
Trends	Recency	Current	Short-term Trend assessment date less than 10 years old
		Out of Date but Adequate	Short-term Trend assessment date is more than 10 years old or Unknown, but species is Unthreatened
		Out of Date	Short-term Trend assessment date more than 10 years old
		Not Available	Short-term Trend data are not available
	Trend Quality	Sufficient	Short-term Trend assessed at a single value or multiple values with a minimum trend greater than -10% (stable or increasing)
		Unknown but Sufficient	Short-term Trend is Unknown, but species is Unthreatened
		Poor	Short-term Trend is less than -10% (in decline) with two or more values selected
		Unknown	Short-term Trend is Unknown

Summary of Information Availability

No information is needed to assess status

Summary of Information Needs

All information to assess status are available

Additional Threat Details

The table below contains the complete threats assessment for this species. While the Conservation Status Rank Calculation is based on cumulative, broadly categorized (Level 1) threats data, threats are assessed and tracked for more specifically categorized (Level 2) threats when available.

Threat Category	Date Assessed	Assessed By	Data Source	Scope	Severity	Immediacy	Comments
Biological Resource Use - 5.1 - Hunting & Collecting Terrestrial Animals	2025-03-11	Dan Bachen	MTFWP, MTNHP Expert Opinion	Large	Negligible	High	Species is subject to hunting through a well managed season that does not appear to face threats of decline.
Biological Resource Use - 5.3 - Logging & Wood Harvesting	2025-10-16	Dan Bachen	Expert Opinion	Restricted	Moderate	High	Regeneration of even-aged stands after forestry have long-term impacts on habtiat suitability.
Natural System Modifications - 7.1 - Fire & Fire Suppression	2025-03-11	Dan Bachen	Expert Opinion	Restricted	Moderate	High	Impacts of fire appears poorly defined for this species. Although it is cited as a threat (Youtz et al. 2022). Assessment of specific impacts on abundance and habitat of low, modereate, and severe fire are not defined within Montana or similar ecosystems.
Invasive & Other Problematic Species, Genes & Diseases - 8.2 - Problematic Native Species/Diseases	2026-03-17	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Moderate	High	Large scale habitat loss / degradation due to beetle kill: Dusky grouse in the Rocky Mountains occupy mountain habitats characterize as open fir-spruce conifer forests. While they use areas dominated by shrubs/steppe and grassland to forage in summer months, they rely on conifer forests as breeding and winter habitats. Dusky grouse are almost entirely forest obligates in winter due to the dependence on consuming needles and utilizing large conifers as roosting sites. These habitats are affected by natural and anthropogenic factors such as timber harvest, beetle kill, wildfire, and climate change.
Climate Change & Severe Weather - 11.1 - Habitat Shifting & Alteration	2025-03-11	Dan Bachen	Audubaon Survival by Degrees	Large	Moderate	Moderate	Species is cold adapted and Audubon Survival by Degrees project predicts decline in suitable habitat in low elevation and isolated mountain ranges in central Montana