

# Greater Sage-Grouse

## *2015 Not Warranted Finding Under the Endangered Species Act*



*Greater sage-grouse in sagebrush / USFWS*

### **Greater sage-grouse not warranted for protection under the ESA**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has determined that the greater sage-grouse, a large ground-dwelling bird unique to North America, does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

### **What is a greater sage-grouse?**

Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) are upland birds that are entirely dependent on sagebrush. Males are known for their elaborate communal mating dances on breeding grounds known as “leks.”

### **Why did the Service make this determination?**

The Service evaluated the best available scientific and commercial information regarding the greater sage-grouse, including threats to the species and its sagebrush habitat and concluded that the threats which caused the Service to initially designate the bird “warranted but precluded” in 2010 had been significantly reduced due to federal and state land use conservation plans. Implementation of these plans will reduce threats to the greater sage-grouse across 90 percent of the species’ breeding habitat. The finding also considered

thousands of other conservation efforts across the species’ 173-million-acre range, including the voluntary commitment of millions of acres of private rangeland to sage-grouse conservation.

### **What are the major threats to the species?**

The primary threats to the species are the loss, fragmentation and degradation of sagebrush habitat due to a variety of causes. In the Rocky Mountains part of the range, habitat loss is driven primarily by energy development and infrastructure needed to support it. Other stressors, such as habitat loss to ex-urban development, conversion to cropland, invasive grasses, nest predation and West Nile virus, can cause localized population declines.

In the Great Basin, the primary threats are the expansion of invasive grasses such as cheatgrass (which results in more frequent and intense wildfires) and conifer encroachment. Both eliminate the sagebrush that greater sage-grouse need. Additional stressors, such as improper grazing, predation, mining and infrastructure development can contribute to localized population declines.

### **Why is sage-grouse conservation such a high priority?**

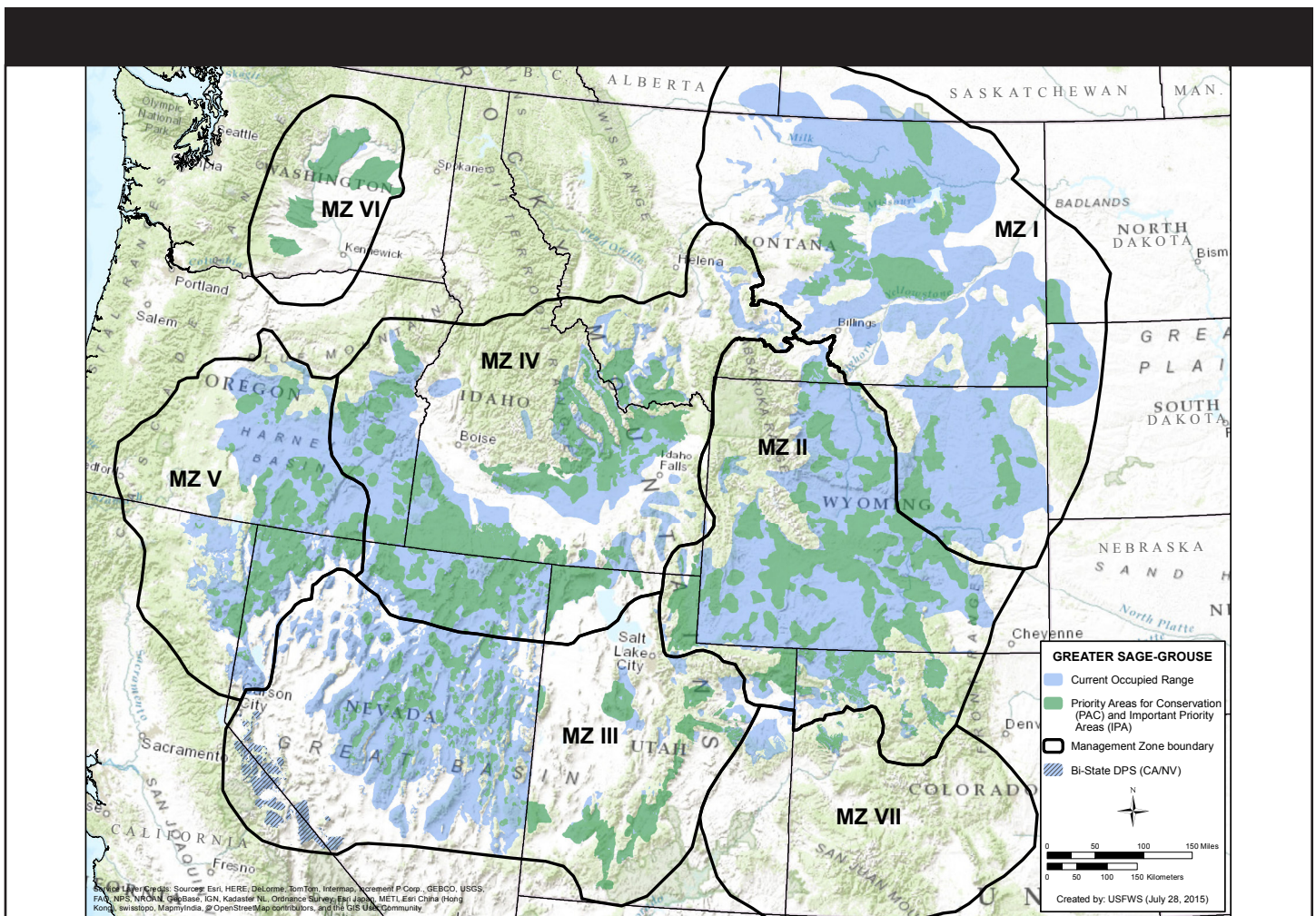
Greater sage-grouse are sagebrush obligates – the species requires vast expanses of healthy, unbroken sagebrush to thrive. These same conditions support mule deer, elk, pronghorn, golden eagles and hundreds of other mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, along with many unique insects, spiders, plants and lichens. Sagebrush is the most widely distributed vegetation in the West, but since the 19th century, the sagebrush ecosystem has suffered a death by a thousand cuts. If the condition of sagebrush is not restored, some of these species, such as pygmy rabbit, sage thrasher, the Brewer’s sparrow and sagebrush lizard could be the subject of future ESA listing petitions.

Sagebrush landscapes play a critical role in the hydrologic cycle of the arid West by catching and holding the sparse winter snows.



*Brewer's sparrow / Tom Koerner, USFWS*





Sagebrush itself often serves as a “nurse” plant for other plants, many of which are important to sustaining grazing wildlife and domestic livestock. Healthy sagebrush supports the West’s ranching economy and provides both renewable and non-renewable energy resources that power the nation.

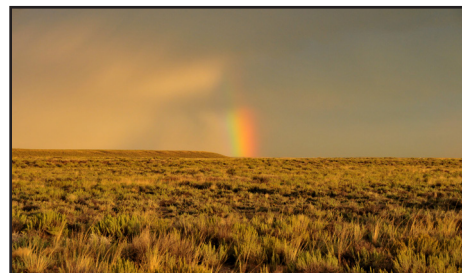
**How did the ESA help drive conservation efforts?**

The Service’s Sept. 30, 2015 deadline to review the status of the greater sage-grouse sparked a collaborative conservation effort across 11 western states that is unprecedented in complexity, scope and scale. The Service’s “not-warranted” determination relies on the effective implementation of federal and state land-use plans and increased efforts to control invasive species and wildfire in the Great Basin. Success in restoring the health of sagebrush ecosystem will also require the continued commitment

of private landowners and industry and conservation organizations to monitor and adapt conservation work to improve sagebrush health.

**How will the Service participate in sagebrush conservation?**

The Service will remain an active partner in the sagebrush effort, funding new research, providing on-the-ground support for private landowners, working with federal, state, industry and conservation partners and managing national wildlife refuges for ecosystem health.



*Sagebrush rainbow / USFWS*

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**For more information on greater sage-grouse conservation and the Service’s finding, please visit our website:**  
<http://www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse/>

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**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
<http://www.fws.gov>

**September 2015**

