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Interior Expands Common-Sense Efforts to Conserve *Sage Grouse* Habitat in the West

*Western Bird Found ‘Warranted but Precluded’
from Endangered Species Act Protection*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of the Interior will expand efforts with state, local and tribal partners to map lands that are vital to the survival of the greater *sage-grouse*, a ground-dwelling bird that inhabits much of the West, while guiding and managing new conventional and renewable energy projects to reduce impacts on the species, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced today.

Salazar made the announcement in conjunction with a finding by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that, [based on accumulated scientific data and new peer-reviewed information and analysis](#), the greater *sage-grouse* warrants the protection of the Endangered Species Act but that listing the species at this time is precluded by the need to address higher priority species first. The greater *sage-grouse* will be placed on the candidate list for future action, meaning the species would not receive statutory protection under the ESA and states would continue to be responsible for managing the bird.

“The *sage grouse*’s decline reflects the extent to which open land in the West has been developed in the last century,” said Salazar. “This development has provided important benefits, but we must find common-sense ways of protecting, restoring, and reconnecting the Western lands that are most important to the species’ survival while responsibly developing much-needed energy resources. Voluntary conservation agreements, federal financial and technical assistance and other partnership incentives can play a key role in this effort.”

Adding the species to the candidate list will allow the Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies an opportunity to continue to work cooperatively with private landowners to

conserve the candidate species. This includes financial and technical assistance, and the ability to develop conservation agreements that provide regulatory assurances to landowners who take actions to benefit the species. One such agreement was signed last month in western Idaho, encompassing an area of over half a million acres.

“There is much we can accomplish for *sage-grouse* working with private landowners who care about the future of this iconic western species,” said Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Tom Strickland. “Voluntary conservation efforts on private lands, when combined with successful state and federal strategies, hold the key to the long-term survival of the greater *sage-grouse*.”

Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Abbey, whose agency manages more greater *sage-grouse* habitat than any other government agency, said that the BLM will today issue [guidance](#) that will expand the use of new science and mapping technologies to improve land-use planning and develop additional measures to conserve *sage-grouse* habitat while ensuring that energy production, recreational access and other uses of federal lands continue as appropriate. The BLM guidance also addresses a related species, the Gunnison *sage-grouse*, which has a more limited range, and which is in the process of being evaluated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine whether it also warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act.

“Managing for sensitive and candidate species is nothing new to the BLM,” said BLM Director Bob Abbey. “Using sound science and effective on-the-ground coordination with our many partners, we will build on current accomplishments in managing for sustainable *sage-grouse* populations on our National System of Public Lands.”

The guidance, which supplements the BLM’s 2004 *National Sage-Grouse Conservation Strategy*, identifies management actions necessary at some sites to ensure the environmentally responsible exploration, authorization, leasing and development of energy resources in the priority habitat of greater *sage-grouse*.

Under the guidance, the BLM will continue to coordinate with State fish and wildlife agencies and their Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee in the development of a range-wide key habitat map. This mapping project, which is not intended to replace individual State fish and wildlife agency core habitat maps, will identify priority habitat for *sage-grouse* within each of the western states and reflect this across the known range of *sage-grouse*.

Greater *sage-grouse* are found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, eastern California, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. They currently occupy approximately 56 percent of their historical range.

If trends since the mid-1960s persist, many local populations may disappear within the next 30 to 100 years, with remaining fragmented populations more vulnerable to extinction in the long-term. However, the *sage-grouse* population as a whole remains

large enough and is distributed across such a large portion of the western United States that Fish and Wildlife Service biologists determined the needs of other species facing more immediate and severe threat of extinction must take priority for listing actions.

The Service will review the status of the species annually, as it does with all candidate species, and will propose the species for protection when funding and workload priorities for other listing actions allow. Should the status of the greater *sage-grouse* sufficiently improve as a result of the efforts to be undertaken, the Service could determine that the protection of the Endangered Species Act is not needed.

For more information about the Service's finding on the greater sage-grouse, click [here](#).

For more information about the BLM's efforts to conserve sage-grouse habitat, click [here](#).

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