

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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# News Release



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Fish and Wildlife Service Will Add Bi-State Population of Greater Sage-Grouse To List of Candidates for Endangered Species Act Protection**

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse meets the necessary criteria for recognition as a Distinct Population Segment under the Endangered Species Act, and that adding this population to the federal list of threatened and endangered species is warranted. However, listing the Bi-State DPS of the greater sage-grouse at this time is precluded by the need for listing actions on other species that have a higher priority need for protection under the Act.

As a result, the Bi-State DPS of the greater sage-grouse will be placed on the list of species that are candidates for Endangered Species Act protection. The Service will review the status of the Bi-State DPS annually, as it does with all candidates for listing, and will propose it for listing when funding and workload permit.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced that the federal government will expand its efforts to protect open lands that are important to the survival of the Bi-State population and the greater sage-grouse range-wide. In collaboration with local, state, and tribal partners, Interior will use new science and mapping technologies to improve land-use planning and to ensure that energy production, recreational access and other uses of federal lands will continue where appropriate, while additional measures are taken to protect the bi-state population and the greater sage-grouse across its range.

The Bi-State area population of greater sage-grouse, previously referred to as the Mono Basin population of sage-grouse, occurs in portions of Carson City, Lyon, Mineral, Esmeralda, and Douglas Counties in Nevada, and of Alpine, Inyo, and Mono Counties in California. The State wildlife agencies in Nevada and California have jointly identified six Bi-State area Population Management Units (PMUs): Pine Nut, Desert Creek-Fales, Mount Grant, Bodie, South Mono, and White Mountains. The current analysis of available information suggests only Bodie and South Mono PMUs are likely to persist over the next thirty years, and may also contract in size without increased conservation efforts or implementation of recovery actions.

Threats to the species include destruction, modification, and fragmentation of habitats in the Bi-State area caused by urbanization, infrastructure development (e.g. powerlines and roads), mining, energy development, grazing, invasive and exotic species, pinyon-juniper encroachment, wildfire, and the likely effects of climate change. Current regulatory mechanisms are not adequate to address these habitat-based threats or other threats such as disease and predation, or impacts from recreational activities. In addition, the relatively few local populations of the Bi-State DPS, as well as their small size and relative isolation, contribute to the risk of extinction.

The Service based its final determination on the accumulated scientific data provided by state and federal agencies and Tribes, as well as data and information provided through non-governmental, commercial and public comments. The review of relevant materials included 25 chapters of new information and or analyses contained in the peer-reviewed monograph entitled: *Ecology and Conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse: A Landscape Species and Its Habitats* which was edited by the U.S Geological Survey for publication in the near future by the Cooper Ornithological Society in their Studies in Avian Biology Series. Thirty-eight scientists from federal, state, and nongovernmental organizations collaborated to produce the analyses, synthesis and findings presented in the chapters of this monograph.

The Service assigns a listing priority number to each candidate species based on the magnitude and immediacy of the threats they face. This ranking system is used to determine which candidate species should be more immediately proposed for addition to the list of threatened and endangered species. Because it faces more immediate and severe threats, the Bi-State DPS of the greater sage-grouse has been assigned a listing priority number higher than that for the range-wide greater-sage-grouse, which will also be added to the candidate list.

The Service received two petitions to list the Bi-State population, one from the Institute for Wildlife Protection (dated December 28, 2001), and the other from the Stanford Law School Environmental Law Clinic (dated November 10, 2005) on behalf of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign, Western Watersheds Project, Center for Biological Diversity, and Christians Caring for Creation. A series of actions by the Service was taken in response to the petitions, which included publication (in 2006) of a 90-day finding that these petitions did not present substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned actions were warranted. In response to legal challenges, the Service agreed to reconsider this decision.

The Service also announced a finding today regarding a petition to list the western subspecies of the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. A western and an eastern subspecies of the greater sage-grouse were described in the 1940's based on comparisons of a limited number of specimens, and many scientists subsequently questioned the validity of these subspecies designations. Based on a thorough evaluation of the best scientific information available, including new genetic analyses, the Service found no evidence to support recognition of either subspecies. As a result, the Service announced today it has made a finding that listing the western subspecies is not warranted, as it is not a valid taxonomic entity eligible for listing under the Act.

The greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is a large, ground-dwelling bird, measuring up to 30 inches in length, is two feet tall and weighs between two to seven pounds. It has a long, pointed tail with legs feathered to the base of the toes and fleshy yellow combs over the eyes. In addition to the mottled brown, black and white plumage typical of the species, males sport a white

ruff around their necks. The sage-grouse is found from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet in elevation. It is an omnivore, eating soft plants (primarily sagebrush) and insects.

For more information regarding this finding, please visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse> or <http://www.fws.gov/nevada>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

