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## Industry coalition's internal sage grouse memo causes flap

**By Scott Sonner**  
**Associated Press**

RENO, Nev. (AP) - An industry group opposed to federal protection for the sage grouse threatened legal action against environmentalists who publicized the group's internal memo that outlines lobbying tactics and political strategies to keep the bird off the list of endangered species.

The conservation group RangeNet removed the six-page memo from its Web site Thursday after the Partnership for the West - a coalition of ranchers, miners, oil and gas interests and other commercial users of public lands - made the demand late Wednesday.

Industry coalition leaders said the document outlined nothing illegal or improper, but said publicizing an internal memo was inappropriate.

The memo advocates enlisting Colorado Gov. Bill Owens to offer an "anti-listing resolution" next month at a meeting of the Western Governors Association and goes on to outline other methods to persuade the federal government not to protect the sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

"Unleash grass-roots opposition to a listing, thus providing some cover to the political leadership at (the Interior Department) and throughout the administration," the memo said.

The goals include waging "a highly coordinated, multi-industry effort across 11 Western states to make the science-based case for the right listing decision" by organizing experts who can "scrutinize the science of those supporting a listing" and engage "political leaders in the West and in Congress to lobby the administration against listing."

The memo recommends approaching the Interior Department directly if members are rebuffed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency responsible for sage grouse protection.

"Engage with USFWS regional directors. ... If they do not readily engage, back channel with DOI officials," the memo said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service had no comment, agency spokeswoman Betsy Lordan said from Washington D.C.

The memo also suggests highlighting potential impacts on recreational fishing and hunting on federal lands with sage grouse "to assist in outreach to the hook and bullet crowd."

Larry Walker, a Bureau of Land Management retiree who runs RangeNet's Web site from his home in Beaverton, Ore., said the memo "smacks of special access" by the group, using its ties with the Western Gov.'s Association and the administration.

"It looks like an awful lot of coziness between government and industry," he told The Associated Press.

Jim Sims, executive vice president of the Partnership for the West in Golden, Colo., demanded in an e-mail to RangeNet on Wednesday night that Walker remove the memo from the site "and destroy any paper or electronic copies."

"This memorandum was written as a confidential communication for our members only," Sims wrote.

"I don't know how those people got hold of an internal memo," Sims told AP. "It is not appropriate for that to be distributed outside the coalition. But the strategy itself is a very straightforward, very public effort," he said by telephone.

"It involves leaders across the West in agriculture, the oil and gas industry, coal, energy, basically everyone who has come together in this task force who wants to make sure at the end of the process, state and county and local officials are kept in charge of conserving the sage grouse," he said.

Sims said a federal listing could affect more than 110 million acres across 11 Western states.

"The restrictions that could be placed on this amount of land would affect virtually every activity in the West. The economic fallout can be stupendous," he said.

The 375 members of the Partnership for the West include the Nevada Farm Bureau, Petroleum Association of Wyoming, Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Idaho State Snowmobile Association, Northwest Mining Association, United Four Wheel Drive Association, AngloGold North America, Coldwell Banker Commercial, Kennecott Energy Co., Peabody Energy and Placer Dome America.

RangeNet is affiliated with the Western Watersheds Project, a group Jon Marvel and others founded in Hailey, Idaho, in 1993 to oppose livestock grazing on public lands in the West.

Marvel said the industry campaign is not surprising given those who stand to be affected most by protection of the sage grouse are "corporate ranching, corporate oil and gas, corporate mining."

"It looks like an excellent way to undermine the intentions of the Endangered Species Act by politicizing a possible listing."