



Wyoming

Norton: Sage grouse listing would hurt energy production

By Deborah Baker
Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) -- Interior Secretary Gale Norton says listing the sage grouse as an endangered species could significantly impact energy production and grazing.

"Some say the grouse could become the spotted owl of the intermountain West," Norton told Western governors at their annual meeting Tuesday. "But the sage grouse occupies nearly 12 times as much land as the northern spotted owl."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considering whether the once-abundant game bird is in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Norton said coal mining, natural gas production, electric transmission corridors and cattle grazing are all in the middle of sagebrush habitat.

To help keep the sage grouse from being listed as endangered, "we must minimize the impacts of energy production, electric generation and transmission on its habitat," she told the governors.

Norton suggested the adoption of management practices that recognize that energy exploration and production are temporary uses of public lands, and that resources such as wildlife, water, clean air and vegetation must be maintained for the future.

The Bureau of Land Management will require its field offices from now on to review such so-called best management practices — specific to each site — when evaluating applications for drilling and rights-of-way, Norton said.

Such practices include doing intermediate reclamation — re-contouring and revegetating — while wells are still functioning, making roads narrower, burying power lines in or next to roads, putting multiple wells on individual pads and planning better to avoid a crisscross pattern of unnecessary roads, she said.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal, a Democrat, said encouraging such voluntary measures "works for maybe half the companies," depending on their attitude. He suggested that BLM consider making them a requirement.

"What works on one site doesn't work on another site. ... We have to do site-specific work," Norton replied.