

THE TELLURIDE WATCH

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Bad News, Good News for Sage-Grouse

The bad news is that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced last week that it will not designate the Gunnison sage-grouse as an endangered species or even list it as a candidate. The good news, according to San Miguel County Commissioner Art Goodtimes, is that the Bureau of Land Management, at the state level, is "still going to conserve" the grouse's local habitat.

"They will still put conditions on oil and gas leases or not put them up for sale if they're on (sage-grouse) occupied land," Goodtimes told his fellow commissioners and county staff on Wednesday.

Goodtimes called the federal decision on the status of the sage-grouse "outrageous," and predicted that "there will be lawsuits." Indeed, he indicated that his personal preference was for the BOCC to join a lawsuit but conceded that, for now, it was probably best to "not do anything precipitous."

The decision to exclude the sage-grouse from identified endangered species was based on sightings of male birds on a given morning in breeding areas. Such a technique of assessing overall species population and the need for species protection is recognized by some as essentially flawed.