

## **PRESS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release

December 22, 2003

### **Conservation Organizations Petition to List Greater Sage Grouse Under Endangered Species Act**

#### ***Habitat Loss, New Threats Prompt Call for Federal Protection***

Twenty-one conservation organizations, including the Sierra Club, submitted a petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today to list the Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) as “threatened” or “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act.

The species has suffered declines of 45 percent to 80 percent over the past 20 years due to habitat loss and fragmentation.

"The sage grouse is a valuable game bird as well as an important part of America's outdoor heritage, and we must seek to reverse its decline using all the tools available," said Mike Smith, chairman of the Sierra Club's Wildlife and Endangered Species Committee. "The Endangered Species Act is one of those tools."

The sage grouse is a striking and charismatic bird that inhabits sagebrush ecosystems in nine western states. The species' utter dependence on vast areas of healthy sagebrush habitat makes it the proverbial “canary in the coal mine.” Where the grouse struggle to survive, the landscape has suffered serious damage.

The species' historic range closely conformed to the distribution of tall and short sagebrush on the prairie sagebrush steppe (the “Sagebrush Sea”) covering parts of 16 western states and three Canadian provinces. However, since 1900 the distribution of sage grouse has been greatly reduced, with extirpation of populations at the periphery of their range. Sage grouse no longer occur in Arizona, British Columbia, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

**Today, the total sage grouse population is estimated at 140,000 individuals, representing only about 8 percent of historic numbers.**

Remaining sage grouse populations suffer from habitat degradation resulting from urban and agricultural conversion, invasive species, altered fire regimes, unsustainable livestock grazing and other causes. New threats, such as increased energy development on the Rocky Mountain Front, persistent drought and the West Nile encephalitis virus found in sage grouse in Montana and Wyoming threaten to reduce sage grouse populations even further.

“The Bush Administration has prioritized resource extraction over conservation on public lands, and that has increased the pressure on sage grouse populations now contending with West Nile disease, drought and all the hardships associated with degraded habitat,” said Mark Salvo, Grasslands and Deserts Advocate for American Lands Alliance.

Protecting and recovering sage grouse and restoring sagebrush habitat would also benefit a family of other sensitive sagebrush obligate species in the West, such as the sagebrush vole, sage sparrow, sagebrush lizard and pygmy rabbit.

-----

Complete information about Greater Sage Grouse and the petition is available at [www.sagebrushsea.org/sage\\_grouse.htm](http://www.sagebrushsea.org/sage_grouse.htm)

**American Lands Alliance**

Mark Salvo 503-757-4221 • [mark@americanlands.org](mailto:mark@americanlands.org)

**Biodiversity Conservation Alliance**

Jeff Kessler 307-742-7978 • [jkessler@igc.org](mailto:jkessler@igc.org)

**Center for Biological Diversity**

Noah Greenwald, M.S. 503-243-6643 • [ngreenwald@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:ngreenwald@biologicaldiversity.org)

**Center for Native Ecosystems**

Jacob Smith 970-527-8993 • [prebles@indra.com](mailto:prebles@indra.com)

**Forest Guardians**

Nicole J. Rosmarino, Ph.D. 505-988-9126 x 156 • [nrosmari@fguardians.org](mailto:nrosmari@fguardians.org)

**The Fund for Animals**

Andrea Lococo 307-859-8840 • [alococo@fund.org](mailto:alococo@fund.org)

**Gallatin Wildlife Association**

Glenn Hockett 406-586-1729 • [glhockett@mcn.net](mailto:glhockett@mcn.net)

**Great Old Broads for Wilderness**

Veronica Egan 970-385-9577 • [ronni@greatoldbroads.org](mailto:ronni@greatoldbroads.org)

**Hells Canyon Preservation Council**

Brett Brownscombe 541-963-3950 • [brett@hellscanyon.org](mailto:brett@hellscanyon.org)

**The Larch Company**

Andy Kerr 541-201-0053 • [andykerr@andykerr.net](mailto:andykerr@andykerr.net)

**The Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides**

Caroline Cox 541-344-5044 x 24 • [ccox@pesticide.org](mailto:ccox@pesticide.org)

**Northwest Ecosystem Alliance**

Dave Wertz 360-671-9950 x 14 • [dwerntz@ecosystem.org](mailto:dwerntz@ecosystem.org)

**Oregon Natural Desert Association**

Bill Marlett 541-330-2638 • bmarlett@onda.org

**Oregon Natural Resources Council**

Tim Lillebo 541-382-2616 • tl@onrc.org

**Predator Defense Institute**

Brooks Fahy 541-937-4261 • info@predatordefense.org

**Sierra Club**

Bart Semcer 202-675-6696 • bart.semcer@sierraclub.org

Mike Smith 303-497-8346 • mike.smith@sierraclub.org

**Sinapu**

Wendy Keefover-Ring 303-447-8655 x 1 • wendy@sinapu.org

**Western Fire Ecology Center**

Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph.D. 541-302-6218 • fire@efn.org

**Western Watersheds Project**

Jon Marvel 208-788-2290 • jon@westernwatersheds.org

**Wild Utah Project**

James Catlin 801-328-3550 • wup@xmission.com

**Wildlands CPR**

Bethanie Walder 406-543-9551 • wildlandscpr@wildlandscpr.org