

**NEWS ADVISORY
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**New Study Chronicles Declining Populations, Major Threats to Sage-Grouse
Feds Considering ESA Listing for Greater and Mono Basin Sage-Grouse**

The U.S. Geological Survey has posted 24 of 25 chapters of a new, definitive monograph on sage-grouse just months before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is scheduled to render multiple listing decisions for the species. The monograph, tentatively titled “Ecology and Conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse: A Landscape Species and its Habitats,” documents declining populations and major threats to this imperiled species, from energy development and West Nile virus to invasive species and free-roaming horses and burros.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is required, pursuant to federal court approved settlements, to make listing decisions for greater sage-grouse and Mono Basin area sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. The greater sage-grouse occurs in sagebrush steppe in eleven western states. The Mono Basin area sage-grouse is a genetically distinct subpopulation with a much smaller range in southeastern California and southwestern Nevada.

The 24 chapters provide important information about sage-grouse and their habitat:

- “Model forecasts suggest that at least 13% of the populations but none of the [sage-grouse management zones] may decline below effective population sizes of 50 within the next 30 yr, while 75% of the populations and 29% of the SMZs are likely to decline below effective population sizes of 500 within 100 yr if current conditions and trends persist” (chapter 16).
- “Shrublands developed for energy production contained twice as many roads and power lines, and where ranching, energy development, and tillage agriculture coincided, human features were so dense that every 1 km² could be bounded by a road and bisected by a power line” (chapter 21).
- “Sage-grouse respond negatively to three different types of development and conventional densities of oil and gas wells far exceed the species’ threshold of tolerance” (chapter 21)
- “A large proportion of existing sagebrush communities is at moderate to high risk of invasion by cheatgrass” (chapter 11).

- “Juniper and pinyon woodlands have expanded into sagebrush habitats at higher elevations... Approximately 12% of the current distribution of sagebrush is predicted to be replaced by expansion of other woody vegetation for each 1 C increase in temperature.” (chapter 11).
- “Very little of the lands used by Greater Sage-Grouse has protected status in national parks or reserves” (chapter 2).
- “Available evidence clearly supports the conclusion that conserving large landscapes with suitable habitat is important for conservation of sage-grouse” (chapter 4).

Notably, among the chapters posted today, none describes the myriad effects of domestic livestock grazing on sage-grouse and sagebrush steppe. Livestock grazing degrades nesting, brood-rearing, summer and winter habitat, and spreads cheatgrass and other invasive weeds into sagebrush habitat. A cow has been observed eating a sage-grouse egg in Nevada, and researchers reported this week 146 cases of sage grouse flying into a nearly five-mile section of barbed wire fence over a seven-month period in Wyoming.

The chapters posted today (<http://sagemap.wr.usgs.gov/monograph.aspx>) are peer-reviewed and have been accepted for publication together in a special volume in *Studies in Avian Biology*, a series published by the Cooper Ornithological Society. One more chapter, a synthesis of current trends and management, must still be finished for the monograph. The U.S. Geological Survey has also distributed a news release on the monograph chapters (<http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2342>).

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