

For Immediate Release

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Contact:

Jon Marvel, Executive Director, Western Watersheds Project • 208-788-2290

Laird Lucas, Executive Director, Advocates for the West • 208-870-7621

Mark Salvo, Director, Sagebrush Sea Campaign • 503-757-4221

Katie Fite, Biodiversity Director, Western Watersheds Project • 208-429-1679

### **Greater Sage-grouse Warranted...but Precluded from ESA Protection**

Seven years after conservationists petitioned to protect greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced today that the species is “warranted but precluded” from listing under the Act. The grouse will now join 249 other imperiled species on the list of “candidate species” under the ESA. The decision marks the agency’s second attempt to assess the species for listing after the Bush Administration published an ecologically flawed, politically tainted decision not to list the grouse in 2005.

“We were right, the Bush Administration was wrong,” said Mark Salvo, Director of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign. “The sage-grouse is in trouble.”

The greater sage-grouse is a charismatic bird that lives in sagebrush steppe in eleven western states. First described by Lewis and Clark in 1805, nineteenth century travelers and settlers reported seeing huge flocks of sage-grouse that darkened the sky as they lifted from valley floors. However, westward expansion and development over the next 200 years eliminated almost half of sagebrush habitat. The total sage-grouse population, estimated between 140,000-500,000 birds, has declined between 69-99 percent from historic levels.

“The action by Secretary Salazar and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service comes years too late as hundreds of thousands of acres of sage-grouse habitat have been permanently altered or reduced in value for this charismatic native species since the initial petition for listing,” said Dr. Clait Braun, Director of Grouse, Inc. “Some populations are already at the brink of extirpation in each of the states where this species persists.” Dr. Braun, retired Avian Research Program Manager for the Colorado Division of Wildlife, has been involved with sage-grouse research and management since 1973.

Myriad human activities in the Sagebrush Sea have decimated sage-grouse habitat, including livestock grazing, oil and gas development, agricultural conversion, application of herbicides and pesticides, unnatural fire, urban sprawl, mining, off-road vehicle use, and the placement and construction of utility corridors, roads and fences.

“The only way sage-grouse will survive is if large areas of the sagebrush sea are left undeveloped, and chronic disturbances like livestock grazing are removed from those areas,” said Katie Fite, Biodiversity Director for Western Watersheds Project. “This sad delay will make it much more difficult to effectively conserve this magnificent bird.”

The Fish and Wildlife Service's finding indicates that current conservation efforts are failing to conserve sage-grouse. The grouse's new status as a candidate species may require agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management to revise their land use plans on public land to improve habitat for sage-grouse and other sagebrush species.

"I look forward to making a careful review of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's reasons for this decision for sage-grouse," said Jon Marvel, Executive Director of Western Watersheds Project. "That review will determine if further litigation is needed to bring the agency into compliance with the law."

The Sagebrush Sea Campaign, a program of WildEarth Guardians, was the lead petitioner to list the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. Western Watersheds Project, a western conservation organization, successfully litigated a remand of the negative listing decision in 2007. Advocates for the West represented Western Watersheds Project in federal court. More than twenty conservation groups joined the petition to list sage-grouse under the ESA in 2003.

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### Resources

Video and images of sage-grouse, factsheets on sage-grouse and the Sagebrush Sea, and maps of sage-grouse range and land use in the West are posted at [www.sagebrushsea.org](http://www.sagebrushsea.org).