

**American Lands Alliance \* Biodiversity Conservation Alliance  
Center for Native Ecosystems \* Wild Utah Project**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Fish and Wildlife Service to Publish Positive Finding on Sage Grouse Endangered Species Petition *Agency Cites “substantial biological information”***

DENVER – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that it will publish a positive “90-Day Finding” on a petition to protect the greater sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. In this finding, the agency points to “substantial biological information” indicating that the sage grouse may indeed deserve Endangered Species Act protection.

“Our petition for listing included a massive analysis of the science on sage grouse, and we’re pleased that the Fish and Wildlife Service agrees that this bird deserves a chance to be protected under the Endangered Species Act,” said Mark Salvo of American Lands Alliance. “Since federal agencies under the Bush Administration refuse to implement meaningful conservation measures, the Endangered Species Act may be the bird’s last best shot at survival.”

The petition was submitted by a coalition of conservation groups concerned about the continued decline of sage grouse populations. The degraded sagebrush habitat, coupled with the radical increase in industrial projects, now threaten the bird’s continued survival.

“The sage grouse is an integral part of sagebrush country,” said Jim Catlin of the Wild Utah Project. “Not only is it important to hunters and wildlife watchers, but restoring sage grouse to their historic populations is essential in order to recover the health and productivity of the land and the communities that depend on it.”

Large swaths of the sagebrush ecosystem where the sage grouse are making their stand are the very places that are taking the brunt of oil and gas drilling under the Bush Energy Policy in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Montana.

“The sage grouse stands right in the path of the stampede to increase oil and gas drilling across the West,” said Erik Molvar, a wildlife biologist for Biodiversity Conservation Alliance. “The

federal agencies could employ new technologies like directional drilling to produce oil and gas while staying out of sensitive sage grouse habitats, but instead the current policy is to plunk down roads and drilling pads right in the middle of the most important nesting areas.”

Local population declines may also be linked to overgrazing, invasion of noxious weeds such as cheatgrass, and West Nile virus, a disease transmitted by mosquitoes which has been linked to coalbed methane wastewater ponds in the Powder River Basin. Sage grouse populations nationwide have declined by 80 percent, and populations are already extinct in Arizona, British Columbia, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

“The sage grouse is the ‘canary in the coal mine’ for sagebrush habitats, telling us that this ecosystem is hurting,” said Erin Robertson, Staff Biologist for Center for Native Ecosystems. “By protecting this bird, we’re protecting both our western landscapes and other wildlife.”

Now that the Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that there is sufficient scientific evidence to warrant serious consideration of Endangered Species listing, the agency will conduct an in-depth twelve-month “status review” on its way to making a final determination on whether to list the sage grouse.

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