

THE SAGEBRUSH SEA CAMPAIGN

(A Project of Western Watersheds)

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Lead Petitioner Reacts to “Not Warranted” Recommendation to Protect Sage Grouse

Conservationists were disappointed, but not surprised by news that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has recommended that the Bush Administration deny protection to the greater sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

“Sage grouse have suffered precipitous declines in recent decades,” said Mark Salvo, Director of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign. “A listing would have required the federal government to protect sagebrush habitat where the sage grouse lives. By not listing the species, damaging activities will be allowed to continue on much of the sagebrush steppe, to the detriment of sage grouse and scores of other wildlife species.”

The historic range of sage grouse closely conformed to the distribution of sagebrush in what became sixteen Western states and three Canadian provinces. But since 1900 sage grouse populations have been reduced; the species no longer occurs in Arizona, British Columbia, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has acknowledged that sage grouse numbers have declined between 69 and 99 percent in recent decades. The total sage grouse population, estimated at 140,000 individuals, represents only about eight percent of historic numbers.

“Our attorneys will be reviewing the final decision when issued, and advising us on our legal options,” noted Salvo. “The only science upon which the Bush Administration based this decision was political science. They are paying back their political base in the grazing and oil and gas industries.”

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