

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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ART GOODTIMES

For Immediate Release

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San Miguel County leads Coalition challenging Fish & Wildlife's endangered species failure

Telluride, Colorado -- Citing blatant violations of the Endangered Species Act, San Miguel County and a coalition of citizen groups filed a lawsuit today in U.S. District Court for Washington, D.C., challenging the failure of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to list the Gunnison Sage-grouse as "threatened" or "endangered."

"All the best available science suggests the existence of the Gunnison Grouse is seriously threatened throughout most of its range," said San Miguel County Commissioner Art Goodtimes. "The County is pleased to lead this litigation to bring the Federal Government back to the table to help local working groups save this bird from extinction."

Co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit include the Sagebrush Sea Campaign, Center for Native Ecosystems, Forest Guardians, The Larch Company, Sinapu, Center for Biological Diversity, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Black Canyon Audubon Society and Sheep Mountain Alliance – several of whom have been active members of Gunnison Sage-grouse working groups. The Coalition is represented by Amy Atwood and Geoff Hickcox of the Western Environmental Law Center.

Residential growth on private lands and energy development on public lands (both current and proposed oil and gas drilling and uranium mining), together with West Nile virus and increased predation, are among the most significant threats to the Gunnison Sage-grouse throughout its current range.

Gunnison County is the only region in the world left with a viable flock of birds, while San Miguel County's second largest population is imperiled and no longer viable over the long term, according to avian scientists.

The Gunnison Sage-grouse's historic range once extended into Utah, Arizona and New Mexico, as well as much of southwestern Colorado.

The filing comes on the heels of several articles in national newspapers criticizing the current administration's environmental policies, including allegations of political interference in Endangered Species Act listing decisions at the highest levels of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The International Ornithological Congress recommended this year that the common name for Gunnison Sage-grouse be changed to Gunnison Grouse, and that the wider ranged Greater Sage-grouse be renamed Sage Grouse.