



Greater Sage-Grouse 101

In 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) found that the [greater sage-grouse](#) was warranted for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Higher priorities precluded the FWS from proposing a listing rule, so it had been a “candidate” species for the past five years. In its 2010 finding, the FWS identified the primary threat as the loss and fragmentation of sagebrush habitat, coupled with a lack of regulatory mechanisms to protect habitat across the bird’s range.

In 2011, then-Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, along with Governors Matt Mead (WY) and John Hickenlooper (CO), formed the Sage Grouse Task Force with the shared goal of taking action on state and federal lands in order to avoid the need to list the bird and keep it under state management.

Greater sage-grouse habitat covers 165 million acres – representing a loss of 56% of the species’ [historic range](#). The range covers 11 states across the West, including Washington, Oregon, California, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota. Major threats to the bird’s habitat include increasingly intense rangeland fires, invasive species, and fragmentation due primarily to energy development.

Of the 165 million acres, the federal land management agencies manage [64%](#), states manage approximately 5%, and 31% are privately owned. Both state and federal land management plans are critical pieces to conserving sagebrush habitat – one cannot succeed without the other.

On Tuesday, September 22, 2015 the FWS determined that protection for the GRSG under the ESA is no longer warranted and has withdrawn the species from the candidate species list.

Intense rangeland fires are the major threat to the sagebrush landscape in the Great Basin region of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Oregon and California. The Interior Department recently released a [comprehensive, science-based strategy](#) to reduce the size, severity and impact of rangeland fires by addressing the spread of cheatgrass and other invasive species that exacerbate the threat of fire; pre- positioning fire management resources for more effective rangeland fire response; and increasing efforts to restore fire-impacted landscapes with native grasses and sagebrush.

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The FWS considers the greater sage-grouse an “indicator species,” meaning its decline reflects the decline of the larger sagebrush landscape – one of the most imperiled ecosystems in the United States. More than 350 other species rely on sagebrush habitat, including elk, pronghorn, mule deer and golden eagles.

In addition to state and federal land management plans, the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Sage Grouse Initiative has worked with private landowners to voluntarily conserve habitat. More than 1,100 ranchers and partners across the West have already restored more than [4.4 million acres](#) of sage-grouse habitat while maintaining working landscapes.

An independent [study](#) found that the majority of federal lands within the priority sage- grouse habitat have zero to low potential for oil and gas, solar, and wind energy development. Similarly, the BLM estimates that approximately 90% of lands with high to medium oil and gas development potential are located outside of priority habitat.

In April 2015, the FWS determined that the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse, a distinct population segment located in California and Nevada, was [not warranted](#) for listing under the ESA. This was due, in large part, to a funding commitment and a local, state and federal conservation partnership that has proactively worked for over a decade to conserve key habitat and reduce long-term threats to the species.

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