



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 11-9

Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Conservation

A. BACKGROUND

1. On March 5, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) released a 12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-grouse. This review found that the greater sage-grouse was warranted for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but the rule-making process was precluded by higher priority listing actions. The Service made its decision based on two findings: present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of habitat or range; and inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.
2. In 2008, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) renewed a 2000 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Forest Service (FS), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to provide for cooperation among the agencies in the development of a range-wide strategy for the conservation and management of sage-grouse and their habitat. The new MOU also includes the U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Farm Service Agency.
3. The Western States, through their membership in WAFWA, have recognized that sage-grouse are an important natural component of the sagebrush ecosystem. Sage-grouse serve as one indicator of the overall health of the sagebrush ecosystem in western North America. The current range of the sage-grouse includes 11 Western states (California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming). Federal agencies manage almost two-thirds of sage-grouse habitat, while state agencies manage approximately 5 percent of the overall habitat.
4. The final Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) was published in the Federal Register on March 18, 2003. It identifies criteria to be used in determining whether proposed conservation efforts for a candidate or sensitive species are likely to contribute to improving the habitat and the species' survival, thereby making a federal listing unnecessary. The policy applies to conservation efforts identified in conservation agreements, conservation plans, management plans, or similar documents developed by federal agencies, state and local governments, tribal governments, businesses, organizations and individuals.
5. In December 2006, WAFWA completed the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (Strategy). The overall goal of the Strategy is to maintain and enhance populations and distribution of sage-grouse by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations. This Strategy outlines the critical need to develop an association among local, state,

provincial, tribal, and federal agencies; non-governmental organizations; industry; and individual citizens to design and implement needed conservation actions.

6. An important aspect of the Strategy is to develop federal legislation to provide the funding and structure for sage-grouse conservation. In 2009, WAFWA, along with the Western Governors' Association, finalized a draft of the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA), which would provide such a funding mechanism and conservation structure.
7. In December 2010, NRCS began implementation of its Sage-grouse Initiative across the range of the species. Approximately \$20 million was dedicated for sage-grouse conservation in 2010 with up to \$30 million available in 2011. The NRCS' Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program provided an additional \$23 million in 2011, which will be used to provide working-lands conservation easements for 49,000 acres of large, intact sage-grouse habitat in Wyoming, Montana and Colorado, thereby addressing habitat fragmentation concerns.
8. In June 2011, Directors of the Service, BLM NRCS, and FS signed an interagency agreement "to coordinate across agencies to set mutually agreeable priorities, share expertise and talent, streamline working relationships, and effectively collaborate on managing and enhancing sage-grouse habitat."
9. The economic impacts of placing sage-grouse on the endangered species list would be severe, since much of the West's grazing of rangeland, natural gas, oil, coal and wind resources coincide with sage-grouse habitat.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support all reasonable management efforts necessary to avoid a threatened or endangered listing of the greater sage-grouse and its attendant predicted negative impacts to Western economies from that listing.
2. Western Governors recognize there is a continuing need to evaluate the species' status and develop overall management criteria at the range-wide level so conservation needs and successes can be assessed, while still supporting states' efforts to develop their own individual management plans. Governors applaud the efforts of Western states, through WAFWA and other forums, to collaborate with federal and local authorities on conservation of the greater sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystem.
3. The Governors believe that continued funding is essential to the conservation of the greater sage-grouse. Funding and other resources must continue in order to sustain the monumental effort that has been undertaken in the West, including the local working group planning process; federal, state and local governments; industry; conservation groups; and other private parties. The Governors strongly encourage a continued focus on the range-wide health of the species and caution

that any disengagement at this critical juncture would likely have negative consequences for the species, private industry and the states.

4. The Governors applaud recent federal agency commitments for coordination in support of sage-grouse habitat conservation, and support a speedy revision to federal land management plans in order to produce significant benefits to sage-grouse habitat across its range.
5. The Governors urge the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture to devote any and all available resources, including direct grants to state and local entities, to the development and implementation of their conservation plans. Secretaries should direct the BLM and USFS to revise priority Resource Management Plans and Forest Plans, in alignment with states and their existing management plans.
6. The Governors further urge Congress to provide the appropriate funding to federal departments to support necessary land management plan revisions that will conserve priority greater sage-grouse core areas and sagebrush habitat. In particular, the Governors recommend congressional consideration and approval of the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA), which provides a funding mechanism for greater sage-grouse conservation.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. Western Governors direct WGA to work with Congress, the Administration, and other appropriate entities to implement the policies contained in this resolution.
2. Western Governors direct the Western Governors' Wildlife Council to develop a summary of the state and local policies and initiatives underway to protect sage grouse and sage grouse habitat for review at their Winter Meeting in December 2011.
3. This resolution will be posted on the WGA Web site to be referred to and distributed as necessary.

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