

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

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Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Status Review of Greater Sage-Grouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today the greater sage-grouse will receive additional review to determine if the species warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service is opening a 90-day public comment period to allow all interested parties an opportunity to provide information regarding the status of the species.

The Service is initiating the new status review to take into consideration relevant new information that has become available since its 2005 finding that the greater sage-grouse did not require protection under the ESA. The Service will evaluate all new information regarding the status and distribution of the greater sage grouse, including the impacts or potential impacts of threats to the species resulting from either human activities or natural causes. The Service also will consider the effects of conservation efforts.

The Service expects to use this status review to address a recent court decision that required it to reexamine its 2005 decision. The Service may make one of three possible findings regarding listing the species throughout all or a significant portion of its range:

- Listing is not warranted;
- Listing is warranted; or
- Listing is warranted, but immediate preparation of a proposed listing rule is precluded by the need to work on pending listing proposals of higher priority.

A “not warranted” finding means further consideration under the ESA would end unless significant new information becomes available. A finding that listing is “warranted” or “warranted but precluded” would trigger further steps to determine whether to list the species. A “warranted” finding would be promptly followed by publication of a proposed rule to list the species, with an opportunity for public comment. A final decision to list or not list the species would be made one year after publication of a proposed listing rule.

A finding that listing is “warranted but precluded” results in recognition of the species as a candidate for listing. Such a finding must be reconsidered annually, taking into account changes in the status of the species. When higher priority listing actions have been addressed for other species, a proposed listing rule is prepared and issued for public

comment. Such candidate species do not receive protection under the ESA. However, the Service encourages implementation of conservation efforts for such species so that listing might become unnecessary. The required annual reconsideration of a finding for a candidate species may result in a new finding that listing is not warranted.

In January 2005, the Service determined that the greater sage-grouse was not in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, and announced that protection under the ESA was not warranted. An organization called Western Watersheds Project challenged the 2005 finding in federal court. In December 2007, the court remanded the finding back to the Service for further consideration.

The greater sage-grouse is a large, rounded-winged, ground-dwelling bird, up to 30 inches long and two feet tall, weighing from two to seven pounds. It has a long, pointed tail with legs feathered to the base of the toes. Females are a mottled brown, black, and white. Males are larger and have a large white ruff around their neck and bright yellow air sacks on their breasts, which they inflate during their mating display. The birds are found at elevations ranging from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet and are highly dependent on sagebrush for cover and food.

Greater sage-grouse are found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, eastern California, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming. They are also found in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Comments and information will be accepted until May 27, 2008, and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2008-0022; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. Information submitted in response to the 12-month finding published in 2005 will be considered and need not be resubmitted.

Notice of this initiation of a status review is published in today's Federal Register.

For more information regarding the greater sage-grouse, please visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/sagegrouse/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.