



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington, D.C. 20240



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## Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

From: Director *A Dale Hall*

Subject: Greater Sage Grouse Interim Status Update Results

Attached is a memorandum dated December 16, 2008, that provides an executive summary of the "Greater Sage-Grouse Interim Status Update" that was transmitted to you on October 31, 2008. The purpose of the attached document is to provide an update on our synthesis of biological information relative to the status of the greater sage grouse, and the threats to the species that may affect its viability and persistence. This document is an interim step in completing our greater sage-grouse status review, and will inform our eventual finding on whether the greater sage-grouse should be listed or not under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The attachment to this memorandum and the Interim Status Updates are biological documents that report on the information available to the Service and will ultimately serve as the underpinnings of any finding that the Service should make regarding the greater sage grouse. As I reviewed the attached transmittal, I had some questions regarding its content. To clarify those questions, I consulted Regional Director Steve Guertin and our Sage Grouse Coordinator Jay Slack. I am including a summary of those points that I explored with them in this transmittal to you. They are as follows:

What information was not available?  
How will that pending information be used by the Service?  
How significant is that pending information?

The Service has a requirement to use the "best scientific information available" to make determinations under section 4 of the ESA. As you are aware, in the case of the greater sage grouse, information is currently being produced by many scientists that will be chapters ultimately published as a journal monograph. Many of those chapters are available to the Service at this time. In fact, the most vital chapters are in our possession. The Service went to great lengths to work with the scientific community to acquire the most vital information for its use in our interim review. We continue to acquire chapters as they become available. Likewise, we continually seek any new information that might

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become available prior to any final determination. This is not unique to this or any other scientifically based decision that the Service makes considering the fact that scientific information, in its very nature, is constantly evolving. We do not anticipate completion until summer, 2009, at the earliest.

What are the uncertainties?

What influence will they have in the final determination?

What are we doing to address uncertainties?

Given the nature of the evolution of science, new data (chapters), could always provide facts that were unexpected. However, as I mentioned above, the Service went to great lengths to acquire the most vital information to conduct the subject analysis. The remaining chapters are likely to provide some information, but the current set of information that has been analyzed in our interim review represents, in our opinion, is the most critical data necessary to make a petition finding.

What is being done to resolve uncertainties?

The Service collaborated with a robust consortium of Federal, State and private partners that are collecting population information, restoring habitat, addressing management concerns such as exotic species, and collecting a myriad of scientific information that will help future ESA determinations, and help guide sage grouse conservation efforts as a whole.

How does the Service's current understanding relate to a final determination that will be made?

As noted below, given strict adherence to the court's order, a final decision at this time is not possible. However, as a result of the Service's recent review of the information available to us, the three Regional Directors that oversee sage grouse habitat agreed that the threats to the sage grouse would not likely rise to a level to support a positive petition finding. I confirmed today that we have not acquired any information subsequent to their meeting that has changed our understanding of those threats to the species.

What does this mean in relationship to the court's order?

Since the Service was required by court order to consider the update of the 2004 status review of the species in its petition finding and that currently all chapters have not been made available to the Service, making a decision at this time is not possible. However, the Service has gone to great lengths to acquire the vital scientific information necessary to make a finding should the court insist on a finding prior to the publication of the monograph. Our interim report captures our scientific understanding of the status of the species using the science available to us.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.