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Celebrating an epic conservation success and an invitation to hear more about it.

1 message

Director, FWS <fws_director@fws.gov> Tue, Sep 22, 2015 at 10:02 AM
Bcc: fws_all_employees@fws.gov

Good day, everyone. And it is a very good day!

Today, I have the privilege of standing with Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell, and announcing an epic conservation success, one that will shape the landscape of the West for generations to come, and how we think about and approach wildlife conservation in North America: a not warranted determination for the Greater sage-grouse.

Reflecting the tireless work, professionalism and passion of Service employees and the conservation actions of federal agencies, states, and private landowners, the threats to the greater sage grouse and the "Sagebrush Sea" where it makes its home have been reduced to such an extent that the protections of the Endangered Species Act are not needed at this time.

Stimulated and informed by our warranted but precluded finding in 2010, an extraordinary conservation partnership emerged. This pending decision for sage-grouse has catalyzed an epic conservation effort! People have come together and worked tirelessly to address the threats to the species, primarily habitat loss and fragmentation from a number of sources. For example:

- BLM and USFS embarked upon and completed the revision of 98 land use plans covering over one half of the species remaining habitat on over 60 million acres.
- The states have updated or developed conservation plans to address the primary threats within their borders.
- The Service has embarked upon CCAAs with private landowners, primarily in

Oregon and Wyoming and USDA has targeted key private lands conservation, investing more than $400 million through the Sage Grouse Initiative, and pledging another $198 million by 2018.

The Secretary has been instrumental in leading a new effort to address the threat posed by invasive annual grasses and too-frequent wildfire.

All of this collaborative and science-based effort led the three involved regions to recommend, unanimously, to me that the greater sage-grouse did not warrant listing, as we announced today. This decision will be long remembered and will rewrite how the Endangered Species Act can work to protect our wildlife legacy at a landscape scale.

Continuing success will take hard work. While the threats have been lessened, they have not been eliminated. Wildfire and invasion of exotic plants will continue to be a challenge. To help meet this challenge I have directed 4 million dollars per year for at least the next 5 years to fund the Service's work to continue partnering in this ecosystem.

What makes me the most proud today is to stand together with all of our dedicated wildlife biologists, administrative professionals, and administrators from Regions 1, 6, and 8 (and Headquarters!) who led this work with partners and who have been made this success for the greater sage-grouse possible. I wish I could acknowledge everyone who deserves credit for today's success, but there's not enough time in the day. So I'll mention those I can.

For some, this has been a long journey from the first ESA finding in 2005, to the next finding in 2010, to today's decision! For example, two dedicated professionals like Dr. Pat Deibert, our national sage-grouse coordinator, and Paul Henson, our Ecological Services project leader in Oregon, have been involved since that first petition finding! Dr. Deibert has served as our consummate technical expert on the species and its habitat, earning the admiration of our partners across the range. All of the involved Ecological Service's Project Leaders have shown a strong commitment to sound science and to robust analysis, and they have worked tirelessly with their state and federal counterparts to ensure we get the necessary conservation actions on the ground.

Seasoned Ecological Services leaders like Michael Thabault, Terry Rabot, Nicole Alt, Mary Grim, and Mike Fris, have provided the direction for one of the most data rich, wide-ranging, and complex ESA status reviews we have ever completed. Their staffs throughout three regions have worked hard to understand and apply the science to this challenging analysis and decision and to build by their actions a new collaborative model for conservation in the American West! I would not want to count up how many collective hours they have spent meeting and advising BLM, USFS, Governor's offices, and our state wildlife agency partners. Their dedication and tenacity is humbling. Our Partners for Fish and Wildlife professionals and the National Wildlife Refuge System across the west have also stepped up and contributed to the effort. In short, this is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service success!

I take great pride in being associated with such passionate and dedicated people that can bring all aspects of the organization and all their skills to bear on such a consequential decision. While the sage-grouse was the catalyst, the decisions we made today will reverberate through an entire ecosystem for years to come, benefitting habitat and a multitude of species that share the sage steppe ecosystem, including portions of Canada and 11 western states. The sage grouse, the pygmy rabbit, the sage thrasher, and some 350 other plant and animal species who depend on healthy sagebrush will benefit. These are landscape efforts that will involve our partners in four landscape conservation cooperatives, in eleven states, and several federal agencies.

I realize that not everyone will agree with where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service landed today. I want to emphasize to you is that this was a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision. There were many supporting actors that had significant roles in accomplishing conservation actions that support sage-grouse – but this ESA decision was ours alone to make and it reflects our consensus assessment of the status of the species.

If you would like to hear more about the information and analysis that went in to this finding, we will be hosting a webinar on **Wednesday, September 23 at 1:00 P.M., Mountain Time.** Please join your colleagues in Regions 1, 6, and 8 as they share the process. Log in information is below.

WHAT: All employees are invited to a webinar about the Greater sage-grouse status review and listing determination

WHEN: Wednesday, September 23 at 1pm MT

CALL INFORMATION:

Phone#: 1 (800) 369-2059

Participant#: 9299522

The call will be operator controlled, muted until Q&A.

WEBINAR:
http://www.mymeetings.com/nc/join.php?sigKey=mymeetings&i=746299287&p=20170923&t=c