From: Robert Segin
To: Denise Sanchez; FW6 RO ARDs; FW6 RO EA
Subject: RE: News clips 6_1
Date: Monday, June 01, 2015 9:31:35 AM

ENDANGERED SPECIES:

Colo. coyote hunter killed gray wolf -- FWS

Phil Taylor, E&E reporter

Published: Friday, May 29, 2015

The Fish and Wildlife Service yesterday said it has confirmed the doglike animal that was shot and killed by a coyote hunter late last month in north-central Colorado was a federally protected gray wolf.

The finding, which was the result of a DNA test performed by the agency's forensics lab in Ashland, Ore., rekindled debate over whether wolves, iconic predators that were nearly extirpated from the Lower 48 in the mid-20th century, should be restored to their historical habitat in places like Colorado.

The wolf was shot by a legal coyote hunter near Kremmling along the Colorado River. The hunter immediately notified Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), which notified FWS, the federal agency said in a statement.

"The gray wolf is protected by both the federal government and the state of Colorado as an endangered species," Fish and Wildlife said. "The service routinely investigates incidents affecting endangered species and will conduct this investigation with the assistance of CPW."

The incident shows that wolves, which were reintroduced to Wyoming and Idaho in the mid-1990s as part of a controversial federal recovery effort, continue to disperse back into their historical range.

In February, federal wildlife officials confirmed that a gray wolf that was shot and killed by a coyote hunter in southern Utah over the winter was the same one that had roamed the north rim of the Grand Canyon, a journey of hundreds of miles from the place where it was last collared in Cody, Wyo. (***Greenwire***, Feb. 11).
At least two other wolves have made trips to Colorado since 2004, though both were killed.

A 2-year-old female gray wolf was found dead on June 7, 2004, on the side of Interstate 70 about 30 miles west of Denver. Its broken back and ribs suggested it was hit by a vehicle.

In April 2009, a wolf from near Yellowstone National Park was found dead along a road in Rio Blanco County on Colorado's western slope. FWS later concluded that the wolf, which had been captured and collared as part of a Montana research project, was killed by an illegal poison.

Wolves now number roughly 5,500 in the Lower 48, though it is rare to see one outside of the northern Rockies, eastern Oregon and Washington or in the western Great Lakes.

The Obama administration in June 2013 proposed removing Endangered Species Act protections for wolves everywhere in the Lower 48 except for parts of Arizona and New Mexico, a move that would allow states to decide whether they remain protected. It is unclear when the administration will move to finalize that proposal.

Last month's fatal shooting in Colorado underscores the need for continued federal protections, said Jonathan Proctor, Rockies and Plains program director for Defenders of Wildlife.

"Removing federal protections would make it less likely that wolves would be able to establish new packs in areas outside their current range, essentially halting wolf recovery into western and southern Colorado in its tracks," he said.

Defenders is proposing wolves be allowed to return to historical habitat including at the Grand Canyon, Olympic Peninsula in Washington, western Oregon, much of western Colorado, Northern California and parts of Utah. The group says the species today occupies about 36 percent of its "suitable" range.

Some have proposed wolves be restored to Colorado so they can help cull excess elk, particularly in places like Rocky Mountain National Park where hunting is generally banned. Such proposals stir opposition from hunters who harvest elk as well as ranchers, whose livestock is often eaten by wolves.

Colorado wildlife officials in 2005 adopted the **recommendations** of a working group on how to manage wolves, should they be returned to state control. When, and if, wolves are federally delisted, a Colorado wolf management plan will be implemented.
"It is a sensitive issue," said Mike Porras, a spokesman for Colorado Parks and Wildlife in western Colorado.

Matt Robbins, from CPW headquarters, said that if wolves were federally delisted, a state plan would be crafted with public input through Colorado's wildlife commission.

Twitter: @philipataylor | **Email:** ptaylor@eenews.net

http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2015/05/29/stories/1060019336

ENDANGERED SPECIES:

Obama admin poised to break delisting record

Corbin Hiar, E&E reporter

Published: Friday, May 29, 2015

The Obama administration intends to remove more recovered species from the federal lists of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants than all previous administrations combined, according to a recently released White House regulatory plan.

The target -- set tentatively for the end of September -- has divided advocates and critics of the Endangered Species Act, the landmark law that established processes for adding imperiled species to the lists and removing them when they are no longer at threat of extinction.

Under President Obama, the Fish and Wildlife Service has delisted 12 species -- already more species declared recovered than in any single administration since ESA was enacted in December 1973.

The regulatory agenda released by the White House last week set out dates by which the administration hopes to finalize rules that would remove ESA protections from seven additional species.

If it can meet those deadlines, the Obama administration will have successfully delisted more wildlife and plants in less than seven years than the 18 species other administrations together managed to recover in more than 30 years.

The first species scheduled for delisting is the **Modoc sucker**, a tiny fish found in the streams of northeastern California and southern Oregon. The regulatory plan calls for issuing a final rule on the sucker this month.

FWS proposed removing the fish from the endangered species list in February 2014. But the process was delayed because the agency neglected to publish a classified ad about the move in a local newspaper, which is an antiquated legal requirement of the ESA (***Greenwire***, March 2).

In June, FWS is slated to remove federal protections from a bluish-green flowering shrub commonly known as the **Johnston's frankenia**. Found in southern Texas and parts of Mexico, the endangered species was first proposed for delisting a dozen years ago (***Land Letter***, May 29, 2003).

Since 1985 through the end of this year, 36 species have been or are scheduled to be removed from the endangered list. The Obama administration has delisted half of them.

During the Obama administration	
Date delisted	**Species name** *(and areas recovered)*
September 2015	Inyo California towhee
September 2015	Delmarva fox squirrel
July 2015	Hawaiian hawk
July 2015	Eureka Dunes evening primrose
July 2015	Eureka Valley dunegrass
June 2015	Johnston's frankenia
May 2015	Modoc sucker
March 23, 2015	Oregon chub
April 1, 2014	Island night lizard
Dec. 4, 2013	Steller sea lion *(southern Alaska through central California)*
March 4, 2013	Virginia northern flying squirrel
May 23, 2012	Morelet's crocodile
Nov. 28, 2011	Concho water snake
Sept. 15, 2011	Lake Erie water snake
Sept. 2, 2011	Tennessee purple coneflower
May 5, 2011	Gray wolf *(northern Rocky Mountains)*
Feb. 18, 2011	Maguire daisy
Dec. 17, 2009	Brown pelican
Prior to the Obama administration	
Date delisted	**Species name** *(and areas recovered)*
Aug. 8, 2007	Bald eagle *(Lower 48 states)*
Aug. 18, 2005	Eggert's sunflower
Sept. 21, 2004	Tinian monarch
Oct. 7, 2003	Hoover's woolly-star
July, 24 2003	Columbian white-tailed deer *(Douglas County, Ore.)*
Aug. 27, 2002	Robbins' cinquefoil

March 20, 2001	Aleutian Canada goose
Aug. 25, 1999	American peregrine falcon
March 9, 1995	Eastern gray kangaroo
March 9, 1995	Red kangaroo
March 9, 1995	Western gray kangaroo
Oct. 5, 1994	Arctic peregrine falcon
June 16, 1994	Gray whale
June 4, 1987	American alligator
Sept. 12, 1985	Palau ground dove
Sept. 12, 1985	Palau fantail flycatcher
Sept. 12, 1985	Palau owl
Feb. 4, 1985	Brown pelican *(Atlantic coast, Florida, Alabama)*

Timeline by Corbin Hiar.

Final rules to delist three species are then expected in July.

FWS proposed in 1993 to downlist the endangered **Hawaiian hawk** to threatened under the ESA -- a lower level of protection that indicated the species was no longer on the brink of extinction but could be in the near future. But that rulemaking wasn't completed.
Instead, the agency proposed full delisting for the 18-inch-long raptor in August 2008, during the twilight of the George W. Bush administration. Since then, the Obama administration has held three separate comment periods on the proposal to remove federal protections for the bird, which was once associated with Hawaiian royalty.

The agency also plans to remove the Eureka Dunes evening primrose and Eureka Valley dune grass from the endangered species list. The **desert plants**, found only in eastern California, were proposed for delisting last year after nearly a decade of litigation over their statuses (***E&ENews PM***, Feb. 26, 2014).
The White House scheduled rules lifting protections for those two species in September.

The endangered **Delmarva fox squirrel**, which like the Hawaiian hawk was initially protected in 1967 under a precursor to the ESA, was proposed for delisting last year. The slate-gray, white-bellied squirrel is found only in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia (***Greenwire***, Sept. 19, 2014).
The threatened **Inyo California towhee**, a gray-brown, desert-dwelling songbird, is also set to lose federal protections.
FWS Director Dan Ashe claimed that the ongoing surge in delistings is proof that ESA works when imperiled species are given time to recover.

"Our successes in recovering and delisting species demonstrates both the Endangered Species Act's effectiveness and the diverse collaborations it inspires," he said in a statement to *Greenwire*. "Protecting and restoring wildlife at the brink of extinction is a rigorous, science-driven process that can take years of effort."
The service recently promised a raft of regulatory reforms that seem to be aimed at fending off congressional attempts to rework and roll back the ESA, which many Republicans claim has been ineffective at recovering species (***Greenwire***, May 18).
Environmentalists were also generally supportive of the broader recovery efforts that FWS plans to complete. These include issuing proposed rules to remove protections from a half-dozen species and downlist a similar number of animals and plants. Some of those species could then be completely delisted in 2016, before President Obama leaves office.

But Ya-Wei Li, the director of endangered species conservation at Defenders of Wildlife, was disappointed that the White House wasn't planning to increase protections for any of the 10 threatened species that FWS recently found should be classified as endangered. Two of those -- the Little Colorado spinedace and Chihuahua chub -- even have special rules under ESA's Section 4(d) that make it easier for people to incidentally harass or kill them.

"There's still a lot of species that will continue to slip through the cracks unless we give the service the financial, the social and the political support it needs to do this very difficult job," he said.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, the other agency responsible for implementing the ESA, has never completely delisted a species and has no immediate plans to do so. NMFS did however recently propose to remove federal protections from most humpback whales (***Greenwire***, April 20).

Only Clinton listed more species

ESA critics note that the Obama White House is still planning to add dozens more species to the lists of protected wildlife and plants.

"Too many new species are being listed under the ESA for the wrong reasons," said Neal Kirby, a spokesman for the Independent Petroleum Association of America. "When it comes to true species conservation, we must utilize the best available science -- not political activism -- in an effort to balance species conservation and recovery with economic growth and development."

FWS is slated to propose or finalize rules listing about 60 species, although more than half of those are found only in foreign countries or U.S. territories where the ESA's reach or impacts are less keenly felt by domestic industries. The agency has already extended ESA protections to more species under Obama than any other president aside from President Clinton, whose administration listed more than 520 species.

But Vermont Law School professor Patrick Parenteau, an expert on the ESA, argued that the reason Obama has had to do so many species listings is because his predecessor's administration did so few.

Under President George W. Bush, FWS listed around 60 species in eight years. By comparison, the agency extended ESA protections to nearly 50 species during President Ford's 2½ years in office.

"The large number of listings simply reflects the tremendous backlog that has developed" since the Clinton administration, Parenteau said.

The professor also suggested that the increased rate of species losing federal protections isn't necessarily a crowning achievement for Obama's FWS or supporters of the ESA.

"The law is much stricter on the science-based mandate to list as opposed to the more discretionary and political decision to delist," Parenteau said. "Delisting has become the principal measure of success for the ESA, which is a major political victory for the opponents."

Twitter: @corbinhiar | Email: chiar@eenews.net

http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2015/05/29/stories/1060019305

WATER POLICY:

Greenwire's Snider talks political, legal future of Obama water rule

Published: Friday, May 29, 2015

This week, the Obama administration finalized its "Waters of the U.S." rule, making some significant changes to its draft proposal. How will Congress respond to the rule and how legally defensible will it be when challenged in the courts? On today's The Cutting Edge, *Greenwire*reporter Annie Snider discusses the rollout and future of the rule.

Click here to watch E&ETV's The Cutting Edge.

Monica Trauzzi: Welcome to The Cutting Edge. The Obama administration released its highly anticipated water rule this week to pushback and talk of federal overreach, and *Greenwire*'s Annie Snider has been covering all angles of the story. Annie, it has been a long, tough road for this rule, and there were some pretty big changes made in the final. What's most notable?
Annie Snider: Yeah, so again this is a rule that is aimed at clearing up years of confusion over which streams and wetlands fall under the protection of the Clean Water Act. And the Obama administration has really sold it as being about clarity and clearing up that uncertainty, but a lot of people looked at the reposed rule and said, "Whoa, this is really confusing." And so EPA and the Army Corps did some things in this final rule that are really aimed at taking that away, at making it readable for somebody on the ground, to look at what they've got and say, "Is this in or is it out?"
Now one area didn't see particular substantive changes, and this is a controversial area. That's tributaries. So all tributaries are automatically in if they meet sort of the definition of a tributary, and that is a fairly expansive definition. But there are two areas where the administration made some significant changes. One of those is related to wetlands that are -- wetlands and waters that are near to things that are already jurisdictional. So the Supreme Court has said that wetlands that are near to a bigger river or water are inseparably bound up with that and deserve protection. So this is called adjacent wetlands. But what meets that categorization has been up for debate, and in the proposed rule the agencies had used phrases like "floodplain" and "riparian area," saying that waters within those should be considered adjacent. And folks looked at that and said, "Well, OK, floodplain -- are we talking about the 10-year floodplain or the 500-year floodplain?" And so in the final rule the agencies chose the 100-year floodplain, keyed off of that, and then gave numbers of feet distances from that for what would be in and what would be out.

The other thing that they did that was really notable in this was that they said some things are out. They set some boundaries, which is the first time that they've ever done that before, saying that things beyond this limit are out. And that is very clearly aimed at telling people when they don't need to be worrying about the Clean Water Act. Now for practical purposes, how much is beyond those boundaries is kind of an open question. Industry groups say that because of other things that the agencies are doing in this rule, not much is actually going to fall beyond that.

Monica Trauzzi: So were there any clear winners here?

Annie Snider: Depends on who you ask, and it sort of is still shaking out. So agricultural groups were some of the most vocal critics of the proposed rule, and the administration has done a lot here to try and kind of win them over. On the press call on Wednesday, Administrator McCarthy said, "We heard about ditches and we heard about ditches and then we heard more about ditches." So they did some -- they definitely addressed the ditch issue in this. They exempted more ditches, and then they wrote those exemptions in kind of clearer language. Whether that'll solve concerns kind of remains to be seen. The Farm Bureau has said that they're still digging into it, but they kind of remain skeptical. And the National Farmers Union is one of those groups that the administration really wants to win over. They put out a statement saying that they're happy with some things in the rule, like those boundaries, but there are other areas where they're a little bit worried, and one of those areas is certain categories of wetlands.
So this was something that was a top priority for environmental groups going in. There have been these so-called isolated wetlands that are -- you know, were thrown into question by a 2001 Supreme Court decision, but that have more or less been out of the agency's reach a lot of times on the ground. And these include things like the prairie potholes in the Dakotas which serve as habitat for like more than half of the migratory waterfowl in North America, so really ecologically important but not clearly under federal jurisdiction. In the final rule the agencies don't put these under automatic jurisdiction but they give sort of special consideration of five types of wetlands like this: so prairie potholes, vernal pools in California, that sort of thing. Environmental groups got a partial win there but not a full win. They had wanted more of these types of wetlands to be under jurisdiction and they'd wanted it to be automatic. I talked to an environmentalist yesterday who said she'd woken up in a cold sweat thinking about all the types of wetlands now that are more or less out of reach.

Monica Trauzzi: The rollout of this rule was a bit different than usual. Why were some reporters excluded?

Annie Snider: Yeah, that's a question right now. So there was a bit of a scuffle on it on Wednesday.

Monica Trauzzi: Yeah.

Annie Snider: So EPA's press office has started for big rules like this, rather than sending a press release to their entire list of reporters, sending sort of an advanced notice to reporters that they say they know have been interested in following that issue. And so they did that on Wednesday morning to a handful of reporters for a 9:15 press call ahead of a 10 a.m. release, although the documents didn't actually come out until closer to 11:00. But there were a number of reporters who have expressed interest in this issue who weren't on that initial alert, including*Washington Examiner* and *CQ*, but also including *The New York Times*. And it's hard to believe that they don't know that there's an interest there given that the *Times* has written a couple of articles recently, including one that was fairly critical of the agency's kind of PR campaign around the rule.

Monica Trauzzi: Hmm. Despite the fact that the rule was released during a congressional recess week, we heard quite a bit coming from the Hill following the release. What are you expecting to see from the House and Senate going forward now that we see the final rule?

Annie Snider: Yeah, no shortage of reactions from the Hill. So the House has already passed two bills aimed at killing the rule, and it's really up to the Senate at this point. On the House side we have seen some of the committee chairmen kind of going after this issue that was raised in the *Times* article, but like I said, action's really in the Senate. We've seen the lead opponents there saying that the final rule that was put out is really just adding momentum to their efforts to stop it. It's really going to come down to a couple of lawmakers who've sort of been swing votes, and they've said that they're really waiting for the final rule. So we'll see what their reaction is, and Jim Inhofe, whose Environment and Public Works Committee has jurisdiction over the bill aimed at killing it, has said that he's going to have a markup of that bill this summer.

Monica Trauzzi: And you are working on a story for next week that digs into the legal defensibility of the rule. We're expecting of course some legal challenges; we'll look out for that. Thank you for coming on the show.

Annie Snider: Thank you.

Monica Trauzzi: More Cutting Edge coming next Friday. We'll see you then.
[End of Audio]

Click here to watch E&ETV's The Cutting Edge.

http://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2015/05/29/stories/1060019354

AGRICULTURE:
USDA to put aside 800K acres for wetlands, wildlife

Tiffany Stecker, E&E reporter
Published: Friday, May 29, 2015

The Agriculture Department will hold a general sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program this year for the first time since 2013, Secretary Tom Vilsack announced this morning.

In addition, USDA will set aside 800,000 acres for wetlands and wildlife initiatives in the continuous Conservation Reserve Program, a boon for waterfowl habitat. Landowners with CRP acres expiring this September will be able to extend their contracts for a year.

"This has been one of the most successful conservation programs in the history of the country, and today's announcement keeps that momentum moving forward," Vilsack said. He announced the sign-up at Ducks Unlimited's annual conference in Milwaukee.

Conservation groups lauded the boost to the program, which has seen lagging enrollment in the past seven years.

"Today's Conservation Reserve Program news is big for upland habitat in terms of quantity and quality," said Dave Nomsen, vice president of governmental affairs for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever.

The 30-year-old Conservation Reserve Program pays landowners to set aside highly erodible and environmentally sensitive tracts for conservation. The program hit its peak in 2007, when 36.8 million acres were enrolled. Since then, high crop prices have encouraged farmers to let their conservation acres expire and to plant corn and soybeans instead.

In response to declining interest in the program, the 2014 farm bill cut the cap on acres enrolled in the program by a quarter, from 32 million acres to 24 million acres, over the five-year life of the bill.

Conservation groups like the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership have eagerly awaited a general sign-up to fill up the deficits in the program. Enrollment is currently 1.7 million acres below the prescribed cap for this year, and an additional 1.9 acres are expected to expire in September, said Ariel Wiegard, director of the partnership's Center for Agriculture and Private Lands.

"We're very eager to see USDA complete implementation of the program," she said in an email.

A bipartisan group of senators sent a letter to Vilsack last month, asking USDA to ensure that acres were enrolled up to the maximum cap allowed under the farm bill (***Greenwire***, April 23).
The general sign-up will start Dec. 1 and end next Feb. 26. Contracts last between 10 and 15 years. Farmers and ranchers can enroll in continuous CRP throughout the year.

Twitter: @TiffanyStecker | **Email:** tstecker@eenews.net

http://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2015/05/29/stories/1060019356

Wyoming intervenes on fed side in Grand Teton grizzly suit

Posted: May 29, 2015 2:35 PM MDTUpdated: May 29, 2015 2:35 PM MDT
By MEAD GRUVER
Associated Press
CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) - The state of Wyoming is intervening on the side of the federal government in a lawsuit over grizzly bears and

elk hunting in Grand Teton National Park.

Grand Teton is one of just a couple national parks that allow hunting.

Last month, two groups sued federal officials saying they would allow elk hunters to kill too many grizzlies in accidental confrontations before reassessing the rules for the Grand Teton elk hunt.

Elk hunters have killed a grizzly bear in self-defense in Grand Teton only one time in recent memory. The Sierra Club and Western Watersheds Project claim that providing for elk hunters to kill more grizzlies ignores other threats to the bears throughout the region.

Attorneys for Wyoming argue the elk hunt needs to continue to help control elk numbers.

Copyright 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

http://www.kulr8.com/story/29192458/wyoming-intervenes-on-fed-side-in-grand-teton-grizzly-suit

New U.S. Water Rule is Crucial for Clean Drinking Water and Resilience to Droughts and Floods

Posted by **Sandra Postel** of National Geographic's Freshwater Initiative in Water Currents on May 29, 2015

It took nearly a decade, but finally the waters left terribly muddied by two U.S. Supreme Court cases have gotten a good bit clearer.

This week, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers issued a new rule clarifying which of the nation's streams and wetlands come under the protections of the federal Clean Water Act.
Without this rule, some 117 million people – about one in three Americans – would continue to get drinking water from streams that lacked clear protection from pollution and degradation. And large populations of fish and wildlife would remain at risk of losing critical habitat.

The need for this clarification arose in large part from the U.S. Supreme Court's 2006 decision in the Rapanos-Carabell case, named for the two petitioners who each had sought to develop wetland areas on their Michigan properties – one for a shopping center in Midland, the other for condominiums north of Detroit.

In a mixed ruling, the four conservative justices ruled that the Clean Water Act applies only to "permanent, standing or continuously flowing" bodies of water, casting aside the protection of ecologically crucial seasonal and ephemeral wetlands and streams that are often hydrologically connected to flowing waters downstream.

Four other justices disagreed with this hydro-illogical interpretation and sided with sound science and the overall intent of the Clean Water Act to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters."

It was Justice Anthony Kennedy, however, who, in a separate opinion, introduced the confusing requirement that only streams and wetlands for which a "significant nexus" with navigable waters can be shown to exist should be subject to the law's protections.

Justice Kennedy's opinion set up a case-by-case approach that quickly became a regulatory nightmare and left in limbo the status of vast areas of small streams and wetlands.

Back in 2005, I joined nine other scientists, including the esteemed Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, in writing and submitting an amicus curiae ("friend of the court") brief to inform the justices about the relevant science in this case.

In the summary of our argument, we wrote:

"Reasonable people can disagree over language, and it is for the Court to decide questions of law. But when it comes to the connection of tributaries, streams, and wetlands to navigable waters and interstate commerce, there is no ecological ambiguity. In the opinion of Amici, if the Clean Water Act does not protect these resources, then it does not protect navigable waters from pollution, and it cannot achieve its goals."
Besides underscoring the various pathways by which tributaries, wetlands, aquifers and rivers are connected, we pointed out that besides supplying water and fish, aquatic ecosystems provide valuable economic services. They recharge groundwater, filter pollutants, mitigate floods and droughts, purify drinking water, and sustain a diversity of habitats.

We noted that the loss of water-cleansing wetlands in the Mississippi watershed far upstream from the Gulf of Mexico can contribute to the formation of the low-oxygen "dead zones" that threaten the Gulf 's fisheries and food webs each year.

We pointed out that interconnected wetlands and stream systems absorb stormwater, thereby alleviating flood damage.

With Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives having already passed a bill that would roll back the new EPA-Army rule, and the Senate considering a similar measure, it is crucial for citizens everywhere to speak out about the importance of clean water and freshwater ecosystems to their health, communities and economies.

The EPA and Army Corps of Engineers have done a great service in clarifying the waters protected under the Clean Water Act, which enjoyed bi-partisan support and was signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon in 1972.

The new rule does not create any new permitting requirements, and it maintains all previous exemptions and exclusions, including for farm activities such as planting, harvesting and moving livestock.

But it removes uncertainty, unlocks regulatory logjams, and reinforces the critical role healthy freshwater ecosystems play in our economy and in building resilience against the more extreme floods and droughts coming down the pike.

Our government is the custodian of the public trust in water. Both sides of the aisle should respect and uphold the original intention of the Clean Water Act and leave this new water rule in full force.

Sandra Postel is director of the Global Water Policy Project, Freshwater Fellow of the National Geographic Society, and author of several books and numerous articles on global water issues. She is co-creator of Change the Course, the national freshwater conservation and restoration campaign being piloted in the Colorado River Basin.

http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2015/05/29/new-u-s-water-rule-is-crucial-for-clean-drinking-water-and-resilience-to-droughts-and-floods/

9 States Back Utah Ruling Tossing Federal Prairie Dog Rules

SALT LAKE CITY — May 29, 2015, 3:57 PM ET
By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

Nine states have stepped into a lawsuit over the Utah prairie dog to support a ruling that animal activists say threatens to undermine the Endangered Species Act.

The attorneys general asked an appeals court to uphold a ruling striking down federal protections for the Utah prairie dog on private property. They argued that federal authorities shouldn't be managing animals that live only within state borders.
But U.S. Department of Justice attorneys say that the majority of protected species live only in a single state and courts have long upheld federal authority to protect them wherever they live.

The federal government is appealing a ruling from U.S. District Judge Dee Benson, who sided in November with southern Utah residents who said that federal rules protecting the threatened species were allowing prairie dogs to overtake their town. The property owners from Cedar City said the small, burrowing animals damaged the golf course, airport and cemetery and interrupted funerals with their barking.

The Utah Attorney General supported the Cedar City residents on Thursday with a friend-of-the-court brief filed before the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. It contends that Utah's rural communities are hurt by the "uncontrolled proliferation" of the Utah prairie dog. The brief was signed by state attorneys from Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming.

An attorney with the group Friends of Animals said the states are among a minority that oppose federal protection for threatened and endangered animals.

"Sadly, they each have a history allowing animals to die within their borders for even minor economic gain," Michael Harris wrote in an email to the Associated Press. "Luckily, forty-one other states have chosen to rebuff this outrageous attempt to undermine the federal Endangered Species Act."

Animal-rights groups say Benson's ruling was a radical departure from 40 years of animal protection under the Endangered Species Act. Federal attorneys and animal-rights groups taking part in the lawsuit are due to respond this summer.
The Utah landowners filed a lawsuit with the help of the Sacramento, California-based Pacific Legal Foundation. Lawyers for the group argued that because the Utah prairie dog is found only within the state, federal authorities shouldn't be able to regulate it on private property.

That argument hadn't gotten much traction in other courts before Benson's decision. But if the appeals court upholds the ruling, it could bring the Endangered Species Act before the U.S. Supreme Court, according to the brief filed Thursday.
Utah prairie dog numbers dwindled to about 2,000 in the 1970s as they were targeted by ranchers and farmers who believed the animals competed with livestock and crops, according to court papers. The species' numbers have rebounded significantly since coming under federal protection, though the majority live on private land.

After Benson's decision was handed down in November, Utah wildlife authorities adopted a new plan that allows the roughly 6,000 prairie dogs to be moved off private land or killed. While the new state regulations are similar to the federal rules, state officials say they allow more of the animals to be removed from private property.

http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/states-back-utah-ruling-tossing-federal-prairie-dog-31398724

2 wolves poached in southwestern Montana

HELENA (AP) – Montana wildlife officials say poachers shot and killed two wolves, one just outside Yellowstone National Park and the other near the Centennial Valley.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks officials said in a statement Friday that a hiker found a dead wolf off the Old Yellowstone Trail near Gardiner on May 10. The wolf was a yearling female that was shot days earlier.

Last Saturday, a dead adult male wolf was found at the Ruby River Long Creek Divide. Wildlife officials estimated the wolf was shot a day or two before its carcass was discovered.

Hunting season for wolves ended on March 15. The penalty for killing a wolf out of season is a citation and $1,000 in restitution.

FWP officials are asking anyone with information to call 800-TIP-MONT.

http://missoulian.com/news/local/wolves-poached-in-southwestern-montana/article_bad613aa-a3e2-5e7e-a01a-965529820dd3.html

CH 9 News Story
http://www.9news.com/story/news/local/2015/05/28/officials-confirm-gray-wolf-killed-in-colorado/28125117/

Battle to preserve bats in the Black Hills continues

By SCOTT FELDMAN - Associated Press - Sunday, May 31, 2015

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) - As a disease that has ravaged the population of the northern long-eared bat continues to spread throughout most of its habitat, scientists are looking at the Black Hills as the last bastion of hope for the species' continued survival.

"In my view, the Black Hills could serve a very important function as a refugee or sanctuary for the species, at least for the next few years, and hopefully in that time a treatment will be found," said Mollie Matteson, a senior scientist for the Center for Biological Diversity.

On May 15, Matteson gave a presentation entitled, "The last stand of the northern long-eared bat," via Skype as part of the Endangered Species Day Celebration hosted by the Prairie Hills Audubon Society, the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center and the Norbeck Society, among other organizations.

Although the bats were listed as "threatened" and placed on the endangered species list on April 2 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a special exemption was placed in the ruling that essentially eliminated most of the protections the bats would normally get for their habitat in the Black Hills, the Rapid City Journal (http://bit.ly/1JV7jR5) reported.

For example, logging, mining, oil drilling and tree clearing are all allowed in the Black Hills in spite of the bat's habitat gaining a "protective" status, she said.

Matteson said the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the same day the ruling that included the exemption was passed. A judge has been named in the suit, but no other action has occurred, she said.

The northern long-eared bat has suffered a mortality rate between 90 and 99 percent after a fungal disease called white nose syndrome spread a couple of years after it was initially discovered in 2006, she said.

The northern long-eared bat is a hibernating creature that goes into a cave or mine and spends the winter in a torpor state, similar to a bear. While the bat is hibernating, the fungus grows on the bats. The fungus causes the bat to awaken from hibernation earlier and more often than normal. It also invades the bat's skin, which dehydrates the animal. The disease is usually lethal, she said.

The bat has been virtually wiped out in most of its native habitat, which is primarily in the eastern United States. However, there is a contingent of the species found in the Black Hills that remains untouched by white nose syndrome.

The percentage of the overall northern long-eared bat population that lives in the Black Hills is unknown, although surveys have started this year.

The fact that white nose syndrome hasn't spread to the Black Hills is a double-edged sword. It makes the Black Hills an excellent sanctuary for the bats, but it also served as justification for loosening the usual restrictions that industries would have to abide by in a habitat with an endangered species present.

Matteson admitted that the disease is the primary killer of the bats, but she said because so many have been killed by the disease, it's imperative that other threats to the species, such as habitat destruction, are minimized.
"The disease is the primary killer of these bats, but they are at risk from other threats such as loss of habitat and pesticides used in

agriculture," she said. "The bat is facing extinction and will likely go extinct without strong protections, at least until a cure is hopefully discovered."

The survival of bats is crucial because of how many insects they consume. The northern long-eared bat consumes between 3,000 and 8,000 insects per day, or about half its body weight. Matteson said studies estimate the bats have a value to agriculture somewhere between $3.7 billion and $53 billion per year because of how many insects they eat that don't have to be killed with pesticides. If the bats go extinct, the insect population could explode.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has described the special rule as an interim rule and will finalize it by the end of the year. A comment period is open until July 1.

Matteson urged people in attendance to get more involved in the policy making and contact South Dakota's representatives in Congress and the Senate to voice their opinion. She also asked people can send comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Read more: http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/31/battle-to-preserve-bats-in-the-black-hills-continu/#ixzz3bp8YFJo4

3 resource bills set for votes in House

Dylan Brown, E&E reporter
Published: Monday, June 1, 2015
Republican leadership added three natural resource bills to the list of legislation up for a full House vote this week.

Legislation renaming a mountain after a fallen Marine and reducing the budget for U.S. EPA's National Estuary Program will be considered under suspension of the rules, a process that limits debate, prohibits amendments and requires a simple two-thirds majority for passage.

Rep. Tom McClintock's (R-Calif.) H.R. 979 would rename a mountain in California's Sierra National Forest for late Marine Staff Sgt. Sky Mote (*Greenwire*, Feb. 16).

The 27-year-old explosives technician was killed in Afghanistan in 2012 after an Afghan police officer opened fire with an AK-47 at a U.S. military base.

All 53 members of California congressional delegation co-sponsored the bill to rename a peak in the John Muir Wilderness where Mote's family gathers each year "Sky Point."

Also up for a vote is H.R. 944, by Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-N.J.), which would trim $8 million from the National Estuary Program's current budget.

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved the bill, which reauthorizes the program's budget at $27 million per year through fiscal 2020 (*Greenwire*, April 15).

The third bill on the list is H.R. 404 by Rep. Adrian Smith (R-Neb.), which would authorize early repayment to the Bureau of Reclamation within Nebraska's Northport Irrigation District.
http://www.eenews.net/eedaily/2015/06/01/stories/1060019375

The grolar bear dilemma -- do warming-created hybrids hurt species?

Manon Verchot, E&E reporter
Published: Monday, June 1, 2015
Only purebred dogs are allowed to compete at the Westminster Kennel Club's annual dog show.

"The basic purpose of dog shows is to facilitate the evaluation of breeding stock for use in producing the next generations," the organization's website says.

Judges choose winners based on how closely a dog fits a standard, or "ideal breed." Standards are based on both personality traits and physical ones -- from eye color to ear shape and even tail placement. Mutts need not apply.

It is competitions like these that contribute to the common perception that mixing animal species leads to "maladapted" animals, according to Michael Arnold, a professor of genetics at the University of Georgia.

But closer analysis of genetics suggests that perception is far some settled. What is clear is that warming is increasing many opportunities for gene mixing.
"As we've developed genomic methodologies, we're finding that organisms are exchanging genes with other species," Arnold said. "Genetic exchange due to organisms coming together from climate change is the rule rather than the exception."

Animals have been interbreeding for millennia. Even modern humans are the product of genetic exchange with Neanderthals some 60,000 years ago.
But the rate at which species interbreed is accelerating because of climate change, researchers say. As habitats and animal ranges change and bleed into one another, species that never before would have encountered one another are now mating.

Warmer temperatures have allowed grizzly bears and polar bears to venture to habitats they don't usually occupy and mate to form a hybrid: the pizzly or grolar bear.
Similar trends have been observed between golden-winged warblers and blue-winged warblers.
"This issue is horrendously complex because of our ability to change the environment," said Arnold.
Considering that human activity has indirectly brought together species through planetary warming and increased fossil fuel emissions, the

question on the minds of many biologists like Arnold is whether humans should play a role in preventing hybridization like this.

A threat to genetic diversity?

Montana's Shields Basin has long been a spawning haven for the westslope cutthroat trout. But as waters in the region warm, rainbow trout have swum up from the western lakes where they were introduced decades ago to cutthroat native grounds.
As rainbow trout meet and interbreed with dwindling cutthroat trout populations, the survival of cutthroat trout is at risk. Instead, a hybrid species is taking its place.
"It's a major cause of species extinction -- lots of species are now disappearing because they are being genetically swamped by other, commoner ones," said Stuart Pimm, a professor of conservation ecology at Duke University.
In some cases, hybridization can lead to reduced genetic diversity in animals, according to David Tallmon, an associate professor of biology at the University of Alaska.
"Rather than growing a new branch on the [genetic] tree, you have two branches growing together," he said.
In the case of cutthroat-rainbow trout hybrids, the hybrids are less genetically fit, with offspring of the hybrids struggling to survive, a study led by researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey found.
The rate at which humans are driving species to extinction is 1,000 times faster than the rate at which animals would go extinct naturally, Pimm's research shows.
"The issue is how fast we are driving species to extinction," said Pimm. "We're responsible for that, and, in doing so, we are handing our children a world not as rich and interesting as the one we got from our parents. We should do what we can to be good stewards."

Combining the strengths of coyotes and wolves

However, some biologists disagree, saying that hybridization is natural and doesn't always produce negative results. In some cases, hybrids are better adapted to cope with changing landscapes.
"Hybridization can increase genetic diversity in some cases," said Tallmon.

A coyote-wolf-dog hybrid that made its way to western New York in the 1940s has the combined features of stealthy coyote-like movements and a larger skull, making it better-adapted to hunting white-tailed deer.
Members of the *Heliconius* butterfly genus in the Amazon breed with other species within the genus and have developed more distinctive colors in the process. Without these colors, the birds would not be aware that these butterflies contain cyanide, and the defense mechanism would be useless.
Though crossbreeding between Amazonian butterflies was not triggered by climate change, it is an example of hybridization that strengthens the survival abilities of a species.

No help from Endangered Species Act

Humans are doing a lot more than warming the planet, so hybridization is not the only issue that has the potential to decrease biodiversity.
"We are losing biodiversity not due to genetic exchange, but because we are eating up the landscape," said Arnold. "What we want to do is we've got to stop destroying landscape."
In cases where warmer temperatures are bringing species together, human intervention should be carefully thought through, he added.
Hybrids are not classified as their own species, so there are no regulations to protect them -- they can't be placed on the U.S. government's endangered species list.
"With large-scale climate change, the question is: Are these hybrids more well-adapted?" said Arnold.
Twitter: @maverchot | Email: mverchot@eenews.net

http://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2015/06/01/stories/1060019399

Sage Grouse Land Use Plans Should Defer to States

Posted by: HL News Posted date: **June 01, 2015** In: Hunting News | comment : 0

DENVER – In reaction to today's release of several land use plan amendments for Greater Sage-Grouse by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), Western Energy Alliance issued the following statement:
"Conservation of the sage grouse is a goal shared by the oil and natural gas industry, ranchers, other industries, states, and communities across the West," said Kathleen Sgamma, vice president of government and public affairs at Western Energy Alliance. "That goal is best achieved at the state level, not with a one-size-fits-all federal approach. Western Energy Alliance will protest all land use plan amendments that fail to conform with state plans, and will continue to support actions by Congress to delay these land use plans and a final listing decision."
"The economic impact of sage-grouse restrictions on just the oil and natural gas industry will be between 9,170 and 18,250 jobs and $2.4 billion to $4.8 billion of annual economic impact across Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming. Oil and natural gas companies has committed to several hundred conservation measures to protect the sage grouse and its sensitive habitat. With these land use plan amendments based on flawed science, the federal agencies are discouraging more effective state-based conservation, to the detriment of the sage grouse," concluded Sgamma.
http://huntinglife.com/sage-grouse-land-use-plans-should-defer-to-states/

From: Robert Segin [mailto:robert_segin@fws.gov]
Sent: Monday, June 01, 2015 9:23 AM
To: Ryan Moehring
Subject: RE: If you want to add your stuff I'll send it out.

We rotate on Monday as she does not work on Mon . I do 1st and 3rd Mon. Today she is only here for the party.

From: Ryan Moehring [mailto:ryan_moehring@fws.gov]
Sent: Monday, June 01, 2015 9:10 AM
To: Robert Segin
Subject: RE: If you want to add your stuff I'll send it out.

What happened to having Denise send the clips?

From: Robert Segin [mailto:robert_segin@fws.gov]
Sent: Monday, June 01, 2015 8:57 AM
To: Ryan Moehring
Subject: If you want to add your stuff I'll send it out.

9 States Back Utah Ruling Tossing Federal Prairie Dog Rules

SALT LAKE CITY — May 29, 2015, 3:57 PM ET
By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

Nine states have stepped into a lawsuit over the Utah prairie dog to support a ruling that animal activists say threatens to undermine the Endangered Species Act.
The attorneys general asked an appeals court to uphold a ruling striking down federal protections for the Utah prairie dog on private property. They argued that federal authorities shouldn't be managing animals that live only within state borders.
But U.S. Department of Justice attorneys say that the majority of protected species live only in a single state and courts have long upheld federal authority to protect them wherever they live.
The federal government is appealing a ruling from U.S. District Judge Dee Benson, who sided in November with southern Utah residents who said that federal rules protecting the threatened species were allowing prairie dogs to overtake their town. The property owners from Cedar City said the small, burrowing animals damaged the golf course, airport and cemetery and interrupted funerals with their barking.
The Utah Attorney General supported the Cedar City residents on Thursday with a friend-of-the-court brief filed before the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. It contends that Utah's rural communities are hurt by the "uncontrolled proliferation" of the Utah prairie dog. The brief was signed by state attorneys from Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming.
An attorney with the group Friends of Animals said the states are among a minority that oppose federal protection for threatened and endangered animals.
"Sadly, they each have a history allowing animals to die within their borders for even minor economic gain," Michael Harris wrote in an email to the Associated Press. "Luckily, forty-one other states have chosen to rebuff this outrageous attempt to undermine the federal Endangered Species Act."
Animal-rights groups say Benson's ruling was a radical departure from 40 years of animal protection under the Endangered Species Act. Federal attorneys and animal-rights groups taking part in the lawsuit are due to respond this summer.
The Utah landowners filed a lawsuit with the help of the Sacramento, California-based Pacific Legal Foundation. Lawyers for the group argued that because the Utah prairie dog is found only within the state, federal authorities shouldn't be able to regulate it on private property.
That argument hadn't gotten much traction in other courts before Benson's decision. But if the appeals court upholds the ruling, it could bring the Endangered Species Act before the U.S. Supreme Court, according to the brief filed Thursday.
Utah prairie dog numbers dwindled to about 2,000 in the 1970s as they were targeted by ranchers and farmers who believed the animals competed with livestock and crops, according to court papers. The species' numbers have rebounded significantly since coming under federal protection, though the majority live on private land.
After Benson's decision was handed down in November, Utah wildlife authorities adopted a new plan that allows the roughly 6,000 prairie dogs to be moved off private land or killed. While the new state regulations are similar to the federal rules, state officials say they allow more of the animals to be removed from private property.
http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/states-back-utah-ruling-tossing-federal-prairie-dog-31398724

2 wolves poached in southwestern Montana

1

HELENA (AP) – Montana wildlife officials say poachers shot and killed two wolves, one just outside Yellowstone National Park and the other near the Centennial Valley.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks officials said in a statement Friday that a hiker found a dead wolf off the Old Yellowstone Trail near Gardiner on May 10. The wolf was a yearling female that was shot days earlier.

Last Saturday, a dead adult male wolf was found at the Ruby River Long Creek Divide. Wildlife officials estimated the wolf was shot a day or two before its carcass was discovered.

Hunting season for wolves ended on March 15. The penalty for killing a wolf out of season is a citation and $1,000 in restitution.

FWP officials are asking anyone with information to call 800-TIP-MONT.

http://missoulian.com/news/local/wolves-poached-in-southwestern-montana/article_bad613aa-a3e2-5e7e-a01a-965529820dd3.html

CH 9 News Story

http://www.9news.com/story/news/local/2015/05/28/officials-confirm-gray-wolf-killed-in-colorado/28125117/

Battle to preserve bats in the Black Hills continues

by Taboolaby Taboola
Sponsored LinksSponsored Links
Promoted LinksPromoted Links

.

By SCOTT FELDMAN - Associated Press - Sunday, May 31, 2015

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) - As a disease that has ravaged the population of the northern long-eared bat continues to spread throughout most of its habitat, scientists are looking at the Black Hills as the last bastion of hope for the species' continued survival.

"In my view, the Black Hills could serve a very important function as a refugee or sanctuary for the species, at least for the next few years, and hopefully in that time a treatment will be found," said Mollie Matteson, a senior scientist for the Center for Biological Diversity.

On May 15, Matteson gave a presentation entitled, "The last stand of the northern long-eared bat," via Skype as part of the Endangered Species Day Celebration hosted by the Prairie Hills Audubon Society, the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center and the Norbeck Society, among other organizations.

Although the bats were listed as "threatened" and placed on the endangered species list on April 2 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a special exemption was placed in the ruling that essentially eliminated most of the protections the bats would normally get for their habitat in the Black Hills, the Rapid City Journal (http://bit.ly/1JV7jR5) reported.

For example, logging, mining, oil drilling and tree clearing are all allowed in the Black Hills in spite of the bat's habitat gaining a "protective" status, she said.

Matteson said the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the same day the ruling that included the exemption was passed. A judge has been named in the suit, but no other action has occurred, she said.

The northern long-eared bat has suffered a mortality rate between 90 and 99 percent after a fungal disease called white nose syndrome spread a couple of years after it was initially discovered in 2006, she said.

The northern long-eared bat is a hibernating creature that goes into a cave or mine and spends the winter in a torpor state, similar to a bear. While the bat is hibernating, the fungus grows on the bats. The fungus causes the bat to awaken from hibernation earlier and more often than normal. It also invades the bat's skin, which dehydrates the animal. The disease is usually lethal, she said.

The bat has been virtually wiped out in most of its native habitat, which is primarily in the eastern United States. However, there is a contingent of the species found in the Black Hills that remains untouched by white nose syndrome.

The percentage of the overall northern long-eared bat population that lives in the Black Hills is unknown, although surveys have started this year.

The fact that white nose syndrome hasn't spread to the Black Hills is a double-edged sword. It makes the Black Hills an excellent sanctuary for the bats, but it also served as justification for loosening the usual restrictions that industries would have to abide by in a habitat with an endangered species present.

Matteson admitted that the disease is the primary killer of the bats, but she said because so many have been killed by the disease, it's imperative that other threats to the species, such as habitat destruction, are minimized.

"The disease is the primary killer of these bats, but they are at risk from other threats such as loss of habitat and pesticides used in agriculture," she said. "The bat is facing extinction and will likely go extinct without strong protections, at least until a cure is hopefully discovered."

The survival of bats is crucial because of how many insects they consume. The northern long-eared bat consumes between 3,000 and 8,000 insects per day, or about half its body weight. Matteson said studies estimate the bats have a value to agriculture somewhere between $3.7 billion and $53 billion per year because of how many insects they eat that don't have to be killed with pesticides. If the bats go extinct, the insect population could explode.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has described the special rule as an interim rule and will finalize it by the end of the year. A comment period is open until July 1.

Story Continues →

Read more: http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/31/battle-to-preserve-bats-in-the-black-hills-continu/#ixzz3boxBBkCY

3 resource bills set for votes in House

Dylan Brown, E&E reporter
Published: Monday, June 1, 2015

Republican leadership added three natural resource bills to the list of legislation up for a full House vote this week.

Legislation renaming a mountain after a fallen Marine and reducing the budget for U.S. EPA's National Estuary Program will be considered under suspension of the rules, a process that limits debate, prohibits amendments and requires a simple two-thirds majority for passage.

Rep. Tom McClintock's (R-Calif.) H.R. 979 would rename a mountain in California's Sierra National Forest for late Marine Staff Sgt. Sky Mote (*Greenwire*, Feb. 16).

The 27-year-old explosives technician was killed in Afghanistan in 2012 after an Afghan police officer opened fire with an AK-47 at a U.S. military base.

All 53 members of California congressional delegation co-sponsored the bill to rename a peak in the John Muir Wilderness where Mote's family gathers each year "Sky Point."

Also up for a vote is H.R. 944, by Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-N.J.), which would trim $8 million from the National Estuary Program's current budget. The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved the bill, which reauthorizes the program's budget at $27 million per year through fiscal 2020 (*Greenwire*, April 15).

The third bill on the list is H.R. 404 by Rep. Adrian Smith (R-Neb.), which would authorize early repayment to the Bureau of Reclamation within Nebraska's Northport Irrigation District.

The grolar bear dilemma -- do warming-created hybrids hurt species?

Manon Verchot, E&E reporter
Published: Monday, June 1, 2015

Only purebred dogs are allowed to compete at the Westminster Kennel Club's annual dog show.

"The basic purpose of dog shows is to facilitate the evaluation of breeding stock for use in producing the next generations," the organization's website says.

Judges choose winners based on how closely a dog fits a standard, or "ideal breed." Standards are based on both personality traits and physical ones -- from eye color to ear shape and even tail placement. Mutts need not apply.

It is competitions like these that contribute to the common perception that mixing animal species leads to "maladapted" animals, according to Michael Arnold, a professor of genetics at the University of Georgia.

But closer analysis of genetics suggests that perception is far some settled. What is clear is that warming is increasing many opportunities for gene mixing.

"As we've developed genomic methodologies, we're finding that organisms are exchanging genes with other species," Arnold said. "Genetic exchange due to organisms coming together from climate change is the rule rather than the exception."

Animals have been interbreeding for millennia. Even modern humans are the product of genetic exchange with Neanderthals some 60,000 years ago.

But the rate at which species interbreed is accelerating because of climate change, researchers say. As habitats and animal ranges change and bleed into one another, species that never before would have encountered one another are now mating.

Warmer temperatures have allowed grizzly bears and polar bears to venture to habitats they don't usually occupy and mate to form a hybrid: the pizzly or grolar bear.

Similar trends have been observed between golden-winged warblers and blue-winged warblers.

"This issue is horrendously complex because of our ability to change the environment," said Arnold.

Considering that human activity has indirectly brought together species through planetary warming and increased fossil fuel emissions, the question on the minds of many biologists like Arnold is whether humans should play a role in preventing hybridization like this.

A threat to genetic diversity?

Montana's Shields Basin has long been a spawning haven for the westslope cutthroat trout. But as waters in the region warm, rainbow trout have swum up from the western lakes where they were introduced decades ago to cutthroat native grounds.

As rainbow trout meet and interbreed with dwindling cutthroat trout populations, the survival of cutthroat trout is at risk. Instead, a hybrid species is taking its place.

"It's a major cause of species extinction -- lots of species are now disappearing because they are being genetically swamped by other, commoner ones," said Stuart Pimm, a professor of conservation ecology at Duke University.

In some cases, hybridization can lead to reduced genetic diversity in animals, according to David Tallmon, an associate professor of biology at the University of Alaska.

"Rather than growing a new branch on the [genetic] tree, you have two branches growing together," he said.

In the case of cutthroat-rainbow trout hybrids, the hybrids are less genetically fit, with offspring of the hybrids struggling to survive, a study led by researchers from the U.S. Geological Survey found.

The rate at which humans are driving species to extinction is 1,000 times faster than the rate at which animals would go extinct naturally, Pimm's research shows.

"The issue is how fast we are driving species to extinction," said Pimm. "We're responsible for that, and, in doing so, we are handing our children a world not as rich and interesting as the one we got from our parents. We should do what we can to be good stewards."

Combining the strengths of coyotes and wolves

However, some biologists disagree, saying that hybridization is natural and doesn't always produce negative results. In some cases, hybrids are better adapted to cope with changing landscapes.

"Hybridization can increase genetic diversity in some cases," said Tallmon.

A coywolf, a hybrid between a wolf and a coyote. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

A coyote-wolf-dog hybrid that made its way to western New York in the 1940s has the combined features of stealthy coyote-like movements and a larger skull, making it better-adapted to hunting white-tailed deer.

Members of the *Heliconius* butterfly genus in the Amazon breed with other species within the genus and have developed more distinctive colors in the process. Without these colors, the birds would not be aware that these butterflies contain cyanide, and the defense mechanism would be useless.

Though crossbreeding between Amazonian butterflies was not triggered by climate change, it is an example of hybridization that strengthens the survival abilities of a species.

No help from Endangered Species Act

Humans are doing a lot more than warming the planet, so hybridization is not the only issue that has the potential to decrease biodiversity.

"We are losing biodiversity not due to genetic exchange, but because we are eating up the landscape," said Arnold. "What we want to do is we've got to stop destroying landscape."

In cases where warmer temperatures are bringing species together, human intervention should be carefully thought through, he added.

Hybrids are not classified as their own species, so there are no regulations to protect them -- they can't be placed on the U.S. government's endangered species list.

"With large-scale climate change, the question is: Are these hybrids more well-adapted?" said Arnold.

Twitter: @maverchot | Email: mverchot@eenews.net

http://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2015/06/01/stories/1060019399

Sage Grouse Land Use Plans Should Defer to States

Posted by: HL News Posted date: **June 01, 2015** In: Hunting News | comment : 0

DENVER – In reaction to today's release of several land use plan amendments for Greater Sage-Grouse by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), Western Energy Alliance issued the following statement:

"Conservation of the sage grouse is a goal shared by the oil and natural gas industry, ranchers, other industries, states, and communities across the West," said Kathleen Sgamma, vice president of government and public affairs at Western Energy Alliance. "That goal is best achieved at the state level, not with a one-size-fits-all federal approach. Western Energy Alliance will protest all land use plan amendments that fail to conform with state plans, and will continue to support actions by Congress to delay these land use plans and a final listing decision."

"The economic impact of sage-grouse restrictions on just the oil and natural gas industry will be between 9,170 and 18,250 jobs and $2.4 billion to $4.8 billion of annual economic impact across Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming. Oil and natural gas companies has committed to several hundred conservation measures to protect the sage grouse and its sensitive habitat. With these land use plan amendments based on flawed science, the federal agencies are discouraging more effective state-based conservation, to the detriment of the sage grouse," concluded Sgamma.

http://huntinglife.com/sage-grouse-land-use-plans-should-defer-to-states/