



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
**U.S. Department  
of the Interior**

www.doi.gov

## News Release

Date: October 15, 2014

Contact: Jessica Kershaw, [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

### **Secretary Jewell Commends Wyoming Ranchers for Commitment to Conserving Sagebrush Habitat**

*Private Landowners Key to Reversing Long-term Decline in Sagebrush  
Habitat across the West that Supports Wildlife, Economic Activity*

**PINEDALE, WY** – Secretary of the Interior Sally- Jewell today joined Wyoming Governor Matt Mead, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe and local officials to recognize the efforts of private Wyoming landowners in helping to conserve the landscape of the American West at a ceremonial signing of nine long-term protection plans for sagebrush habitat – the first of their kind in Wyoming.

The ceremony, in the Upper Green River Valley, one of the greater sage-grouse’s remaining strongholds, highlighted the conservation leadership of the ranching community and the state of Wyoming in advancing sagebrush protection that benefits both wildlife and future generations of ranchers.

“Successful conservation of sagebrush habitat depends on a spirit of collaborative partnership among states, tribes, federal partners, private landowners and other stakeholders – and this is especially true for the greater sage-grouse, which inhabits both public and private lands across the West,” Jewell said. “Today we’re celebrating a group of committed private landowners who are stepping up to the plate to take voluntary actions that will take care of the land and wildlife, and preserve their ranching heritage and the Western way of life.”

State, federal and local officials were on hand to commemorate the first Wyoming ranches to be enrolled in Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA), covering more than 39,000 acres in the state.

“The efforts of Wyoming ranchers are integral to Wyoming’s first-in-the-nation strategy for protecting the greater sage-grouse,” said Governor Mead. “Wyoming is working to maintain a healthy sage-grouse population that never needs to be listed. Wyoming’s strategy is a model for protecting this species and balancing multiple use. The efforts support the environment, energy and the economy.”

The support of landowners is a key element in a joint effort by the federal government and western states to develop and implement a landscape-level conservation plan for the sage-grouse before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has to make a decision whether to propose the bird for Endangered Species Act protection in 2015.

The nine landowners – six in Sublette County and three in northeastern Johnson County – developed site-specific plans that address threats to sage-grouse and maintain or improve healthy sagebrush habitat. In many cases, these landowners have been managing their properties for decades in ways that maintain and/or protect sage-grouse habitat. The CCAAs formalize their agreement to continue those practices in exchange for assurances that they will not have to undertake additional actions in the event the bird is listed.

“This is about more than just the sage-grouse,” Ashe said. “It’s about a uniquely American landscape full of hard-working ranchers, world-class big game and wide-open spaces that’s a defining part of our national identity. The health of this bird is reflective of the health of the sagebrush ecosystem. If we can recover the sage-grouse, it will be to the direct benefit of the Western economy and way of life.”

The greater sage-grouse is an umbrella species, sharing the sagebrush with more than 350 other kinds of wildlife, including elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope and golden eagles. While roughly 64 percent of the sage-grouse’s 165 million acres of occupied range is on federally managed lands, private lands are critical for the species, often including limited and vitally important riparian and wet-meadow habitat.

BLM’s Wyoming State Director Don Simpson said public lands, which are managed for many uses, are just one piece of the puzzle. “Agreements such as these acknowledge that private lands are critical to successfully managing the landscape on a larger scale for maintaining sage-grouse and many other wildlife species,” Simpson said. “Collaborative management such as what is being celebrated today is a cornerstone of natural resource management in the West.”

Earlier in the day, Secretary Jewell and Director Ashe toured the Boulder ranch of Brad Bousman, whose family has been running cattle in the area since 1903 on several thousand acres of private land and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) grazing allotments. The first to step forward to sign up for a CCAA, Bousman is also the first to approach the BLM about a similar management agreement called a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) used for federal lands, for his allotment.

“We wanted the protection the CCAA has to offer,” said Bousman. “And the CCA should make it easier to get our grazing permits renewed. I would encourage other ranchers to look into it.”

In a CCAA, landowners voluntarily agree to manage their lands to remove or reduce threats to species. Landowners, in return, receive a 20-year permit from the Service that provides assurances that no additional conservation measures will be required or new restrictions imposed if the species becomes listed, so long as the CCAA is being properly implemented. The goal of the program is to encourage immediate benefits for a species while providing the landowner with the ability to plan for the future with certainty

Greater sage-grouse once occupied more than 290 million acres of sagebrush in the West, but the bird, known for its flamboyant mating ritual, has lost more than half of its habitat since then. Some modern estimates placed the grouse in the millions, but current estimates place population numbers between 200,000 and 500,000 birds. The species now occurs in 11 states and two Canadian provinces. Loss and fragmentation of habitat, with a lack of regulatory mechanisms to protect sagebrush habitat, are the primary threat across its range.

To learn more about greater sage-grouse and sage-grouse conservation, visit the Service’s website at: <http://www.fws.gov/greaterSageGrouse/>.