

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



## News Release

April 13, 2010

### Federal Agencies Sign Agreement to Protect Sage-Grouse Habitat

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*Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
to provide unprecedented support for Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush  
Ecosystems*

WASHINGTON, April 13, 2010— Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar today announced a far-reaching agreement to support the conservation of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems in parts of 11 Western states.

“Today’s agreement enables us to help this rare species in a comprehensive, integrated way,” said Vilsack. “By working cooperatively toward the same goal, we can build on the progress states have made protecting the sage-grouse and the sagebrush ecosystem it depends on.”

“The greater sage-grouse has historically inhabited millions of acres in the West, and if we are going to conserve the species we must work across political and administrative boundaries at a landscape scale to protect and restore its sagebrush habitat,” Salazar said. “This agreement gives us a framework to prevent further habitat fragmentation and undertake other conservation efforts in partnership with states, tribes, private landowners and other stakeholders.”

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Dave White and Rowan Gould, acting director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, signed the partnership agreement to promote and preserve greater sage-grouse habitat and sagebrush ecosystems.

The agreement ensures beneficial and consistent actions for conservation of greater sage-grouse habitat and provides a collaborative framework for states and private landowners. For its part, the Fish and Wildlife Service is committing to work with NRCS to use the authorities of the Endangered Species Act to provide participating landowners with reasonable assurances that their activities will be consistent with the act should the sage-grouse later be listed as a threatened or endangered species.

In March Vilsack announced a new initiative to protect sage-grouse population and habitat using two popular USDA conservation programs — Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP). USDA will provide up to \$16 million this fiscal year to provide financial assistance for producers to reduce threats to the birds such as disease and invasive species and improve sage-grouse habitat. Producers can sign up through April 23 to participate in the first round of rankings for this initiative.

In recent years the greater sage-grouse has lost 44 percent of its habitat due to agriculture; urban development; energy extraction, generation and transmission; invasive weeds, pinion-juniper tree encroachment, and wildfire. The human footprint across the area where greater sage-grouse live is large and becoming larger as the country strives for energy independence, agriculture, development and other, often competing uses.

Also in March, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that, based on accumulated scientific data and new peer-reviewed information and analysis, the greater sage-grouse warrants the protection of the Endangered Species Act. However, the service determined that adding the species to the federal list of threatened and endangered species at this time is precluded by the need to address higher priority species first. As a result, the greater sage-grouse will be placed on the list of candidate species and will be proposed for protection under the Act as funding and priorities dictate.

Greater sage-grouse currently occupy 258,000 square miles of the sagebrush ecosystem, and are found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, eastern California, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. For more information on the NRCS and US Fish and Wildlife Service greater

sage-grouse agreement or other conservation issues please visit:

[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) or [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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. Both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, the Fish and Wildlife Service is known for its scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.

This year represents the 75th year of NRCS helping people help the land. Since its inception in 1935, the NRCS conservation delivery system has advanced a unique partnership with state and local governments and private landowners delivering conservation based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests.

[Back to Top](#)

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