

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

**Mountain-Prairie Region
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U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service To Review Status Of Gunnison Sage-Grouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it is initiating a status review of the Gunnison sage-grouse to determine whether the species warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service intends to complete this 12-month review by the lawsuit settlement agreement date of June 30, 2010.

The Service is seeking the latest scientific and commercial information on the status of the Gunnison sage-grouse from the public, government agencies, tribes, industry and the scientific and conservation communities. After gathering and analyzing this information, the Service will determine whether to propose adding the Gunnison sage-grouse to the federal list of threatened and endangered species. Comments will be received until December 23, 2009.

The Service is seeking information concerning: (1) the taxonomy, biology, ecology, genetics, and status of the Gunnison sage-grouse; (2) specific information on the conservation status of the Gunnison sage-grouse including information regarding distribution, abundance, and population trends; (3) specific information on threats to the Gunnison sage-grouse; (4) specific information regarding conservation actions designed to improve Gunnison sage-grouse habitat or reduce threats to the Gunnison sage-grouse and its habitat.

In April 2006, the Service published a finding that listing the Gunnison sage-grouse under the ESA was not warranted. The Service determined that the rangewide population of the Gunnison sage-grouse was stable and threats to the species were not significant to current, known populations. In November 2006, San Miguel County (Colorado), Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians and others filed a lawsuit regarding the not-warranted finding. Per a stipulated settlement agreement, the Service agreed to submit a 12-month status review finding to the Federal Register by June 30, 2010.

The Gunnison sage-grouse currently exists in seven populations, six in Colorado and one in both Colorado and Utah. These include the Gunnison Basin, San Miguel Basin, Monticello-Dove Creek, Pinon Mesa, Crawford, Cerro Summit-Cimarron-Sims Mesa and Poncha Pass populations. The Gunnison Basin population is the largest and represents the best opportunity for long-term conservation of the species. Gunnison sage-grouse historically occurred in southwestern Colorado, northwestern New Mexico, northeastern Arizona, and southeastern Utah, an area of 21,370 square miles.

The Service and the Colorado Division of Wildlife continue to work cooperatively to further the conservation interests of the sage-grouse. More than seventy landowners who own over 102,000 acres of land within Gunnison sage-grouse range have expressed interest in voluntary conservation efforts, such as candidate conservation agreements with assurances. These are voluntary arrangements under the ESA designed to prevent the need for listing through preventive conservation efforts and provide landowners assurances against future land restrictions if the species is listed. Agreements would outline conservation measures to benefit the grouse while still allowing the landowners to use their lands.

Local conservation plans have been approved by the Service for six of the seven populations. A range-wide Gunnison sage-grouse conservation plan was also completed and signed by Colorado Division of Wildlife, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Service and other Federal agencies in June 2005.

Comments and information will be accepted until December 23, 2009 and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2009-0080; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

For more information about the Gunnison sage-grouse, visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/gunnisonsagegrouse>

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. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.