

About the Documents:

Titles: Proposed Endangered Status for Gunnison sage-grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) and Proposed Designation of Critical Habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse

Timeline of the Peer review:

Proposed rule and proposed critical habitat published: Both documents published January 11, 2013

Peer review initiated: January 2013

Peer review to be completed by: March 12, 2013 (i.e., close of the comment period)

Final determination regarding proposed rule expected: September 2013

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270) and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific review of the information contained in our proposal to list the Gunnison sage-grouse as endangered under the Endangered Species Act and to designate critical habitat. This review will occur concurrently with the public comment period for the proposed action.

The Service, in cooperation with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, will nominate potential peer reviewers. We will consider the following criteria for any potential nomination.

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with Gunnison sage-grouse or similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these nominations) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the proposed listing and designation of critical habitat for the Gunnison sage-grouse. Responses will be requested by the close of the comment period. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the proposed rules for both listing of the species and for designation of critical habitat, and a list of citations. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the proposed action is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the rulemaking process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions the reviewers will be asked include the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of the biology, habitat, population trends, and historic and current distribution of the species accurate?
2. Does the Proposed Rule provide accurate and adequate review and analysis of the factors affecting the species?
3. Are our assumptions and determinations regarding critical habitat logical and adequate?
4. Are there any significant oversights, omissions or inconsistencies in our proposed rules?
5. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
6. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions/arguments/conclusions?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will (1) be included in the administrative record of our final determination regarding this proposal (i.e., a final rule or a withdrawal), and (2), be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our final rulemaking determination. Because this peer review process is running concurrently with public review of the proposed action, peer reviewers will not be provided public comments (although comments may be viewed through <http://www.regulations.gov>). A final determination regarding this proposed action is expected by September 30, 2013.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by February 1, 2013, in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan through the normal comment process associated with the proposed rule. Public comments on the proposed rule are scheduled to be accepted until March 12, 2013. You may submit comments by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2011-0111; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

We will not accept e-mail or faxes. We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that we will post any personal information you provide us.

Contact

For more information, contact Charles Sharp at 970-243-2778 ext. 18.