

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

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Fish and Wildlife Service Extending Request for Information for Greater Sage-Grouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is extending the period for submitting information regarding the status of the greater sage-grouse by 30 days. The Service is currently conducting a status review of the greater sage-grouse to determine if the species warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act. This extension will ensure interested parties have an opportunity to provide information pertinent to the status review. The Service requests that information be submitted to the agency by June 27, 2008.

The Service is conducting this status review of the greater sage-grouse to consider relevant new information that has become available since the agency's initial 2005 finding that the species did not require protection under the ESA. The Service will evaluate all new information regarding the status and distribution of the greater sage-grouse, including the impacts or potential impacts of threats to the species resulting from human activities or natural causes. The Service also will consider the beneficial impacts on the species from conservation efforts.

In January 2005, the Service determined that the greater sage-grouse was not in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, and announced that protection under the Endangered Species Act was not warranted. The Western Watersheds Project challenged the 2005 finding in federal court. In December 2007, the court remanded the finding back to the Service for further consideration. On February 26, 2008, the Service initiated the status review of the greater sage-grouse.

The greater sage-grouse is a large, rounded-winged, ground-dwelling bird, up to 30 inches long and two feet tall, weighing from two to seven pounds. It has a long, pointed tail with legs feathered to the base of the toes. Females are a mottled brown, black, and white. Males are larger and have a large white ruff around their neck and bright yellow air sacks on their breasts, which they inflate during their mating display. The birds are found in locations at elevations ranging from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet and are highly dependent on sagebrush for cover and food.

Greater sage-grouse are found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, eastern California, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming. They are also found in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The Service requests that any information be submitted by June 27, 2008. Information can be sent 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-2008-0022; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. Information submitted previously in response to the 12-month finding published in 2005 will be considered and need not be resubmitted.

Notice of this extension requesting information on the greater sage-grouse is published in today's Federal Register. Elsewhere in today's Federal Register, we have published separate notices of 90-day petition findings and the initiation of status reviews for the Mono Basin population and the western subspecies of the greater sage-grouse. Consequently, the Service has formally initiated three status reviews involving the greater sage-grouse, and each of the respective notices in today's Federal Register request that information be submitted by the June 27, 2008 date. Information submitted for any one of these status reviews that is relevant to the others need not be submitted more than once. Because the ongoing status review of the greater sage-grouse covers the entire range of the species, it also encompasses the Mono Basin population and the western sage-grouse. It is our intention to address the taxonomy and status of the Mono Basin area population and the western subspecies within the range-wide status review of the greater sage-grouse. Further, because the three status reviews are interrelated, we anticipate that any common aspects will be taken into account in our ultimate decisions.

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

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.