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# News Release



**For Immediate Release**

**Date: April 28, 2008**

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## **Mono Basin Area Population of Greater Sage-Grouse Warrants Review for Possible Protection Under the Endangered Species Act**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced it will conduct a status review of the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse to determine if it warrants federal protection as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the species provided in a petition requesting listing of the population under the ESA. The Service will now undertake a more thorough status review of the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse to determine whether adding the species to the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife is warranted.

“The finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to list the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse,” said Bob Williams, Field Supervisor for the Service's Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office. “The 90-day finding is the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available. We are encouraging the public to submit any relevant information about this population of sage-grouse and its habitat to us for consideration in the comprehensive review.”

To ensure this status review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse and its habitat. Further, because the Service is already conducting a status review of the greater sage-grouse across the entire range of the species, the agency intends to evaluate the Mono Basin area population within the rangewide status review. Based on the status review, the Service will make one of three possible determinations regarding the Mono Basin population:

- 1) listing is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken;
- 2) listing as threatened or endangered is warranted. In this case, the Service will publish a proposal to list, solicit independent scientific peer review of the proposal, seek input from the public and consider the input before a final decision about listing the species is made. In

general, there is a one-year period between the time a species is proposed and the final decision; or

3) listing is warranted but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the species is added to the Federal list of candidate species, and the proposal to list is deferred while the Service works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk. A warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews of the finding until such time as either a listing proposal is published, or a not warranted finding is made based on new information.

The greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is a large, ground-dwelling bird, measuring up to 30 inches in length, 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 and fleshy yellow combs over the eyes. In addition to the mottled brown, black and white plumage typical of the species, males sport a white ruff around their necks. The sage-grouse is found from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet in elevation. It is an omnivore, eating soft plants (primarily sagebrush) and insects. The Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse occurs in Carson City, Lyon, Mineral, Esmeralda, and Douglas Counties in Nevada, and portions of Alpine, Inyo, and Mono Counties in California.

In 2001, a petition was submitted to the Service by the Institute for Wildlife Protection requesting that the Service emergency list the greater sage-grouse population in the Mono Basin area as endangered. On December 26, 2002, the Service found that the petition did not present substantial information indicating that listing was warranted. In 2005, the Service received a new petition from the Stanford Law School Environmental Law Clinic on behalf of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign, Western Watersheds Project, Center for Biological Diversity, and Christians Caring for Creation to list the Mono Basin area sage-grouse as threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. In order to resolve litigation, the Service published a non-substantial 90-day finding on December 19, 2006, based on information contained in the 2001 and 2005 petitions.

Subsequently, the Stanford Law School Environmental Law Clinic filed a complaint on behalf of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign, Western Watersheds Project, Center for Biological Diversity, and Desert Survivors, in 2007 challenging the Service's 2006 90-day finding. In response to the complaint, the Service has reconsidered the 90-day finding and will be conducting an in-depth examination of the species status.

Anyone wishing to submit information regarding the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse may do so 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-R8-ES-2008-0043; of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that we will post any personal information you provide us. The Service requests that information be submitted by June 27, 2008.

For further information about the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse and this finding visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/nevada> or contact Robert D. Williams, Field

Supervisor, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office by mail at: 1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234, Reno, NV; by telephone (775-861-6300); or by facsimile (775-861-6301). Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

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