

# News Release

Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Bi-State Distinct Population Segment of Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed for Protection under Endangered Species Act**

*Special rule would allow flexibility for beneficial land management practices*

RENO, Nev. – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to protect the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of greater sage-grouse along the California-Nevada border as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The proposal includes a special rule that would provide increased flexibility for land management practices that are intended to benefit the sage-grouse.

“We applaud the combined efforts of our federal, state and local partners, as well as private landowners across the species’ range, to address the significant challenges faced by the Bi-State DPS of greater sage-grouse,” said Ren Lohofener, Regional Director of the Service’s Pacific Southwest Region. “These efforts are essential to the recovery of the species. Today’s proposal, based on the best available science, should not deter us from continuing our work on behalf of the Bi-State DPS and its important sage brush habitat.”

The DPS’s current range is limited to six population management units (PMUs) along the California and Nevada border, which is less than 50 percent of its historical range. Scientists predict that four of the six PMUs could be lost in the foreseeable future.

Today’s Bi-State DPS proposal is being considered separately from the petition for protection of the greater sage-grouse and will have no bearing on the future evaluation of the wider-ranging populations of greater sage-grouse. The sage-grouse is a large, ground-nesting bird known for elaborate courtship displays on its breeding grounds.

The special rule proposed for the Bi-State would allow increased flexibility in implementing actions that will help conserve sage grouse. For example, the Service will consider whether to exempt from ESA take prohibitions land management practices consistent with the Bi-State Sage Grouse Local Area Working Group Action Plan, which was finalized in 2012, thus removing the need for any additional regulatory review.

Signatories to this plan include the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Nevada Department of Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Service.

While the 2012 Action Plan is non-regulatory, it provides a general strategic path toward conservation, provides stakeholders a degree of confidence in implementation, and will serve as a good framework for development of a species recovery plan.

The Service also is proposing to designate approximately 1.86 million acres of critical habitat for the DPS. This habitat encompasses federal, state, tribal and private lands on four separate units in Carson City, Douglas, Lyon, Mineral and Esmeralda Counties in Nevada, and in Alpine, Mono, and Inyo Counties in California.

Critical habitat is a term defined in the ESA and identifies geographic areas containing features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The Service will open a 60-day comment period to provide the public an opportunity to comment on the proposed listing, special rule and designated critical habitat. During the public comment period, the agency will also seek peer review from qualified members of the scientific community to ensure that the final decision is based on the best available science. A copy of the finding and other information about the bi-state DPS of the greater sage-grouse is available at <http://www.fws.gov/nevada> or by contacting the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office at 775-861-6300.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.

The agency will hold two informational public meetings regarding the proposals at the following times and locations:

November 5, 2013

4 to 6 p.m.

Tri-County Fairgrounds, Home Economics Building

Sierra Street and Fair Drive

Bishop, CA 93514

November 6, 2013

1 to 3 p.m.

Smith Valley Community Center

2783 State Route 208

Wellington, NV 89444

Scientific information regarding these proposals will be accepted until December 27, 2013, and may be submitted by one of the following methods:

(1) Electronically: Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal:

<http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS-R8-ES-2013-0042 and FWS-R8-ES-2013-0072, which are the docket numbers for these rulemakings. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on "Comment Now!"

(2) By hard copy: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R8-ES-2013-0042 and FWS-R8-ES-2013-0072; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

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