



## U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

*Conserving the Biological Diversity of the Great Basin, Eastern Sierra, and Mojave Desert*

#### Questions and Answers

#### 90-Day Finding for the Mono Basin Area Population of Greater Sage-Grouse

**Q. What is the sage-grouse?**

**A.** The greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is a large, ground-dwelling bird, measuring up to 30 inches in length, is two feet tall and weighs between 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.

**Q. What is the range of the greater sage-grouse?**

**A.** The historic range of the greater sage-grouse included Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Arizona, and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Greater sage-grouse are no longer found in Nebraska, Arizona, and British Columbia.

**Q. What is the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse and where does it occur?**

**A.** The petitioners have identified the Mono Basin area population of greater sage grouse as including those birds that are found in portions of Carson City, Lyon, Mineral, Esmeralda, and Douglas Counties in Nevada. It also includes portions of Alpine, Inyo Counties, and Mono Counties in California.

**Q. What is being done to conserve greater sage-grouse?**

**A.** Concern about long-term declines in greater sage-grouse populations has prompted western State wildlife agencies and Federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to engage in a variety of cooperative efforts aimed at conserving and managing sagebrush habitat for the benefit of greater sage-grouse and other sagebrush dependent species.

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) has completed of a range-wide conservation assessment of the greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat, with strong cooperation from the Federal agencies. The assessment is a valuable source

of information regarding greater sage-grouse ecology. WAFWA is now coordinating and the development of a range-wide conservation strategy.

Western states within the current range of greater sage-grouse are developing and implementing conservation plans to address issues such as habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation, and to identify opportunities for habitat restoration and enhancement. The intent of these plans is to find and implement local solutions to conserve the greater sage-grouse.

**Q. Why did the Service prepare a 90-Day Finding?**

**A.** 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. This petition was the subject of a non-substantial 90-day finding published on December 26, 2002. 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.

**Q. What information did the Service use to make this 90-day finding?**

**A.** The Service reviewed petitions dated November 15, 2004, and December 28, 2001, to list the Mono Basin area sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act and has concluded the petitions present substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing this population may be warranted.

**Q. Does the 90-day finding mean the Service is going to list the Mono Basin population of greater sage-grouse?**

**A.** No, the finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to list the Mono Basin area population of greater sage-grouse. The 90-day finding is the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available, known as a 12-month finding, to determine whether to propose adding the species to the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants.

**Q. What is the next step in the process?**

**A.** To ensure this status review (12-month finding) 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. Based on the status review, the Service will make one of three possible determinations:

- 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.
- 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.

**Q. Will the Mono Basin area population of sage-grouse be evaluated with the greater sage-grouse?**

**A.** Yes, 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.

**Q. How can I provide information?**

**A.** Anyone wishing to submit information regarding the Mono Basin area population of sage-grouse the 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; Division 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. Comments must be received by June 27, 2008.

**Q. How do I get more information?**

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