

# News Release



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## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Says Western Sage-Grouse Not a Sub-species

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the best scientific information, including new genetic analysis, does not support recognition of a western subspecies of the greater sage-grouse. Therefore, listing a western subspecies is not warranted, as it is not a valid taxonomic entity eligible for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

A western subspecies of the greater sage-grouse was described in the 1940s based on comparisons of a small number of specimens, and many scientists subsequently questioned the validity of this subspecies designation. The Service has since conducted a thorough evaluation of the best scientific information available, including physical characteristics, behavior, geography and new genetic analysis, and found no evidence to support recognition of either subspecies.

The Service was petitioned by the Institute for Wildlife Protection seeking ESA protection for the western sage grouse, which occurs in northern California, eastern Oregon, eastern Washington and possibly parts of Idaho. The Service concluded in 2003 that the western sage grouse is neither a distinct population segment nor a valid subspecies of the greater sage grouse, and therefore was not eligible for protection under the ESA. The Service's decision was sent back to the agency by the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for further consideration of whether the western sage grouse may be a subspecies. The court upheld the Service's determination that the western sage grouse is not a distinct population segment of the greater sage grouse.

Today's announcement is included in the Service's decision that the listing of greater sage-grouse is warranted for ESA protection but is precluded by higher listing priorities. The greater sage-grouse will be placed on the candidate list for future action, meaning the species would not receive statutory protection under the ESA and states would continue to be responsible for managing the bird. The Service also determined that the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse, found in California and Nevada and formerly known as the Mono Basin population, meets the necessary criteria for recognition as a Distinct Population Segment under the ESA, and that adding this population to the federal list of threatened and endangered species is warranted. However, listing the Bi-State DPS of the greater sage-grouse at this time is precluded by the need to list candidate species with that have a higher priority need for protection under the ESA. It will be placed on the list of candidate species. The Service will review the status of the Bi-State DPS and the greater sage-grouse annually, as it does with all candidates for listing, and will propose them for listing when funding and workload permit.

The finding on greater sage-grouse incorporates the birds referenced in the petition to list a western subspecies, which will therefore be included on the list of candidate species.

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 feet to over 9,000 feet in elevation. It is an omnivore, eating soft plants (primarily sagebrush) and insects.

Greater sage-grouse are found in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, eastern California, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. They occupy approximately 56 percent of their historical range.

For more information regarding today's findings, 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](http://www.fws.gov).