

Greater Sage-Grouse: Endangered Species?



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There's probably nothing that could happen on Western lands that would change the way we use those lands more than the listing of the sage grouse.

Kathleen Clarke, Director, Bureau of Land Management
(March 15, 2004)

Some say the grouse could become the spotted owl of the intermountain West. But the sage grouse occupies nearly 12 times as much land as the northern spotted owl.

Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior (June 23, 2004)

A listing of sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act would have a dramatic impact on oil and gas activity.

Dru Bower, V.P., Petroleum Association of Wyoming (July 7, 2004)

The prospect of an endangered listing for the sage grouse "hangs like the sword of Damocles" over Wyoming's economy.

Wyo. Gov. Freudenthal (quoted in Caspar Star-Tribune, June 4, 2010)

Greater Sage-Grouse ESA Listing Chronology

December 2003: Listing petition filed

June 2004: WAFWA Conservation Assessment concludes that S-G population losses and habitat threats “**do not provide causes for optimism**” for future survival

January 2005: Bush Administration denies ESA listing, saying it is “**encouraged** by current assessments of grouse population status, trends and distribution”

December 2007: US District Court in Idaho reverses because FWS decision:

- “lacked a coherent analysis of habitat and the regulatory mechanisms designed to protect the sage-grouse,” and
- “was tainted by the inexcusable conduct of one of its own executives, Julie MacDonald, [whose] tactics included everything from editing scientific conclusions to intimidating FWS staffers.”

The New York Times

December 15, 2007

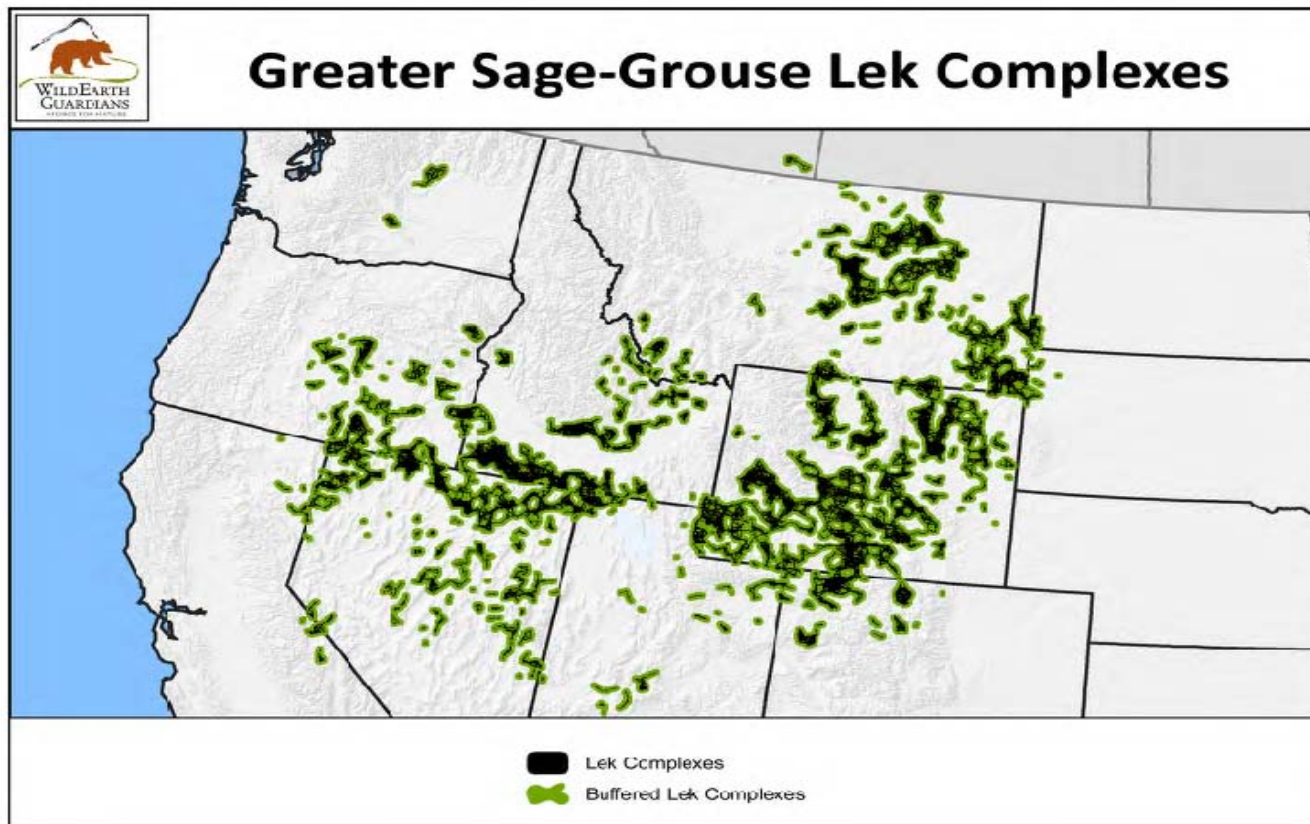
EDITORIAL

Bird in the Brush

Judge Winmill's ruling brings the sage grouse back to center stage in the battle over public lands and development in the West. **Politically and economically speaking, it is a keystone species, one whose legal status will determine patterns of grazing, urban expansion and, especially, oil and gas development over much of the American West.** Sage grouse numbers have plummeted in the past century, almost entirely because of human exploitation of its habitat. In Wyoming, oil and gas exploration has already destroyed its breeding grounds, and there are plans for tens of thousands of new wells in sage grouse country.

It's tempting to say that the least a dwindling species can expect is a fair, scientific assessment of its numbers and survival chances. Over the past seven years, we have learned that even that is too much to expect from the Bush administration, especially when the species in question occupies terrain that is coveted by ranchers, developers and the petroleum industry. In the case of the sage grouse, the Fish and Wildlife Service appears to have done a better job serving industry than the public or the grouse. It is time to redress that mistake.

Fall 2009: Studies In Avian Biology “monograph” presents over two dozen new scientific articles on S-G, including energy impacts and mapping of lek connectivity



March 2010: FWS publishes new “**warranted, but precluded**” determination (75 Fed. Reg. 13910):

- over 90 pages discuss population losses and habitat threats from ag, grazing, infrastructure, energy development (traditional and renewable), invasive weeds, fires, climate change, West Nile virus, etc
- 10 pages detail the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms to protect GSG populations and habitats, including BLM’s land use plans
- But ESA listing again denied, because FWS supposedly lacks resources to deal with listing backlog

BLM RMPs (*WWP v. Salazar, 08-cv-516-BLW, D. Idaho*):

December 2008 challenge to 18 BLM resource management plans and associated EISs determining long-term management of more than 25 million acres of sage-grouse habitat in Idaho, Utah, Nevada, California, Wyoming and Montana.

Great Basin Sage Grouse (*WWP v. Interior, 08-cv-435-BLW, D. Idaho*):

January 2009 challenge to over 273 BLM grazing permits covering more than 4.6 million acres, as well as energy (primarily oil and gas) leases on over 5.7 million acres, and hazardous fuel projects on 70,000 acres in Idaho and Nevada.

Jarbidge Sage Grouse (*WWP v. Bennett, 04-181-BLW, D. Idaho*): February 2009 decision ordering that “grazing-as-usual” must end in sage-grouse habitat following massive Murphy Fire.

Green Mtn Common, WY (*WWP v. BLM, WY-05-10-02, Dept. Int*): May 2010 decision enjoins BLM from building 30 miles of fencing in key S-G habitat

Plus much other land management litigation -- Kemmerer WY; Soldier Meadows NF; Duck Creek UT; NF Malheur OR; Upper Salmon Basin ID; Nickel Creek ID; Washington State, etc.

BLM Resource areas currently under litigation

