



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 08-12

Sagegrouse and Sagebrush Conservation

A. BACKGROUND

1. In 2008, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) renewed a 2000 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service), the Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management to provide for cooperation among the agencies in the development of a range-wide strategy for the conservation and management of sage-grouse and their habitat. The new MOU also includes the U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency.
2. The Western States, through their membership in WAFWA, have recognized that sage-grouse are an important natural component of the sagebrush ecosystem. Sage-grouse serve as one indicator of the overall health of the sagebrush ecosystem in western North America. The current range of the sage grouse includes 11 Western states (California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming).
3. The final Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts (PECE) was published in the Federal Register on March 18, 2003. It identifies criteria to be used in determining whether proposed conservation efforts for a candidate or sensitive species are likely to contribute to improving the habitat and the species' survival, thereby making a federal listing unnecessary. The policy applies to conservation efforts identified in conservation agreements, conservation plans, management plans, or similar documents developed by federal agencies, state and local governments, tribal governments, businesses, organizations and individuals.
4. In December 2006, WAFWA completed the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (Strategy). The overall goal of the Strategy is to maintain and enhance populations and distribution of sage-grouse by protecting and improving sagebrush habitats and ecosystems that sustain these populations. This Strategy outlines the critical need to develop the associations among local, state, provincial, tribal, and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, industry, and individual citizens to design and implement needed conservation actions.
5. An important aspect of Strategy is to develop federal legislation to provide the funding and structure for sage-grouse conservation. The proposed legislation, the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA) is modeled on the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. The Western Governors recognize that there is a continuing need to evaluate the species' status and develop overall management criteria at the range-wide level so conservation needs and successes can be assessed. The Western Governors support the states' efforts to develop their own individual management plans, which take into account unique characteristics including abundance and distribution, challenges to and opportunities for conservation, land uses, and human impacts.
2. The Governors believe that the efforts undertaken by the various local working groups should be directed toward satisfying the PECE process in identifying conservation efforts that are likely to contribute to improving the habitat and species' survival, thereby continuing to make a threatened or endangered federal listing unnecessary.
3. The Governors urge the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture to devote any and all available resources, including direct grants to state and local entities for the development and implementation of their conservation plans. The Governors further urge Congress to provide the appropriate funding to that end. In particular, the Governors recommend Congressional consideration and approval of the North American Sagebrush Ecosystem Conservation Act (NASECA) modeled on the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.
4. The Governors believe that continued funding is essential to the conservation of the sage-grouse. In order to sustain the monumental effort that has been undertaken in the West, including the local working group planning process, federal, state and local governments, together with industry, conservation groups and other private parties, must continue to provide funding and other resources. The Governors strongly encourage a continued focus on the health of the species, range-wide, and caution that any disengagement at this critical juncture would likely have negative consequences for the species, private industry and the states.
5. The Governors urge the parties to the MOU to complete the work outlined in a timely manner and to continue the development and implementation of all state conservation plans envisioned under the agreement.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Western Governors' Association (WGA) shall post this revised resolution on its Web site to be used and referred to as necessary, and shall convey this resolution to the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Appropriations and authorizing committees for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

2. WGA shall, working closely with WAFWA and state wildlife agencies, facilitate coordination of interested states to work with local, state and federal partners to assure that the objectives of this policy are met and to enhance coordination of efforts across political boundaries to achieve stable and healthy populations; provide valuable information to decision-makers and project partners; and further activate concerned individuals, organizations, and agencies to implement projects that conserve the Greater Sage Grouse and sagebrush habitat.

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