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## **Western Energy Alliance Applauds Secretary Jewell's Sage Grouse Not-Warranted Decision** <sup>[1]</sup>

DENVER - In reaction to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell's announcement today that a listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act is not warranted along with the release of the Records of Decision for the sage grouse land use plan amendments, Western Energy Alliance issued the following statement.

"We applaud Secretary Jewell's decision that a listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse is not warranted," said Kathleen Sgamma, vice president of government and public affairs. "States, counties, federal agencies, industries, ranchers, private landowners and conservation groups have come together to successfully protect the sage grouse and its habitat. The Fish and Wildlife Service has correctly recognized that those efforts are more effective than a federal listing under the Endangered Species Act.

"The Interior Department arrived at the right decision, but took the wrong path to get there. The decision rests on robust population numbers and effective state and local efforts that are working to protect the species, not the flawed federal land use plans that the Secretary also released today. As state wildlife agencies have shown, sage grouse populations have not only rebounded recently but are stable over the long-term. The scientific work underpinning our Data Quality Act challenges will be invaluable to support the not-warranted decision while still enabling legal challenges to the land use plans to move forward.

"We are disappointed that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service persist with top-down, centralized management of sage-grouse on public lands that discourages more effective western efforts," continued Sgamma. "Rather than incorporating state sage grouse plans into the federal plans, BLM has discounted the input and conservation work of governors, counties, and productive public land users in favor of a uniform approach.

"In our protests of the land use plans, we highlighted the many corners that were cut in the process that leave the agencies vulnerable to legal challenge. The plans exaggerate the impact from energy development and fail to recognize that oil and natural gas coexists with sage grouse conservation. In fact, companies already avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts and have implemented over 770 specific conservation measures to protect sage grouse," concluded Sgamma.

### **Background**

- The Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies' (WAFWA) [2015 population update](#) <sup>[2]</sup> shows a 63 percent increase in sage grouse population over the last two years, with a total breeding population of 424,645. WAFWA also found that the population in core sage grouse areas is essentially unchanged over the 50-year period beginning in 1965.
- States across the West have implemented [sage grouse conservation plans](#) <sup>[3]</sup> based on actual conditions on the ground in their states. Governors across the West [protested the land use plans](#) <sup>[4]</sup> and argued, in their consistency reviews, that the federal plans should defer to state conservation efforts.
- The Western Governors' Association's [inventory of initiatives](#) <sup>[5]</sup> across the West highlights the comprehensive conservation work underway to protect sage grouse, including investments of \$425 million.
- A western coalition of counties and agriculture and industry groups have filed [four separate Data Quality Act challenges](#) <sup>[4]</sup> to the science the Interior Department used in the land use planning.
- [Sage grouse restrictions in the land use plans](#) <sup>[6]</sup> could cost as many as 31,000 jobs and \$5.6 billion in lost annual economic activity. Impacts from [lost oil and natural gas development](#) <sup>[7]</sup> are projected at 9,267 jobs lost and nearly \$2.5 billion in lost annual economic growth.
- Oil and natural gas [companies have implemented](#) <sup>[8]</sup> over 770 specific conservation measures, an average of 6.5 per project.

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- [2] [http://www.wafwa.org/news/e\\_1606/News/2015/8/WAFWAReportDocumentsGreaterSage-GrousePopulationRebound.htm](http://www.wafwa.org/news/e_1606/News/2015/8/WAFWAReportDocumentsGreaterSage-GrousePopulationRebound.htm)
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