



WGFD

Conserving Wildlife, Serving People

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US Fish and Wildlife Service Says Core Sage Grouse Habitat Areas Must Remain Protected—Even From Wind Development

Cheyenne - Officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week said that wind energy development in Wyoming's core sage grouse habitat areas, even for research purposes, would "negate the usefulness of the core area concept" and would bring into question whether adequate regulatory mechanisms are in place in the state to protect the species.

Recent questions raised by the federal agency about research and mitigation planning efforts for proposed wind farm projects in core sage grouse habitat prompted the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to seek clarification from the Fish and Wildlife Service on these proposed efforts with the core area strategy that was endorsed by the Service. The strategy, developed by a team assembled by Governor Dave Freudenthal, led to Executive Order 2008-2, which specifies that new development or land uses within core population areas should be authorized or conducted only when it can be demonstrated that the activity will not cause declines in sage grouse populations.

A letter from Brian Kelly, Field Supervisor for the Wyoming Ecological Services Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, states the Service believes "... constructing wind farms in core areas, even for research purposes, prior to demonstrating it can be done with no impact to sage grouse, negates the usefulness of the core area concept as a conservation strategy and brings into question whether adequate regulatory mechanisms are in place to protect the species."

The greater sage grouse is an iconic species that inhabits much of the sagebrush-steppe habitat in Wyoming, and robust populations of the bird currently exist across the state. However, several petitions to list the bird as threatened are currently before the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the Executive Order notes that such a listing would have a significant adverse effect on the economy, custom and culture of the state of Wyoming.

"People in Wyoming understand the gravity of a decision to list the species, in terms of impacts not only to future wind development, but also oil and gas development, mining, agriculture and recreation," said John Emmerich, Deputy Director of the Game and Fish Department. "We've

been working closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to understand their perspective on how wind development or wind research in sage grouse core areas might affect sage grouse and future decisions about this species. It became clear to us, after concerns were raised by the Service, that we needed a better understanding of the potential impacts of wind farm siting before we got too far down the road on projects that were proposed in core areas.

“We wanted the Service to be absolutely clear in terms of its views on wind development in sage grouse core areas and under what conditions they would continue to endorse the core area strategy,” Emmerich added.

The correspondence sent by WGF D requesting clarification and the US Fish and Wildlife Service response can be found on the WGF D website at http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife_management/sagegrouse/index.asp.

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