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August 25, 2010

***** PRESS RELEASE *****

*****Executive Order 2010-4 Attached*****

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**GOVERNOR FREUDENTHAL ISSUES EXECUTIVE ORDER ON SAGE-GROUSE
CORE AREA STRATEGY TO PROTECT BIRD AND ALLOW DEVELOPMENT**

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – Governor Dave Freudenthal has issued a revised executive order on Wyoming’s sage-grouse Core Population Area strategy, aimed at protecting the bird to prevent an Endangered Species Act listing while offering opportunities for resource development.

Executive Order 2010-4 includes maps with new boundaries of protected sage-grouse Core Area habitat where development is prohibited. It replaces Executive Order 2008-2 and allows for development in non-Core Areas, even where sage-grouse are present.

“We need to protect what truly needs protecting and provide flexibility and opportunity outside core areas,” Freudenthal said. “Sage-grouse management, as outlined in this executive order, is driven by the best data we have regarding sage-grouse habitats, populations and impacts to the species. It is clear there will be specific cases where the application of habitat protections will require site-specific variation, and the process to determine that flexibility is clear and fair,” Freudenthal said.

The executive order includes a map of the sage-grouse Core Areas, which was revisited using new data developed from a \$500,000 study funded by the Wyoming Legislature. The listing of the greater sage-grouse would have a significant, adverse effect on the economy of the state of Wyoming, including the ability to generate revenue from state lands, the executive order noted. It suggests that the Core Population Areas not be altered for at least five years, although the Governor indicated that he would be open to a more immediate review if new data becomes available.

“The State of Wyoming has emerged as the leader in the effort to conserve sage-grouse in North America, and it is my intent that we will accomplish that goal, while at the same time, maintaining a strong and vibrant economy in our state,” Gov. Freudenthal said. “Our actions to date, specifically the creation of the Core Area strategy, are a framework for conservation, and allow us to move forward in a responsible manner,” he said.

Executive Order 2010-4 reiterates that wind development will not be permitted in Core Areas. On two separate occasions the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has stated that the best available science indicates that wind development is incompatible with Core Area protection. Research outside of Core Areas is ongoing, according to the Governor’s Deputy Chief of Staff Ryan Lance, to evaluate sage-grouse reaction to wind development to inform a more flexible approach in the future.

Lance said that the Governor recently asked the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, again, if wind energy development could be permitted in the core areas. “The response was that it would call into question the sufficiency of the core area strategy, thereby leading to a possible listing of the sage-grouse, so it’s critical that we maintain the bird and its habitat, consistent with the best available science,” Lance said.

The Executive Order lists 17 provisions and addresses three issues not fully developed in the 2008 Executive Order, due mainly to a lack of data and information; these include: mapping, connectivity zones and development outside of Core Areas.

In an effort that relied heavily on the involvement of sage-grouse local working groups comprised of industry, conservation and land owner interests, the remapping was a public process that consisted of the local groups making recommendations to the Governor’s Sage Grouse Implementation Team. The Team adopted the vast majority of the local groups’ recommendations.

Also affected by the executive order are connectivity zones, which help ensure genetic mixing of sage-grouse population, a key issue in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s recent decision that sage-grouse warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. Stipulations inside the connectivity zones have been defined and the order makes clear the zones are not to be managed as Core Areas.

Outside of Core Areas, the executive order clarifies that stipulations are to be relaxed, so that there are enhanced resource development opportunities.