

Nevada looking at ways to deal with sage grouse

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada wildlife officials continue to survey prime sage grouse habitat across the state and plan a meeting next month to take stock of efforts to prevent its listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The state will likely use Wyoming's approach to conserving bird habitat as a template for its own policy – a direction recommended early this month by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

“We want to avoid listing in a big way,” said Ken Mayer, director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife. NDOW will host a meeting of stakeholders in the sage grouse issue in Carson City on Jan. 18.

In March 2010, U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials declared listing for the greater sage grouse is “warranted but precluded” across its range of 11 western states. That means federal scientists believe listing would be justified, but other species in bigger trouble have a higher priority.

The population of the chicken-sized bird has declined for decades, and it now occupies only about half of its original year-round habitat, experts said.

On Dec. 9, Salazar said Wyoming's approach to conserving “core” sage grouse habitat on Bureau of Land Management land can be adopted by 10 other western states, including Nevada.

Wyoming is home to roughly half of the West's greater sage grouse population, while about 25 to 30 percent are in Nevada, Mayer said.

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