

Sage grouse heads toward endangered listing

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Maintaining the status quo when it comes to protecting Nevada's sage grouse will eventually lead to its listing under the Endangered Species Act, a situation that could come with widespread economic impact to the state, experts said.

Instead, federal and state officials and private property owners must work together in a unified strategy to conserve increasingly threatened sagebrush habitat vital to the bird's future, participants in a "stakeholder's update" hosted recently by Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval's office agreed.

"If we keep doing the same thing, we will end up with a bird that is listed," said Amy Lueder, Nevada's state director for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

Representatives of the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife and other agencies gathered in Carson City to discuss ongoing activities to protect sage grouse habitat and avoid its listing as a threatened or endangered species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared in March 2010 that listing of the greater sage grouse is "warranted but precluded" across its range of 11 western states, including Nevada. That means federal scientists believe listing would be justified, but other species in bigger trouble have a higher priority.