**NEWS RELEASE**

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**
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# U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Listing Gunnison Sage-Grouse Under Endangered Species Act

*Agency seeks information from public, scientific community to inform final decision; continues work with states on voluntary conservation agreements*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that it is taking the next steps in a process to protect the Gunnison sage-grouse as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. After an extensive review conducted in compliance with a court approved settlement agreement, the agency found that current scientific evidence suggests that the Gunnison sage-grouse is in danger of extinction.

As a result, the Service will open a 60-day public comment period and host a series of public meetings in order to seek new information from the public and the scientific community before making a final listing determination. It is important to note that today's action is only a proposal and does not represent any final decision. Regardless of whether the species is ultimately added to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife, the Service will continue working with agencies and landowners to facilitate ongoing and future efforts to advance its conservation and long-term recovery.

"We applaud the combined efforts of our many agency and local partners, as well as private landowners across the species' range, for their efforts to address the significant challenges faced by the Gunnison sage-grouse," said Noreen Walsh, regional director of the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. "In particular, Colorado Parks and Wildlife has worked diligently to conserve habitat through easements and conservation agreements with landowners. Continuation of these efforts will be essential for the recovery of the species, and we look forward to receiving additional scientific and technical information about the species from our partners and the public before making a final decision."

The Gunnison sage-grouse is a large, ground-nesting bird known for elaborate courtship displays on its breeding grounds. It is a close relative of the larger greater sage-grouse. The booming calls of male sage-grouse have long been associated with the arrival of spring on the sagebrush steppe of the West.

The Gunnison sage-grouse now occupies only approximately seven percent of its historic range. Approximately 5,000 breeding birds remain in sagebrush and adjacent meadow and streamside habitats in and around the Gunnison Basin in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah.

State conservation agencies, in partnership with federal agencies, are working on landscape-level, voluntary conservation planning effort to conserve Gunnison sage-grouse habitat. Thanks to collaborative conservation efforts, the largest remaining Gunnison sage-grouse population has remained relatively stable over the past 12 years. However, work remains to stabilize the other six remaining populations and to address threats throughout the bird's range, particularly habitat fragmentation resulting from increased development activity.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the Service is required to also propose potential critical habitat. In accordance with that requirement, today the Service has proposed 1.7 million acres of critical habitat. Specifying the habitat essential for the conservation of the species, as required by law, helps federal agencies identify where to focus their efforts to benefit the species. Earlier this year, the President directed that any future designations of critical habitat carefully consider all public comments on relevant science and economic impact, including those that suggest methods for minimizing regulatory burdens. If the listing is finalized, any potential critical habitat designation will include a full analysis of economic impact, including impact on jobs, and will strive, to the extent permitted by law, to avoid unnecessary burdens and costs on states, tribes, localities, and the private sector.

Finalizing the listing and any potential critical habitat designation would not necessarily result in any restrictions on human activities. Only if an activity required federal actions, funding or permitting would the agency in question need to work with the Service to avoid, reduce or mitigate potential impacts to the species or its habitat should it be listed.

The Service committed to publishing the proposed listing and proposed critical habitat for the Gunnison sage-grouse in Fiscal Year 2012 through a settlement agreement with WildEarth Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity. On August 17, 2012, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia modified the agreement to extend the deadline for submission of the proposal to the *Federal Register* to December 30, 2012, and following that granted an additional extension to January 7, 2013.

The Service is requesting input from the public before making final listing and critical habitat decisions. Comments on each proposed rule, both of which will publish concurrently in the *Federal Register* on January 11, 2013, must be received within 60 days, on or before March 12, 2013. In addition to submitting comments, the public is encouraged to attend a series of informal meetings to be held in January and February 2013. In coordination with Gunnison sage-grouse Local Working Groups, meetings will likely occur in Gunnison, Colorado; Montrose or Delta, Colorado; and Cortez, Colorado or Monticello, Utah and will be advertised at http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/.

For more information about the Gunnison sage-grouse and copies of each proposal, visit the Service's web site at http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/birds/gunnisonsagegrouse.

The Endangered Species Act provides an important safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and

innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit http://www.fws.gov/endangered/.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/. Connect with our Facebook page, follow our Twitter feed, watch our YouTube channel and view our Flickr photo stream.*

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