



USGS Releases Sage-Grouse Studies

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On November 4, 2009, the United States Geological Survey released a series of articles on the Greater Sage-Grouse. The articles have been peer reviewed and will be published by the University of California Press and the Cooper Ornithological Society. The topics cover biology, ecology, habitat, population trends and conservation. The purpose of the articles is to provide information to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to determine whether the Greater Sage-Grouse should be protected under the Endangered Species Act. The press release accompanying the articles notes that “the underlying cause for population declines in this western species is loss of suitable sagebrush habitat...” The release identifies the causes of habitat loss as fire, climate change, invasive plants, disease, energy development, livestock grazing and agriculture. The release and accompanying articles can be found at <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=2342>.

Two articles in the series focus on energy development. The first, *Energy Development and Greater Sage-Grouse*, attributes lower sage-grouse populations to energy development, among other factors. To improve sage-grouse habitat in energy-producing areas, the study recommends burying power lines, minimizing construction and managing produced water to prevent the spread of the West Nile Virus. The second article is *Energy Development and Conservation Tradeoffs: Systematic Planning for Sage-Grouse in their Eastern Range*, which directly ties oil, gas and wind development to lower sage-grouse populations. The article's proposed solution is to designate priority landscapes for protection and then evaluate other on-site threats. The authors note that many high-density sage-grouse sites are in areas of increasing energy development, mostly in Wyoming. Both articles advocate for increasing habitat protection by reducing energy development.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to make a decision regarding listing of the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act this spring.