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Governor Mead signs Updated Executive Order for Sage-Grouse Core Areas

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – Governor Matt Mead has signed an updated version of the Sage-Grouse Core Area Protection Executive Order, which provides more flexibility for management in the core areas and adds language requiring continual reevaluation of the science and data for sage-grouse management.

“This is not an action I take lightly or without reservation. However, because the listing of the greater sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species could cripple the economy of our State I believe this Executive Order is needed,” Governor Mead said. “I believe this effort, which started almost a decade ago represents the most significant conservation measure ever undertaken by a state in support of protecting a species.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has expressed support for Wyoming's Core Area Population strategy. The agency called it a "sound policy" for conservation of the greater sage-grouse and the Order factors heavily in the agency's annual status review, which is required under the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service previously determined that listing the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act is warranted, but precluded. That means there are higher priority species in need of the federal government's resources.

"There is an active effort to have the sage-grouse listed, but this Order reflects a state effort to develop a compromise acceptable to all sides," Governor Mead said. "We need more of these state-led efforts to have a voice in protection of species and I appreciate the federal government's support of this strategy."

This Order reflects the continued hard work of many people. Governor Mead thanked the Sage-Grouse Implementation Team for its perseverance in balancing the needs of sage-grouse and the needs of the industries that employ many people in Wyoming.

Bob Budd, Chair of the Implementation Team, said, "The team appreciates the thorough review that Governor Mead and his staff have done. We believe the Order lays a good foundation upon which to move forward."

Governor Mead said it is important to ensure the strategy is flexible and the changes he made to the Order help to achieve that goal. This includes allowing some land uses inside the core area if the activities will not cause declines in sage-grouse populations and co-locating disturbances in areas that are already disturbed or are naturally unsuitable for sage-grouse.

The Executive Order replaces the Order signed by former governor, Dave Freudenthal, in 2010. The revised order leaves the boundaries of the core area intact.

Governor Mead noted that this updated Order provides more clarity to state agencies. It clarifies that the Order does not grant new regulatory powers to state agencies. “All of the regulations used in the sage-grouse core area already exist. The Order does not create new regulation, but clarifies how those regulations are used in the core area.”

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