



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 8, 2010

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Note to news directors: Photographs of sage-grouse at INL Site are available on request.

DOE prepared for Greater Sage-Grouse designation



Greater Sage-Grouse male displaying on INL Site lek during early spring. [Click on image to enlarge](#)

On March 5, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service released its findings on a multi-year study of greater sage-grouse, to determine if the bird should be protected under the Endangered Species Act throughout its range, or any significant portion of its range.

Based on the data collected during the review, the Fish & Wildlife Service announced its finding that the greater sage-grouse warrants the protection of the Act, but that listing the species at this time is precluded by the need to address higher priority species first. This designation acknowledges the decline in population of the species but doesn't provide for any direct actions under the Act at this time.

In preparation for this finding, the U. S. Department of Energy Idaho Operations Office began working with the Fish & Wildlife Service in 2004 to create a Candidate Conservation Agreement. This agreement between the two agencies provides a management plan for greater sage-grouse located at the Idaho National Laboratory site. DOE has also provided a technical advisor to participate on the Idaho Sage-Grouse Advisory Committee since 2003.

Around the western United States a number of human activities have taken a heavy toll on the grouse's habitat in recent decades. The 890-square-mile INL site occupies some of the best sagebrush habitat remaining in Idaho due to the limited access to the area, which provides protection of both the habitat and the birds themselves, as well as the small footprint (less than 3 percent) of DOE facilities on the INL. The conservation agreement will provide the foundation for protecting the species while moving forward with existing and new projects at the facility.

Since 1995, DOE has provided funding to study greater sage-grouse and their habitat on the INL. S.M. Stoller Corporation has been overseeing research and data collection on grouse and their habitat since 2000. Part of the research has involved monitoring 57 historical leks on the INL site. Leks are mating grounds for greater sage-grouse and provide habitat crucial to the bird's survival. Researchers have monitored the leks and counted the male birds, to assess usage of the historical mating grounds.

Under subcontract to Stoller, the Wildlife Conservation Society is conducting a radio telemetry study to monitor seasonal use of habitat and the migration habits of the grouse. These data have already provided valuable information to assist in managing both the habitat and the birds.

The research and resulting data that have been collected in the past several years on the INL site will enable the development of an agreement between DOE's Idaho Operations Office and the Fish & Wildlife Service. The agreement will provide for protection of grouse and their habitat, while permitting the DOE and its contractors to fulfill their missions on the INL.

-DOE-ID-10-002-

Editorial Date March 9, 2010
By Tim Jackson



Greater Sage-Grouse lek on INL Site. [Click on image to enlarge](#)



Greater Sage-Grouse male displaying on INL Site lek. [Click on image to enlarge](#)



Greater Sage-Grouse male displaying on INL lek (2). [Click on image to enlarge](#)