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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Concludes that Greater Sage-Grouse Do Not Warrant Federal Protection

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FORT COLLINS, CO – Amongst key leadership from federal and state agencies, alongside other stakeholders who've been part of the largest landscape-level planning effort undertaken, Audubon Rockies staff gathered today under the backdrop of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge to hear the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announce that collective efforts have precluded the necessity of listing Greater Sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In an unusual turn of events, this listing decision was announced directly after the BLM and U.S. Forest Service plans were signed. These federal documents now provide regulatory certainty for the protection of Greater Sage-grouse, a major weakness identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in its 2010 “warranted but precluded” finding.

After almost a decade of working on Greater Sage-grouse conservation issues, Audubon Rockies' Executive Director was proud to be at the event. “Given that this species is found across 11 states with a myriad of threats, this hasn't been easy. But I am proud of us in the West because we came together to find solutions to address the decline of this iconic bird,” notes Alison Holloran. Audubon Rockies staff have addressed the declining sagebrush ecosystem challenge through education, science, and advocacy. “We have continuously pushed for conservation plans to be based on science and we are further than we've ever been before. We are seeing a positive change in how this ecosystem is being looked upon and that is very encouraging for a lot of species that depend on it.”

Repeatedly referenced by speakers at the event, including Audubon's own Brian Rutledge, was the unprecedented level of collaboration that has gone into protecting the new symbol of the sagebrush ecosystem. People from different political parties and walks of life are learning about this ecosystem and calling for its protection. “During this process we have learned to not allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good, and we have arrived at a good plan for both people and wildlife,” states Rutledge.

As Sally Jewell, Department of Interior Secretary, noted in her [pre-recorded video announcement](#) released directly before the event, sage-grouse “historically used to darken the skies as vast numbers took flight” ... but are “suffering a death by a thousand cuts.” Now however, we are in the midst of the largest conservation effort in the history of our country. Brian Rutledge remains optimistic. In front of a large crowd, he spoke of hope for this ecosystem and ended with “this is the start of a new beginning for the West, as we work together to bring back a healthy sagebrush ecosystem.”

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Audubon Rockies is a regional office of The National Audubon Society, with dedicated staff working in Wyoming and Colorado. The National Audubon Society strives to protect birds and their habitats throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education and on-the-ground conservation. Audubon's state programs, nature centers, chapters and partners have an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire and unite diverse communities in conservation action. Audubon is a nonprofit conservation organization.

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