



Audubon Wyoming News

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SUMMER 2008

A CRITICAL TIME FOR SAGE GROUSE

By Brian A. Rutledge, Executive Director of Audubon Wyoming

On Friday, June 27th, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's comment period for the listing of the Greater Sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act closed. While Audubon Wyoming supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's process, this institution remains skeptical as to the Bureau of Land Management's intention to take the steps necessary to protect this species. If the Department of the Interior fails to implement the recommendations of the State of Wyoming Sage-grouse Implementation Team for conservation of sage-grouse core areas in the next few months, a listing of the bird under the Endangered Species Act may be inevitable.

The State of Wyoming has produced a "Core Area Management Plan" for the Greater Sage-grouse that, if implemented by the Bureau of Land Management in the next few months could avert a listing of the species. However, the agency and the oil and gas industry have maintained a "business as usual approach" to sage-grouse conservation, generating skepticism among conservationists.



The unbroken sagebrush country, that provides crucial habitat for the Greater Sage-grouse, is one of the most awe-inspiring landscapes of the Rocky Mountain West. Places that we know and love as citizens- places such as the Red Desert, the Upper Green River Valley and the Powder River Basin- support the sage-grouse and numerous other sage-dependent

species such as antelope, the Pygmy Rabbit, the Ferruginous Hawk and the Long-billed Curlew. The energy boom now gripping Wyoming is exerting tremendous pressure on the sage-grouse as well as the world-class hunting and recreation opportunities these same lands provide us.

However, the road to protecting the sage-grouse is paved with good intentions. We are on the brink of a listing of the Greater Sage-grouse in Wyoming. BLM and industry have to wake up today and take decisive action to avoid a train-wreck in the making. A reconsideration on the pace of



leasing and stipulations for development, based on peer-reviewed science could avert the necessity for an ESA listing. Actions speak loudly and performance, as of today, leaves grave doubt of their positive intentions. Whatever the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decides, its decision must be based on performance and policy, not expressed intent.

The Greater Sage-grouse once common throughout the American West has dwindled to a fraction of its former population. Currently 95.5% of BLM lands in Wyoming are open to mineral leasing and oil and gas development. Sage grouse "core areas" that provide key habitat to the species encompass 23% of the state. If the BLM and industry decide to seriously consider the recommendations of the State of Wyoming, development would still be allowed in these areas, but with effective mitigation requirements in place. A decision on whether to list the Greater Sage-grouse is expected from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by December.

We look forward to working with BLM and industry during the critical months ahead of us. We can accomplish the realization of energy development, while maintaining the character and quality of our land. We trust that the decision-makers will not squander this opportunity to do the right thing.

Audubon Wyoming's New Community Naturalists'



Mac Blewer serves as Community Organizer/Naturalist for Audubon Wyoming out of Laramie. Mac came to Audubon with a long history of community outreach and grassroots coordination. He was the Outreach Coordinator for the Wyoming Outdoor Council for six years and was National Wetlands Campaign Organizer for the National Audubon Society in Washington, D.C. Mac has also worked for the National Wildlife Federation and the National Parks Conservation Association on various public lands protection issues. He has a BSc. Honors Degree in Environmental Biology from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. When he is not birding or hiking he spends time exploring the Red Desert or resting up at his off-the-grid cabin in Lander.



Jessica Ryan is the Community Naturalist at the Audubon Center at Garden Creek in Casper, Wyoming. Jess was born and raised in Western Pennsylvania and has lived in Wyoming for the past few years. She attended Teton Science Schools Professional Residency in Environmental Education with an emphasis in Natural History Interpretation. She finished a dual master's degree at the University of Wyoming majoring in Natural Science and Environment and Natural Resources. Jess has worked for the National Park Service and local parks sharing information about our local and national treasures with students of all ages. Jess brings her love of the outdoors, place-based education, and inspiring others to discover the wonders of our environment to the Community Naturalist position. Please call (307) 473-1987 or stop by the Audubon Center at Garden Creek to explore our 450 acre, outdoor classroom and learn more about volunteer and educational opportunities.

AUDUBON WYOMING

The state office of the National Audubon Society is the primary contact for education, conservation, and outreach in the state of Wyoming.

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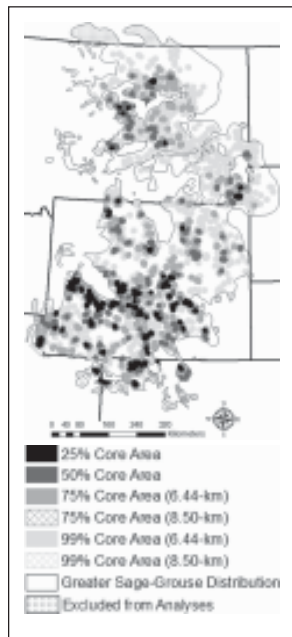
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Audubon using science to direct landscape conservation for sage-grouse

By Kevin Dougherty, Senior Ecologist

World demand for energy is predicted to increase by up to 50% or more between now and 2030. Increasing energy demand of an expanding human population and the resulting roads, rigs, surface disturbance and increased air and water quality impacts from oil and gas development all pose a daunting challenge to the conservation of our wildlife populations in North America and the ecosystems upon which they depend. To ensure the sustainability of our wildlife, we must enact conservation measures to reduce impacts to wildlife populations through conservation planning. To date no such plans are in place to conserve wildlife populations in Wyoming and throughout the West despite the accelerated rate of energy development. However, Audubon is leading the effort to ensure such planning processes are implemented by federal and state governments here in the Cowboy State as well as in Colorado, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota.

To initiate scientifically based conservation planning for the Greater sage-grouse, Audubon Wyoming has recently completed an ambitious conservation effort to prioritize sage-grouse population "hotspots" throughout Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, Utah, and the Dakotas. To elucidate conservation planning options we highlighted the smallest areas that cumulatively contain approximately 25-, 50-, 75- and 99% of breeding sage-grouse by processing sage-grouse breeding display counts "lek counts" in a computer based Geographic Information System. Each year displaying male sage-grouse are counted on individual leks by numerous state, federal, contract employees, and bird enthusiasts like Audubon members throughout the sage-grouse range. We processed information across the eastern portion of the sage-grouse range and used densities of sage-grouse to identify initial core areas because abundance is the first step to understanding regional distribution and connectivity of populations. We are actively working with Google Earth so that Audubon members and other interested parties without technical computer skills will be able to view this information via the Google Earth interface.



The good news is that Audubon's modeling is already proving critical to managing sage-grouse at the landscape scale. Already disparate interests have come together to recommend a sound and balanced approach to managing sage-grouse habitat in Wyoming. The state's Sage Grouse Implementation Team, which includes representatives of the oil and gas industry, state agencies and conservation organizations including our own Brian Rutledge, has used our science as the backbone of the plan to protect the most critical habitat

areas for sage-grouse while at the same time allowing responsible energy extraction. Audubon believes we can protect the wide-open spaces that the sage grouse needs while proceeding cautiously with oil and gas development in some of these areas.

Past efforts have shown that our capacity to describe problems in great detail does not always translate easily into solutions. Our sage-grouse population tool and the resulting buy in by citizens across the political divide show that proactive conservation planning is a powerful and proactive way to bridge the gaps between stake holders, researchers, and land managers. However, this work is intended to be a starting point for the adaptive management process not the end point of conservation planning.

Additionally, Audubon is currently trying to look into the crystal ball of the future of energy development by partnering with the Nature Conservancy and the University of Montana. Using scientifically based methods we are building landscape level predictive models to better understand how much development will occur in the next 10 years and beyond. Audubon hopes that with proactive planning we can eliminate the need for reactive protesting. We have a long road ahead of us and we are going to need the help of our members and chapter leaders with all of this. Thank you for your continued support. Enjoy your Summer.

CHAPTER CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information about a chapter near you, please contact the leaders listed below.

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Kids' Corner



Butterflies

R Y I F D Z I F Y C T I N O S
 A D W A T D Y C X G I F C W F
 L I F E C Y C L E P P O U L T
 L O L M W I J O F D S P O A D
 I H D N O W P G L R X W A Y F
 P O L L I N A T E O E G U L F
 R F B N K R A T Q R R T G Z F
 E F G T D A A R S Z V F T D E
 T S W E M R L P C P X M U U J
 A X N X G D A F U H R P R L B
 C B Z I G Y X V U P J I G X V
 C O M I R A O X W Y N W N W D
 X R X G Z D J Y S B I W K G P

BUTTERFLY
 MONARCH
 FLOWERS
 SPRING

MIGRATE
 COLORFUL
 PUPA
 LIFE CYCLE

CATERPILLAR
 POLLINATE
 GARDEN
 WINGS

Did you know...

The ears of a cricket are located on the front legs, just below the knee.



An albatross can sleep while flying.

On average, pigs live for about 15 years.



Dragonflies are one of the fastest insects, flying 50 to 60 mph.



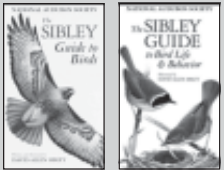
Color Me!

Simple ways to capture the magic of sunny days in your own backyard.

- Swing in a Hammock.** Look for pictures in the clouds and watch them change, or read books to each other.
- Play Dress-Up.** Collect funny hats, gloves, purses, flowing gowns, and "superhero capes." Slip into your new clothes, and have a make-believe garden party, Spider-Man adventure, or masquerade ball.
- Build a Secret Fort.** Drape old sheets over lower tree limbs and clotheslines. Eat dinner there. Stay up chasing fireflies and listening to "night sounds."
- Hold a Car Wash.** Line up toy cars and trucks (or any waterproof playthings), and give them a good scrub in a pot of water or with the garden hose. Rinse and let dry in the sun.
- Go on a Bug Safari.** Dig for worms, scout for lizards, and hunt for frogs and tadpoles. Marvel at an ant carrying an oversize crumb.
- Befriend a Tree.** Everyday give it a little bit of water and have your parents show you how to trim it so that it will grow up as you do!
- Chalk it Up.** Everyone loves sidewalk chalk. Use the glow-in-the-dark kind so you can glimpse your artwork from the window at bedtime.
- Dance in the Rain.** Go outside during a gentle summer shower. Dance around in swimsuits, catch raindrops in your mouth, and jump in all the puddles.

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Help support Wyoming's wildlife and wild lands by purchasing your copy of *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (\$42.50) and *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior* (\$32.50) from Audubon Wyoming! Other titles also available. Stop by 101 Garden Creek Road to browse our selection!



Please visit our website at:

www.audubonwyoming.org

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Make a Difference for Wyoming's Wildlife & Wildlands!!

JOIN/DONATE

Membership — \$20.00

All donations received in the Audubon Wyoming office are tax-deductible and used to benefit Wyoming's birds, wildlife and their habitats.

Complete & return to: **Audubon Wyoming**
358 North 5th Street
Laramie, WY 82072

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

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Payment (Please do not send cash):

- Check (make payable to Audubon Wyoming)
 Visa MasterCard AMEX

Card # _____

Card expiration date (MM/YYYY) _____ / _____

Signature _____

VOLUNTEER

Do you enjoy watching wildlife? Love spending time in the outdoors? Then we invite you to volunteer with Audubon Wyoming! You don't have to be a bird expert...you just have to be willing to learn and want to have fun! Contact the Community Naturalist in your area for volunteer opportunities.



Email Addresses Needed From Members
With Audubon's Sagebrush Conservation Initiative in full swing, we are going to need to keep in touch with our members more efficiently during the coming months and years. Conversely, it will be important for decision-makers to hear from you, our members, about issues that are important to you. Please send e-mail contact info to: ddowney@audubon.org

Thank you for your help with this.

— Audubon Wyoming Staff