

Washington

WDFW: Greater sage grouse still requires state protection

Recovery plan relies on voluntary actions

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Greater sage grouse should stay on Washington's threatened species list, according to state Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists.

WDFW estimates 1,004 sage grouse inhabit the state, while Washington's recovery plan calls for a stable population of at least 3,200 before the agency will consider upgrading the bird's status to "sensitive species," according to a new report.

The recommendation to the Fish and Wildlife Commission comes shortly after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list greater sage grouse as a federally protected species in 11 Western states.

Penny Becker, WDFW wildlife diversity division manager, said the timing was coincidental. WDFW periodically reviews the status of all state-protected species, she said.

Greater sage grouse have been a state threatened species since 1998 and have not been hunted in Washington since 1987.

USFW said it will depend on federal and state recovery plans and partnerships with private landowners to save the sage grouse. A report that accompanied USFW's decision noted that Washington has relied heavily on voluntary conservation actions.

Sage grouse in Washington are far fewer and roam over far less territory than in neighboring states Oregon and Idaho, which also have conservation plans.

The showy birds once lived



Courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Greater sage grouse inhabit a few places in Eastern Washington. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recommends the birds remain a state-protected species.

throughout shrub-steppe areas of Eastern Washington, relying on sagebrush for food and shelter. Most of the bird's habitat was converted to cropland or made unsuitable by livestock grazing, according to WDFW's report.

Greater sage grouse are now found in Douglas County and on the U.S. Army's Yakima Training Center. The birds also are being reintroduced in Lincoln County and on the Yakama Indian Reservation.

The report identifies wildfires as "perhaps the greatest immediate threat to sage grouse in Washington."

Becker said in an email that WDFW is not proposing any changes to recovery plans.

"Grazing can be implemented in a way that is consistent with sage grouse recovery

needs," she said.

Washington established its own list of protected species in 1980, originally simply adopting the federal list. The state list now differs from the federal list on some species, including greater sage grouse and gray wolves. Washington has 53 endangered, threatened or sensitive species.

The state's efforts to increase greater sage grouse numbers have included:

- Releasing 277 sage grouse from Southern Oregon since 2008 in Lincoln County.

- Releasing 61 birds from Nevada or Oregon between 2004-06 at the Yakima Training Center.

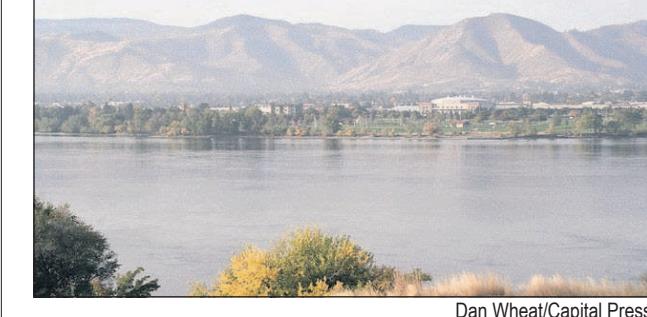
- Introducing 155 sage grouse from Oregon, Nevada and Wyoming since 2006 on the Yakama Reservation.

- Fences have been marked or removed to reduce collisions. The Bureau of Land Management, for example, marked 126 miles of fences on federal and state lands in Lincoln County.

- WDFW has converted almost 2,500 acres of cropland in Lincoln County since 1996 to sage grouse habitat. In northern Douglas County, 413 acres of grain fields are being converted to shrub-steppe.

WDFW will take public comments on retaining protected status for sage grouse through Dec. 29.

Comments can be submitted by email to TandEpublic.com@dfw.wa.gov or by mail to Gerald Hayes, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
The Columbia River flows past Wenatchee, Wash., on Oct. 15. The entire Columbia River system, including the Snake River, averages a flow of 133 million acre-feet of water annually. About 5 percent of that is used by agriculture and cities.

Underground water storage tested

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — It won't be a silver bullet for all of Washington's water needs, but the state Department of Ecology hopes to have some answers next year on prospects for storing Columbia River water underground in northern Douglas County to help offset future droughts.

By mid-year, the department expects to have results from a couple years of testing the possibility of storing water in underground rock on state Department of Natural Resources land. The water would be drawn from the section of the Columbia River known as Rufus Woods Reservoir between Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dams.

DOE has studied the entire Columbia Basin. Large new surface storage alternatives, such as the proposed Black Rock Reservoir west of Yakima, haven't panned out, Gregory said.

Several years ago, the department began considering underground storage. The only "large-scale" possibility being pursued is the one in northern Douglas County, Gregory said.

"It's in the evaluation stage. It's not like a gold nugget. It's the one with the potential for the largest amount of water right now as far as I know," he said.

Test wells are being used to determine the ability of the rock to transmit and store water, says Guy Gregory, senior hydro-geologist and technical unit supervisor of DOE's Water Resources Program in Spokane.

He would not speculate on the potential size other than to say it will be less than 1 million acre-feet being sought some years back for surface storage.

An average of 133 million acre-feet of water annually flows down the Columbia River system, including the Snake River, as measured at Bonneville Dam, said Tim Hill, outreach coordinator of DOE's Office of the Columbia River in Yakima. The Columbia River Basin is 258,000 square miles.

Grant money will help researchers identify insects causing zebra chip

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

A \$2.7 million grant will help Northwest researchers determine whether insects causing zebra chip disease in potatoes come from outside the region or already live here.

The USDA Specialty Crops Research Initiative recently awarded the grant to Washington State University researchers, who will work with scientists from Oregon and Idaho.

Zebra chip causes infected potatoes to develop brown stripes that are most apparent when fried. The striped sections easily burn, leaving a bitter flavor, according to WSU.

WSU entomologist Bill Snyder said one group of psyllids enters the Northwest on weather fronts from elsewhere in the country. The other group is already in the area, surviving the winter on nightshade and related weeds.

Not knowing whether the local or distant psyllids are spreading the disease makes it difficult for farmers to predict whether they'll have a bad or



Courtesy Carmen Castillo Carrillo/
Washington State University

the problem, researchers could monitor the weeds they use to survive the winter and report population increases, Snyder said. If outside psyllids are the culprit, the industry would monitor weather patterns and predict conditions for movement.

It's also possible both psyllids are causing the disease, Snyder said.

"We just have known so little about the local psyllids," he said. "A couple years ago, people thought there wasn't even such a thing."

The local psyllids may have been around for hundreds or thousands of years, Snyder said. They are different genetically from the ones entering the area.

The grant allows the researchers to expand the work that's already been done across the region, he said.

"People already sample for psyllids in the different states throughout the year," he said. "Now we'll have one network for all three states and everyone will be readily sharing information."

good zebra chip year, Snyder said.

"They don't really know how to manage it, either, since they don't know where the bad insects are coming from," he said.

Snyder hopes to develop good prediction models to give farmers "real-time" information about the risk of seeing the insects turn up on their land.

If the local ones are causing



Presidential Search

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- Challenges the president may face
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6:00-7:30 p.m.

Monday, Oct. 26

1807 East Hamlin Street

WSU NORTH PUGET SOUND AT EVERETT

Tuesday, Oct. 27

Choice of two sessions:

7:30-9:00 a.m.

10:30 a.m.-noon

Everett Community College

Gray Wolf Hall, Room 156

2000 Tower Street

BELLEVUE COLLEGE

6:00-7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Oct. 27

Building D, Room D106

3000 Landerholm Circle SE

More information about other forums and to provide feedback online: presidentialsearch.wsu.edu

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