

US eases land restrictions meant to protect sage grouse

Gov. Brown backs 'shift' to active conservation

By **MATTHEW BROWN**
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — The Trump administration today finalized changes to sweeping federal land use plans for Western States to ease energy industry restrictions in a way officials say will protect a struggling bird species.

The changes by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management will guide future efforts to conserve greater sage grouse, ground-dwelling birds that range across portions of 11 Western states.

Environmentalists have said the widely-anticipated move will undermine protections for the chick-

en-sized bird. They would allow more oil and gas drilling and other activities on grouse habitat.

But the administration secured key backing from Democratic and Republican governors in affected states.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, said in a statement that the changes marked "a shift away from planning toward active conservation and landscape management."

The birds are known for an elaborate mating ritual in which males puff out a yellow air sac in their chest as they strut around breeding grounds known as leks. Their numbers have plummeted due to energy development, disease and other factors.

Opponents are expected to challenge the changes in court. Brian Rutledge with the Audubon Society said



AP Photo/David Zalubowski

Male greater sage grouse perform their mating ritual on a lake near Walden, Colo.

the revisions will make it harder to stop the long-term decline of sage grouse by giving oil and gas companies access to crucial grouse habitat.

"It's a free for all, based on prioritizing fossil fuel

extraction over any other use of the federal landscape," Rutledge said.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management Acting Director Brian Steed said the changes address concerns aired by state officials that

previous policies governing millions of acres of federal land were too restrictive.

Those policies were largely enacted under former President Barack Obama. They were memorialized in a 2015 partnership between Western states and the federal government.

Steed said the broad revisions to the Obama-era plans were meant to move beyond what he called a "one-size-fits-all" approach under the old rules. He said the changes give more flexibility to land managers and states concerned about balancing economic development with protections for the bird.

"Our intent was not to throw out the plans, but to make them better respond to the needs on the ground," Steed said. "We're doing that in a very careful way to ensure that the bird's protec-

tions are still in effect."

The birds once numbered in the millions but the most recent estimates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service places the population at between 200,000 to 500,000.

The 2015 plans capped years of negotiations and were intended to prevent grouse from being listed as a threatened or endangered species.

Such a designation could have brought severe limitations on grazing, energy development and other activities across the bird's range, which covers some 270,000 square miles.

Under President Donald Trump, Interior Department officials have vowed to lift obstacles to drilling. Grouse protections have long been viewed by the energy industry as an obstacle to development.

FAA's close ties to Boeing company questioned after 2 deadly crashes

By **TOM KRISHER,**
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DEE-ANN DURBIN
Associated Press

For more than six decades, the Federal Aviation Administration has relied on employees of airplane manufacturers to do government-required safety inspections as planes are being designed or assembled.

But critics say the system, dubbed the "designee program," is too cozy as company employees do work for an agency charged with keeping the skies safe while being paid by an industry that the FAA is regulating.

"There is a potential conflict of interest," said Todd Curtis, a former Boeing Co. safety engineer and creator of *airsafe.com*, a website that focuses on airline safety. "They (the FAA) don't have the money to do all of the oversight. It's a question of being practical."

The FAA's oversight duties are coming under greater scrutiny after deadly crashes involving Boeing 737 Max jets operated by airlines in Ethiopia and Indonesia, killing a total of 346 people. The U.S. was nearly alone in allowing the planes to keep flying until it relented on Wednesday after getting satellite evidence showing the crashes may be linked.

The FAA concedes that it doesn't have resources to keep up with a growing aviation industry, and experts say it lacks the personnel to inspect every component, especially those made in other countries. But the agency says the program's results speak for themselves. The U.S. has the safest skies in the world. Until April of



AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim

An engine is recovered in November from a Boeing 737 MAX 8 jet that plunged into the Java Sea, killing all of its passengers.

last year, U.S. passenger airlines had not had a fatality since 2009, while carrying several billion passengers.

But safety experts say it's time to look into the agency's relationship with Boeing, based in Chicago. The FAA's ties to the company were revealed when Boeing and the agency released similar messages shortly after the Indonesian airliner crashed in October and again this week, when the FAA announced that Boeing would upgrade the Max's flight-control software, said Mary Schiavo, a former Transportation Department inspector general.

With the messages, the FAA "revealed that they were just parroting what Boeing told them," she said.

The agency needs more people with technical skills to adequately monitor a com-

pany that makes machines as sophisticated as today's jets, she said, contending that it didn't understand the Max's flight-control computer program.

"The FAA readily states they don't understand the 4 million lines of code and the 150 computers," Schiavo said. "What they do is see that Boeing followed the process, they checked the FAA boxes. The public thinks the FAA has more involvement."

Indeed, the agency's own website says that employees of manufacturers can approve design changes and aircraft repairs. "Using designees for routine certification tasks allows the FAA to focus its limited resources on safety critical certification issues," it says.

Congress will examine the relationship between

Boeing and the FAA. U.S. Rep. Peter A. DeFazio, D-Oregon, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said he would hold hearings on the FAA's process for approving the planes.

The agency's practice of delegating certification processes has come under scrutiny before. In a 1993 report, the Government Accountability Office warned that the FAA was falling behind the industry in technical competence because of lack of training and delegation of tasks to the manufacturers. The report said 95 percent of certification work for the Boeing 747-400 jetliner was delegated to the manufacturer in 1989. By comparison, 70 to 75 percent of that work was done by the FAA in the early 1980s, the report said.

Senate votes against Trump border emergency

By **LISA MASCARO,**
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WASHINGTON — In a stunning rebuke, a dozen defecting Republicans joined Senate Democrats to block the national emergency that President Donald Trump declared so he could build his border wall with Mexico. The rejection capped a week of confrontation with the White House as both parties in Congress strained to exert their power in new ways.

The 59-41 tally Thursday, following the Senate's vote a day earlier to end U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen, promised to force Trump into the first vetoes of his presidency. Trump had warned against both actions. Moments after Thursday's vote, the president tweeted a single word of warning: "VETO!"

Two years into the Trump era, a defecting dozen Republicans, pushed along by Democrats, showed a willingness to take that political risk. Twelve GOP senators, including the party's 2012 presidential nominee, Mitt Romney of Utah, joined the dissent over the emergency declaration order that would enable the president to seize for the wall billions of dollars Congress intended elsewhere.

"The Senate's waking up a little bit to our responsibilities," said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., who said the chamber had become "a little lazy" as an equal branch of govern-

ment. "I think the value of these last few weeks is to remind the Senate of our constitutional place."

Many senators said the vote was not necessarily a rejection of the president or the wall, but protections against future presidents — namely a Democrat who might want to declare an emergency on climate change, gun control or any number of other issues.

"This is constitutional question, it's a question about the balance of power that is core to our constitution," Romney said. "This is not about the president," he added. "The president can certainly express his views as he has and individual senators can express theirs."

Thursday's vote was the first direct challenge to the 1976 National Emergencies Act, just as Wednesday's on Yemen was the first time Congress invoked the decades-old War Powers Act to try to rein in a president. Seven Republicans joined Democrats in halting U.S. backing for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in the aftermath of the kingdom's role in the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Even though there's not likely to be enough numbers to override a veto, the votes nevertheless sent a message from Capitol Hill.

"Today's votes cap a week of something the American people haven't seen enough of in the last two years," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, "both parties in the United States Congress standing up to Donald Trump."

Utti: No sophomore jinx season for Seaside star

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game. So Hawes made it clear Utti has what it takes for the game when he recalled that in the state playoffs, "her senior year, in our first-round game, she was undercut and landed on her chin and braced herself with her right wrist. First 40 seconds of the game. I went out on the court, and thought, oh my, this is how it ends. She was bleeding all over.

"We literally patched her together and sent her back out, and she comes over and says her wrist is hurt," he said. "She hadn't even noticed because of her sliced chin. She said she couldn't shoot from more than a foot because it hurt too much and I said, 'just get to the rim.' And, of course, she did. She played the final games with a broken wrist. Tough, tough young woman."

In Fresno State's quarter-final matchup with UNLV, Utti drew the short straw and was assigned to guard a cou-



Jeff Ter Har

Maddi Utti during a 2017 state playoff game at Molalla, when she split her chin and broke her wrist in a fall, then led Seaside to victory.

ple of very tall senior girls — 6-4 Katie Powell and 6-2 Paris Strawth.

It was a tough assignment that caused her to draw two early fouls, earning her a seat on the bench for some

of the first half.

After the intermission the team adjusted, shut down the big girls and Utti continued to contribute to the victory. The play-by-play sheet provided at the conclusion

of the game shows "steal by Utti, good layup by Utti, assist by Utti, rebound by Utti."

Armed with press credentials, I attended the post-game news conference. Utti

was one of the two athletes that head coach Jamie White brought to the session.

After a warm greeting, I let Utti know I was very impressed with her and the team's play. My first question was what message she had for folks back home.

"Tell everyone I appreciate their support, they have all been so good to me."

Turning to coach White, I asked how the team shut down UNLV's tall players, in particular Powell, who had 14 points in the first half and three in the second.

Said White, "we focused on getting her out of the game and with her long reach, quick movements and tenacious defense, Maddi had a tremendous impact on keeping the ball out of Powell's hands or disrupting her shots."

Utti had an impressive season, starting in all 31 games and averaging just over 32 minutes. She shot 56.4 percent from two-point range and 50 percent from beyond the arc. At the free

throw line she was 52 of 63. Total points for the season were 380.

She gathered 77 offensive and 150 defensive rebounds, 68 assists, 59 steals and 33 blocked shots. For her efforts, she earned honorable mention on the all-Mountain West team and first team all-Mountain West defense.

Prior to the start of the UNLV game, Marci Utti, with a glow of pride in her daughter, had mentioned these two all-Mountain West team honors.

"It was hard work that got her to Fresno State, earned her a starting position and then these honors. She is not done yet."

Indeed there will be more to come from Maddi Utti, and we on the North Coast can be very proud that one of our own is representing Seaside High and the communities in such fine fashion.

Neil Branson is a former teacher, cross country and track coach at Seaside High School