

# Lawsuits target oil, gas leases in imperiled sage grouse habitat

By **MATTHEW BROWN**  
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A pair of lawsuits filed Monday target the Trump administration's sale of oil and gas leases on huge swaths of Western public lands that contain crucial habitat for an imperiled bird.

Wildlife advocates asked courts to reverse lease sales on more than 1,300 square miles of land in Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada, according to attorneys involved.

The legal actions also sought to block several upcoming sales unless the U.S. Interior Department conducts further environmental reviews. Those leases would total more than 1,800 square miles in the four states plus Idaho.

Many of the parcels in dispute are home to greater sage grouse, a chicken-sized, ground-dwelling bird that ranges across portions of 11 Western states.

Greater sage grouse populations drastically declined in recent decades, because of energy development that broke up the bird's habitat, along with disease, livestock grazing and other causes. Its population once numbered in the millions but had fallen to fewer than 500,000 by 2015, according to wildlife officials.

Under former President Barack Obama, the Interior Department delayed lease sales on millions of acres of public lands largely because



Jerret Rafferty/The Rawlins Daily Times via AP, File

**In this 2008 file photo, male sage grouse fight for the attention of females southwest of Rawlins, Wyo. Environmental groups are suing the Trump administration for allegedly ignoring policies meant to protect the imperiled bird.**

of sage grouse worries. In 2015, it adopted a set of wide-ranging plans meant to protect the best grouse habitat and keep the bird off the endangered species list.

Trump's Interior secretary, Ryan Zinke, has placed a greater priority on energy development, including directives from the agency that modified restrictions imposed by the Obama administration.

Attorneys behind Monday's lawsuits argued those modifications were improper and that Zinke's agency unlawfully limited environmental reviews of lease sales.

"They are indiscriminately leasing everything that's nominated in sage grouse habitat, without any

determination beforehand that maybe these areas are particularly important" to the bird, said Michael Saul, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Justice Department spokesman Wyn Hornbuckle declined comment on the matter.

Energy industry representatives have been strongly supportive of Zinke's pro-energy agenda. They point out that even when land is leased for drilling, companies must abide by limitations on when they can drill to avoid disrupting grouse during breeding season.

"We realize there are some hoops we're going to have to jump through if we're going to develop the resource," said Alan Olson, executive

director of the Montana Petroleum Association.

Monday's lawsuits included one in Idaho filed by Center for Biological Diversity and Western Watersheds Project, and another in Montana by the Montana Wildlife Federation, The Wilderness Society, National Audubon Society and National Wildlife Federation.

Also Monday, environmentalists agreed to a truce in a third lawsuit over protections for the Gunnison sage grouse, a smaller cousin of the greater sage grouse.

The Gunnison grouse, found only in Colorado and Utah, was designated a threatened species in 2014. Center for Biological Diversity and Western Watersheds Project sued the federal government the next year, saying the Gunnison grouse should be classified endangered, meaning it is in greater danger and warrants stronger protections than a threatened species.

The two groups said they would put the lawsuit on hold after federal officials agreed to come up with a recovery plan for the bird within 2½ years.

The deadline guarantees the recovery plan won't drag out for years, the groups said. They could resume their lawsuit if the government misses the deadline, or if they are unhappy with the recovery plan.

Only about 5,000 Gunnison sage grouse were left in 2014.



Chris Pietsch/The Register-Guard via AP

**Oregon grape plant waits to be planted by students during a habitat restoration project near Dorena Lake.**

# Thieves uprooting Oregon's state flower

By **DYLAN DARLING**  
The Register-Guard

DORENA — Shovels in hand, a group of 15 middle school-aged kids from Dorena School took time out of their morning recently to plant Oregon grape at a nearby park.

The kids dug deep enough to give the plants' roots a firm footing and pulled up rocks to loosen the soil. Accustomed to such restoration work, the group had 40 plants in the ground in less than an hour. The Dorena School kids had a specific mission last Thursday: replace the Oregon grape plants stolen by thieves in the park.

The thought of someone stealing the Oregon grape — the state flower, which bears purple berries that look like small grapes — might seem silly. But the thefts do happen to the ire of watershed restorers, park rangers and police. Over the past year the pace of Oregon grape thefts appears to have picked up, said Christie Johnson, park ranger with the Army Corps of Engineers in Cottage Grove.

Replacing stolen Oregon grape at the park near Dorena, in the Cascade foothills east of Cottage Grove, cost the Corps about \$200, Johnson said. The federal agency manages Dorena Lake and nearby parks.

"When people steal these plants it costs money," Johnson said. "It costs taxpayers."

If caught, the crime also could cost the thieves.

Illegally collecting native plants from public lands without a permit might result in as much as a \$2,500 fine, Johnson said.

Oregon grape plants produce a bright yellow flower that becomes a small, grape-like fruit that tastes nothing like a grocery store grape. The plants' roots and bark contain berberine and other chemicals used in medicines to treat infections and stomach problems. Authorities suspect that changes in the herbal medicine market might have increased demand for Oregon grape, prompting more thefts.

"There are a lot of people who believe in using these herbal medicines," Johnson said.

Oregon grape thieves don't discriminate about where they steal the plants, uprooting the scrub from public and private land, said Audrey Squires, restoration projects manager for the Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council. The Lowell-based nonprofit group leads restoration on and around the Middle Fork, a tributary to the Willamette River.

Squires has begun compiling a database of Oregon grape thefts after thieves brazenly took armfuls of the plants in March from a Middle Fork restoration project on private land.

The database shows 20 thefts in Lane County, as long ago as 2011 and as recently as this April. The data also indicates the number of thefts increasing more recently.

## BRIEFLY

### OSU student faces additional hate-crime charge

CORVALLIS — An Oregon State University student accused of putting offensive stickers on the cars of members of a racial justice group has been charged with an additional hate crime.

The *Corvallis Gazette-*

*Times* reports court records say Andrew Oswalt faces a third count of first-degree intimidation.

The amended indictment filed in Benton County Circuit Court alleges Oswalt acted with one or more people to tamper or interfere with property by applying the stickers to the cars "with intent to cause substantial inconvenience to another because of the defendant's

perception of another's religion." Oswalt pleaded not guilty Monday to the additional charge.

### Federal judge sides with fish in dispute

PORTLAND — A federal judge has denied a request from Klamath Basin farmers and ranchers to ease their water situation this

spring. A court injunction requires the Bureau of Reclamation to hold 50,000 acre-feet of stored water in Upper Klamath Lake through early June to flush away a deadly parasite that infects threatened coho salmon.

Because it's been a dry year, the bureau believes the injunction makes it unlikely there will be enough water for farms.

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## AccuWeather Forecast

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TODAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Mostly sunny and pleasant	Partly sunny and pleasant	Intervals of clouds and sunshine	Beautiful with clouds and sun	Mostly cloudy

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
72°	47°	80°	53°	77°
77°	47°	84°	55°	82°

HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
77°	47°	84°	55°	82°
77°	47°	84°	55°	82°

## ALMANAC

### PENDLETON

through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	63°	44°
Normals	67°	42°
Records	88° (1976)	24° (1905)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"  
Month to date 0.00"  
Normal month to date 0.03"  
Year to date 5.42"  
Last year to date 8.21"  
Normal year to date 5.14"

### HERMISTON

through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	68°	48°
Normals	69°	42°
Records	89° (1947)	22° (1954)

**PRECIPITATION**  
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"  
Month to date 0.00"  
Normal month to date 0.04"  
Year to date 4.05"  
Last year to date 5.88"  
Normal year to date 4.03"

### SUN AND MOON

	Today	May 15	May 21	May 29
Sunrise today	5:42 a.m.			
Sunset tonight	8:03 p.m.			
Moonrise today	10:52 p.m.			
Moonset today	7:40 a.m.			

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

## REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	62	46	s	58	48	pc
Baker City	69	36	pc	76	43	pc
Bend	68	42	s	76	45	pc
Brookings	64	47	s	58	47	pc
Burns	67	33	s	75	40	pc
Enterprise	64	38	pc	72	44	pc
Eugene	71	45	s	73	43	pc
Hepner	71	47	s	78	51	pc
Hermiston	77	47	s	84	55	pc
John Day	67	39	pc	75	47	pc
Klamath Falls	67	37	s	75	43	pc
La Grande	67	39	pc	75	44	pc
Meacham	65	38	pc	73	43	pc
Medford	77	49	s	82	51	pc
Newport	60	46	s	57	47	c
North Bend	62	48	s	58	48	pc
Ontario	74	43	pc	80	49	pc
Pasco	77	46	s	84	53	pc
Pendleton	72	47	s	80	53	pc
Portland	75	51	s	76	50	pc
Redmond	71	37	s	79	42	pc
Salem	74	48	s	75	45	pc
Spokane	69	47	pc	73	50	pc
Ukiah	65	36	s	74	41	pc
Vancouver	74	48	s	76	48	pc
Walla Walla	72	53	s	79	58	pc
Yakima	80	47	s	85	50	pc

## WORLD CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	74	51	pc	76	51	s
Hong Kong	87	75	pc	86	74	t
Jerusalem	81	60	s	84	65	pc
London	56	40	r	59	44	pc
Mexico City	78	56	pc	78	58	t
Moscow	61	42	c	62	41	pc
Paris	74	60	t	71	57	t
Rome	61	42	c	62	41	pc
Seoul	67	47	r	62	48	sh
Sydney	73	59	pc	79	67	c
Tokyo	76	67	t	78	58	sh

## WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Thurs
Boardman	SW 4-8	WSW 6-12
Pendleton	WNW 6-12	WSW 7-14

## UV INDEX TODAY

2 4 7 7 4 2

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.

0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme

The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

**National Summary:** The risk of severe thunderstorms, including tornadoes, will extend from Texas to Illinois today. Cool air and spotty showers are in store for the West while the East can expect summerlike warmth.

**Yesterday's National Extremes:** (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 95° in Laredo, Texas      Low 21° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

## NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thur.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	66	42	pc	68	46	pc
Atlanta	84	60	s	85	61	s
Baltimore	76	62	s	77	64	pc
Birmingham	88	64	s	89	67	s
Boston	63	44	pc	73	49	pc
Boise	86	62	s	87	63	pc
Boulder	70	45	s	76	52	s
Charlotte, SC	86	65	s	84	63	pc
Chicago	83	59	s	83	61	s
Cleveland	81	64	c	75	60	t
Dallas	80	66	pc	77	64	t
Denver	88	70	pc	80	67	t
Detroit	53	37	t	55	39	t
El Paso	80	66	c	78	64	t
Fairbanks	82	56	pc	77	55	s
Fargo	42	26	c	50	29	c
Honolulu	68	42	c	72	46	pc
Houston	82	70	r	82	72	c
Indianapolis	87	72	pc	86	70	c
Jacksonville	82	65	pc	77	64	t
Kansas City	81	60	s	82	60	pc
Las Vegas	84	68	c	81	55	t
Little Rock	66	54	sh	79	63	t
Los Angeles	85	68	pc	83	68	t
Los Angeles	65	52	pc	71	55	s
Louisville	86	68	pc	84	69	t
Miami	85	68	pc	84	69	pc
Minneapolis	82	74	t	84	74	pc
Millwaukee	75	54	t	61	51	t
Minneapolis	69	52	c	73	51	pc
Nashville	86	65	s	86	69	pc
New Orleans	86	67	s	86	68	pc
New York City	86	68	s	88	70	pc
Oklahoma City	82	68	c	84	58	t
Omaha	72	57	t	73	52	t
Philadelphia	85	65	s	90	69	pc
Portland, ME	74	58	c	73	66	s
Providence	83	64	s	82	65	pc
Raleigh	86					