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## Conservation Organizations to File Suit for Sage Grouse

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Three conservation groups will mount a legal challenge against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, after it decided not to treat the sage grouse as an endangered species. The Center for Biological Diversity, Desert Survivors, and Western Watersheds Project plan to file a lawsuit to demand the birds be protected.

"The sage grouse's desperate need for Endangered Species Act protection is no longer in dispute," said Rob Mrowka, an ecologist at the center in a news release. "More bureaucratic delay is sure to drive it extinct."

According to the Endangered Species Act, the government is only allowed to delay extending protections to a species when it is making expeditious progress in listing other species.

According to the center, the progress is far from expeditious. In the first year of the Obama administration only two species were listed, the lowest number since the Reagan administration. Yet 251 species are waiting.

"Delay of protection for the sage grouse is an abuse of discretion that is a recipe for extinction for these magnificent birds," said Mrowka. "We had hoped the Obama administration would move quickly to reduce the backlog of species waiting for protection, but instead it's adding to the backlog."

The dangers to the birds are habitat loss and degradation of habitat from development, grazing livestock, invasive weeds, transmission lines, and all terrain vehicles. The birds were native to the prairie. Their numbers have declined up to 70 percent, says the center.

One group is physically isolated from the others, and genetically different. "Because the Mono Basin population of sage grouse exists at the periphery of the sage grouse range and is genetically unique, it contains characteristics that may well be critically important to the survival of the species as a whole, particularly in light of climate change," said Mrowka.

The sage grouse are famous for their spring courtship rituals. The animals gather at display areas, where the males appear to dance for the females, flaring their tail feathers, strutting, and creating unusual sounds from air sacs in their necks. After mating, they lay about six to seven eggs and incubate them for one month.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a nonprofit organization with 255,000 members, according to its news release.