

ELSEWHERE IN THE BULLETIN

Governor Freudenthal issues sage-grouse order

By Jen Sieve-Hicks

Published:

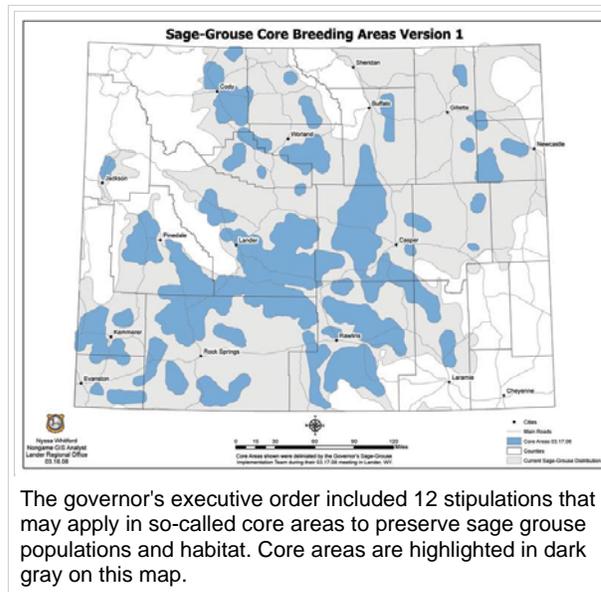
Wednesday, August 6, 2008 12:40 PM CDT

Print Page

In an unprecedented move, on Friday Governor Dave Freudenthal issued an order that asks state agencies to work to maintain and enhance sage-grouse habitat in the state.

The order, which applies only to state agencies, consists of 12 stipulations and a map of designated "core areas" where the stipulations could be implemented. Included in the core area are two tracts, one east of Buffalo and the other west of Kaycee.

According to a statement Governor Freudenthal issued on Friday, it is an attempt to stave off a decision from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the game bird under the Endangered Species Act—a move that could spell ruin for northeastern Wyoming's coal-bed methane industry.



The governor's executive order included 12 stipulations that may apply in so-called core areas to preserve sage grouse populations and habitat. Core areas are highlighted in dark gray on this map.

"The executive order is not an end in itself, it is really just a way to demonstrate that the state's ante is on the table," Freudenthal said in a prepared statement on Friday. "Wyoming's efforts, matched with those of our federal partners and private landowners, will hopefully start us down the road to the point where no one even looks at needing to list the grouse in this state."

A decision on whether to list the bird is expected later this year.

In laying out the plan, Freudenthal noted that it does not prohibit new development, but that several stipulations may apply in core areas to prevent destruction of the bird's habitat or further depopulation of the bird. Additionally, the order calls for "enhanced" reclamation and fire suppression efforts in core areas.

While the Wyoming Audubon Society has lauded the plan as "courageous" and a "commonsense" approach, local conservation groups have not been as enthusiastic.

Jill Morrison, executive director of the Powder River Basin Resource Council, said that the plan protects a lot of habitat statewide, but that not enough land in the Powder River Basin was included in the order.

"The areas they're designating for protection are really on the fringes of the Basin, and our concern is for the grouse habitat and populations in the middle of the Basin," Morrison said. "I think the Powder River Basin is always looked at as the sacrificial lamb for energy development."

However, Wyoming Petroleum Association Vice-President Cheryl Sorenson said that everyone—including private landowners, conservationists and oil and gas industry members—was given "a seat at the table to work on sage-grouse conservation."

Sorenson said that the Petroleum Association was particularly pleased that there is a clause for valid and existing rights, and "that the core areas can be modified at any time due to habitat and population changes."

For a more detailed look at this story please pick up a copy of this Week's issue of the bulletin.