



Another good breeding year for sage grouse in Wyoming



4 HOURS AGO

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — A ground-dwelling bird that has been considered for protection as an endangered species had another good breeding year in Wyoming, the state with more of the birds than any other.

Sage grouse are brown, chicken-sized birds that live in the sagebrush. Abundant rain and snow in much of Wyoming last spring and summer helped grass and wildflowers amid the sagebrush. That in turn helped ensure abundant insects, which sage grouse chicks rely on for protein in their first month of life.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department estimates each sage grouse hen produced an average of 1.7 chicks in Wyoming 2015. That's about the same as 2014 and up from the 10-year average of 1.3 chicks per hen. Reproduction in recent years has ranged as low as 0.8 chicks per hen in 2012.

Biologists estimate the number of sage grouse by studying birds killed by hunters during Wyoming's brief sage-grouse hunting season each fall. Hunters in central and southwest Wyoming voluntarily donate wings from their birds for the research.

"It is good to see that sage grouse numbers are still climbing. We know populations are cyclical, and we are in a wet period that benefits sage grouse and their habitat," Tom Christiansen, Wyoming sage grouse program coordinator, said in a release.

The greater sage grouse ranges across all or parts of 11 states from California to the Dakotas. The bird has declined precipitously over the past century of human development, but fairly large numbers of sage grouse remain in Wyoming's mostly undeveloped sagebrush basins.

Federal officials announced in September that the greater sage grouse does not warrant protection as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act.