

Jewell, Western Governors discuss sage grouse

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LAS VEGAS (AP) — Interior Secretary Sally Jewell says the federal government is trying to find a way to save the sage grouse without having to list the bird as an endangered species.

Jewell, at the Western Governors' Association's winter meeting in Las Vegas, said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working with environmentalists and officials in 11 Western states to find a solution to protect the species and its habitat without a formal listing.

"We want to create an environment where a listing is not warranted," she said. "So we're all working with that common objective. ... It truly is epic collaboration. It's not just the sage grouse that's at stake. It's the Western way of life that's at stake."

Jewell's comments came during a luncheon speech Saturday at the conference hosted by Republican Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, who is association chairman, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

Sandoval and some other governors object to listing the sage grouse, arguing it would spare hundreds of thousands of acres from development and harm mining and ranching.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is facing a September deadline to decide whether to list the bird as an endangered species and set aside protected habitat for it.

The two-day meeting also focused on energy needs, including fossil fuels and renewable resources such as wind, solar and geothermal. Governors also discussed land management and how to balance the competing needs of people and wildlife.

Sandoval said the West remains a place of great opportunity and growth, and the states are facing challenges in providing resources such as water and energy as a result.

"Across the West, we continue to face growing communities and new challenges," he said in his opening remarks. "The challenges of these new populations must be met head-on."

U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz touted the Obama administration's "all of the above energy policy," which promotes both fossil fuel development as well as clean energy.

"We clearly want to work with the states in all the ways that we can to keep minimizing the environmental footprints," he said.

Moniz said the administration is working on programs to recycle nuclear fuels and will not force a high-level nuclear waste site on any state.

Nevada's Yucca Mountain, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, has long been targeted as a repository site, but Sen. Harry Reid, Sandoval and other top Nevada elected officials remain strongly opposed to it.

Moniz reaffirmed in a private meeting with Sandoval that the Obama administration continues to believe Yucca Mountain is "not a workable solution," the two said in a joint statement issued Saturday night.

"That has not, and will not change," the statement says. "The (Energy) Department firmly believes in a consent-based process as a prerequisite for long-term success."

Governors scheduled to attend the conference were Republicans Butch Otter of Idaho, Susana Martinez of New Mexico, Dennis Daugaard of South Dakota, Gary Herbert of Utah and Matt Mead of Wyoming, and Democrats John Hickenlooper of Colorado and Steve Bullock of Montana.