

Meeting on sage grouse March 3

ELKO — A public meeting on what can be done to prevent the listing of the sage grouse as an endangered species will be held at 6:30 p.m. March 3 at the Elko Convention Center theater, former Assemblyman John Carpenter said Monday.

“We’ve already got a number of speakers lined up. I think we will have a lot of people there. If they list the sage grouse, it will raise the devil for everything,” Carpenter said.

He said he is organizing the meeting with the help of “a few interested people” to give everyone the chance to comment.

Carpenter said this will provide a forum for people in light of their disappointment when the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s recent open house didn’t provide the public a chance to speak and ask questions in a meeting setting.

“It was mostly a social event, rather than a real meeting,” he said.

The BLM’s Elko office is gathering comment for an environmental impact statement on how to manage the sage grouse, and the EIS in turn will be used for the BLM and U.S. Forest Service to amend local land-use plans.

Elko County Commissioners aired concerns at their last meeting about the BLM’s new interim policy on the sage grouse that is in effect while the EIS process is under way.

Elko BLM District Manager Ken Miller said then that the BLM already is doing most of what the policy covers to avoid the listing.

“It would be a lot worse,” he said, if the bird is listed.

The BLM is taking public comment on the planned EIS until Feb. 7, and the study is slated for completion in May 2014.

If the federal agencies send representatives to the March 3 meeting, “they can learn firsthand the questions people have,” Carpenter said.

“I know that we welcome any opportunity to have dialogue about sage grouse and best practices for its protection,” Lesli Ellis, public affairs specialist for the Elko BLM District, said Monday.

“We will be having an open house on Feb. 29th where we will be available to discuss several different projects currently being undertaken by Elko BLM to include Sage-grouse protection,” she also said in an email. Details are still being worked out.

Elko County Commission Chairman Jeff Williams said commissioners haven't had an opportunity to talk about the March 3 meeting yet but will do so at their Wednesday meeting at 1:30 p.m. at the Nannini Administration Building.

He said commissioners will want to be at the March 3 meeting, however.

"We probably will be there as citizens to this hearing, but we don't know yet if we will take a leadership role," Williams said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ruled in March 2010 that the listing of the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act was "warranted but precluded" because of higher priorities.

The USFW now has until September 2015 to decide whether the greater sage-grouse should be listed.

Carpenter said so much of what is said is about habitat for sage grouse, but people "have been trying for years to find out what they really want us to do."

Many think they should step up predator control, such as controlling the number of ravens that eat the sage grouse eggs, he said.

"When I first came to Elko there were all kinds of birds. Now, there are a gazillion ravens flying around," Carpenter said.

He said there is an urgency to come up with plans to avoid the listing.

Ellis said comments on the planned EIS on the sage grouse can be submitted by email to sagewest@blm.gov, and questions may be sent via email to sagequery@blm.gov.