

Nevada sage grouse critics call feds closed-minded

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Written by

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A former Nevada lawmaker and longtime critic of U.S. land managers says he's convinced the feds have already made up their mind to list the Greater sage grouse as a threatened or endangered species.

But a U.S. Bureau of Land Management official says that's not the case and insisted at a public meeting in Elko this week they want the community's input on how best to save the troubled bird without a federal listing.

Elko County Commissioner Grant Gerber suggested the BLM and U.S. Forest Service are seeking comment on a regional sage-grouse conservation plan only to placate critics of the push to protect the Greater sage grouse, which is found in 11 Western states, including Nevada, Utah, Idaho and Oregon.

Ranchers, miners, energy developers and state officials fear restrictions on the use of public lands in sage grouse habitat would have deep economic consequences in the rural West.

Former Republican Assemblyman John Carpenter said he believes the government is determined to list the chicken-sized game bird as part of a bigger strategy to lock up federal lands.

"These people don't give a damn about the sage grouse. All it is is for control," Carpenter told the Elko Daily Free Press.

"They want to get control of the people that are using the public land and get them off," he said. "They want to get the cowboys and the miners and recreationists and everybody else and get them off."

BLM Elko District Manager Jill Silvey disagreed with Carpenter's assertion that the BLM was in favor of a listing.

"That's clearly not our objective," she said about the listing decision the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to make in the fall of 2014.

About 60 people attended the informal gathering Wednesday night at an Elko motel where federal officials explained they will accept written comments until Jan. 29 on a number of options being considered as part of the draft conservation plan.

After the BLM reviews public comment, it will develop a proposed plan to be drafted around June. That will be followed by agency review and a 60-day governor's consistency review and a protest period.

The intention is to issue a public record of decision by Sept. 30