

## SAGE GROUSE BILL APPLAUDED

A new bipartisan bill from U.S. Sens. Harry Reid and Dean Heller of Nevada to protect sage grouse habitat in Nevada is being well received by conservation groups, sportsmen and women and business leaders, the Nevada Conservation League reported.

The Nevada Sagebrush Landscape Conservation and Economic Development Act was announced Friday by the two Nevada lawmakers.

“In Nevada we’ve been working hard to conserve sage grouse,” said Nevada Assembly Speaker Marilyn Kirkpatrick, D-North Las Vegas. “This is a positive development that will assist us enormously.”

The bill would protect important sage grouse habitats in Nevada. Sage grouse populations have been declining across the West, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service could add the bird to the endangered species list in 2015.

That would protect sage grouse habitat and could help prevent the need for federal sage grouse protections. The legislation would also provide economic certainty to Nevada businesses if the bird is listed under the Endangered Species Act.

“Protecting these areas is good for the Nevada outdoor recreation economy, which is responsible for \$14.9 billion in consumer spending and more than 140,000 jobs,” said April Mastroluca of the Nevada Conservation League, citing data from the Outdoor Industry Association. “These protections guarantee more places to get outside and play — and spend money — a win-win situation for Nevada.”

Willie Molini, a sportsman and retired director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife, welcomed the legislation. “Sage grouse habitat is used by more than just the grouse,” he said. “This bill protects quality hunting and fishing lands for mule deer and bighorn sheep as well.”

The bill also contains provisions aimed at bolstering renewable energy development and would establish a sagebrush restoration fund that can restore damaged sage grouse habitat.

“As a renewable energy developer, Ormat has closely watched sage grouse policy evolve,” said Bob Sullivan, vice president of business development for Ormat Technologies Inc., based in Reno.

“In developing conservation regulation, Sens. Reid and Heller met face-to-face with local energy professionals assuring our interests are heard,” Sullivan said. “We commend their commitment to preserving sage grouse habitat while promoting economic development in Nevada.”

— Sean Whaley

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