

# Senate sends BLM message on sage grouse

By STEVE TETREAULT

The U.S. Senate has signaled that it expects the Bureau of Land Management to "collaborate" with western states looking to avert an endangered species listing for the sage grouse.

Before it recessed Saturday morning for a two-week break, senators voice-voted an [amendment](#) saying as much. It called on the BLM to cooperate in "developing and approving state plans that prevent the listing."

Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., who sponsored the amendment, said it reinforced the idea that states have "primary responsibility for wildlife management."

If the chicken-sized range bird is listed as an endangered species, "it will hurt most states in the western portion of the country. It will make important activities, such as renewable energy and grazing, in many cases impossible," Heller said, as millions of acres could be locked up as protected habitat.

The amendment, attached to the Senate's blueprint for the 2014 federal budget, is not binding on the BLM. But lawmakers from the West have been turning up the volume on their concerns as the Fish and Wildlife Service approaches a decision by 2015.

The Heller amendment sought to create a "deficit neutral reserve fund" related to the sage grouse. The fund is not an actual pot of money, but a procedural device that would make it easier from a budget standpoint for the Senate to take up sage grouse legislation later this year if it becomes necessary.