



The Mountain Pact

New Proposals Threaten Millions of Acres of Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat

On [Thursday](#), December 6, the Trump Administration released [new proposals](#) that will roll back protections for the greater sage-grouse and open up 9 million acres of public lands to oil and gas leasing. The Trump administration's 'energy dominance' agenda has repeatedly prioritized oil



and gas development over conservation, recreation, and all other uses in the management of America's public lands – an approach that threatens greater sage-grouse populations across the West along with 350 plant and animal species that rely on those habitats for survival.

2015 Greater Sage Grouse Management Plan

Greater sage-grouse live in large areas of [sagebrush steppe](#), much of which is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); and share this habitat with elk, mule deer, golden eagles and pronghorn. In 2015, the Obama administration spearheaded an "unprecedented" decade-long collaboration to keep sensitive sage-grouse habitats on public lands off-limits to oil and gas extraction. This collaboration was [dubbed](#) the, "Largest landscape level conservation effort in U.S. history." It concluded with multi-party consensus from Western Governors, ranchers, conservationists and oil and gas industry representatives that implemented management plans to protect sage-grouse habitat, while also designating specific areas for oil and gas development.

The 2015 plan kept the greater sage-grouse off of the Endangered Species List in an effort to protect the species while allowing for some well regulated energy extraction so long as a large buffer was maintained in

nearby communities. If drilling was allowed in 'sagebrush focal areas' there were limits on construction, bans on drilling during mating season, and there was a requirement that companies pay into a fund that was used to preserve habitat in other locations. Since this historic decision in 2015, sage-grouse [populations have rebounded](#).

New Proposals and What This Means For Mountain Communities

Secretary Zinke and the BLM have released proposed revisions to this management plan that will open up sensitive greater sage-grouse habitat to oil and gas development. This revision will [remove protections](#) from nine million acres of the 10.7 million that were designated as 'sagebrush focal areas' in 2015; while handing mitigation plans over to individual states and reverting to pre-Obama era regulations.

Nearly half of greater sage-grouse habitat lies on public lands, the majority of which is managed by the BLM, including 8.8 million acres in Idaho, 2.5 million acres in Utah, and 1.7 million acres in Colorado. Opening greater sage-grouse habitat to oil and gas extraction is another move in line with the Trump Administration's effort to open much of America's public lands and waters to oil and gas drilling. The departure from the 2015 collaborative plan ignores over half a million comments in support of maintaining protections in favor of special interests. By ignoring Westerners and their own [best available science](#), the administration is threatening the survival of the sage-grouse and undermining certainty for businesses that depend on a healthy and working sagebrush landscape. Decline in sage-grouse populations could prompt a decline in the 350 species that live in the sagebrush habitat – a habitat that supports \$1 billion worth of economic output from outdoor recreation each year.

These proposals are yet another threat to the public lands our communities rely on for recreation, tourism, and our livelihoods; and could also increase public health concerns relating to [increased pollution](#). The Trump administration needs to listen to the voices of Westerners in this process. Amending these historic management plans threaten greater sage-grouse, public lands, and our communities.

How to Take Action

Contact The Mountain Pact at info@themountainpact.org to learn how to take action, write a Letter to the Editor, or an Opinion Editorial asking Secretary Zinke and the BLM to listen to the voices of Westerners and keep protections for sage-grouse in place. The survival of the greater sage-grouse and the health of millions of acres of public lands are at risk if oil and gas drilling is allowed on these 9 million acres.

