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## ENDANGERED SPECIES:

### Sage grouse conservation will cost Wyo. \$1B -- study

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A soon-to-be published study estimates that the conservation regulations that helped avoid a greater sage grouse Endangered Species Act listing in September will cost the state of Wyoming about \$1 billion in total economic impact, including thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in lost revenue to state and local governments.

The study, commissioned by Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead's (R) office, estimates that the state will face a loss of 5,500 jobs, \$349.9 million less in labor earnings and \$56 million less in state and local government revenue. That comes with the implementation of a federal plan to protect sage grouse habitat in the state, which U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service adopted as an alternative to listing the bird.

The study sought to measure the value of sage grouse habitat to the state. These lands provide a direct annual impact of \$18.4 billion -- about 22 percent of Wyoming's total commodity production value of \$84 billion, according to 2013 figures, said Temple Stoellinger, a law professor at the University of Wyoming.

The analysis measured the economic impact of oil and gas drilling, oil and gas production, grazing and wind energy between 2013 and 2020. Mining, including Wyoming's large coal industry, was not included.

Stoellinger and University of Wyoming economics professor David "Tex" Taylor modeled the economic costs associated with the implementation of the Bureau of Land Management's "9-plan" grouse resource management plan amendment -- one of 15 major land-use plan revisions that BLM developed in an effort to conserve greater sage grouse. The 9-plan was included in final regulations that helped avoid a sage grouse listing.

The 9-plan covers nearly 16 million acres of BLM and Forest Service lands in the state, and closely mimics Mead's own strategy for conserving sage grouse habitat

***(E&ENews PM, May 28).***

The study also looked at the potential costs had the sage grouse been listed

THE STUDY ALSO LOOKED AT THE POTENTIAL COSTS IF THE SAGE GROUSE WERE LISTED, based on two alternatives from the 9-Plan's environmental impact statement. In the more restrictive scenario, known as the 9-Plan's Citizens' Alternative, or Alternative C, the effects include \$5.4 billion in total economic impact, 24,000 jobs lost, \$287 million in lost revenue to state and local governments, and \$1.5 billion lost in total labor earnings.

David Willms, an adviser to Mead, said at a Farm Foundation event in Washington, D.C., last week that the impacts of the 9-Plan are far less than the costs the state would have incurred if FWS had found that the sage grouse's low populations warranted a "threatened" or "endangered" status, a move that would have triggered restrictions on land use in the West.

The cost "pales in comparison" to the economic impact if the grouse had been listed, said Willms. David Bush, communications director for Mead, echoed those comments.

"There are costs associated with the plan, but a listing for the sage grouse would have been far more devastating," Bush wrote in an email.

Mead called the federal land-use plans a "good compromise" following Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's announcement in September that FWS would not list the sage grouse ([Greenwire](#), Sept. 23).

Wyoming is home to about 54 percent of the greater sage grouse in the United States, according to the Bureau of Land Management. Occupied sage grouse habitat represents 68 percent of the total surface area in the state, according to Stoellinger's analysis, with core or priority habitat representing 24 percent.

The state is also a large energy exporter, providing 39 percent of the country's coal.

Willms mentioned the study at the Farm Foundation event to highlight the need to reform the 42-year-old Endangered Species Act, criticizing the Obama administration for listing more than 300 species over the last seven years, while delisting only 12.

"Twelve is hardly a number to brag about," said Willms.

The current sage grouse conservation plan for Wyoming will weigh on the oil industry, its officials said. With production at 75.6 million barrels last year,

Wyoming is the largest oil producer of the states with sage grouse habitat, said Bruce Hinchey, president of the Petroleum Association of Wyoming.

"I just know it's going to be expensive for anyone to do extensive drilling programs," he said.