

FEATURE – FEDS SIGN AGREEMENT TO PROTECT SAGE GROUSE

INTRO: The U-S Department of Agriculture and the U-S Fish and Wildlife Service have signed an agreement to protect Sage Grouse habitat. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more. (1:39)

THE SAGE GROUSE'S NATURAL HABITAT HAS DECLINED BY OVER FORTY PERCENT IN RECENT YEARS. NOW THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE AND THE U-S FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WILL WORK WITH RANCHERS AND OTHER LANDOWNERS TO PROTECT SAGE GROUSE HABITAT.

Dave White, USDA NRCS Chief: What's good for the sage grouse is also what's good for the rancher and the rancher's bottom line. For example prescribed grazing, which a rancher works out the frequency, the duration, the amount of grazing is absolutely vital for good sage grouse habitat.

N-R-C-S AND FISH AND WILDLIFE WILL WORK WITH LANDOWNERS IN ELEVEN WESTERN STATES TO PROTECT SAGE GROUSE HABITAT WITH MINIMAL AFFECT ON FARMING AND RANCHING WORK.

Rowan Gould, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: We can only get connectivity of the habitat by having the ranches, the farming community working with us to conserve this species, provide that connectivity, provide the habitat they need and they are going to come back.

ONE GOAL OF THE AGREEMENT IS TO REDUCE BARRIERS FOR GROUSE MOVEMENT AND TO INCREASE HABITAT CONNECTIVITY.

White: These are voluntary programs. A rancher can choose to participate or not participate. They control it. If they don't want to do it that's fine. If a rancher wants to work with us and address the sage grouse issues they can continue to be provided with some certainty that they continue to operate regardless of whether the grouse is listed or not.

U-S-D-A IS PROVIDING UP TO SIXTEEN MILLION DOLLARS IN FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO LANDOWNERS TO IMPROVE SAGE GROUSE HABITAT. I'M BOB ELLISON FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.