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Federal agencies cut deal to help Western landowners protect sage grouse

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Steve Nehl/The Oregonian

A male sage grouse puts on a display during near Burns during mating season in 2004..

Farmers and ranchers in Oregon, Washington and nine other western states can help protect both their operations and sage grouse thanks to an agreement between two federal agencies.

The agreement announced today by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar involves the USDA's **Natural Resources Conservation Service** and Interior's **Fish and Wildlife Service.**

The agencies will work together to help landowners protect the sage grouse and its habitat. USDA will provide up to $16 million this fiscal year to improve habitat and reduce threats to the birds, including threats from disease and invasive species..

In return, the landowners will be in better position to avoid potentially stifling regulations if the bird is judged endangered

Last month, the Obama administration said the **Greater sage grouse** deserves to be added to the federal list of threatened and endangered species — but won't be because of a backlog of imperiled species. .

Sage grouse are found in Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, California, Colorado, Utah, South Dakota, North Dakota and Canada.

Their once vast numbers have been reduce severely, mainly from loss of habitat.

-- The Associated Press

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