



Utah Sage-Grouse Update

By: [Justin Rammell](#)

At the July hearing of the Utah Board of Oil, Gas and Mining, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources announced that by December they would submit plans to the Board concerning sage-grouse habitat. Lowell Braxton, the Utah Representative for the Independent Petroleum Association of the Mountain States, anticipates that DWR will propose additional sage-grouse regulations and/or a memorandum of understanding to limit development in sage-grouse habitat. Mr. Braxton worries that Utah is heading in the same direction as Colorado, by giving the wildlife officials a veto over the Board's authority to regulate energy development.

The catalyst for sage-grouse discussions in Utah began when the United States Fish and Wildlife Agency announced that sage-grouse were being considered for possible listing under the Endangered Species Act. See 73 Federal Register 10218. In anticipation of possible listing, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources released the Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Management Plan 2009 that included specific goals for habitat and population improvements on an eco-system scale. Specific guidelines for development activity in sage-grouse habitat areas are still being drafted.

Currently, sage-grouse are protected on federal lands by Resource Management Plans, issued by the Bureau of Land Management. For example, the Vernal Resource Management Plan, released in October 2008, limits development in sage-grouse areas with lease stipulations. The stipulations prohibit surface-disturbing activities within one-quarter mile of active sage-grouse leks year round, prohibit permanent structures within two miles of active sage-grouse leks when possible, and require implementation of best available technology to reduce noise within one-half mile of active leks.