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NEWS RELEASE

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**Secretary Zinke Signs Order to Improve Sage-Grouse Conservation,
Strengthen Communication and Collaboration Between States and Feds**

WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke yesterday signed a secretarial order to improve sage-grouse conservation and strengthen communication and collaboration between state and federal governments. Together, the Federal government and states will work to conserve and protect Sage-Grouse and its habitat while also ensuring conservation efforts do not impede local economic opportunities.

In signing Secretarial Order 3353, Secretary Zinke established an internal review team that will evaluate both Federal Sage-Grouse plans and state plans and programs to ensure they are complementary. As the team explores possible plan modifications, it will also consider local economic growth and job creation.

“Year after year, local communities watched as the federal government put restrictions on public lands in the name of sage-grouse conservation,” **said Secretary Zinke.** “While the federal government has a responsibility under the endangered species act to take action, destroying local communities and levying onerous regulation on public lands that they rely on is no way to be a good neighbor. State agencies are at the forefront of efforts to maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations, and we need to make sure they are being heard on this issue. As we move forward with implementation of our strategy for sage-grouse conservation, we want to make sure that we do so first and foremost in consultation with state and local governments, and in a manner that allows both wildlife and local economies to thrive.”

In September 2015, the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture finalized the Greater Sage-grouse plans, which included amendments and revisions to 98 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service land use plans in 11 Western states. The plans were cited by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as a key reason for its decision that the Greater Sage-grouse did not merit protection under the Endangered Species Act. Protection under the act could potentially stifle economic development across large areas of the American West where more than half of Sage-Grouse habitat is on public lands managed by the BLM and the Forest Service.

The Secretary has asked this interagency team of experts from the BLM, FWS, and U.S. Geological Survey to focus on addressing the principal threats to rangeland health and Sage-Grouse habitat—invasive grasses and wildland fire. The team will also consider creative approaches and ideas, including a captive breeding program, setting population targets by state, and opportunities to improve state involvement.

The team will examine the plans in light of policies set forth in Secretarial Order 3349, American Energy Independence. To this end, the team will be asked to identify plan provisions that may need to be adjusted or rescinded based on the potential for energy and other development on public lands.

This Secretarial Order follows through on statements Secretary Zinke made during his confirmation hearing, when he stated that he understands each state has different needs and issues and committed to working with them and local communities. He concluded that together the Federal government, states and western communities will get this job done.

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