

Sage grouse drops near drilling sites

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A study found the population of sage grouse declined sharply in breeding habitat near oil and gas exploration fields in western Wyoming.

The study found drilling activity cut male sage grouse populations at nearby mating grounds by an average of 51 percent, compared to 3 percent drops at undisturbed sites, the Rocky Mountain News reported Friday.

"This study is going to change the debate on sage grouse and oil and gas development," said Erik Molvar of the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance. "The (federal) Bureau of Land Management won't be able to tell the public that (its) standard oil and gas ... mitigation measures will protect the sage grouse anymore."

The study, conducted by a University of Wyoming graduate student at the request of the Bureau of Land Management and EnCana Oil & Gas USA, found that drilling activities up to three miles from sage grouse breeding sites led to declines in breeding males.

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