



CREATION JUSTICE MINISTRIES

Justice for God's planet and God's people.

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Creation Justice Ministries Statement on Protection of the Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystem

Today, Secretary of the Interior Jewell and Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced major decisions about the future of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in ten states. The decisions attempt to strike a responsible balance between economic development and conservation.

On public lands in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming, more than half of the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem has already been lost. We have seen a 95 percent population reduction of sage grouse, a prairie chicken with a flair for dramatic displays of puffs and plumes. The sage grouse is an indicator species that reveals the health of the wider sagebrush-steppe ecosystem in which it resides. The unprecedented effort to protect the greater sage grouse will not only protect this iconic species of the west, but also benefit more than 350 other species that call the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem home.

Creation Justice Ministries Executive Director Shantha Ready Alonso said, "God's unique creation in the sagebrush sea is precious. These protections will benefit people with land-based livelihoods and all who find spiritual meaning by immersing themselves in the wilderness of the sagebrush sea. While we are called to do as much as we can to heal and protect God's creation, the decisions today are a good faith effort that we can build on."

With the pope's visit this week, we are reminded that caring for God's creation must be a priority for all of us. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis said "Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes." (#62) He also reminds us that "living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (#217)

The role of the Endangered Species Act in bringing diverse stakeholders to the table to work together to protect sage grouse and their habitat shows that when we work together we can take responsible actions to care for our nation's wildlife and truly honor God's creation. The faith communities represented by Creation Justice Ministries are committed to continued watchful care and stewardship of all God's lands and creatures for generations to come.

*Creation Justice Ministries equips, mobilizes, and represents the creation care policies of 38 Christian member communions.
Statement released on September 22, 2015. Find more at www.creationjustice.org*