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## News Release

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### **Interior Department, Barrick Gold of North America & The Nature Conservancy Announce Partnership to Protect Sagebrush Habitat** *Mitigation bank will enhance Nevada ranchlands for benefit of greater sage-grouse, provide certainty to company*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today the U.S. Department of the Interior, in partnership with Barrick Gold of North America and The Nature Conservancy, announced an agreement to provide credit for greater sage-grouse habitat improvements in Nevada while continuing to support gold mining in the state.

The [agreement](#) among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and Barrick establishes a conservation bank that allows the mining company to accumulate credits for successful mitigation projects that protect and enhance greater sage-grouse habitat on the company's private Nevada ranch lands. As a result, Barrick gains certainty that the credits can be used to offset impacts to habitat from the company's planned future mine expansion on public lands.

The BLM, FWS and Barrick have all agreed to use The Nature Conservancy's science-based Sage-grouse Conservation Forecasting Tool to quantify the benefits of habitat conservation projects on the company's ranch lands and adjacent public lands as well as the impacts of Barrick's future proposals for mining activities in the area. This unprecedented use of a conservation bank agreement adds to a suite of tools that can provide greater certainty to public land users by compensating for any adverse impacts their actions may have on public resources while permitting important economic activities. On a broader scale, the State of Nevada's conservation credit exchange system, developed in concert with Environmental Incentives LLC, could facilitate other similar agreements to improve habitat and provide certainty to industry.

“This is the kind of creative, voluntary partnership that we need to help conserve the greater sage-grouse while sustaining important economic activities on western rangelands,” said Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell. “This conservation banking agreement and Barrick's partnership with The Nature Conservancy illustrates the kind of public-private collaboration that

is essential to a successful effort to conserve rangeland habitat for people and over 350 species of wildlife.”

“When we first approached the Interior Department with this idea, we wanted to demonstrate that industry, regulators and conservation experts can work together to solve complex problems,” said Michael Brown, Executive Director of Barrick North America. “After many years of working with The Nature Conservancy, we are excited to see what they can do to help us improve habitat on our ranch lands and, hopefully, to provide a model for others interested in making similar improvements. We’re pulling many years of experience and cutting-edge conservation science together to protect the sage grouse, which, in turn, supports the broader ecosystem.”

The conservation bank concept commits Barrick and other land users to achieve ‘net conservation benefits’ for the greater sage-grouse by encouraging greater gains in functional sage grouse habitat through preservation and restoration than what is lost through development activities. Over time, the application of this concept should result in significant, landscape-scale improvements to habitat conditions throughout the region. Through implementation of this conservation bank, Barrick will obtain assurance that the voluntary compensatory mitigation measures taken by the company, when sufficient to provide a net conservation gain to the species, will be accounted for by BLM and the FWS as the agencies review the company’s future proposed mining operations.

The Nature Conservancy’s [Sagebrush Conservation Forecasting Tool](#) uses satellite imagery to create maps of current habitat conditions. Scientists then employ predictive computer models that simulate the natural patterns of vegetation change over time (e.g., young to mature plants), to identify which restoration actions will be most helpful to sage-grouse.

“By engaging with Barrick and the Department of the Interior, we can use our scientific and conservation planning expertise to help inform decisions that protect, manage and restore vital wildlife habitat on potentially hundreds of thousands of acres of land,” says Michael Cameron, Associate Director of the Nevada Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. “Working together we can have a meaningful impact that supports both conservation and the economy of Nevada.”

In addition to its gold mining operations, Barrick owns several Nevada ranches. The company has completed a variety of habitat improvement projects on these ranches over the past 25 years, supporting mule deer, native fish and other species. The Nature Conservancy’s forecasting tool will be applied to 582,000 acres of ranch lands under Barrick management in Nevada. The agreement sets the stage for more investment in conservation of greater sage-grouse habitat, but it does not change or exempt Barrick from any existing laws and regulations governing its mining activities and its responsibility for environmental protection.

Other public land users are also stepping up to improve conservation practices. Ranchers in [Oregon](#) and [Wyoming](#), for example, have committed to implement measures that will protect greater sage-grouse habitat across millions of acres of rangelands in return for assurances that, should the bird be listed as endangered or threatened, their operations will not be affected.

Secretary Jewell added, “Through landscape level mitigation efforts, conservation banks, credit exchanges, conservation easements, and conservation assistance programs, we are advancing partnership efforts that are redefining how we achieve our conservation goals across the American West.”

Through this sage-grouse effort and others, the Department is implementing the [Secretary’s vision](#) for more meaningful, landscape-level investments to compensate for development impacts.

Greater sage-grouse once occupied more than 290 million acres of sagebrush in the West, but the bird, known for its flamboyant mating ritual at sites called leks, has lost more than half of its habitat due to growing threats from conversion to agriculture, rangeland fire, invasive species and development.

The deteriorating health of western sagebrush landscapes has sparked unprecedented and proactive collaboration across 11 states. These collaborations are conserving uniquely American habitat that supports wildlife, outdoor recreation, ranching and other traditional land uses.

More information on the greater sage-grouse and the ongoing, collaborative work to conserve the sagebrush landscape is available at: <http://www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse/>

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