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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

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Governor Mead, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sweetwater River Conservancy Launch Nation's First Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Bank

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – Governor Matt Mead, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Sweetwater River Conservancy announced the launch of the nation's first conservation bank for greater sage-grouse today. The bank will consist of an expanse of land in central Wyoming that contains key sage-grouse habitat and robust sage-grouse population. The bank provides conservation credits allowing energy development and other activities to proceed on lands elsewhere in the state.

The conservation bank is located on private Wyoming ranchland, including a 55,000-acre working cattle ranch - the Pathfinder Ranch. As the demand for credits grows, the bank could expand to 700,000 acres using lands owned, or managed by the Sweetwater River Conservancy.

“We continue to lead the nation, demonstrating that energy, the environment and the economy working together can complement each other. Private landowners, industry and conservationists along with state and federal agencies have worked together on this innovative conservation plan. It conserves habitat while facilitating oil and gas, mining and other economic drivers in Wyoming,” Governor Mead said. “I thank the Sweetwater River Conservancy and all the groups that took part.”

In 2010, the Service determined that the greater sage-grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but was precluded by higher priorities. Since then, a remarkable, broad-based coalition of different disciplines has come together across the bird’s 165 million-acre, 11-state range to address threats and prevent the need for a listing. Market-based mitigation tools, for example, conservation banks - and the financial incentives they provide - are valuable for conserving the habitat required for abundant, well-distributed sage-grouse populations.

Most of the Sweetwater River Conservancy Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Bank is classified as a sage-grouse core area by the State of Wyoming.

“For this effort to work, the BLM, Forest Service and other land managers must be a full partner allowing the credits to be used and establishing clear guidelines for projects to proceed. Using credits as an offset paves the way for effective management of sage-grouse and other species,” Governor Mead said.

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