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**Federal lawsuit highlights failure to protect endangered bird habitat
Valentine's message to Baird and Stelmach: "Sage grouse have nowhere to dance!"**

CALGARY – Six conservation groups have launched a major lawsuit against the federal Minister of Environment, John Baird, for refusing to identify critical greater sage-grouse habitat. The once widespread grouse has been listed as “endangered” since 1998 and now survives in a remote area in the southeastern corner of Alberta and southwestern corner of Saskatchewan.

The Federal Court lawsuit is being brought by Ecojustice Canada (formerly Sierra Legal Defence Fund) on behalf of the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Grasslands Naturalists, Nature Saskatchewan and the Wilderness Committee. It argues that failure to identify critical habitat in the recovery strategy for the grouse amounts to a refusal to enforce Canada's *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*. The *Act* requires the Minister to identify, to the fullest extent possible, habitat critical to a species' survival.

The greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is the largest North American grouse. It depends on silver sagebrush (*Artemisia cana*) for food and cover. The grouse are well known for their spectacular spring-time courtship displays on dancing grounds, or leks. Their habitat consists primarily of silver sagebrush flats that exist only in extensive areas of Dry Mixed grass. While the federal government has not identified the grouse's critical habitat, Premier Ed Stelmach's Alberta government has refused to limit oil and gas installations, which scientists have shown undermine breeding and survival of sage-grouse.

“Protecting habitat is the most important thing we can do to help the recovery of species at risk – and for the sage-grouse this needs to be done now,” said Mark Boyce, Professor of Biology at the University of Alberta and author of a study pinpointing the habitat of the grouse.

“Unfortunately, as with other endangered species, Environment Canada has chosen not to identify critical habitat in the sage-grouse strategy, despite having ample scientific information to do so.”

“Our groups are sending a Valentine's message to Minister John Baird and Premier Ed Stelmach,” said Cliff Wallis, Vice-President of the Alberta Wilderness Association. “Their refusal to protect critical habitat could mean that sage-grouse will soon have nowhere to perform their ritual mating dance – and little chance of survival.”





For more information and photos of grouse, please see Media Backgrounder at www.ecojustice.ca or contact:

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