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ABOVE: Thacker Pass, the site of largest and highest-grade lithium deposits in the area of the McDermitt Caldera. INSET: Sage grouse habitat on the Oregon-Nevada border could be threatened by Trump administration decisions meant to increase lithium mining. ABOVE: PROVIDED BY CHRIS HENRY, NEVADA BUREAU OF MINES AND GEOLOGY; INSET: U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

'This area is basically under siege'

Can sage grouse survive the new lithium rush?

Wyatt Myskow
Inside Climate News

MCDERMITT CALDERA — On a cold and overcast spring morning, Katie Fite stood in one of the country's last sage-grouse strongholds, contemplating the wooden stakes in the ground that she fears warn of its destruction.

Every spring, males of the chunky bird species with spiky tail feathers come to a dwindling number of locations to strut, pop their inflatable white neck pouches and make a "paloop, paloop" sound in an attempt to court a mate. As their name suggests, sage-grouse need sagebrush, the green-brown shrub that once dominated arid Western landscapes. But both the bird and its habitat are rapidly disappearing due to climate change, invasive species, wildfires and energy development.

Now a mining company wants to extract lithium here.

> **"This is an area in which the law [and the industry built around it] is so complex there is no appetite for meaningful reform."**
>
> **Jamie Pleune**
> Mining-permitting expert and associate professor of law at the University of Utah's Wallace Stegner Center

Millions of sage-grouse once filled the West, but federal data shows their numbers have plummeted 80 percent since 1965 as more than a million acres of the sagebrush landscape they depend on is lost every year. They've long teetered toward the endangered-species list.

"We want to save sage-grouse?" Fite, public lands director for WildLands Defense, asked as she walked through the mating area, known as a lek, on the public lands where the McDermitt Lithium project would dig. "This is not how we do it. This is a travesty."

The project's owner agreed to avoid drilling during the sage-grouse breeding season in an effort to avoid impacting a species that is easily put off mating if conditions aren't just right. But there is so little sagebrush habitat left in the country, Fite said, that "you can't even pretend to mitigate this."

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Killing sea lions won't improve salmon numbers

According to study, culling mammal would be a mistake

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

As the number of salmon continues to decline along the West Coast — and billions are spent to save them — there have been increasing calls to target the predators who feed on the iconic fish.

Seals, sea lions and seabirds consume millions of pounds of endangered salmon each year, which has led federal and state lawmakers to propose laws allowing more widespread culling of the species for salmon conservation.

That would be a mistake, however, according to a new study released Nov. 19 by scientists at NOAA Fisheries and Oregon State University.

In the research published in the journal "Science," the authors examined how widespread ocean culling of seals, sea lions and shorebirds is unlikely to increase salmon runs and may have the opposite effect. Removing one set of predators, they note, would likely give rise to other species that could negatively impact salmon.

Dylan Gomes, who led the research at NOAA Fisheries' Northwest Fisheries Science Center and Oregon State University, said he understood why sea lions and seals are blamed.

"We see marine mammals and seabirds eating a lot of salmon — having sea lions take salmon off the fishing

See SALMON, Page 6A



Sea lions feed on large amounts of salmon. But a new study says culling sea lions isn't a great answer. PROVIDED BY NOAA FISHERIES



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