

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 04, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC, 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing to address issues pertaining to a potential listing of the Greater Sage Grouse as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Should the Greater Sage Grouse be placed on the endangered species list, it will have a severe impact on the economies of all of our states, as well as the West as a region.

As you know, Western state wildlife agencies are on the front lines of sage grouse protection and have devoted considerable time and money to develop and implement sage grouse protection plans. State wildlife agencies, which are ultimately responsible for wildlife within their respective jurisdictions, have made great strides in the protection of the sage grouse and their habitat in order to keep populations sustainable. For over a decade, states, local governments, tribes, non-governmental entities, industry and individual citizens have been actively working and supporting conservation efforts related to the Greater Sage Grouse. Sadly, however, these state and local conservation efforts, as well as those of the Bureau of Land Management, were ignored with Judge Winmill's 2007 decision to remand the 2005 Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determination that a listing for the Greater Sage Grouse was "not warranted."

Conservation efforts in the states are robust and are taking place in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming, and Utah. Many of the local working groups in these states include members of FWS staff. These staff members help guide the conservation actions, efforts, and programs in place at the state and local level. Citizens across the West have donated their time, efforts, land, and sometimes dollars to help protect the Greater Sage Grouse. We are sure you can appreciate the consternation that has occurred across the region as participants in such groups are beginning to understand that their volunteer efforts do not meet conservation guidelines under FWS's "policy for the evaluation for conservation efforts" (PECE) – even though in many cases these same FWS staff have helped craft those actions.

Given the efforts currently underway, we are concerned that the FWS may be preparing a final listing decision without sufficient regard for the species' actual conservation status. And further, that a potential listing would have a negative impact on on-the-ground conservation efforts. Our concern is based on a number of FWS's actions that have been taken since the remand. Of particular note is that the FWS is no longer relying on the work of the Western Association of Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) for the Conservation Status review. Instead, the existing settlement agreement governing the Greater Sage Grouse decision directs involvement from the

Cooper Ornithological Society, despite the fact that all the data on Greater Sage Grouse is collected by the states.

A Greater Sage Grouse listing would not only have a devastating impact on industries currently operating in our states, it could potentially destroy opportunities for the renewable energy development the Administration has ardently supported. Additionally, the ranching, mining, oil and gas development, and farming heritage of our respective states would be at risk as the ESA as currently administered provides disincentive for multiple-use.

We are supportive of the goal to protect species and their habitat, but question whether a Federal ESA listing would achieve this goal. In this difficult economy, our primary concerns are the potential extinction of jobs and job creation, renewable energy projects, and a negative impact on energy development and ranching on public lands. Given the massive scope of Greater Sage Grouse habitat throughout the West, it is vital that any decision made regarding this species be completed in a manner consistent with the FWS policies and procedures and based on the best available data.

We ask that you exercise caution and carefully consider the data and significant efforts already underway in our states to protect Greater Sage Grouse and their habitat as you reach a listing decision.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop (UT-01), Chairman
Congressional Western Caucus

Members of the Congressional Western Caucus 111th Congress:

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