

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2021

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write to you today in response to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) recent announcement to initiate a review of land management plans for the greater sage-grouse. While we believe this comprehensive review is premature, it is our expectation that you collaborate, coordinate, and listen to all state and local stakeholders as you proceed. We urge the Administration to recognize the important, successful state and locally-led sage-grouse conservation efforts and to resist activist pressure to thwart progress with unilateral decisions that will harm western communities and their work on behalf of the species. Similarly, we are greatly dismayed to see your budget did not support long-standing bipartisan efforts surrounding state and local management of the greater sage-grouse.

For years, state and local governments, non-profit conservation organizations, and local communities have consistently proven themselves as the best stewards of their unique landscapes and have implemented successful sage-grouse management and conservation plans to avoid potential adverse impacts on multiple uses on public lands, including energy and mineral development, grazing, hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. As you know, these sectors are critical to rural communities and economies.

Based on the best scientific data available, it will take many years to see the positive, incremental results of these collaborative conservation efforts for the greater sage-grouse. It is critical that agencies and partners rely on the best science, developed through data collection, lek counts, and assessing effectiveness of these plans and best practices. Using more robust, longitudinal data to assess effectiveness of plan implementation, coupled with state and private efforts, will better inform the Department. We urge the Department of Interior and associated partners to promote voluntary conservation efforts which have been highly successful and have cost millions of dollars in private and public capital investment to implement. States, including California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Oregon, and Wyoming have implemented conservation plans that establish responsible management constraints, limit hunting, control non-native predators, reduce invasive juniper trees, and implement habitat restoration after energy development. Additionally, millions of federal taxpayers' dollars have been spent on sage-grouse conservation. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture alone has appropriated over \$200 million. These efforts must be taken into account before any major decisions are made in regard to greater sage-grouse recovery.

Equally important to allowing state strategies to succeed is the recognition that wildfires are the biggest threat to greater sage-grouse populations. Better federal land management, including efforts to expedite the removal of cheatgrass – which is one of largest contributors to wildfire escalation – should be acknowledged during the review process. In fact, between 2000 and 2018, more than 15 million acres of

sagebrush steppe were burned by wildfire. Proactively addressing and treating for the overall health of public lands – as it relates to wildfire potential – will do far more for species protection and habitat restoration than spending millions on plan reviews and imposing further federal restrictions on conservation partners. The Administration must recognize the role wildfires play in greater sage-grouse management, and we request that any efforts to restrict active land management and other wildfire prevention practices be denied.

Furthermore, drought continues to play a role in sage-grouse recovery. We cannot penalize western land users for a natural endemic that results in the loss of greater sage-grouse habitat. We must find commonsense solutions to the realities of catastrophic drought that plague much of the West. To ensure sage-grouse habitat is maintained, drought mitigation must be a part of the broader discussion of species recovery. Water storage, wildfire prevention, water user flexibility, and increased coordination at all government levels are imperative.

Additionally, as the administration has indicated mineral withdrawals could accompany sage-grouse designations, the Department’s collaborative efforts must include states, developers, and other interested parties regarding the prospect of hard-rock mineral development in and around the affected areas. Domestic critical minerals are a public good that must be considered during this process, especially in light of E.O. 14017 on securing America’s supply chains and the rising demand for renewable technologies and battery storage.

The greater sage-grouse land management plans targeted specific actions to reduce threats to the greater sage-grouse. This enabled the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conclude that an Endangered Species Act listing for the greater sage-grouse was not warranted due to the cumulative, coordinated conservation efforts of federal, state, and private landowners, as well as the millions of acres of private, voluntary conservation efforts.

As you determine the scope of your review, we ask that the 2019 sage-grouse amendments that specifically sought to enhance cooperation and coordination – particularly to align with state plans and management strategies and improved adaptive management – be included. BLM must continue to collaborate and coordinate with state and local governments, tribes, and impacted communities to ensure use of the best available science and preserve flexible, aligned plans that accommodate local situations. In addition, as the West faces another fire season, we also compel the Department, working through the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, to proactively address fire threat in sagebrush steppe ecosystems. Singularly, proactive fuels treatment and fire response in habitat may be the largest contribution the Department can make to greater sage-grouse habitat and species conservation.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue for the West.

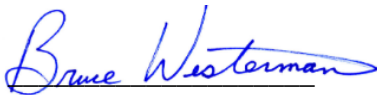
Sincerely,



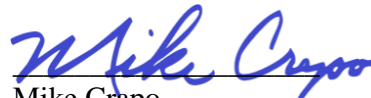
Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



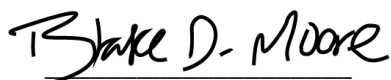
Cynthia Lummis
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United States Senator



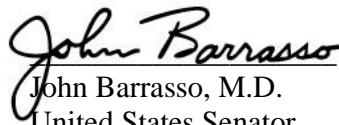
Blake Moore
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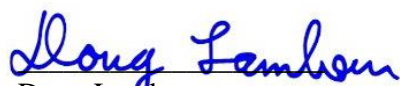
John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator



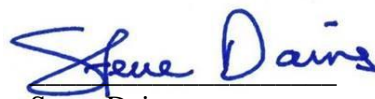
Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



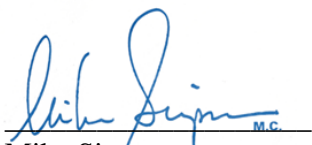
Ben Sasse
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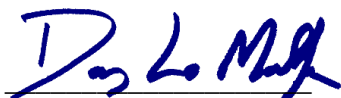
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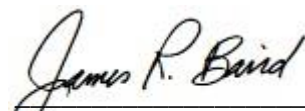
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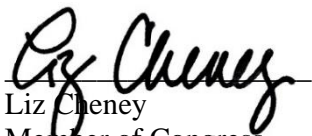
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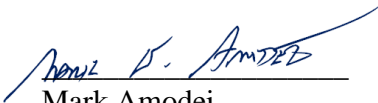
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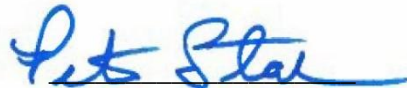
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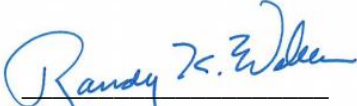
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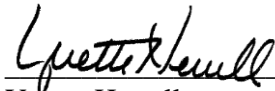
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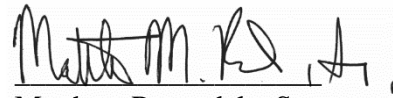
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Member of Congress



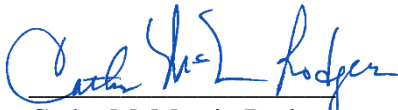
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Cc: Acting Director Nada Culver, Acting Director Martha Williams