

August 1, 2018

Dear [BLM state lead],

Representing counties and municipalities from across Idaho, we are writing today to express strong opposition to any efforts to weaken the conservation protections in the Bureau of Land Management's Greater sage-grouse management plans.

Local governments like ours joined the state of Idaho and many stakeholders in working for nearly a decade on ensuring that management plans for the Greater sage-grouse are based on sound science. The final plans achieved that goal. As a result of these plans, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the sage-grouse populations were sufficiently protected and that a listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was not warranted.

These management strategies are more than smart conservation – they also support our local economies. A healthy sagebrush ecosystem is an important economic driver for Western economies. There are hundreds of other species that rely on intact sagebrush habitat including the golden eagle, elk, pronghorn and mule deer. Research has shown that across the American West, the sagebrush ecosystem powers the outdoor recreation industry to the tune of more than \$1 billion.

We are concerned that the draft plan for Idaho ignores the deal that federal officials made with western states in 2015, when the plans were originally finalized, and the sage-grouse was found to be on the road to recovery. The plan contains new provisions that serve as loopholes and exceptions to habitat protections. It also removes key elements that biologists agree are necessary to avoid the need for listing the species as threatened or endangered under the ESA. We need certainty that crucial habitat will be protected to ensure the species thrives into the future.

In Idaho the amended plans should:

- Remove Southwestern Montana from the DEIS entirely. Montana requested no changes to its plan, and the Department of Interior should honor that.
- Reinstate protections for general habitat and “no surface occupancy” stipulations for oil and gas development in former Sagebrush Focal Areas in order to protect the most important habitat.
- Implement a strong standard to avoid damage to habitat and to restore habitat where impacts are unavoidable.
- Improve plan monitoring and oversight, including providing training to field staff and the necessary incentives to ensure proper implementation.

Please keep the commitments made in the original sage-grouse management plans intact, to protect sage-grouse and the habitat that is vital to hundreds of species across the West, as well as to our local economies and way of life.

Sincerely,