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July 7, 2008

Public Comments Processing
Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2008-0022
Division of Policy and Directives Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222
Arlington, VA 22203

On behalf of our Western colleagues, we submit the following for inclusion in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (FWS) review of the Greater Sage Grouse for possible listing under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act. In January 2005, Western Governors applauded the FWS decision that the Greater Sage Grouse did not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. This decision was remanded back to the FWS in December 2007 by the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho for further review.

Governors of the states affected by the decision and our respective state departments of fish and wildlife are compiling data and success stories on Greater Sage Grouse restoration and conservation efforts. This information will be submitted to the FWS by the June 27, 2008 deadline. It is our understanding that information submitted in 2004 will also be used in your review. We are hereby submitting additional information to support the ongoing activities in the eleven affected states.

We recognize that Greater Sage Grouse are an important natural component of the sagebrush ecosystem, serving as an indicator of the overall health of the sagebrush ecosystem in western North America. Therefore, we have devoted considerable effort collecting information, conducting analyses of the Greater Sage Grouse and preparing range-wide and individual state conservation plans.

We are witnessing an unprecedented conservation effort for listed species and species at risk in the West. With over 500 species already listed as threatened and endangered, the West clearly has much to gain from cooperative conservation. We are leading the way by charting a new course of grassroots-driven species protection with an emphasis on listed species recovery efforts and restoration efforts for species in decline, rather than process. We strongly believe these efforts have made, and will continue to make, a positive difference.

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For over a decade, Western Governors have been actively supporting conservation efforts related to Greater Sage Grouse. Eleven states are working cooperatively with numerous partners to protect the Greater Sage Grouse. Given the scope of this area, which stretches from South Dakota to California and from Utah to Montana, the conservation effort is nothing short of remarkable. We continue to support the work of over 60 local working groups working on conservation of the sagebrush ecosystem and the Greater Sage Grouse. Western Governors believe the initiatives of these local working groups are providing the fundamental building blocks of Greater Sage Grouse conservation. Their local information, special circumstances and communication networks are vital to the implementation of projects that will protect habitat and address other needs of the Greater Sage Grouse.

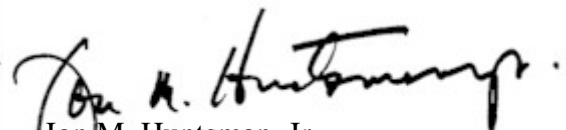
The Governors also continue to support implementation of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) Greater Sage Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy released in December 2006. We ask you to include their document in the official record. This WAFWA document provides a path forward and each state is utilizing it in the development of approaches that address issues, needs, opportunities and partnerships related to the conservation of Greater Sage Grouse and sagebrush habitats at the range-wide scale.

In January 2007, Western Governors unanimously approved a policy resolution seeking greater identification of sensitive wildlife migration corridors and crucial wildlife habitat and attention to avoiding, minimizing or mitigating the effects of energy urban and transportation infrastructure development. In response, WGA brought together a broad-based group of representatives to conduct this study, and make recommendations. Findings from this collaborative process will be delivered to the Western Governors in June 2008. One area of focus for the states is the crucial habitat for the Greater Sage Grouse.

We have attached our policy resolutions on Greater Sage Grouse Conservation (2005) and wildlife corridors (2007) and ask that you to include these documents in the official record. Thank you for allowing us to comment on this very important issue.

Sincerely,


Dave Freudenthal
Governor, State of Wyoming
Chairman


Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.
Governor, State of Utah
Vice Chairman

Attachments