The Honorable Matt Mead  
Co-Chair, State-Federal Sage-Grouse Task Force  
Western Governors’ Association  
1600 Broadway, Suite 1700  
Denver, Colorado 80202

Dear Governor Mead:

Thank you for your letter dated January 16, 2015, cosigned by Governor Hickenlooper, regarding the Department of the Interior’s (Department) timeline and funding plans for greater sage-grouse protection and sagebrush steppe restoration.

The rider attached to H.R. 83 concerning several grouse species has no effect on our efforts to develop and implement state and Federal plans and to build partnerships to incentivize conservation. Further, it does not affect the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (Service) court-ordered obligation to make a determination by September 30, 2015, as to whether the greater sage-grouse does or does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act.

In line with that obligation, the Service is on schedule to make a determination by that date, based on revised Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service land management plans, an enhanced rangeland fire strategy as called for in my recent Secretarial Order, and states’ plans to conserve the greater sage-grouse. As you outline in your letter, together we can create a model for conservation and make important strides to protect the iconic sagebrush-steppe landscape of the American West.

We are steadfastly moving ahead with our efforts to conserve sagebrush habitat and advance the unprecedented collaboration happening across 11 states, leading up to the court-ordered determination. The Department intends to spend the $15 million appropriated for greater sage-grouse conservation to complete the BLM land management plans and implement actions critical to sagebrush conservation and restoration such as juniper removal, fire pre-suppression and restoration efforts, native seed collection and banking, among others. The Department’s bureaus will continue to work with the states to complete our land management plans, solicit their advice in developing our rangeland fire strategy, and prioritize actions on the ground to protect and restore sagebrush landscapes and important habitat.

I am proud of this joint effort with you and the other Governors to protect a landscape that sustains hundreds of species of wildlife, robust economic activity, and the Western way of life. There is no doubt that this is a difficult and complex issue, but I am more determined than ever to work with the states, ranchers, energy developers, the sportsmen’s community, conservationists,
and other stakeholders who are putting effective conservation measures in place with the shared goal of reaching a 'not warranted' determination by the end of the fiscal year.

Thank you for your continued leadership and partnership in addressing this important issue.

A similar letter was sent to Governor Hickenlooper.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Sally Jewell