January 16, 2015

Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

Western states have expended considerable resources to develop management plans to conserve greater sage-grouse and its habitat. These plans preserve the customs and culture of the West, the states and local communities. We have invested countless hours and millions of dollars in habitat conservation, mapping and monitoring. The result is a model for conservation which accommodates land ownership patterns of individual states, ameliorates the identified threats to greater sage-grouse, and honors the laws of each state.

In a 2011 settlement, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) committed to making a final listing decision for the greater sage-grouse – ‘warranted’ or ‘not warranted’ – by the end of federal Fiscal Year 2015. In December 2014, Congress passed and the President signed the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 (H.R. 83). H.R. 83 contains language prohibiting the FWS from writing or issuing a rule to list the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. We understand that the Department of the Interior interprets this language to prohibit only the final publication of a rule proposing a listing, and that all other work leading up to the issuance of a “determination” about the listing may continue in FY 2015.

We therefore have the following questions:

1. What is the schedule for completion of the determination concerning the listing of the greater sage-grouse?

2. What funding was provided to support state and federal efforts focused on greater sage-grouse conservation? In particular, how will the BLM use the $15 million appropriated to the agency? Further, will the BLM commit to collaborating with states to determine the best use of this funding?

We consider the long-term survival of the greater sage-grouse a key responsibility. We are committed to working with the federal government and
other stakeholders to provide the FWS the necessary certainty to reach a ‘not warranted’ determination. State management efforts will require the eventual completion of federal land and resource management plan amendments because federal planning is an important component of the various overall state plans. We are, however, concerned with the current court mandated listing timeline, its impact on the federal plan revision process and our collaborative efforts to integrate state management plans into that process. Only when state and federal agencies work collaboratively toward adoption and implementation of complementary management plan provisions will we be able to finalize a framework that works – for greater sage-grouse habitats and populations across private, federal and state lands.

We are in the midst of the largest effort – to conserve a species and its habitat – ever undertaken. We are committed to a constructive process that results in a reasonable course of action for BLM, U.S. Forest Service, state and private lands and benefits the greater sage-grouse for the coming decades.

Sincerely,

John Hickenlooper
Governor, State of Colorado
Co-Chair, State-Federal Sage-Grouse Task Force

Matt Mead
Governor, State of Wyoming
Co-Chair, State-Federal Sage-Grouse Task Force