

Ravalli County Commissioners

From: MACO <MACO@mtcounties.org>
Sent: Monday, December 16, 2013 12:32 PM
To: MACO
Subject: USFWS comments on sage-grouse strategy
Attachments: 2013 12-10 LTR Bush_Hagener- MT Draft GSG Conservation Strategy Comments.pdf

Harold:

I am forwarding an E-mail from MT FWP with comments from Jodi Bush, of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service(USFWS), regarding the Draft Greater Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy. Please forward this to all County Commissioners. We are having a web conference December 18, 2013 and our final meeting January 14 and 15, 2014 in Helena to finalize our plan. Our draft plan is on MT Fish Wildlife and Parks website.

Commissioners, as you read Jodi's comments, there are several key points I would like you to keep in mind.

- 1) Jodi Bush, along with her staff and most of USFWS personnel in the Western States do not want sage grouse listed. They know and have acknowledged they do not have the staff or resources to manage this bird.
- 2) USFWS must look at two criteria when considering whether or not to list a species.
 - 1) They MUST have certainty the plan will be implemented.
 - 2) Then they MUST have certainty the plan will be effective.

As you read through the plan and compare Jodi's comments, ask yourself is there certainty the plan will be implemented and effective. Also remember if the bird is not listed, it will be challenged in court. Can USFWS defend its decision with our plan?

3) I believe we have one chance at keeping the sage grouse off the Endangered Species List. Once it goes on, it will never come off. However, if we have a solid plan with certainty, USFWS may say follow your plan and that will be adequate to conserve the bird and habitat.

4) One of the comments I have heard a lot is follow the Wyoming plan. Primarily change the No Surface Occupancy from a one mile buffer to a .6 mile buffer like Wyoming, increase noise levels during breeding season, and increase maximum allowable disturbance. In the Wyoming plan they took almost all of the sage grouse habitat less industrial areas and called it core areas. There is no general habitat areas. The other big difference between Montana and Wyoming is Montana current core area is approximately 54% privately owned verses approximately 30% privately owned in Wyoming. If Montana were to follow the Wyoming plan, we would have to call most of the general habitat core area less industrial areas. This would increase core area from approximately 9 million acres to approximately 24 million acres. I can not support this! How do we address the privately owned property and the certainty the plan will be implemented? Public land is easier to regulate that private. We do not want to infringe on private property rights. Comparing the two kind of like comparing apples and oranges. The general consensus of the council was to write a plan that fits Montana.

My goal has been and still is keep the sage grouse off the Endangered Species List without destroying Montana's economy. As you can see there is a very fine line. I think we have a fairly good plan, however we need to take Jodi's comments seriously. While I do not agree with all of her comments, I believe she has Montana and the sage grouse best interest in mind.

Please call me at 406-346-2251 or E-mail at rlee@rosebudcountymt.com with your thoughts and/or comments and I will take them to Helena in January. (Note: the predator issue has been beaten the death).

Harold, thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely
Robert E. Lee

From: Wightman, Catherine
Sent: Wednesday, December 11, 2013 2:49 PM
To: Baker, Tim ; Bill McChesney ; Brad Hamlett ; Carl Wambolt ; Curtix Monteau ; Gary Forrester ; Glenn Marx ; Hagener, Jeff ; Janet Ellis ; Jay Gore ; Pat Connell ; Paul Callahan ; Ray Shaw ; Robert Lee
Cc: McDonald, Ken ; Northrup, Rick
Subject: USFWS comments on sage-grouse strategy

Council members,

Please find attached a copy of the USFWS letter regarding the draft sage-grouse strategy. We have received approximately 400 letters and comments on the strategy. A disc with scanned copies of all comments will be mailed to you tomorrow. The files are too large to email. FWP will be working on a summary of comments. In the short-term, our plan is to identify main themes for the video-conference on Dec 18th.

Additional details on the December 18th video-conference will be forthcoming early next week.
Catherine

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