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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

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December 19, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

Thank you for conducting a review of the Department of the Interior's (DOI) federal sage grouse management strategy and supporting documents. As you continue to evaluate how best to engage in future habitat conservation, I urge you to work closely with Governor Mead and experts from the state of Wyoming who have proven their ability to successfully manage sage grouse.

I believe it is important to prioritize successful practices and avoid any listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It is equally important that future federal sage grouse management reflects Wyoming's successful work, complements state, local, and private measures, and does not cause undue harm for the economies and ecosystems across the West.

Sage grouse are a complex species and given the migratory characteristics of the birds, I believe DOI's future policies must provide for successful management scenarios across the 11-state range. Recognizing the need for consistency across the range while also addressing different habitat needs, economic structures, and diverse stakeholder groups among the states will require thorough review of the current management strategy.

In a November 29, 2017 letter, Wyoming Governor Mead wrote to you that no state across the range has more at stake than Wyoming. I strongly share this sentiment. Wyoming is home to a significant number of birds and more than 40 million acres of sagebrush habitat. For more than a decade, Wyoming has worked across ownership and management boundaries to develop a comprehensive sage grouse management plan that both protects the habitat and recognizes the complexity in management of the distinct species across millions of acres.

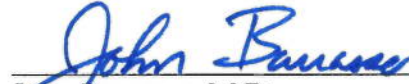
Wyoming has worked to address the true causes of harm to sage grouse and their habitat, as well as promote innovative tools to improve future populations. As evidenced in conservation of other species unique to Wyoming and our range, our state continues to explore novel and potentially important approaches like the Wyoming state mitigation framework, captive breeding, and creative application of emerging technologies. Sage grouse management in Wyoming and across the range will continue to require a great diversity of tools.

While the on-the-ground situation in each area may be different, the measure of success across the 11-state range will be dependent on the success of each individual state. You should listen to

the states and resolve issues that remain unresolved from the Governors' consistency reviews in 2015. It will be important to develop consistent benchmarks for success in sage grouse habitat across the DOI and Forest Service plans to avoid a listing under the ESA. In development of these metrics, I urge caution when exploring population targets, as states' authority in wildlife management should complement DOI's jurisdictional work for habitat on federal lands.

Future sage grouse management is, and will continue to be, an area in which Wyoming is on the leading edge. I look forward to working with you, the Forest Service, Wyoming, and other states to develop an even stronger partnership focused on successful sage grouse conservation.

Sincerely,



John Barrasso, M.D.
U.S. Senator

Cc:

Mr. Brian Steed, Acting Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Mr. Tony Tooke, Chief, U.S. Forest Service