

November 18, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-146A The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies Appropriations
125 Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Please Conserve Greater Sage-Grouse in the Final FY 2021 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters and as you enter year-end negotiations on appropriations bills, we write again to urge you to ensure that the rider prohibiting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) from considering listing the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is not included in the final FY 2021 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. This provision has been included in final Interior bills since 2014. It is imperative that this exemption not be included in the final FY 2021 bill.

The greater sage-grouse and the ecosystem on which it depends have been severely imperiled for many years and the situation only continues to worsen. Between 2015 and 2019, sage-grouse populations in Utah, Wyoming and Idaho have dropped 61%, 41%, and 42%, respectively. While some attribute this to natural population cycles, leading sage grouse experts disagree and are [expressing](#) serious concern about the bird's future. In addition to habitat loss from [oil and gas development](#), a record-setting

wildfire season has placed bird populations in Washington state in serious jeopardy. Wildlife managers reported last month that the Pearl Hill fire [burned](#) over half the active areas where sage-grouse males court females in the state's endangered population in Douglas County. The public lands and [Sagebrush Sea](#) on which the sage-grouse depends are also vital to local communities and economies for the [ecosystem services](#) – such as carbon storage, clean water, and pollinators for food supplies – and recreation and tourism benefit they provide. This ecosystem also provides habitat for more than 350 other species of conservation concern.

The FWS found that the greater sage-grouse warranted protection under the ESA in 2010, leading the Obama administration to undertake a massive federal land use plan overhaul to protect the species. Only after this stakeholder-driven, \$45 million planning effort did the FWS conclude in 2015 that the bird no longer warranted protections. While the potential for listing the sage-grouse provided the impetus for conservation efforts under the Obama administration, the rider prohibiting listing has removed any incentive for these efforts and makes it impossible for FWS scientists to properly evaluate and protect the species. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has rolled back many of the federal land use protections set in place after 2010.

Our nation and our planet face an extinction crisis of epic proportions. Last year's global [assessment](#) on the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services found that 1 in 8 species on Earth – about 1 million species – are facing extinction. In September 2020, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity released an updated [report](#) warning that humanity is at a crossroads and the extinction crisis is intensifying. Another study published last year in *Science* revealed that since 1970, bird populations in the U.S. and Canada have [declined](#) by 29 percent, or the equivalent of nearly 3 billion birds.

It is long past time for Congress to allow the FWS to do its job and to finally stop denying protections to this iconic keystone species. Again, we urgently request that this destructive rider be removed from the final FY 2021 appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Advocates for the West
American Bird Conservancy
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Welfare Institute
Animal Wellness Action
Association of Avian Veterinarians
Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico - Northwest Chapter
Battle Born Progress
Bighorn Audubon Society
Black Hills Clean Water Alliance
Blue Ridge Audubon Chapter
Bold Nebraska
Born Free USA
Californians for Western Wilderness
Center for Biological Diversity
Christian Council of Delmarva
Clean Water Action

Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Coastal Plains Institute
Conservation Council For Hawaii
Conservation Law Foundation
Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship
Cumberland-Harpeth Audubon Society
Defend Our Future
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Earthworks
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environment America
Environmental Action
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Inyo
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Golden Gate Audubon Society
Grand Canyon Trust
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
HECHO (Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting and the Outdoors)
Healthy Child Healthy World
Heartwood
High Country Conservation Advocates
Howling For Wolves
Humane Society Legislative Fund
Idaho Conservation League
Information Network for Responsible Mining
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute
Juniata Valley Audubon Society
Kids for Saving Earth
Klamath Forest Alliance
LEAD Agency, Inc.
League of Conservation Voters
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Lynn Canal Conservation
Maryland Ornithological Society
NY4WHALES
NYC Audubon
Natchaug Ornithological Society
National Audubon Society
National Wildlife Federation
Native Plant Conservation Campaign

Natural Resources Defense Council
NatureServe
Nevada Conservation League
New Mexico Sportsmen
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Partnership for the National Trail System
Pelican Island Audubon Society
Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology
Poder Latinx
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Quiet Use Coalition
Rio Grande Indivisible - New Mexico
Rocky Mountain Wild
Salem Audubon Society
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Save Our Allegheny Ridges
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save Wolves Now Network
Saving Birds Thru Habitat
Sequoia ForestKeeper®
Sheep Mountain Alliance
Sierra Club
Tennessee Ornithological Society
The Lands Council
The Urban Wildlands Group
The Wilderness Society
Turner Endangered Species Fund
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Union of Concerned Scientists
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Western Values Project
Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Outreach
Wild Zone Conservation League
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Watch
Wildlands Network
Wyoming Untrapped
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates

cc: The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Chuck Schumer, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives