APPENDIX H

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region

IN REPLY REFER TO:
FWS/R6

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Denver, Colorado 80225-0486

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Lakewood, Colorado 80228-1807

NOV 20 2012

Jeff Ver Steeg
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
1313 Sherman Street, Suite 618
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Mr. Ver Steeg:

On March 5, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published a status review for the Greater sage-grouse (75 FR 13910), with a determination that listing the species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq., Section 4(b)(3)(B)) was warranted but precluded. The Greater sage-grouse (sage-grouse) is now identified as a candidate for listing under the Act. Habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and the lack of regulatory mechanisms conserving habitat were the primary factors contributing to the species candidate status. However, recreational hunting of the sage-grouse continues to be an issue raised by several stakeholders, although it was not identified as a primary concern in the Service's listing determination. Some states have asked for a clarification of the Service's thinking on this issue, so we have prepared the following thoughts for your consideration.

In our status review, the Service examined the impacts of hunting and concluded that there was no evidence suggesting that recreational hunting (including falconry) has been a primary cause of range-wide declines of the Greater sage-grouse. Additionally, the Service did not identify State regulations regarding sage-grouse hunting as inadequate, based on the annual review of the sustainability of hunting sage-grouse and the ability of states to quickly make any appropriate adjustments, as part of their annual hunting season regulatory process conducted by each state.

Although regulated, sport harvest as a singular factor, does not threaten the sage-grouse throughout its range. There is strong data supporting that the sustainability of harvest levels depends, to a large extent, on the quality of sagebrush habitats and the health of the affected population. The Service appreciates the long standing attention of states to closely regulate harvest of sage grouse as part of their efforts to conserve the species.

In light of continuing habitat loss, fragmentation, and other factors with the potential to negatively affect sage-grouse (e.g. West Nile virus), the Service supports the States commitment to continue their longstanding practice of carefully managing hunting mortality, including adjusting seasons, adjusting allowable harvest levels, and imposing emergency closures if needed to protect specific local populations.

We appreciate your efforts to ensure the conservation of the sage-grouse. If you have further questions, regarding this letter, please contact Pat Deibert, Sage-Grouse Recovery Coordinator at Pat_Deibert@fws.gov, or by calling (307) 772-2374, ext. 226.

Sincerely,

Acting Regional Director