

ATTN: Northwest Colorado Greater Sage Grouse RMP Amendment

Jim Steitz
564 Esslinger Drive
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Bureau of Land Management
Northwest District Office
2815 H Road
Grand Junction, CO 81506

September 24, 2013

To Whom it May Concern,

I urge the BLM to **adopt all necessary conservation rules for the survival of the Sage Grouse as amendments to its Resource Management Plans**, and to integrate the morally and scientifically grounded Sage Grouse Recovery Alternative submitted by the conservation community. The BLM has delayed for years the necessary policies to protect the remaining Sage Grouse habitat, allowing its populations to continue their retreat before hydrocarbon extraction, groundwater mining, and cattle grazing. The Sage Grouse is out of time and out of space, and BLM must adopt conservation rules to prevent the functional extinction of this keystone species of western semi-arid ecosystems.

The conservation alternative would correctly require BLM to identify and protect their breeding, brooding and winter habitats. In these habitats, **BLM must not allow human disturbance such as oil and gas drilling, power lines, and excessive cattle grazing that reduces the vegetation cover below what these animals require**. The BLM has, for decades, found ways to evade and obfuscate its mandate to maintain viable and widespread populations of the Sage Grouse and other wildlife, rolling under a pseudo-legalistic rug each successive geographic and demographic vanquishing of the Sage Grouse. Over the long saga of this species, each year has brought further population losses, with precious little acknowledgement by the BLM of this cumulative loss over time.

Excessive grazing in particular has dramatically altered the vegetation community of semi-arid habitats through the Great Basin, for very little economic value in the forage utilized, representing a gross failure by the BLM to roughly balance the marginal values of competing uses. As a former resident of Utah and New Mexico, I was astounded by the willingness of the BLM to strip vast areas of desert, sagebrush, and semi-arid grassland of their very thin vegetation cover for an extremely meager biomass volume of livestock feed, supplementing the diet of an extremely small number of cattle for a correspondingly minute number of ranchers. If the BLM is to uphold its mandate to provide an equitable and reasonable balance of values to the American people, it must protect these precious ecosystems and the Sage Grouse that lives among them, not strip them for the piddling bit of livestock-palatable biomass that provides their physical scaffolding. **The Sage Grouse, from this time forward, must enjoy first right to the vegetation of these sparse habitats, not biologically foreign human livestock.**

If the BLM cannot or will not make the tough but necessary decisions to prioritize the survival of the Sage Grouse, then the Fish and Wildlife Service will be obligated to list this animal as Threatened or Endangered by the standing deadline of 2015. The burden of proof and efficacy now falls upon **BLM to fulfill its legal responsibilities to the Sage Grouse, or have those responsibilities stripped and delegated instead to the jurisdiction of the Endangered Species Act**, which its current demographic

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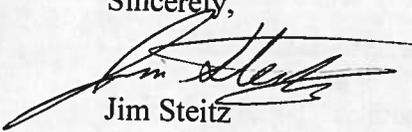
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status would already rightfully justify. The BLM and has already been shown extraordinary generosity and patience in being allowed three more years with the Sage Grouse, and you must take this final opportunity to properly value western America's semi-arid ecosystems. Ultimately, the BLM must face the cold and plain reality that certain "no" decisions must be issued to those interests and parties wishing to appropriate the resources upon which the Sage Grouse relies. These include **withdrawing sage grouse habitat from mining, from oil and gas drilling, from groundwater extraction, and from the invasive leveling** of sagebrush and other woody semi-arid vegetation in service of cattle grazers.

I look forward to seeing whether BLM will immediately begin to protect the Sage Grouse as it is mandated to do, by adopting the Sage Grouse Recovery Alternative submitted by the conservation community for each RMP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Steitz", written over a horizontal line.

Jim Steitz