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Office of the Governor

January 27, 2016

Bureau of Land Management Nevada State Office
1340 Financial Boulevard
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Bureau of Land Management Carson City District
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, Nevada 89701

Attn: Mr. John Ruhs, Nevada State Director
Ms. Colleen Sievers, Project Manager

Submitted electronically to: blm_nv_ccdowebmail@blm.gov

RE: *Comments on Changes to the Nevada and California Greater Sage-Grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan and the Tonopah Field Office Resource Management Plan Amendment, Nevada*

Dear Mr. Ruhs and Ms. Sievers:

As Governor of the State of Nevada, I have been actively involved with the conservation of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush ecosystems throughout my administration. In response to Department of Interior Secretary Salazar's invitation in 2011, Nevada took immediate action to update and develop a conservation plan for greater sage-grouse in Nevada incorporating and expanding the best science available. I issued Executive Order 2012-09 to establish the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program that includes inter-agency and interdisciplinary expertise from my state agencies and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Forest Service (USFS), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and resource stakeholders to create the Nevada Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan (State Plan) and the Conservation Credit System (CCS). I also provided specific information on the inconsistencies between our State Plan and the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in accordance with the procedures of the National Environmental Policy Act.

In a comparison of the two planning processes, Bi-State and range-wide, a troublesome pattern emerges. Both the Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA) and the proposed final changes in the Bi-State FEIS discussed herein are strikingly similar and both represent a significant departure from the process that was outlined by Secretary Salazar that was intended to be collaborative, inclusive, and proactive. Which, by the way, accurately describes the successful process used in the Bi-State Plan Area to create and implement the Bi-State Action Plan. The similarities between the two BLM planning processes leads one to believe that consistency between the two plans, Bi-State and range-wide, was a higher objective for the BLM than creating a plan through collaboration.

When the Washington, D.C. office of the Department of Interior took over the responsibility for the content and proposed actions in the plan amendments and environmental impact statements, the regard for Nevada's expertise and knowledge was gravely diminished. Our comments seemed to be disregarded and written off. The absence of practical management expertise in the ARMPA has now left the BLM and USFS in a quandary

regarding implementation of the approved actions. Oddly enough, the BLM and USFS now propose to make changes in the Bi-State Plan Amendment that will mirror the ARMPA for the greater-sage-grouse, repeating the same misguided approach to conservation.

The proposed changes to the Bi-State FEIS exemplify the inadequacies of the top-down planning process. These proposed changes apparently have been derived from protests of environmental groups who do not participate in the local planning processes and openly acknowledge their purpose is to eliminate multiple use of public lands. The proposed changes do not reflect the philosophy or recommendations from the State of Nevada, the Bi-State Local Area Working Group (LAWG), the Bi-State Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), or the Bi-State Executive Oversight Committee (EOC). Once the process deviated from the initial collaborative approach, the local agencies were never consulted. The discrepancies between the Draft and the Final EIS with the proposed changes are evidence that the course of action changed.

The clear lack of understanding in Washington D.C. for the Bi-State LAWG, TAC, and the EOC is evidenced by the revisions to the habitat maps for the Bi-State Area. The Bi-State habitat map was a collaborative process led by the TAC with support from the LAWG and EOC that resulted in a purely science-based model developed by USGS that incorporated thoughtful consideration for fragmentation, indirect impacts, and the sensitivity of the small Bi-State populations. Deviation from the local, science-based planning will undermine the ongoing success of the collaborative Bi-State planning efforts that have been ongoing since 2000 and will diminish the achievements of on-the-ground conservation benefits for greater sage-grouse. The Bi-State planning and conservation process is doing an exceptional job of achieving on-the-ground conservation benefits for greater sage-grouse without unnecessary intervention from the federal management agencies that will inevitably erode the trust that successful conservation is based on.

The Bi-State conservation planning process is unique and is working remarkably well because the local, state, and federal agencies in Nevada and California work collaboratively to manage wildlife and watershed resources from the ground-level perspective. Local involvement from state and federal resource management agencies and private stakeholders is being used to implement and update the Bi-State Action Plan, *their* plan, with financial commitments from BLM, USFS, USFWS, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other sources. It is the Bi-State process, *their* process, of effective conservation planning and management that was given credit by Secretary Jewell as a significant factor contributing to the 'not warranted' finding by USFWS. A statement posted by USFWS recapping the success of the Bi-State planning process is included as Attachment A.

I must also alert you to my observations that the similarities between the ARMPA for the range-wide distribution of greater sage-grouse and the proposed changes for the Carson/Tonopah Field Offices Bi-State FEIS are not coincidental and raise the question of being predecisional. I sincerely urge you to reevaluate your predecisional approach to this process.

Successful and lasting conservation of all of our natural resources, not just greater sage-grouse, will not be achieved through regulation. Conservation happens when caring people on the ground become involved and actively participate in land management.

Sincere regards



BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor