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From: [Sherry Schenk](#)

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To: [BLM_HQ_GRSR Planning](#)

Subject: [EXTERNAL] comment on Sage Grouse

Importance: Normal

Sensitivity: None

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BLM Utah State Office
Attn. Patricia Diebert
440 West 200South , Suite 500
Salt Lake City, Utah 841001

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the plans for protection of the Greater Sage Grouse population. I have greatly valued all the opportunities I have had to observe sage grouse and know there are other people who value them greatly also. The populations of Sage Grouse have decreased greatly in our region: 40% in the last 20 years, and 80% in the last 50 years. It is imperative that we do all we can to improve the numbers of Greater Sage Grouse and the conditions of the habitat in which they live.

The 2015 amendments were a good framework to start to improve the conservation of these birds. The 2015 amendments established protections from excessive livestock grazing and mineral development. These amendments were created through a very commendable collaborative process that involved a wide range of stakeholders and federal, state, and local government representatives. The document created plans to protect both the sage grouse and the more than 350 species that live in the sagebrush lands using the best available science of the time. Unfortunately there were efforts made to weaken the provisions of this document and the weaker, less protective 2019 amendments were created.

I commend the agency for examining and using current related scientific knowledge, including the effects of climate change on both the sage grouse and their habitat. As you now consider new rules for conserving the sage grouse and their habitat, please remember the extreme drought conditions that have been experienced in Utah and Colorado in the last few years. Locally we have observed that the drought has decreased the amount of seed production on desert plants and has stunted their growth which leaves less vegetative material to be consumed by sage grouse and other species.

Consequently recommendations I would suggest are:

1. Start with the management strategies given in the 2015 plan as the new plan is formulated.
2. New management strategies must be designed to foster increasing the population of Greater Sage Grouse by establishing large areas around known or potential leks that offer protection from the negative impacts from oil and gas development, and creates areas where livestock grazing numbers are held to a low level so that the grasses and forbs needed by sage grouse as they attempt to successfully raise their young can be reestablished.
3. Roads and trails in close proximity to sage grouse habitate should be closed to avoid disturbance during periods of breeding and the raising of chicks.
4. Utility construction should be routed around prime sage grouse habitat so that raptors are not able to use utility poles as perches from which to hunt sage grouse young.

I ask that the BLM focus on designing a very strong plan that will strengthen protections for sage grouse and their sagebrush habitats when they are creating the new plan for sage grouse management.

Sincerely,

Sherry Schenk
Grand Junction, Colorado