November XX, 2020

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

Dear XXXXXX:

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](https://www.wyofile.com/scientists-blast-inaction-on-denial-of-sage-grouse-troubles/) serious concern about the bird’s future. In addition to habitat loss from [oil and gas development](https://www.eenews.net/assets/2019/07/29/document_pm_01.pdf), 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](https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/endangered-wildlife-habitat-burned-in-wildfires/) 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](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/sagebrush-sea-about/12170/) on which the sage-grouse depends are also vital to local communities and economies for the [ecosystem services](https://www.fws.gov/sagebrush/index.html#:~:text=America's%20sagebrush%20also%20serves%20as,most%20imperiled%20places%20in%20America.) – 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](https://ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-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](https://www.cbd.int/gbo5?ftag=MSF0951a18) 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](https://science.sciencemag.org/content/366/6461/120) by 29 percent, or the equivalent of nearly 3 million 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,