THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

DEC 13 2011

The Honorable Dennis Daugaard
Governor of South Dakota
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Dear Governor Daugaard:

Last Friday, December 9, 2011, Governor Matt Mead and I co-hosted a meeting in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in which eight States within the range of the Greater Sage-Grouse participated. Thank you for the high level representation you sent to the meeting. The discussion at that meeting made clear that State and Federal agencies share a commitment to work together to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse and other species emblematic of the sagebrush ecosystem of the West, and in a way that respects the desire of the people in that region to thrive in a prosperous economy that offers good jobs and a promising future for them and for their children.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of a legal requirement for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to decide by the end of Fiscal Year 2015 to either propose the Greater Sage-Grouse for listing under the Endangered Species Act or to conclude that a proposed listing is not warranted. Thus, in the nearly 4 years ahead, there is an opportunity to take action that could preclude the need to list this species by effectively addressing the principal threats to its survival. For that to happen, the meeting made clear to me that together we must:

- Identify those actions with the greatest potential to conserve and restore Greater Sage-Grouse populations and the habitats where such actions would have the greatest benefit;
- Cooperate in efforts to secure the financial and other resources needed to carry out such actions on a scale commensurate with the threats to the Greater Sage-Grouse and its habitat;
- Clarify as much as possible the actions and outcomes that would likely be needed to support a future decision that listing the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act is not necessary; and
- Review and improve mechanisms to provide as much regulatory predictability for private landowners and public land users as is possible in the event of a future listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse or other sagebrush-associated species.

At the meeting there were many promising ideas presented on these and related needs. Much discussion appropriately focused on Wyoming's "core area strategy," which a number of the other States are seeking to adapt to their particular circumstances.

Based on our Wyoming meeting, I asked Governor Mead to co-chair a Sage-Grouse Task Force with Mr. Bob Abbey, Director of the Bureau of Land Management; Mr. David White, Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Mr. Dan Ashe, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a report and recommendations on how we can best move forward with a coordinated multi-state national conservation Sage-Grouse plan. I respectfully request that you designate a high-level person in your administration to be part of this working group. The Sage-Grouse Task Force would report to all of us with their recommendations in 90 days.

Mr. Michael Bean, my Counselor with Fish and Wildlife and Parks, will be Interior's lead person for the Task Force, and he can be reached at (202) 208-7400 or at michael_bean@ios.doi.gov. Also, please do not hesitate to call me directly at (202) 208-6087.

I know that there is an existing 2008 Memorandum of Understanding among State and Federal agencies, under which a very effective executive oversight committee has been established to help guide implementation of the 2006 WAFWA strategy. The role of the Sage-Grouse Task Force is not to displace that existing body, but rather to galvanize attention to the actions that must be taken in the immediate future to conserve the species and obviate any listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse at the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

Thank you in advance for South Dakota's participation in the Sage-Grouse Task Force, which will focus on how best to work together on this issue of such importance to the West and to the Nation.

Sincerely

Ken Salazar

Ken Salazar

cc: Governor Matt Mead
Chief David White, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Director Bob Abbey, Bureau of Land Management
Director Dan Ashe, Fish and Wildlife Service