United States Department of the Interior

Fish and Wildlife Service

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AUG 0 1 2012

The Honorable C.L. "Butch" Otter
Governor of Idaho
State Capitol
Boise, Idaho 83702

Subject: Draft Federal Alternative of Governor C.L. 'Butch' Otter for Greater Sage-Grouse Management in Idaho-June 29, 2012

Dear Governor Otter:

Thank you for your letter of July 13, 2012, regarding your Draft Alternative for Sage-Grouse Management. Let me begin by following up on the trail ride discussion you hosted in June, and reiterate the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) appreciation for your leadership on this important issue. Your staff, the Task Force you appointed, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Office of Species Conservation worked diligently to develop a draft state strategy under an aggressive timeline. Their work built on years of effort by many in Idaho, in particular the foundational accomplishments of the local working groups. My staff and I appreciated the opportunity to serve as technical advisors throughout the Task Force process. Your letter requested that the Service provide feedback regarding (1) whether the "management framework – based on a thematic habitat continuum and population metrics" was a sound policy that should move forward, and (2) whether or not the "habitat zones, especially the Core Habitat Zone and Important Habitat Zone" are consistent with the Service's understanding of the most important sage-grouse habitats in the State.

The Service believes the management framework that you have developed provides a sound policy outline from which to build upon to meet the long-term conservation goals of greater sage-grouse in Idaho. The thematic approach based on conservation objectives that are monitored in an adaptive management construct that your framework incorporates, are fundamental attributes of the Service's own approach to strategic conservation (USFWS and USGS 2006). My staff and I look forward to continuing to work with you (and the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service as they work through their land management planning processes) to identify and resolve issues that will help solidify the adequacy of this framework, and associated policy, necessary for our 2015 Endangered Species Act listing review.

The Core and Important Habitat Zones, as currently drafted by the Task Force, are indeed among the most important sage-grouse habitats in the State. In identifying these zones, the Task Force had the foresight to address not only the conservation of what are now the most important habitats, but also a means to provide for long-term conservation and restoration of sage-steppe habitat and rangelands in Idaho. Addressing the threats to sage-grouse across jurisdictional boundaries in these areas will be important for our listing review in 2015. Specifically, I look forward to continued conversations regarding how the State will approach implementation of long-term conservation on State and private lands where necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft alternative. The compressed timeframes which you have worked within to assemble this framework is commendable. In closing, the Service agrees that success in this endeavor hinges on our ability to work with many in a partnership. We look forward to our continued role as one of those partners with you and others to assist the conservation of greater sage-grouse in Idaho. If you have any questions regarding the information provided here please do not hesitate to contact me at 208-378-5243 or Jason Pyron of my staff at 208-685-6958.

Sincerely,

Brian T. Kelly, State Supervisor
Idaho Field Office

cc: USFWS, National Greater Sage-grouse Coordinator, Cheyenne, WY (P. Deibert)
BLM, State Director, Boise, ID (S. Ellis)
USFS, Regional Forester (H. Forsgren)
IDFG, Director and Sage-Grouse Task Force Co-Chair, Boise, ID (V. Moore)
Governor's Office of Species Conservation, Administrator, Boise, ID (D. Miller)
Governor's Sage-Grouse Task Force Co-Chair, Boise, ID (T. Perry)
USFWS Region 1 Director, Portland, OR (R. Thorson)

Literature Cited:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey. 2006. Strategic Habitat Conservation: final report of the National Ecological Assessment Team. U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 48p.