United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services
5353 Yellowstone Road, Suite 308A
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009

In Reply Refer To:
ES-61411/WY.36/WY10523

MAY - 7 2008

Mr. Ryan M. Lance
Deputy Chief of Staff
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

Dear ~~Mr. Lance~~ RYAN:

Thank you for your letter of April 17, 2008, regarding the proposed strategy developed by the Governor's Sage Grouse Implementation Team (Implementation Team) for the conservation of the greater sage-grouse in Wyoming. Specifically you requested of us: (1) whether the "core population area strategy" was a sound policy that should move forward, and (2) whether or not the core population areas currently identified for Wyoming are consistent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) understanding of the most important sage-grouse habitats in the State.

The Service does indeed believe the "core population area strategy", as outlined in the Implementation Team's correspondence to the Governor, is a sound framework for a policy by which to conserve greater sage-grouse in Wyoming. The Service commends the State for its leadership role in developing this long-term, science-based vision for the conservation of greater sage-grouse. In the 10 months since the Governor convened his sage-grouse summit, and during which time the Implementation Team conducted its work, the Service believes Wyoming has led by example. We have recently become aware of other states and agencies pursuing approaches similar to that developed in Wyoming.

Your request to the Service was, in part, cast under the auspices of our recently signed Memorandum of Agreement to ensure the necessary conservation to preclude the need to list species of greatest conservation need. The Service believes the "core population area strategy" can achieve this goal for greater sage-grouse. However, as you know and as the Implementation Team discussed, for the strategy to be effective, the state, federal and private landowners in the state must implement this strategy. To this end, the Service is poised to assist the State in the development of a state-wide programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for private landowners, which, although voluntary, could incent landowners to adopt the strategy. Likewise, if federal agencies are willing, the state-wide

Conservation Agreement approach can also integrate federal properties. As you know federal properties in Wyoming contain a good share of the key habitat in the State and the inclusion of those properties in the proposed strategy will be a key to its success.

The Service agrees that the core areas as currently defined by the Implementation Team are among the most important sage-grouse habitats in the State. Our only reservation is that the core population areas reflect breeding areas only. Core population areas need to include all seasonal habitats for those key populations, including migratory corridors, and must be identified and appropriately managed. The Implementation Team discussed this at length and implicitly acknowledged it in their recommendations to the Governor. In this regard, the Service again commends the State's leadership to fund and conduct the appropriate state-wide mapping in order to complete this important phase of the strategy. Thus, we strongly encourage the Implementation Team to ensure that all seasonal habitats to sustain the core population areas are identified and incorporated into the strategy, and associated maps, once the State's mapping project is complete.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed core population approach for greater sage-grouse in Wyoming. The effective implementation of the proposed strategy should help ensure the long-term viability of state-managed populations of greater sage-grouse in Wyoming. We look forward to continuing in our participation with Wyoming in greater sage-grouse conservation. If you have any questions regarding the information provided here please do not hesitate to contact me at 307-772-2374, extension 234, or Pat Deibert of my staff at extension 226.

Sincerely,

Brian T. Kelly
Field Supervisor
Wyoming Field Office

cc: BLM, Acting State Director, Cheyenne, WY (D. Simpson)
USFS, Regional Forester (H. Forsgren)
USFS, Regional Forester (R. Cables)
WGFD, Director, Cheyenne, WY (T. Cleveland)
Governor's Sage Grouse Implementation Team, Chair, Lander, WY (B.Budd)
Office of State Lands, Director, Cheyenne, WY (L. Boomgaarden)