July 8, 2013

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

Your appointment as Secretary of the Interior comes at a time of great challenges—and opportunities—for managing our nation's natural resources. Among the most important of these is the National Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy led by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This unprecedented planning process, properly executed, could finally reverse declining Greater Sage-grouse populations, while providing for sustainable use of public lands. However, we believe that your personal leadership will now be required to ensure that the strategy accomplishes its intended goal.

Sage-grouse are a landscape species that require large expanses of intact sagebrush steppe to survive. Approximately 70 percent of sage-grouse current range is on federal land, most of it managed by the BLM and the Forest Service. The national planning strategy will amend more than 100 BLM and Forest Service management plans with new conservation measures to protect and recover sage-grouse populations across their range. The planning process is moving quickly, as federal agencies hope to complete revisions in time for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to consider them in its listing decision for sage-grouse in 2015.

We are very concerned that, despite the promise of the planning effort, the goals of the process have been compromised by inadequate coordination and communication within and between agencies, as well as the unwillingness of agencies to propose measures needed to conserve sage-grouse. This is evident in state and federal management plans released to date that have markedly inconsistent and inadequate conservation measures for sage-grouse, and forgo opportunities to do more to protect the species.

Fortunately, there is still time to right this process. Our organizations have submitted a proposed alternative to the BLM that provides a basis for consistent, adequate conservation measures to conserve and recover sage-grouse and their habitat. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to share our thoughts on how our approach could be successfully implemented by federal planners.

The completion of a comprehensive, rangewide conservation strategy for sage-grouse will be an important conservation legacy for the West. It will only be a success, however, if the sum of the planning parts equals the necessary conservation whole for sage-grouse. Unfortunately, if the planning process continues on its current track, it will fall short of what is needed to conserve the species.

The Department is to be commended for engaging in this landmark undertaking. We look forward to working with you to ensure its success.

Sincerely,

Jamie Rappaport Clark
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Defenders of Wildlife

George Fenwick
President
American Bird Conservancy

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Executive Director
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cc: Dan Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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