From: Stein, Theodore
To: Noreen Walsh
Subject: Re: GRSG: Major CE in Colorado.
Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2015 4:04:23 PM

I'm wondering if we should be a little miffed that SGI reached out for quotes from Sen. Bennett, the Governor...
...and not us.

It's not like we dont have skin in this game.

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On Wed, Jan 14, 2015 at 4:00 PM, Noreen Walsh <noreen_walsh@fws.gov> wrote:

> Legacy – it is the common thread …. I believe
>
> **From:** Stein, Theodore [mailto:theodore_stein@fws.gov]
> **Sent:** Wednesday, January 14, 2015 3:37 PM
> **To:** Noreen Walsh; Michael Thabault; Nicole Alt; Marla Trollan
> **Subject:** GRSG: Major CE in Colorado.
>
> Good afternoon -
>
> Colorado Cattlemen & SGI have secured a major conservation easement in NW Colorado.
>
> E&E story is pasted below.
>
> I'm struck by this quote from a neighboring rancher, which closely tracks one of our key messages.
>
>> "For ranch families like mine and others out here, our future depends on keeping our lands together, something that's harder and harder to do in today's economy," said Rex Tuttle, the owner of a neighboring ranch near Cross Mountain that has also set aside grouse habitat in a conservation easement. "The Cross Mountain easement is more than important financially -- it's about **keeping an irreplaceable landscape together for future generations."**

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ENDANGERED SPECIES:

Sprawling easement on Colo. ranch called key to saving sage grouse

Scott Streater, E&E reporter

Published: Wednesday, January 14, 2015

Federal and state officials today announced the establishment of the largest single greater sage grouse conservation easement on a sprawling private ranch in northwest Colorado, a move the state's top elected leaders say underscores the need to focus on local efforts to save the bird instead of sweeping federal regulation.

At issue is the 60,000-acre Cross Mountain Ranch in Craig, Colo., near Dinosaur National Monument, in an area that contains the largest concentration of greater sage grouse in the state. The family that owns the ranch, working with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, agreed to place 16,000 acres of prime sage grouse habitat on the ranch into a conservation easement that will keep the land undeveloped forever.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Sage Grouse Initiative, using congressionally designated funds in the farm bill, worked with the state of Colorado and private donors connected with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust to pay the ranch to place the acreage into the conservation easement, said Chris West, the land trust's executive director.

The 16,000 acres of ranchland in the new conservation easement connect with existing easements on two other neighboring ranches and tens of thousands of acres of federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, resulting in the permanent protection of roughly 250,000 acres of key grouse habitat in the state, said Tim Griffiths, national coordinator of the NRCS Sage Grouse Initiative in Bozeman, Mont.

The latest conservation easement agreement is a powerful example of the on-the-ground efforts by federal regulators, states and private landowners to identify and implement proactive measures to protect the bird and its dwindling sagebrush steppe habitat, Griffiths said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently evaluating whether the bird needs to be listed for federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. Leaders across the bird's 11-state range say such a listing would cause grave economic harm across the West.

"Thanks to the family of Cross Mountain Ranch and their neighboring ranch families, we're seeing the power of voluntary conservation to keep the vast sagebrush lands intact where it matters most in our state and nationally," Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper (D) said today in a statement.

It's also a stark reminder that federal regulation through the ESA is not necessarily the answer to protecting the bird and preventing it from becoming extinct, said Sen. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.).

"It's the locally driven conservation efforts like these that can help prevent the need for an endangered species listing," Bennet said in a statement.

The Sage Grouse Initiative has used farm bill funding to enroll almost 1,000 ranchers across the West in new grazing systems that maintain hiding and nesting cover on 2.6 million acres, secure easements that reduce the threat of sod-busting and subdivision on 380,000 acres, remove conifers to restore sage grouse habitat on more than 275,000 acres, and take down more than 500 miles of fencing that had caused thousands of bird collisions a year, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Sage Grouse Initiative projects are voluntary.

The latest conservation easement on the Cross Mountain Ranch is especially important in Colorado because the ranch's location in Moffat County supports as many as 8,000 sage grouse -- the largest concentration of grouse in the state.

Voluntary conservation projects like the easement at the Cross Mountain Ranch not only support sage grouse and many other species but also improve conditions for working cattle operations and benefit rural communities, according to the service.

"For ranch families like mine and others out here, our future depends on keeping our lands together, something that's harder and harder to do in today's economy," said Rex Tuttle, the owner of a neighboring ranch near Cross Mountain that has also set aside grouse habitat in a conservation easement. "The Cross Mountain easement is more than important financially -- it's about keeping an irreplaceable landscape together for future generations."

http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2015/01/14/stories/1060011677