From:	Noreen Walsh
To:	Michael Thabault
Subject:	RE: Sage-grouse in the Colorado News
Date:	Wednesday, November 27, 2013 7:39:28 AM

Yes. And an interesting meeting with CO DNR even before that.

Noreen Walsh
Regional Director
Mountain-Prairie Region
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

303 236 7920

The Mountain-Prairie Region of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service: *We provide conservation stewardship of some of America's most scenic lands, to ensure healthy fish and wildlife for the enjoyment and benefit of all people.*

From: Thabault, Michael [mailto:michael_thabault@fws.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, November 27, 2013 7:35 AM
To: Noreen Walsh
Subject: Re: Sage-grouse in the Colorado News

It will be an interesting WGA meeting.

Michael Thabault
Assistant Regional Director
Ecological Services
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mountain Prairie Region
303-236-4210
michael_thabault@fws.gov

On Tue, Nov 26, 2013 at 9:11 PM, Noreen Walsh <noreen_walsh@fws.gov> wrote:
Pease read

Noreen Walsh
Regional Director
Mountain-Prairie Region
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Begin forwarded message:

> **From:** "Ver_Steeg - DNR, Jeff" <jeff.ver_steeg@state.co.us>
> **Date:** November 26, 2013, 11:58:25 AM MST
> **To:** "Walsh, Noreen" <Noreen_Walsh@fws.gov>
> **Subject: Sage-grouse in the Colorado News**

Glenwood Springs Post-Independent

Gov. offers to work with region on sage-grouse

RIFLE — Gov. John Hickenlooper expressed a willingness Monday to work with northwestern Colorado representatives to come up with a compromise solution for protecting the greater sage-grouse without severely impacting the region's economy.

"We do have a real disagreement on some of the science being used in looking at the historic habitat of the sage-grouse, and how it has diminished over time," Hickenlooper said before members of the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) and area business leaders at a special meeting in Rifle.

The Democratic governor recounted a "heated conversation" with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe on that very topic, and criticized the proposal being put forward by the Bureau of Land Management to protect the bird's habitat on federal lands.

"The solution that has been proposed is not appropriate," Hickenlooper said of a preferred alternative contained in the BLM's draft environmental analysis on the sage-grouse issue.

The proposal being considered is a compromise between environmental groups and multiple-use proponents but still includes strict limits on surface uses with the identified "priority habitat."

Some of those measures could have a significant impact not only on development of mineral leases but grazing and other types of lease activities.

Garfield County has spent more than $200,000 to have consultants come up with an alternative plan that identifies a much smaller habitat range for the bird northwest of Parachute and into Rio Blanco County.

Garfield Commissioner Mike Samson, who chairs the AGNC board, asked if Hickenlooper would be willing to designate a "point person" from the state to work with northwest Colorado leaders in developing an alternative solution.

In addition to exploring that option, Hickenlooper also said he also wants to work with other western governors to come up with a framework to deal with the federal government on the sage-grouse and other threatened species.

The greater sage-grouse has been proposed for the federal Endangered Species List if an appropriate protection plan cannot be found.

Garfield County commissioners are scheduled to consider formal comments to the BLM regarding the sage-grouse plan at a special meeting today starting at 8 a.m. in Glenwood Springs.

Hickenlooper also addressed the debate over hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," after voters in three Front Range cities approved ballot measures earlier this month banning the controversial process used to extract natural gas within their jurisdictions.

"This is my global plan to make sure everybody hates me a little bit," he said of criticism from anti-fracking activists and members of his own party on the issue.

However, the right of mineral rights owners to extract oil and gas is protected under the so-called "split estate" provisions of the state constitution, he said.

Under that provision, any type of short- or long-term ban on fracking would constitute a taking, Hickenlooper said.

"That's why we're in a lawsuit today suing one of those municipalities," he said. "It's a taking, and we can't delegate that to local governments.

"Yes, we have to hold ourself to a higher environmental standard," Hickenlooper said. "But we also have got to protect people's rights to access those resources."

The governor also fielded a range of questions on other topics ranging from a statewide water plan to new proposals for air quality controls at the Monday meeting, which was part of a Western Slope swing that included stops in Naturita and Craig.

http://www.postindependent.com/news/9077287-113/hickenlooper-grouse-sage-plan

Grand Junction Daily Sentinel

Western guys wade into flap over grouse

By Dennis Webb

Gov. John Hickenlooper told northwestern Colorado residents Monday that he hopes he can work as chairman of the Western Governors' Association to help find regional common ground on greater sage-grouse management and other oil and gas issues.

His comments came during visits to Craig and Rifle, where he heard local politicians and others reiterate concerns about potential impacts from sage-grouse management and other regulatory proposals pertaining to the energy industry.

Hickenlooper said Western governors want to take a science-based approach to management of the greater sage-grouse.

"We think we will have real impact, having Republicans and Democrats addressing this at the same time," he told an audience in Craig.

The Bureau of Land Management is considering how to manage lands to protect the greater sage-grouse to try to keep it from being listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Endangered Species Act protection.

But there's concern in places such as northwest Colorado that its actions could create undue effects on oil and gas development, ranching, recreation and other activities.

"It's hard to say that those activities are the cause of diminishing numbers of sage-grouse," Hickenlooper said.

He said in Rifle that he's spoken with Dan Ashe, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, on the sage-grouse issue.

"It was heated. It was one of the rare times I raised my voice. … There was a real disagreement on some of the science and some of the issues," he said.

He said governors are working on a framework for solving sage-grouse management on their own.

"I do think it makes it hard for (federal officials) to push back," he said.

He also said he'd be willing to designate a point person to deal with the issue at the state level. Garfield County Commissioner Mike Samson, also chairman of Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado, which hosted Hickenlooper's Rifle visit, specifically requested that of Hickenlooper. Samson also reminded Hickenlooper that county officials are concerned about the potential loss of revenue to counties from limits on oil and gas development if the sage-grouse is listed for protection.

"I understand that clearly," Hickenlooper said.

He said Western governors also are working to agree on a broader, common regulatory framework for oil and gas development that they can present to industry, environmentalists and Washington as to what they think is fair.

Rio Blanco County Commissioner Shawn Bolton asked Hickenlooper if he had a plan in place if lawmakers pass a measure imposing a moratorium or ban on hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas development, such as those approved by voters in some Front Range communities this fall.

Hickenlooper said such actions violate the rights of mineral owners.

"Even a five-year ban, I see that as government taking something," he said.

Hickenlooper was questioned in both Craig and Rifle about Environmental Protection Agency proposals to regulate carbon emissions from new and existing coal-fired power plants.

"For northwest Colorado, federal regulations that cripple clean coal and natural gas would be the worst of all possible options," said Craig City Council member Ray Beck.

Hickenlooper said requiring expensive retrofits of existing power plants doesn't make sense, and he thinks states like Colorado that already have made significant investments in cutting emissions should get credit for that, rather than the federal government taking a hard-line approach.

"We're not saying we don't want to do any more work. We want to do it in a measured sense," he said.

Hickenlooper's tour took him into country where he's come under heavy criticism for positions, including supporting stricter gun laws and higher renewable-energy requirements for rural electricity. Such laws even led Moffat County commissioners to ask voters there whether the county should pursue secession from the state, although voters turned down the idea.

Brandi Meeks, chairwoman of Moffat County Republicans, told Hickenlooper there's still

strong sentiment that he's not representing all Coloradans.

"I would urge you, this next legislative session, please represent all of Colorado, not just the urban center," she said to applause in Craig.

Hickenlooper said he thinks he failed on some measures by not getting out the facts better about why they were warranted. He gave as an example the new universal background check gun law, saying the data show a more limited pre-existing law has been shown to stop a number of violent people from buying guns.

"I don't think we did a good job communicating that and it became a big partisan battle around the Second Amendment," he said.

Roy Reed of Tim's Tools in Silt came to hear Hickenlooper in Rifle on Monday and said beforehand that his sporting-good department used to be the store's best-performing.

"They passed the gun bans. Now it's the worst department," he said.

Hickenlooper was greeted in Rifle by a few picketers opposing his support of oil and gas development.

"Good governors don't frack their citizens and they don't compromise when a species (sage-grouse) is on the brink, threatened by oil and gas development," said Jacob Richards, who lives near Silt.

But other picketers turned out in support of energy development. Marilyn Oden of Rifle and Judy Thomsen of Battlement Mesa lamented the loss of drilling jobs to other states, something Thomsen believes is partly the result of anti-fracking politics.

"We've got a lot of people on welfare now that could have been working," Thomsen said.

http://www.gjsentinel.com/S=960f46f3aca6629e42047277cd605584e1e0a567/news/articles/western-guys-wade-into-flap-over-grouse/

Steamboat Pilot

Gov. Hickenlooper speaks to Northwest Colorado residents in Craig

Craig — Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper met with Northwest Colorado residents in Craig Monday morning and discussed a wide variety of issues, including the sage grouse initiative, the coal industry, education and the new gun laws.

The forum was held at the Moffat County Fairgrounds Pavilion where more than 200 people from Moffat, Rio Blanco and Routt counties attended to speak their minds about how state legislation has impacted rural communities.

The event was part of the governor's efforts to "lean in and listen" to people living on Colorado's Western Slope.

Hickenlooper was scheduled to speak for 45 minutes but stayed for nearly an hour after being 30 minutes late due to unfavorable flying weather. He originally was scheduled to land at the Craig/Moffat Airport but had to reroute to Yampa Valley Regional Airport in Hayden.

He opened the forum by thanking various community members and organizations for inviting him to visit Northwest Colorado. He spoke for roughly five minutes before he began answering questions from constituents.

"We'll all get a lot more out of this if I answer your questions and let you get at me directly," Hickenlooper said to the crowd.

Craig resident and business owner Frank Moe kicked off the question-and-answer session, addressing the governor with a three-part question.

"What does 'lean in and listen' truly mean? Will your listening translate into true concern and representation for rural Colorado, especially Moffat County, and will you come back to Craig and Moffat County after the 2014 legislative session so we can discuss what legislation was passed and signed by you?" Moe asked.

Hickenlooper said his goal is to ensure that Northwest Colorado feels as represented as the rest of the state, which includes discussing issues presented by Colorado legislators. He added that getting perspectives from all sides is vital.

"Too often we're trying to make decisions with different facts, so my commitment is to take that true concern and do a better job of actually communicating," he said. "Will I come back

after the legislative session and discuss the bills passed? Absolutely. Yes, on all three (questions asked by Moe)."

Next, Audrey Danner, interim executive director for the Craig Moffat Economic Development Partnership, spoke to the governor, asking him to listen carefully to all the questions and concerns from citizens.

"Our natural resources drive our economy," Danner said. "You will hear many questions and comments today on all of our natural resources. We ask for the same respect for coal-fired power plants as we do for those renewable energies. They are all important."

Hickenlooper responded by saying he would indeed listen and that he understands. He highlighted that he's now the chair of all of the western governors.

"What we've been trying to do is work with the industry in each of the regulatory areas and get to a point where we can get the Republican governors and the Democratic governors to agree to the same regulatory framework," he said. "I understand the balancing act of how difficult it is between extraction industries and our environment, and that there are competing needs there that are very difficult to balance."

Brandi Meek, chair of the Moffat County Republican Party, stood up and spoke on behalf of her party.

"I talk to a lot of the rural counties here in Colorado, and we all kind of have the same sentiment that all of Colorado is not being represented by you. I had high hopes when you came into office that that would not be the case; however, it seems that every piece of legislation that was put on your desk from a liberal legislator this session was passed by you. As governor, it's your job to create a checks-and-balances system for rural Colorado," Meek said, highlighting the renewable energy bill, gun legislation and the sage grouse issue as reasons why she believes rural communities feel they are not being represented by Hickenlooper.

In the 2013 legislative session, the governor signed Senate Bill 252, which set renewable energy standards for rural Colorado. The bill requires rural electric co-ops throughout the state to get 20 percent of their energy from renewable sources by 2020. That represents a 100 percent increase over the previously required 10 percent.

The governor also signed House Bills 1224 and 1229. HB 1229 requires background checks before the transfer or sale of a gun. HB 1224 limits the sale of large-capacity ammunition magazines. Many residents in Northwest Colorado have spoken out against these bills.

The governor highlighted reasons and facts as to why the gun bills were passed, specifically pointing out the results of background checks that took place in 2012.

"These are the facts. In 2012 — just getting half the background checks — there were 38 people convicted of homicide trying to buy a gun, 133 people convicted of sexual assault who tried to buy a gun, 620 burglars, 1,300 people convicted of felony assault … there were 420 people who had judicial restraining orders trying to buy a gun, and we stopped them," Hickenlooper said. "So again, I don't think we did a very good job communicating that, and it became a big partisan battle around the Second Amendment, and certainly that was the last thing on my mind. We weren't trying to take anyone's guns from them. Our goal really, was this seemed to make Colorado safer. Those people trying to buy guns were not just in Denver or Colorado Springs, they were all over the state."

The discussion shifted away from guns as community members began asking Hickenlooper about the greater sage grouse issue.

The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife are currently trying to protect the sage grouse species — a bird that is dwindling in numbers. Sage grouse is not on the endangered species list but is under close government watch to ensure it doesn't get on that list, according to Sasha Nelson, Moffat County field organizer for Conservation Colorado.

The birds live on land in western Colorado that could be drilled for natural gas, which has caused a huge uproar in how the bird is handled. Additionally, people want to be able to hunt the birds.

"I'm really concerned about the sage grouse, because it's a land use decision that can really adversely affect a rural community," Tom Kourlis said, noting that perhaps the issue with the decline in sage grouse is because of its predators. He suggested managing the birds' predators — like coyotes — in order to protect them.

The governor said he understands the importance of the issue and wants to find a balanced resolution.

“I think the word that we need to look at is balance, and how do we get back into a state of balance,” Hickenlooper said.

After the forum, Hickenlooper met with more than a dozen elected officials from Moffat, Routt, Garfield and Grand counties to continue the sage grouse discussion.

In the meeting, he promised to help find the balance that all sides crave.

Overall, community members seemed pleased that Hickenlooper took time to visit Northwest Colorado.

“I thought he spoke very well and that he addressed what was questioned of him and that he had very good things to say. I think he does care about the problems of rural Colorado,” said Craig resident Rosalie Crane.

http://www.steamboattoday.com/news/2013/nov/25/gov-hickenlooper-speaks-northwest-colorado-craig/