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Subject: FW: Oped in Roll Call from Rick Danvir of Western Landowners Alliance
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FYI -- The below oped ran online today at Roll Call from Rick Danvir with Western Landowners Alliance, although the byline doesn't reflect that. The oped focuses a lot on private lands, but calls attention to the importance of funding for USFWS and BLM to get the job done on this.

Defunding Not the Answer for Sage Grouse | Commentary

By Rick Danvir

Jan. 21, 2015, 5 a.m.

A large and growing group of Western landowners care deeply about land health and the wildlife that dwell on our properties. Healthy wildlife populations enrich our lives and our lands. We work hard to manage our rangelands for sage grouse and other species while maintaining profitable ranching operations. We are concerned, however, that recent congressional actions have put both conservation-minded landowners and sage grouse at risk.

In September 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide whether to list the greater sage grouse, a western bird, as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Because of its broad economic and environmental implications, the question of whether or not to list the bird has become a heated political issue — so much so that Congress recently disallowed use of FWS funds for listing either greater or Gunnison sage grouse (a related species) under the ESA.

This action has temporarily stopped FWS from listing either Gunnison or greater sage grouse. But lost in the story is the fact that these actions also stopped FWS from providing landowner protections, incentives and regulatory flexibility authorized under the ESA.

Few landowners welcome regulatory measures, but preventing the FWS from doing its job doesn't solve the problem — in fact, it may simultaneously impede sage grouse recovery and burden landowners. The desire to avoid listing either sage grouse species led to an unprecedented 20-year conservation effort. Landowners, conservation organizations, energy companies, and state and federal management agencies worked together to develop comprehensive conservation strategies we can all live with. Having Congress defund or interfere with FWS's work makes implementation more difficult for landowners.

A number of landowners participating in the recovery of a different species, the Gunnison sage grouse, received funding and support from state and federal agencies to implement conservation measures. Funding assistance and FWS Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances enabled these landowners to continue normal ranching operations regardless of the bird's status. However, many landowners implementing conservation measures for the greater sage grouse, which has a far larger distribution than the Gunnison, may be less fortunate. The landscape inhabited by greater sage grouse is vast and scattered across many states and political jurisdictions. Consequently, FWS incentives, flexibility and protections are not yet available to all willing landowners. Some have been waiting for years to receive CCAAs. The protections and regulatory flexibility of CCAAs and the ESA should be available to all landowners who have adopted conservation measures for greater sage grouse. Sage grouse CCAAs already exist for Wyoming and Oregon, and could easily be adapted and offered by FWS field offices in other

Western states.

Congress needs to increase, not decrease, funding for the Bureau of Land Management and FWS and direct FWS to provide CCAA coverage to those landowners who have stepped up and done their part in this conservation effort. Without adequately staffed and funded federal mitigation and landowner programs, some who voluntarily adopted sage grouse conservation measures may very well face undeserved land use restrictions.

As landowners, we need our Governors and federal agencies to finish the effort started 20 years ago and implement effective statewide conservation plans. These plans should be coordinated with federal recovery plans and include measures to minimize and mitigate potentially negative development practices in essential sage grouse habitats. Energy development, grazing and recreation will continue — but in a manner that maintains sage grouse populations. As landowners and conservationists, we can attest that it is possible to manage in a way that sustains both livelihoods and wildlife.

Because landowners steward some of the West's most biologically diverse landscapes and provide critical habitat to hundreds of fish and wildlife species, we have a vital role to play in conservation and species recovery efforts. We accept our responsibility and encourage other landowners to join us in taking proactive measures to ensure the survival and recovery of sage grouse populations. And we ask our leaders and fellow conservationists to provide us the time, resources and support to make it happen.

Rick Danvir has been a sage grouse conservationist for over 30 years as a private lands wildlife manager with Deseret Ranches as a resource consultant and as a wildlife commissioner.

http://www.rollcall.com/news/defunding_not_the_answer_for_sage_grouse_commentary-239399-1.html?zkPrintable=true