



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

DEC 02 2014

**COPY FOR YOUR  
INFORMATION**

The Honorable Doc Hastings  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of October 16, 2014, cosigned with several of your colleagues, regarding a recent workshop that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) held to explore genetic issues related to conservation of the greater sage-grouse.

The Service is committed to make a finding on whether an Endangered Species Act listing of the greater sage-grouse is warranted by September 30, 2015. The expert elicitation workshop that you referenced is one small component of a comprehensive process the Service is undertaking to ensure that it possesses and understands the best scientific and commercial data available to inform that decision.

During the genetics workshop, the Service asked scientific experts to help ensure that the Service is aware of and understands relevant and recently completed or upcoming genetic studies. The Service also asked these experts to provide background on the latest laboratory and statistical techniques used by conservation geneticists to answer questions regarding barriers to gene flow, isolation, and divergence of populations. The Service consulted with the chair of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Sage-Grouse Executive Committee in developing the list of invited experts. They took meeting minutes and will prepare a post-workshop executive summary as the official record of the meeting.

The Service has been actively soliciting information relevant to a listing determination since they made the 2010 petition finding that a listing proposal was warranted. At that time, and in every subsequent year through the annual Candidate Notice of Review, the Service requested that the public provide any information relevant to a listing determination. In addition, in August of this year the Service solicited all interested parties to submit information relevant to greater sage-grouse status, population trends, threats, and conservation efforts. The Service anticipates that they will benefit from an upcoming analysis by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies that will update the 2008 report on the range-wide population status and trend of the species.

The Service is preparing to brief interested Members of Congress and staff in early December on the process they will employ this coming year to gather, analyze, and evaluate information for determining whether to propose listing of the greater sage-grouse. They will be prepared at that time to discuss the genetics workshop and the other elements of the assessment process that we will employ this year.

Thank you for your interest in the Service's review of the status of the greater sage-grouse. Please feel free to contact the Service's Director, Mr. Dan Ashe at (202) 208-4545 if you should have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sally Jewell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Sally" and "Jewell" being capitalized and prominent.

Sally Jewell