



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Ms. Leslie Weldon
Deputy Chief, National Forest System
USDA Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Mailstop: 1106
Washington, District of Columbia 20250

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

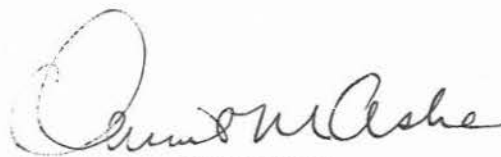
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "M".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Chuck Bonham
Director
California Department of Fish and Game
1416 9th Street
12th Floor
Sacramento, California 95814

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

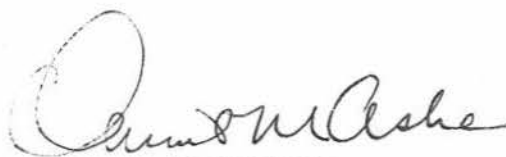
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cameron" being more prominent and the last name "Ashe" following in a similar style.

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Jeff Ver Steeg
Assistant Director, Wildlife Programs
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
6060 Broadway
Denver, Colorado 80216

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

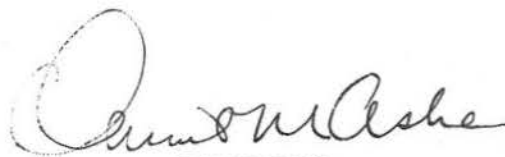
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a stylized "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Mr. Doug Young
Senior Policy Advisor
Governor's Office of Policy and Research
136 State Capitol
Denver, Colorado 80203

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

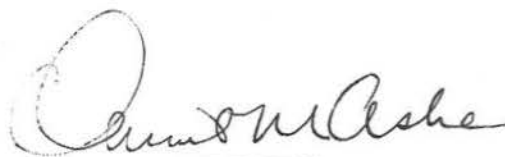
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Ms. Bonnie Butler
Senior Special Assistant for Natural Resources
Office of the Governor-State Capitol
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

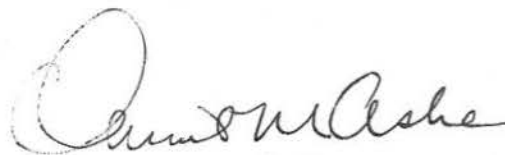
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Dave Risley
Fish and Wildlife Division Administrator
Fish and Wildlife Division
1420 East Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, Montana 59620

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

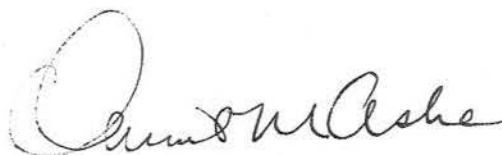
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amanda M. Ashe".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Leo Drozdoff
Director
Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
901 S. Stewart Street
Suite 1003
Carson City, Nevada 89701

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

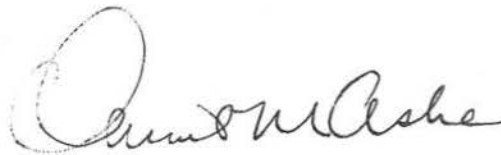
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brandon M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Terry Steinwand
Director
North Dakota Fish and Game Commission
100 N. Bismarck Expressway
Bismarck, North Dakota 58501

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Brett Brownscombe
Deputy Natural Resources Advisor
Office of the Governor
255 Capitol Street, NE
Suite 126
Salem, Oregon 97301

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Tom Kirschenmann
Chief
Terrestrial Wildlife Division
523 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Ms. Kathleen Clarke
Director
Governor's Public Lands Policy Coordination Office
5110 State Office Building
P.O. Box 141107
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

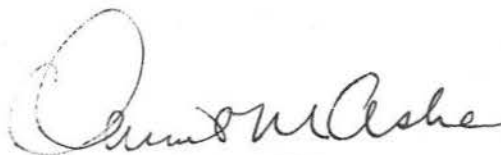
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Ms. Lisa Veneroso
Habitat Program Assistant Director
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Capitol Way N
Olympia, Washington 98501

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

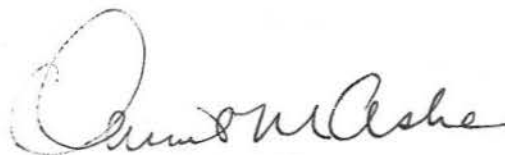
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "M".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Mr. Steve Ferrell
Wildlife Policy Advisor
Governor's Policy Office
122 West 25th Street
2nd Floor, East
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Amanda Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a stylized "M".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Mr. Dan Ashe
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20240

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

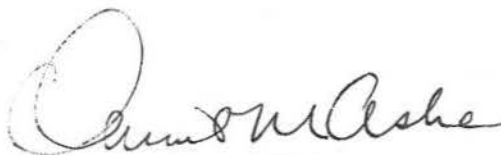
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "M".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Robert Abbey
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20240

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

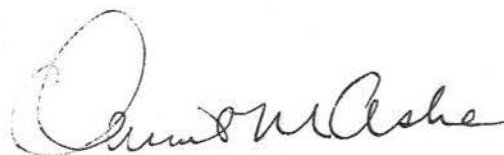
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amanda Ashe".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Mr. Dave White
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, District of Columbia 20250

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

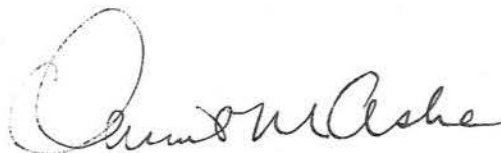
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Andrew M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "M".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052382

Mr. Michael J. Bean
Counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Room 3152
Washington, District of Columbia 20240

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,



Amanda M. Ashe
DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



AUG 17 2012

In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

Ms. Jessica Rubado
National Sage-Grouse Coordinator
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, District of Columbia 20240

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,



Amanda Asher

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Ms. Noreen Walsh
Deputy Regional Director
Region 6, Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Blvd
Lakewood, Colorado 80228

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

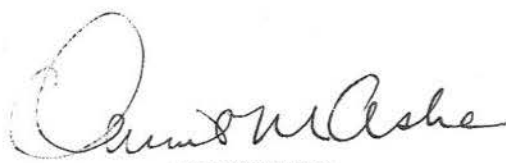
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Amanda Asher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A".

DIRECTOR

Enclosure



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:
FWS/AES/052385

AUG 17 2012

Mr. Tim Griffiths
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
10 East Babcock Street
Federal Building, Room 443
Bozeman, Montana 59715

I am pleased to present the draft report prepared by the Sage-grouse Conservation Objectives Team (COT). The COT was tasked with identifying conservation objectives defining the degree to which the threats need to be ameliorated to conserve the sage-grouse so that it is no longer in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction, by 2013 for the Bi-state Distinct Population Segment (DPS), and 2015 for the Greater sage-grouse range-wide. This draft report is a presentation of their findings.

I offer my thanks to each of the States that contributed a person to the team. Much expertise in sage-grouse biology and management resides in the state agencies, and it was my desire that we work collaboratively to develop a joint product. Since March, State team members have worked diligently with Service team members to complete the draft report. Their work is very much appreciated.

The draft COT report is built on scientific principles of conservation biology, and outlines a strategy for range-wide conservation of this uniquely western species. Using the excellent information provided by the States, the COT has identified key areas of habitat across the species' range as well as the threats operating within each population that need to be ameliorated to conserve the species over the long term. The draft report affirms that conserving the sage-grouse will be dependent upon implementation of adequate regulatory mechanisms or voluntary measures that are sufficiently certain to be implemented and effective such that key threats are eliminated or ameliorated and no longer drive the need for protection under the Endangered Species Act. State conservation efforts greatly informed this draft report, and will continue to be essential in the implementation of the identified strategies.

The COT identified many uncertainties for long-term conservation as they worked through their task which was exacerbated by the short timeframe for completion. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties in understanding the impact mechanisms of some key threats and a lack of detailed species information (e.g., comprehensive genetic connectivity map). Given these uncertainties and the variability in ecological conditions, species' and threat status, and differing cultures across the sage-grouse range, the COT acknowledged that States and Federal agencies can ameliorate the threats in different ways and believed that providing them

with the flexibility to accomplish this outcome through a variety of mechanisms is essential to conservation success. Therefore, this draft report provides guiding principles and objectives for the conservation of sage-grouse and a framework for development of more site-specific actions that are currently under development by our State and Federal partners.

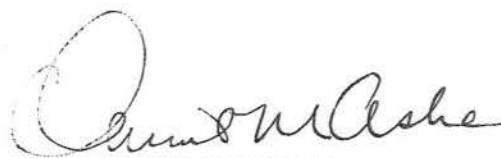
The draft COT report has been submitted for scientific peer review, the results of which are due to the Service approximately around October 1, 2012. I would also value any comments from the Task Force about the draft report. Our intention was for the report to not only help inform a future listing decision but also to help inform the states and other partners as each of you actively develop conservation plans and strategies. If the Task Force can provide comments also around the first of October, the team can evaluate those together with the scientific peer review comments to inform a revised final draft.

The revised product will constitute the final draft. Until that time, I ask that you consider this report as a draft. I do not anticipate that the basic foundations of this draft report will change as a result of the review, but I ask that we remain cautious in its application until it is final.

There was not complete unanimity amongst COT members regarding every sentence in every section in this draft report. However, as the team worked through this effort, the team found consensus more often than not. This was in part due to the commitment to adhere to scientific principles in developing the strategy. But just as important was the commitment by the team members, and the entities they represented, to set aside agency and geographical differences to achieve a common conservation goal. The difficult discussions the team sometimes engaged in only resulted in a stronger product. I commend their commitment to this effort.

What has become abundantly clear as we work through this conservation challenge is that the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse must involve all stakeholders, including State, Federal, Tribal, and local governments, non-government organizations, business and industry, and private citizens who value this resource and desire to keep it on the landscape. We must work collaboratively across State and political lines at both the local and the landscape scales to be successful. Thank you for your commitment to this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cameron M. Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cameron" being more prominent and the last name "Ashe" following in a similar style.

DIRECTOR

Enclosure