

AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES
SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0603

April 4, 2014

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James P. Moran
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member Moran:

Thank you for your efforts to appropriately balance limited resources in this difficult fiscal climate in order to maintain our obligation to responsibly manage our federally owned lands. I am writing to express support for sustained funding in the FY 2015 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill to ensure that efforts by the Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies to support state and local preservation efforts currently underway to conserve and recover Gunnison Sage-Grouse remain intact.

As you know, the BLM is the main federal agency responsible for leading a collaborative effort to protect and restore sage-grouse habitats and to rebuild their populations—since more than 50 percent of the grouse habitat is on BLM lands. This unprecedented initiative includes other federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and a broad array of non-federal entities including the Western Governors Association, western state wildlife agencies, tribes, local governments, and the public.

It will be difficult for the BLM and other federal agencies to succeed in this collaborative management effort without adequate resources. To that end, I respectfully request the subcommittee provide sustained funding that maintains activities that support state and local preservation and conservation efforts.

I am also writing to request that the following language be added to the FY 2015 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill stating:

“None of the funds made available by this Act may be used to add the Gunnison-Sage Grouse to the list of threatened species or endangered species published under section 4(c) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1553 (c)).”

The adoption of this language is designed to postpone the Department’s impulsive march towards listing the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as a threatened or endangered species. The proposed

ESA listing would designate 1.7 million acres in southwest Colorado and southeastern Utah as critical habitat - including private land which would be off limits to most use and development, including agricultural production and grazing, without providing any compensation. Although this blanket management approach may be convenient for BLM to administer, it fails to account for the unique geography and environment of the region.

The most effective way to preserve the Gunnison-Sage Grouse is through preservation efforts like those already occurring at the state and local levels. Western states have already embarked on range-wide efforts to protect the bird's habitat. Local governments and private landowners are using a variety of tools to protect the species, including: the implementation of protective land use policies, conservation easements on private land, Conservation Agreements with Assurances and private property acquisitions. These efforts and others have led to the expenditure of over \$30 million in public and private funds, all with the goal of preserving the species. Thanks to these initiatives we've made great progress and ultimately these measures will achieve or exceed the species protection goals of an ESA listing.

Listing the Gunnison Sage-Grouse would directly impact land management, economies and domestic energy supplies and production in western states while also disrupting effective species preservation efforts currently underway. It would not, however, more effectively preserve the species. While great progress has been made, federal efforts to list the bird would disregard local efforts and conditions to the detriment of the bird's recovery.

This proposed language will allow local landowners and public officials to continue their efforts to protect the species without endangering the entire region's economic growth.

I understand the difficulty you face in appropriating adequate resources for the programs under your discretion and thank you for your consideration of this request and your leadership on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Scott Tipton
Member of Congress