

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 6, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

I am aware that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently working on an Instruction Memorandum (IM) relating to the greater sage grouse. As you know, sage grouse habitat spans the west. In Nevada, we are home to both the greater and bi-state sage grouse populations.

It is my hope that as you work towards finalization of the IM, you will take into careful consideration the potential impacts of the proposed changes on the economy. Species and habitat protection is a laudable goal. It is also important to remember that wildlife protection and economic activity are not mutually exclusive.

In these difficult economic times, I am deeply concerned about any federal actions that would threaten job retention and creation, impair renewable energy development, or compromise other industry on public lands, such as grazing or mining. Given the massive scope of the sage grouse habitat, it is vital that any decisions regarding this species be consistent not only with our mutual desire to see the restoration of the sagebrush ecosystem, but also job creation for Americans.

The State of Nevada has long had significant efforts underway to protect the sage grouse and their habitat. One of the primary challenges we face is the inability to take proactive measures to protect habitat on the 85% of Nevada's land base that is controlled by the federal government.

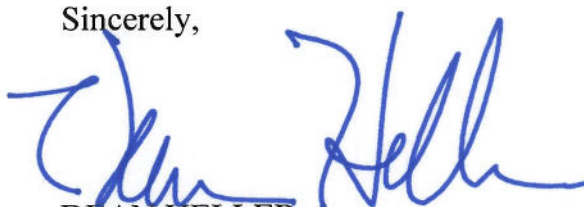
An example of this difficulty is the situation we face regarding the threat of wildfire to sage grouse habitat. Because of Nevada's land ownership pattern, we have limited opportunities to protect habitat from wildfire on public lands at a state or local level and the federal land management agencies spend limited fire funds outside the wildland urban interface. As a result, sage grouse habitat is being degraded by wildfires on federal land, which the federal government does not take sufficient measures to prevent or extinguish. This unfortunate cycle does nothing to help the sage grouse or our economy.

The BLM currently has several tools at its disposal that would benefit sage grouse habitat, such as an aggressive assault on pinyon-juniper encroachment into the sagebrush ecosystem. I understand that funds are limited, but I would suggest now is the time for the Department of the Interior and the BLM to prioritize on-the-ground, active management over optional activities such as adding to the federal estate and creating unnecessary and duplicative programs like America's Great Outdoors and the Climate Change Response Council.

As you may know, Nevada has the highest unemployment rate in the nation at 13.4% and limiting economic opportunity on public lands will only make this worse. I am sensitive to the need to act aggressively to prevent a full listing under the Endangered Species Act and the potentially devastating impacts on jobs, private property, and access and opportunity on public lands that would come with it. I look forward to working with you and all other stakeholders to uphold our mutual desire to protect sage grouse habitat, while also securing the future of economic activity, like renewable energy development, on our nation's public lands.

I respectfully request that as you continue to develop the IM, you exercise caution and carefully consider the impacts to Nevada, and the entire west, of any action by the Department of the Interior pertaining to the greater sage grouse.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator

Cc: The Honorable Brian Sandoval, Governor, State of Nevada
The Honorable Bob Abbey, Director, Bureau of Land Management