

The Honorable John McCain  
Chairman, Armed Services Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Chairman, Armed Services Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

July 7, 2015

Dear Chairman McCain, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Reed and Ranking Member Smith:

On behalf of the undersigned sportsmen, conservation, and resource professional organizations, we respectfully encourage you to oppose inclusion of any sage-grouse provisions in the Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) conference report. Language currently included in the House NDAA undermines existing state and federal conservation plans that have been developed explicitly to keep the sage grouse off of the endangered species list, and should be rejected by the conference committee.

Success for sage-grouse means keeping the bird off of the endangered species list and retaining its continued management by the states through strong, conservation plans on federal public lands, coupled with state conservation plans and voluntary efforts from private landowners. We believe that we are firmly on the path to realizing that success. However, delays in the decision-making process and shifts in management authority would curtail current efforts to assure that voluntary measures and regulatory assurances will be in place in a timely fashion.

Eleven Western states and the federal government have been engaging in an historic level of cooperation and collaboration; our organizations believe that if this robust process is allowed to continue, with the full engagement of all interested parties, that these efforts may preclude the need for listing. Importantly, the USFWS has not requested a delay so as to get to a "not warranted" finding.

Any delay creates even more uncertainty for industry, ranchers and other stakeholders by keeping the status of the greater sage-grouse in limbo, as "warranted, but precluded." Delaying the decision also increases the likelihood of the species being listed further down the road as the urgency is removed for a number of years.

It is also important to note that more is at stake than the sage-grouse. The sagebrush ecosystem is home to more than 350 different species of plants and animals, including such iconic species as mule deer, pronghorn and elk. If we can successfully conserve the sage-grouse and its habitat, we will help prevent a cascade of future listings that could seriously impact the western economy. The proof that collaboration works was clearly illustrated earlier this year, as the distinct Bi-State population of sage-grouse was deemed unwarranted for listing by the Department of Interior; a similar process can play out

with a similar successful outcome on the range-wide population of greater sage-grouse if Congress allows that process to continue.

Moreover, the issue of sage-grouse conservation is irrelevant to our nation's defense and complicates the important effort to pass the National Defense Authorization Act. Therefore, the undersigned organizations encourage you to reject the inclusion of the House language in the conference report.

With regards,

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Berkley Conservation Institute – Pure Fishing

National Wildlife Refuge Association

National Wild Turkey Federation

North American Grouse Partnership

Pheasants Forever

Public Lands Foundation

Quail Forever

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

The Wildlife Society

Wildlife Management Institute