

May 30, 2024

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, Chairman Simpson, and Ranking Member Pingree:

The undersigned fish and wildlife conservation organizations and professional societies write to request your support for removal of the greater sage-grouse rider from the FY2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

This rider, included in annual appropriations since FY2014, prohibits the Department of the Interior from using any funds to make decisions regarding the listing of the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Current science released jointly by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey indicates that greater sage-grouse populations continue to decline, and that approximately 1 million acres of sagebrush habitat are lost annually.

Our organizations believe the annual rider ignores the conclusions of federal, state, and university-based scientific experts and is an unnecessary interference by Congress in science-based regulations set forth by the Endangered Species Act with authorities provided to the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The continued inclusion of this rider is a dangerous precedent for Congressional intervention in the Service's mission to assess the biological status of species and determine whether they warrant protections under the ESA. Efforts to influence the listing of species via the appropriations process are not conducive to science-based decision making, excluding wildlife biologists from the established procedures and benchmarks set forth by the ESA. Rather than top-down, Congressionally-mandated actions, we believe decisions under the ESA should begin in the field and be informed by the best available science – not the appropriations process.

Furthermore, we encourage the Committee to provide strong funding levels for Bureau of Land Management activities that are important to the health of the sagebrush ecosystem, including wildlife habitat management, resource management planning for sage-grouse conservation, post-fire emergency stabilization and rehabilitation, and the National Seed Strategy. We also support funding for U.S. Geological Survey engagement on sage-grouse research, in close cooperation with state wildlife agencies.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to remove the sage-grouse rider. We look forward to working with you and your staff as the FY2025 budget process advances.

Sincerely,

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Colorado Wildlife Federation
Idaho Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Federation
The Nature Conservancy
North American Grouse Partnership
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife Management Institute
The Wildlife Society