



July 6, 2015

The Honorable Cory Gardner
United States Senate
Senate Dirksen Office Building SD-B40B
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Gardner:

Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) supports many of the provisions in the Sage-Grouse Protection and Conservation Act, S. 1036. As an organization made up of six counties and many municipalities in Northwest (NW) Colorado, we are very concerned about the potential listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse (GSG) as well as the accurate designation of habitat for the GSG. Our members are supportive of the provision in S. 1036 that empowers the states to craft and implement their own conservation plans related to the preservation of the GSG.

Our members have been very disappointed at the lack of federal agency willingness to share scientific data with local governments and appreciate the requirement in the bill that the data be shared and that state plans are to be recognized for six years. The requirement that the Department of Interior (DOI) take immediate action to amend all land use plans to comply with the Colorado Statewide Plan is an important step toward continuing the positive work already begun in Northwest Colorado for the protection of the GSG.

Federal lands in our region are a strong economic engine for our communities and the federal multiple use mandate is important to our communities in balancing conservation, habitat and industry. AGNC members are very concerned that any legislation passed regarding the GSG makes it very clear that the multiple use mandate continues to apply to the lands in NW Colorado while the state and local governments work collaboratively to protect the GSG.

AGNC further supports a requirement that recognizes the differences in the terrain of NW Colorado and how the GSG uses the habitat in that terrain. Too often, a one-size-fits all approach is used in designating habitat without a complete understanding of the terrain or the impact on varying landscapes on the species of concern. AGNC members support a more localized delineation of the GSG habitat through modeling that considers environmental and anthropogenic variables as well as analyze seasonal nesting/brood habitats for each of the populations in NW Colorado. Current modeling is not specific enough and results in an overly broad habitat recommendation ignoring unique habitats of each of the six populations.

AGNC appreciates your efforts in introducing legislation that will give states' the authority and ability to solve species issues, like the GSG, at a local level. It has been shown that local management for conservation and protection is more effective than national management which tends to disregard the unique local landscapes, economies and cooperative efforts. Thank you for your consideration of our comments; please let us know if we can be of assistance in moving this important legislation forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Eskelson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeffrey Eskelson, Chairman
Rio Blanco County

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Chazen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Martin Chazen, Vice-Chairman
City of Grand Junction