

**PRESS RELEASES**

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **Obama's Sage-grouse Land Grab is Swiss Cheese**

Washington, August 1, 2019 | Ben Goldey



Today, Members of the Senate and Congressional Western Caucus released the following statements applauding U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue's announcement that the U.S. Forest Service is making amendments to overly restrictive and unclear sage-grouse land management plans created by the Obama administration in 2015:

**Congressional Western Caucus Chairman Paul Gosar (AZ-04):** "The Obama administration imposed one of the largest land grabs in American history under the guise of protecting the Greater sage-grouse, a species that isn't even threatened or endangered. Their real motivation was to lockup as much land as possible, preventing multiple-use activities like oil and gas production, mining, and grazing in the process. The Greater sage-grouse was simply the means to their end as the bird's habitat comprises 173 million acres in 11 Western States. Secretary Perdue's announcement is welcome news as it is the third and final piece of the puzzle in terms of reining in the sage-grouse overreach of the previous

administration. I applaud President Trump and his administration for treating Western states as partners instead of forcing their political agenda down our throats like the Obama administration."

**Senator Mike Crapo (ID):** "The United States Department of Agriculture's announcement today to better coordinate Forest Service plans for habitat protection of sage grouse with state conservation strategies is grounded in good science and practical state and local economic considerations. This approach will have greater public support and participation in Idaho and will lead to a more beneficial outcome for sage grouse and its habitat."

**Senator Jim Risch (ID):** "Idaho's sage-grouse plan brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to recover the species through a collaborative science-based process. A one-size-fits-all approach to land management does not work, and I am pleased the Forest Service is rolling back this federal overreach and taking into account the needs of the species, wildlife managers, and local communities."

**Committee on Natural Resources Ranking Republican Rob Bishop (UT-01):** "This move is one more encouraging demonstration of the administration's deference to state and local wisdom. The Department of Agriculture clearly understands that the 'one size fits all' federal approach of the past is inappropriate and unproductive. The Endangered Species Act will no longer be used as a weapon to circumvent states and their unique regional needs and proven track records on preserving sage grouse habitat."

**Chief Regulatory Reform Officer Andy Biggs (AZ-05):** "I commend the U.S. Forest Service's decision to grant western states greater flexibility to implement sensible sage grouse management plans. State and local officials are much better positioned than bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. to understand the wildlife conservation needs of their communities, which is why I hope today's USFS announcement is merely the first step in an ongoing process of rolling back heavy-handed federal control over millions of acres of western land."

**Chief Agriculture and Business Officer Doug LaMalfa (CA-01):** "The Obama Administration used the sage-grouse as a tool for taking control of tens of millions of acres of land across the country, including in Northeastern California. In reality, the species recovered years ago and has been doing well for quite some time. In fact, there's no valid justification for the de-facto listing of the sage-grouse under the Obama land use amendments, and it's just another example of an overreaching land grab from the previous administration. I appreciate the Administration's efforts to unwind unnecessary Obama-era restrictions and maximize land use in rural parts of the country like Northern California."

**Congressman Russ Fulcher (ID-01):** "Great to see the Forest Service is joining BLM to implement these plans. This proposal moving forward will reinstate trust in our local ranchers and allow the state to make decisions for the benefit of Idahoans."

**Congressman Mike Simpson (ID-02):** "I applaud Secretary Perdue and the Forest Service for their efforts and action to better align the sage grouse management plans with the State of Idaho. Furthermore, the Forest Service also closely worked with the Department of the

Interior to align their plans to ensure maximum coordination and efficiency. I too often hear of a patchwork of federal agency rules which are inconsistently applied across Idaho's landscape. To better conserve sage grouse and sage brush, we need to collaborate across all federal, state, and local agencies to ensure we are reducing their primary threat of wildfire. I think today's announcement is a step in the right direction and I look forward to helping the Forest Service and Interior in their work to conserve sage grouse."

### **Background:**

Today, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced amendments to U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land management plans that were created by the Obama administration in 2015 for Greater sage-grouse management in the states of Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, and Utah.

On Friday, August 2, 2019, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Records of Decision (ROD) for Greater sage grouse conservation on USFS land will be formally published in the Federal Register, beginning a 60-day objection period, after which the USFS will attempt to resolve any remaining concerns before signing the final ROD.

The proposed amendments aim to better align USFS land management plans with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resource management plans and also with state plans in order to conserve sage-grouse populations, strike a better regulatory balance, and build greater trust among Western states and communities. The amendments are state-specific and reject the top-down, one-size-fits-all mandates implemented by the Obama Administration.

The 2015 Obama plans were overly restrictive, confusing, and failed to make clear what activities were authorized and where they could occur. The proposed amendments aim to afford increased clarity and certainty in order to increase multiple-use activities on USFS land in these states while still protecting the sage-grouse. For example, some of the plan amendments provide increased flexibility and assurances for grazing, energy production and wildfire management.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Obama administration found in 2015 that an Endangered Species Act listing of the sage-grouse was not warranted determining that the species was relatively abundant and not at risk of extinction then or in the foreseeable future. However, the Obama administration chose to use the sage-grouse as a mechanism to implement one of the largest land grabs in American history. Essentially, the Obama administration implemented a de facto listing of the sage-grouse by making major changes to 98 BLM and USFS land and resource plans in 11 Western states. These regulatory restrictions were significant as the bird's habitat covers 173 million acres, more than 90 million acres of which is federal land.

The Obama land use plan amendments were in many cases more restrictive than a critical habitat designation under an ESA listing. The amendments sought to lock up tens of millions of acres of federal land in order to stifle oil, gas, and mineral production as well as grazing and other activities. BLM sage-grouse lands cover approximately 80 of the 85 million federal

acres impacted by the Obama administration amendments. The BLM signed ROD amending their resource management plans on March 15, 2019.

The Obama administration simultaneously withdrew 10 million acres of the sage-grouse-related habitat from future mining activity – actions which lacked the benefit of scientific support or correlation with species recovery – but were purely targeted to shut down development. Fortunately, this massive mineral withdrawal was canceled in October of 2017 by the Trump administration.

The previous administration's scheme to use the sage-grouse as a rationalization to shut down large swaths of public lands across the West, particularly for oil, gas, and mineral development along with grazing is unlawful. This unilateral action resulted in devastating impacts on local economies. Western Energy Alliance estimated in 2014 that the plan amendments would cost more than \$5 billion in economic activity and a corresponding 31,000 good-paying jobs. As the Wall Street Journal Editorial Board [noted in an August 11, 2017 piece](#): "The land plans all but ban mining and grazing in certain areas, whereas a species listing at least allows some development after onerous conservation or mitigation planning."

*Picture added - Admin*