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Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Main Interior  
1849 C Street NW, Room 3331  
Washington, District of Columbia 20240-0001

Subject: Continuing Commitment and Assurance to Implement Conservation Actions for the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment of the Greater Sage-grouse

Dear Director:

This letter is being sent to reiterate the Nevada Department of Wildlife's (NDOW) commitment to fulfilling the conservation goals identified in the Bi-State Strategic Action Plan (Section 7.0 of the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan – Past, Present, and Future Actions for the Conservation of the Greater Sage-grouse Bi-State Distinct Population Segment) to the greatest of our ability. These goals include:

- 1) Ensure no net-loss of greater sage-grouse breeding populations in the Bi-State Plan area (2004 Bi-State Plan Species Conservation Goal); and
- 2) Maintain and improve sagebrush and associated habitats to provide for the long-term viability of greater sage-grouse populations within the Bi-State Plan area (2004 Bi-State Plan Ecosystem Conservation Goal).

Beyond personnel time committed to planning and monitoring, our agency has and will continue to contribute funding for project implementation and monitoring sage-grouse population and habitat response to projects and management actions.

***Accomplishments since 2014***

In cooperation with federal land management agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, NDOW has been instrumental in helping to implement several projects identified in the 2012 Bi-State Sage-grouse Conservation Action Plan (Action Plan) including pinyon and juniper removal, habitat improvement, wildfire restoration and monitoring projects.

Removal of encroaching pinyon and juniper trees within sagebrush habitats remains one of the most highly ranked conservation actions to prevent further loss of Bi-State sage-grouse habitat, while also providing an avenue to expand habitat availability as well. Within the Pine Nut Population Management Unit (PMU), NDOW has contributed \$334,683.00 for pinyon and juniper removal projects including hand and mechanical removal techniques. In addition, \$154,199.82 has been provided to pinyon and juniper removal work associated with the East Walker treatment units in the Mount Grant PMU thus far. Additional funding has been allocated to fully complete these projects in future years.

NDOW has contributed funding and assisted with seed purchase and application for wildfire restoration efforts within the Bi-State Plan Area. Specifically, \$57,846.08 was provided to assist with restoration efforts associated with the Bison Fire in the Pine Nut PMU. This fire occurred in 2013 and was 24,139 acres in size. Additionally, NDOW provided \$92,307.66 to help with rehabilitation of the 14,226 acre Spring Peak Fire that also occurred in 2013 within the Mount Grant and Bodie Hills PMUs. Other habitat restoration efforts include weed treatments, conservation easement acquisitions, and riparian improvements. These efforts have incorporated collaboration between private landowners, State of Nevada Conservation Districts, non-governmental organization, and NDOW. To date, NDOW has expended \$10,675 to treat invasive annual grasses in the Bi-State covering approximately 303 acres in the Desert Creek/Fales PMU, provide \$2,860 for the acquisition of an easement in the Pine Nut PMU and contributed \$3,300 for riparian stabilization work along the Walker River in the Desert Creek/Fales PMU.

In addition to assisting with habitat improvement and restoration projects, one of NDOW's main responsibilities associated with any wildlife species is monitoring. Aside from personnel commitments associated with sage-grouse lek monitoring and brood surveys, NDOW has contracted and partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey to conduct intensive movement and demographic monitoring within the Desert Creek and Mount Grant PMUs over the last three years. NDOW has contributed \$261,010.27 thus far and the results associated with these monitoring efforts has provided valuable data relative to movement patterns, dispersal, habitat use as well as informing the Bi-State Integrated Population Model (Coates et al. 2018). Furthermore, NDOW, in cooperation with several other partnering agencies, has administered an aggressive vegetation monitoring program associated with the Nevada Partners in Conservation Development (NPCD) program. Over the last several years, NDOW has spent approximately \$414,641 for vegetative monitoring to determine habitat treatment effectiveness and trajectories within the Bi-State planning area as a whole. This includes high resolution aerial imagery of portions of Bi-State sage-grouse habitat (captured by drones) that can be compared to microhabitat vegetative characteristic data obtained from conventional ground monitoring and later modeled across various spatial scales to remotely evaluate habitat condition.

In total, NDOW has provided \$1,331,523 in funding since 2014. This is in addition to the approximately \$1.4 million NDOW expended through 2013 and demonstrates that our agency is exceeding expectations relative to the initial commitment of \$3.6 million through 2024 identified in our letter to you dated June 8, 2014 (attached).

### ***Future Commitment***

NDOW will continue to contribute available funding and resources to habitat improvement, easement acquisition, wildfire restoration and monitoring. With respect to habitat improvement, additional work is required within some of the East Walker project units and elsewhere. As mentioned, remaining funding is available to assist with the completion of the East Walker project in the Mount Grant and Desert Creek PMUs. Meadow and riparian restoration work needs further assessment and ultimately, implementation of remedies. One of the focal areas, for example, will be within the Nine Mile portion of the newly established Walker River Recreation Area within the Mount Grant PMU. Some of this area is considered valuable brood rearing habitat for sage-grouse and improvements here would benefit the sustainability of the Mount Grant population. NDOW is committed to providing resources to help carry out restoration and improvement projects in conjunction with Nevada State Parks within this area.



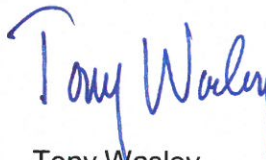
NDOW is also dedicated to providing funding and personnel resources to further monitoring of Bi-State sage-grouse populations and habitat conditions. Within the next six years, NDOW will be contributing over \$300,000 to monitor sage-grouse population movements and demography to assess habitat use and vital rates including annual survival, nest initiation rates, nest survival and brood survival rates. Monitoring the vegetative response to treatments and management actions will also remain a priority for the NPCD program. Through 2017, the NPCD has surveyed 589 plots within the Bi-State PMUs, including the California portions. The metrics collected from these sites provide a rich data set from which to compare pre and post treatment effects of habitat improvement projects.

***Additional Information/Closing Comments***

In closing, we urge your agency to consider these accomplishments and future commitments as evidence that NDOW remains steadfast in implementing the Bi-State Strategic Action Plan. Some of the foremost objectives identified in this section of the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan were relative to a coordinated, interagency approach and developing a science-based adaptive management plan. To date, I think your agency would agree that the Bi-State Local Area Working Group, Executive Oversight Committee, and Technical Advisory Committee have displayed a level of coordination and cooperation between state, federal and private entities that has been functional and effective for a substantial period of time. In fact, other efforts across the range of sage-grouse (e.g. Gunnison sage-grouse) are using the structure and approach taken here in the Bi-State Sage-grouse plan area as a model to adequately address conservation of the species. With respect to adaptive management approaches, we also consider the level of science, in terms of data collection and analysis from the species and habitat standpoint, to be robust and provides managers with information to make better decisions on treatment areas and management actions.

Thank you for your time and we appreciate our close working relationship with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as other federal agencies as we strive to conserve this important species and the habitat on which it depends. If you have any questions, please contact our Upland Game Staff Specialist, Shawn Espinosa, at (775) 688-1523 or [sespinosa@ndow.org](mailto:sespinosa@ndow.org).

Sincerely,



Tony Wasley  
Director