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Organization: Natural Resources Defense Council

Title: Advocate

Comments: To John Shivak and the Objection Reviewing Officer,

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), I am writing to object to the Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Management Plan Amendments, Five Draft Records of Decision for National Forests in Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and Wyoming/Colorado and deliver the objections of 2,125 NRDC members, the vast majority of whom are based in Western States. A compilation of their comments and contact information is attached.

These amendments are a mistake, and we urge you to reverse course on the changes the Forest Service has proposed to the 2015 Greater Sage-Grouse Management Plans, which amount to nothing less than a gutting of a landmark agreement that the overwhelming majority of Westerners support. This plan took years to finalize and was the result of ranchers, scientists, recreationists, conservationists, government officials, and many more coming together to save the iconic sage-grouse. And the sage-grouse is far from the only beneficiary. The management plan protects 350 other species of wildlife that depend on the sagebrush ecosystem, as well as the \$1 billion annual outdoor recreation economy that fuels local economies across the West.

Still, recent studies have found that the sage-grouse populations have experienced sharp declines in recent years. Sage-grouse populations have experienced sharp declines in recent years. Montana's population has fallen more than 40 percent over the past three years; Utah has seen a 61 percent drop since 2015; and Wyoming has counted 40 percent fewer birds since 2016.<sup>1</sup> Idaho reported a loss of 52 percent since 2016; Nevada's 2019 lek counts found a 33 percent decline from 2016; and Oregon's estimated population has suffered a 24.9 percent decline from just last year.

The plans you are moving towards unravelling are critical to keep the iconic species' population from plummeting further and, without them in place, the chance that the Fish and Wildlife Service is required to protect the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act is significantly increased. This would be a deeply undesirable outcome for the land users that came to the table to devise the 2015 Management Plans and the circumstances that would bring us to that point would cause great harm to ecosystems across the West and the communities built around them.

Once again, NRDC and its members urge you to reverse course and leave protections for the sage-grouse and Western way of life intact.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jacob