

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/21/2019 2:09:01 PM

First name: DIANE

Last name: KASTEL

Organization:

Title:

Comments:

OUR FAMILY VEHEMENTLY OPPOSES THE PROPOSAL BY THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION TO FORGE AHEAD WITH PLANS TO GIVE OIL, AND, GAS, COMPANIES EXPANDED ACCESS TO DRILL IN BREEDING, AND, NESTING AREAS FOR THE GREATER SAGE-GROUSE ON FEDERAL LAND, A MOVE THAT CRITICS SAY IGNORES THE BIRD'S NEED FOR LARGE TRACTS OF UNBROKEN HABITAT, AND, TOSSES ASIDE A HARD-WON COMPROMISE TO KEEP IT FROM BEING LISTED UNDER THE "ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT"!

Among other changes affecting "Bureau of Land Management", ("BLM") property in seven states, the new management plans would reduce designated "sagebrush focal areas"-habitat considered most essential for the long-term health of sage-grouse populations, and, currently protected by the tightest restrictions on development- by more than 80 percent, from 10.7 million acres to 1.8 million!

When the "Interior Department" released draft versions of the new plans in May, conservation groups, and, many members of the public, pushed back, saying they would allow reckless development in areas that are crucial to recover the bird's dwindling population! Some 40,000 Americans, including about 15,000 Audubon members, and, supporters, submitted public comments opposing such provisions, and, urging the department to maintain a series of 2015 plans that were a landmark compromise among industry, environmentalists, and, others!

But, the final proposals issued today are little changed from those drafts, and, threaten to seriously degrade prime sagebrush habitat, says Brian Rutledge, director of Audubon's "Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative". "It is a sweetheart deal for oil, and, gas," he says!

In a press release announcing the new plans, "Deputy Interior Secretary", David Bernhardt said they were an attempt "to better align "BLM" resource management plans with state plans for conserving sage-grouse populations, strike a regulatory balance, and, build greater trust among neighboring interests in Western communities"!

Members of the public have a 30-day window to weigh in on the plans before they are made final early next year, and, governors of sage-grouse states get 60 days to review them for consistency with state, and, local policies! (The U.S. Forest Service is also finalizing plans for the land it manages, with a comment period ending January 3.)

Greater Sage-Grouse once numbered in the millions across 13 states, and, three Canadian provinces! They are key players in a sagebrush ecosystem that supports 350 other plant, and, animal species, including mule deer, pronghorn, kit fox, and, birds like Sagebrush Sparrow Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, and, Sage Thrasher! But, development, agriculture, and, more recently, invasive cheat grass have eaten up half the sagebrush habitat the chunky, ground-dwelling birds rely on for food, and, shelter! As a result, the number of breeding males plunged by 56 percent between 2007 and 2013, and, the government estimates that between 200,000 and 500,000 Greater Sage-Grouse remain, spread over 11 states, and, two provinces!