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The purpose of this letter is to comment on the Manti-La Sal National Forest draft "Revised Land Management Plan for the Manti-La Sal National Forest" and specifically on aspects dealing with the impacts of human-caused sounds on wildlife. The current draft revised plan does not address this issue; however, the proposed "Conservation Alternative" does address these potential impacts and provides guidance on how to minimize impacts.

Nearly all animal species rely to some degree on the ability to hear sounds around them and to communicate with others of their species. Many animals use sounds to attract mates and establish territories. Many predators use hearing to locate prey, while many prey species use hearing to avoid predators. The ability to hear is essential to survival to many species. The "Revised Land Management Plan for the Manti-La Sal Nation Forest" does not recognize potential acoustic impacts to wildlife, nor does it provide management approaches to eliminate or minimize such potential impacts.

Human-caused sounds have long been recognized as having the potential to negatively impact wildlife, and recent studies have documented sound levels above which some species are impacted. For the past 10 years I have been studying the impacts of oil and gas drilling and extraction operations sounds on Greater Sage-grouse. We found that, absent human-caused sounds, many habitats can be very quiet, with background sound levels around 15 dBA (using the LA90 metric to describe background levels). Further, we found that grouse populations started to decline when sound levels were 10 dBA above background. Many sagebrush habitats in the Manti-La Sal National Forest are similar to sagebrush areas we studied in Wyoming, and we would expect such areas in the Manti-La Sal to have similar background sound levels.

One aspect of sound level measurement that needs to be considered is the need for equipment that measures very low levels. Sound levels in undeveloped areas can occasionally be as low as 0 dBA, but most sound levels meters used in wildlife studies do not measure this low. In order to get accurate background sound levels, researchers must use low-level equipment, meters that measure down to 5-10 dBA.

The draft "Conservation Alternative" prepared for the Manti-La Sal National Forest addresses potential negative acoustic impacts to wildlife, specifically Greater Sage-grouse, and recommends measures to minimize such impacts. Those recommendations, to keep human-caused less than 10 dBA over background, would likely provide acoustic protections to populations of Greater Sage-grouse in the Manti-La Sal National Forest. I urge the Forest Staff to incorporate such acoustic protections in the final revised management plan for the Manti-La Sal National Forest.