

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 12, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We write today concerning your June 7 Secretarial Order 3353, with its stated purpose of improving greater sage-grouse (“sage-grouse”) conservation and strengthening communication and collaboration between state and federal governments.

As you know, the 2015 federal land use plan amendments and revisions, which helped prevent a sage-grouse Endangered Species Act listing and received bipartisan support from governors in affected states, represented one of the largest land conservation efforts ever undertaken. These plans took four years to develop and were informed by a multitude of public meetings, formal comment periods and input from a diverse array of stakeholders, including ranchers, oil and gas representatives, miners, scientists and environmental organizations.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this unprecedented conservation partnership has significantly reduced threats to the sage-grouse across 90 percent of the species’ habitat, but the future of the bird depends on continued implementation of state and federal management plans. More than 350 species call sagebrush habitat home, so protecting sagebrush ecosystems also has benefits far beyond those for the sage-grouse.

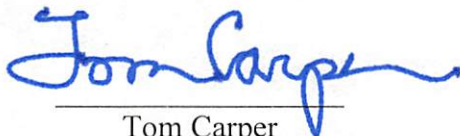
We are very interested in ensuring that the review mandated by your Order does not lead to diminished conservation outcomes and that the process is as transparent, inclusive and science-driven as the process that led to the original 2015 plans. We request your response to the following questions, as well as any documents related to your decision to conduct this review and a response on how and when all of this information will be accessible to the public.

- Who has the Bureau of Land Management designated to coordinate activities within the Department related to the Order?
- Please provide a full list of those appointed to serve on the review team as well as a description of their professional backgrounds and qualifications.
- Please provide a specific timeline for the activities of the review team, including visits to sage-grouse states, public meetings and other forms of stakeholder engagement.
- How are you ensuring that needed conservation activities are continuing under the current state and federal management plans as you undertake the review?

- The Department's announcement of the Order suggested that some affected states felt federal agencies were inflexible when reviewing state plans. What states expressed these concerns and what was the perceived inflexibility?
- The sage-grouse has been carefully studied, and it is important that conservation actions continue to be based on well-established data. How will the review team incorporate the best available science into the process?
- How will the review team coordinate with the Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service and all of the affected states? How will the review team consider input from stakeholders?
- How and when will you make all of the findings and recommendations from your review available to Congress and to the public? Will there be a formal comment period?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions or if we can provide you with additional information concerning the responses we are seeking, your staff may contact Elizabeth Mabry at the Committee on Environment and Public Works at (202) 224-8832. We respectfully request your response by July 21, 2017.

Sincerely yours,



Tom Carper
U.S. Senator



Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Jeffrey Merkley
U.S. Senator



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator