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Mr. Ted Koch, Nevada State Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office
1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234
Reno, NV 89502

Dear Mr. Koch:

New science on the bi-state distinct population segment of sage-grouse (bi-state DPS) has become available since U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) proposed listing of the bi-state DPS as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. That science includes a recent article in *Ecosphere*, discussing the effectiveness of habitat restoration (Arkle et. al. 2014), and a refinement of the Conservation Planning Tool (CPT) developed by Dr. Pete Coates of the United States Geological Survey (USGS). In light of these resources, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (HTNF) is pleased the FWS extended its decision period. Both resources provide the HTNF and our regional partners with the tools necessary to allow for more targeted, effective protection and restoration than was available to date.

There are two areas in which the HTNF will be able to improve our management using the new science. The first is in our current development of a forest plan amendment (amendment) in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This amendment provides the standards and guidelines under which all work will operate, including targeted habitat structure, limited operating periods, fire response, and preferred restoration strategies (short and long-term). After the Arkle et. al. (2014) article was published and the updated CPT became available, we updated our proposed action to reflect the latest science.

The second area in which the HTNF will be able to improve our management using the new science is in the design and prioritization of protection and restoration projects. The Arkle et. al. (2014) article provides managers with guidance about short versus long-term benefits of various restoration projects to the birds and emphasizes the need for protection of habitat versus restoration. Within that framework, managers can now run their proposed projects through the revised CPT to quantify the expected benefit of each project and use it to prioritize them.

In addition to the Arkle et. al. paper and the CPT, a new population trend analysis on the bi-state DPS was recently completed by Dr. Pete Coates using new agency data. His preliminary findings suggest the bi-state DPS is more stable than previously thought. In addition to providing important trend data, Coates' research emphasizes the need for continued and expanded



population (as well as movement, productivity, and survivorship) data collection to allow for informed decisions about the bi-state DPS now and into the future.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM A. DUNKELBERGER
Forest Supervisor

References

Arkle, R.S., D.S. Pilliod, S.E. Hanser, M.L. Brooks, J.C. Chambers, J.B. Grace, K.C. Knutson, D.A. Pyke, J.L. Welty, and T.A. Wirth. 2014. Quantifying restoration effectiveness using multi-scale habitat models: implications for sage-grouse in the Great Basin. *Ecosphere* 5:31.