

Bird Conservation Alliance

**Working Together to Conserve
America's Wild Birds**



June 29, 2022

Tracy Stone-Manning
Director, Bureau of Land Management
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Stone-Manning:

As the Bureau of Land Management moves forward with land use plan amendments to conserve the Greater sage-grouse, we write to express our support for the designation of the range wide Sagebrush Sea Reserve Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) network nominated by 19 conservation organizations on February 8, 2020 and which would protect the most important habitat for this iconic bird and the hundreds of other species reliant on healthy sagebrush ecosystems.

We represent birdwatchers and bird conservationists from across the country. Birdwatching is one of the most popular recreational activities in the United States with 81 million Americans (about one in three adults) participating in 2008. It is also one of the fastest growing outdoor activities in the United States with a projected growth rate between 2008 and 2030 of 32 percent. Birdwatchers travel extensively to see birds and in doing so contribute to local economies and job creation. Expenditures related to wildlife-viewing in the United States is calculated at \$76 billion, the majority of which is attributed to bird-watching.

Protecting the Sagebrush Sea matters not only for sage-grouse, but also for other birds native to the region. These include migratory and resident birds such as Sagebrush Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, Gray Flycatcher, Golden Eagles and Ferruginous Hawk. The Pocket Guide to Sagebrush Birds lists many more.

The need for a Sagebrush Sea Reserve ACEC network could not be more pressing. Greater sage-grouse populations have declined by 80% range-wide since 1965, and by 40% since 2002. In 2015, in an effort to halt these declines, the Bureau amended land use plans to conserve tens of millions of acres of land as Greater sage-grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMAs).

But these measures have not been enough. The five-year monitoring report on the efficacy of

the 2015 amendments found 1.9 million acres of sagebrush in PHMAs were lost between 2012 and 2018 and that hard and soft population triggers, meant to alert land managers to population declines, were tripped forty-two times since 2015.

We applaud the Bureau for revisiting its 2015 land use plan amendments and recognizing the accelerating threats to sage-grouse and their habitat posed by climate change. This is the time to put in place forward-looking, durable, and effective protections, and the Sagebrush Sea Reserve ACEC network would do just that.

Building on past conservation efforts to increase protections against habitat loss and adverse effects of climate change, the ACEC network would be instrumental in advancing sage grouse conservation. We therefore urge the Bureau to designate a Sagebrush Sea Reserve ACEC network as part of its ongoing land use planning process.

Sincerely,

Advocates for the West
American Bird Conservancy
Arkansas Valley Audubon Society
Audubon Society of Forsyth County - Winston-Salem, NC
Bexar Audubon Society
Biodiversity First!
Bird Conservation Network
Birdfriendlyyards.net
Blue Ridge Audubon Chapter
Bucks County Audubon Society
Buffalo Field Campaign
Cape Henry Audubon Society
Center for Biological Diversity
Chicago Bird Collision Monitors
Coastal Plains Institute
Compassion for All Living Beings
Conneaut Hawk Watch
Conservation CATalyst
Eastern Long Island Audubon Society
Ecology Center of Southern California
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Protection Information Center- EPIC
EVERGREEN AUDUBON
Forest Web
Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights
Friends of Bryan Park
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Friends of the Inyo

FRIENDS OF THE SAN PEDRO RIVER INC
Genesee Valley Audubon Society
Houston Audubon
Humane Action Pittsburgh
Illinois Ornithological Society
Kauai Albatross Network
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Lane County Audubon Society
Linnaean Society of New York
Maryland Ornithological Society
Maryland Sierra Club Natural Places committee
Mid-Michigan Stewardship Initiative
Missouri River Bird Observatory
New Mexico Audubon Council
Northwest Arkansas Audubon society
Pasadena Audubon Society
Peoria Audubon Society
Presque Isle Audubon Society
Prince George's County Audubon Society
Raptors Are The Solution
Rockbridge Bird Club
Sacramento Audubon Society
Safe Skies Maryland
Salem Audubon Society
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Save Our Seabirds, Inc.
Saving Birds Thru Habitat
Sierra Foothills Audubon Society
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council
Space Coast Audubon Society
St. Louis Audubon Society
Tennessee Ornithological Society
Umpqua Watersheds
Wasatch Audubon
Washington Crossing Audubon Society
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Whidbey Environmental Action Network