



March 13, 2017

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Dembrow, members of the Committee

I am John O'Keeffe, I am President of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. Also I have served as the landowner representative on the team that wrote the Oregon Sage Grouse plan in 2005, the revised in 2011. I represented landowners and range permittees during the Sage Con effort, Oregon's all lands all threats effort, a key part of the west wide effort to prevent a listing of the Greater Sage Grouse under the endangered species act. I have been active west wide representing the Public Lands Council and The National Cattlemen's Beef Association on Sage Grouse issues.

I have hosted the Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell, on my ranch as part of a tour that show cased the public /Private partnership doing Sage Grouse Conservation in Lake County, Oregon.

During all this time, the most inspiring effort was the Harney County Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, a community wide, three year effort to get it right. Multigeneration of ranchers putting science on the ground. Working with the US Fish and Wildlife to conserve Sage Grouse and help themselves. This effort was made whole by the active involvement of the Range Scientists that work at the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center in Burns Oregon.

After Harney county did this the other Sage Grouse counties were able to take advantage of this stellar effort by adopting a similar document for their counties.

As all this was occurring, active conservation projects were underway. Juniper removal was the most common activity, this helps the watershed, it helps the range, this helps the Sage Grouse, a true win win for the rancher, for the Sage Grouse.

But that was not the only activity. We were building capacity in our RFPAs. You can't measure what does not happen, we will never know the cost saving from this effort, but it is huge. Policy makers in Salem often see ranchers vocalizing opposition to government programs or regulations, I wish you could be there in the country to see ranchers working with government firefighters, long hours on the ground working together to stop a fire. I could go on about RFPAs but instead I will submit for the record a letter from past OCA president and fellow RFLPA member Bob Skinner.

Also happening, ranchers are ensuring that our grazing systems are compatible with Sage Grouse. We have the science, when grazed properly, grazed pastures are less likely to burn, grazed pastures if burned, are more resistant to invasive annual grasses. We have the science showing properly grazed pastures have adequate nesting cover.

This is one of the areas that we still have work to do with the BLM. Since the completion of the SG RMPAs, we have learned that some of the habitat values in the planning document are based on studies that had sampling bias in the original design. This could lead toward management activities that will actually save and accumulate fine fuels for reasons that have not been shown to be beneficial to Sage Grouse. We saw the result of a fine fuel build up in 2012. This is not good in the face of the fact that fire is the number one threat to Sage Grouse.

Weeds, I have found weed infestations the size of my hat, agency personnel while dedicated and competent at spotting weeds, just don't cover the ground like livestock operators do. Early detection is the key to managing weeds, that and having the programs in place and funded so we can act when needed.

A mitigation framework will be a part of going forward. Oregon in the Sage Con effort worked hard to create a mechanism to allow limited, targeted strategic development. There are details to be worked out. When they are worked out, it will largely be ranchers providing the habitat, and those that propose projects will provide the funding. Done well, another win win. Sage Grouse conservation funded and jobs provided in a part of the state that needs jobs. Again, heavy on the "done well".

The beauty of this is it powers itself, ranchers in the act of day to day ranching will do these things. What we will need from the state is continued support for coordination amongst the multiple agencies and landowners, programs in place and funded (mitigation ODFW, weed control ODA, RFPA ODF), perhaps from time to time, a mechanism for conflict resolution and most importantly a message through actions, that Oregon is continuing to follow through on the Sage Grouse planning effort that helped lead to the decision not to list.

Thank you,

John O'Keefe

President, Oregon Cattlemen's Association