



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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18 Members of Congress Question the Interior Department's Bias & Lack of Transparency with Federal Sage Grouse Science

*Members Criticize Obama Administration's Emphasis on ESA Settlement
Deadlines Over Best Available Data*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04), Public Lands and Environmental Regulation Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01), and 16 Members of Congress sent a [letter](#) to the Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell expressing ongoing concerns with the Department's potential future listing of the Greater Sage Grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Specifically, the letter notes concerns with the Department's closed-door and seemingly selective process for evaluating relevant data and science, and failure to adequately coordinate with affected states that are developing their own data and conservation efforts to avoid the need for a listing of the Greater Sage Grouse under the ESA.

Some recent scientific studies indicate that Greater Sage Grouse populations are stable and not declining, contrary to the Interior Department's findings in reports developed several years ago. Concerns have been raised with the Department's refusal to consider these recent population and genetic sage grouse studies, and senior Department officials' focus on adherence to ESA listing deadlines negotiated in a 2011 mega-settlement with litigious groups behind closed-doors.

In the letter, Members question the Department's scheduling of an upcoming science "workshop" in Fort Collins, Colorado that appears to exclude scientists with relevant expertise in sage grouse population and genetics. They also criticize the significant flaws and lack of transparency of the Department's scientific conclusions that the Greater Sage Grouse is declining and that several "distinct population segments" warrant listing. This would trigger federal regulatory actions that will affect millions of acres of private, local, state and federal lands throughout portions of eleven western states.

"With less than a year to go before the Department's self-imposed September 2015 settlement deadline to determine whether to list the Greater Sage Grouse under the ESA, it appears that the Department is blatantly ignoring or downplaying significant flaws and gaps in its own sage grouse data and science, and failing to incorporate recent data that suggests sage grouse populations are stable and not declining. This undermines the Obama Administration's pledge to 'ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation,

*and collaboration,” wrote **Members in the letter.** “An independent scientific review of all best available science will work to strengthen trust and credibility in the agencies’ current opaque and flawed science, and better inform the Department and the American public on this important issue.”*

To view the full letter, click [here](#).

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