

STATEMENT OF DARIN BIRD  
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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON EMPOWERING STATES IN SAGE GROUSE MANAGEMENT  
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Chairman Bishop, ranking member Grijalva and members of the Committee, thank you for the kind invitation to testify today. I am appearing on behalf of Governor Gary Herbert and kindly ask that a copy of his written testimony be included as part of the hearing record as well.

It is easy to come and testify against unpopular federal programs. However, that is not my purpose today. I am here to talk about one of our successes and what is needed to protect sage grouse, western habitats, and hard working Americans.

Catastrophic wildfire has become a major concern across the American West. This year, the federal government has spent 2 Billion dollars on wildfire control. This is a new record and a tremendously burdensome expenditure for the American taxpayer.

When it comes to sage grouse, our number one concern in the state of Utah is wildfire. In 2007, Utah experienced a severe wildfire season. One catastrophic wildfire burned over 300,000 acres in central Utah. As a state, we assessed the problem and took action. We raised millions of dollars in private and state funding. We began to address the root causes of catastrophic wildfire in Sage-grouse habitats and began to restore Utah watersheds.

This program, The Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, has completed hundreds of projects in the last 10 years. Over 500 private, state, and federal partners have contributed to this program financially. We have invested over 160 million dollars and treated approximately 1.3 million acres. In just 9 years we have cut the number of wildfires in Sage-grouse habitat by 50%. We have almost no catastrophic wildfires in our sage grouse habitat. In fact, total acres burned since these efforts began has been 1/5th of what it was before we started these conservation actions...this has saved 514,552 acres of sage grouse habitat in the last 9 years. It has also saved tens of millions of dollars in wildfire fighting costs in the state of Utah.

These projects do more than just control wildfire. They restore our watersheds, native vegetative communities, and dramatically enhance habitat for wildlife. These areas are wetter, produce more runoff, and they dramatically increase the resilience and redundancy of habitats for Sage grouse. Our researchers are documenting dramatic measurable improvements in habitat utilization, nesting success, and population response of sage grouse in these restored areas.

By every measure, this program has been a resounding success for sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat.

I am here to do more than just share a feel good success story of a program that is working. I am here to protect these programs. In 2015, the Obama administration adopted land use plan amendments

aimed at imposing more regulations on human activity on millions of acres across the state of Utah. These federal sage grouse plans may be well intentioned, but they are a threat to the partnerships, funding, and collaboration that makes Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative Work.

Here is the problem: The state of Utah relies on economic activity in areas outside of our Sage grouse Management Areas to help pay for Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative. These new regulations have essentially brought much of the new economic activity in areas outside of Utah's SGMAs to a standstill. What this means is that funding from mitigation, sportsmen, and state tax revenues are being lost. This threatens the one program, (i.e. the Watershed Restoration Initiative) that is doing the most to protect and restore sage grouse in the state of Utah.

Good intentions do not make good policy. My earnest petition is that Congress let the people who are impacted the most enact the policies needed to protect our families, and our communities. I am asking you to protect a program that is unrivaled in the nation.

The success of our Watershed Restoration Initiative in restoring and protecting sage grouse is one of the reasons why Utah's legislature passed a nearly unanimous bipartisan resolution in support of a bill introduced by Congressman Bishop to protect Utah's sage-grouse conservation efforts. Take action and pass legislation that to protect the proven on-the-ground conservation programs that are working for sage grouse, sage grouse habitats, and hard working Americans.

Thank you very much and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.