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Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council
Comments by Fred Fulstone

We have reached a crisis with the sage hen problem. Sitting here every two weeks and talking about threats and showing how long the grass should be. Every time someone would come up with a "good idea", the USFWS spokesman would say, "I strongly object or I strongly disagree". If we want to get the sage hen numbers up we must immediately start an on the ground predator program on the Desert Creek ranch in Smith Valley, before the next hatch in April. We are wasting time on this committee and will lose hundreds of chicks, eggs, and grouse in the Desert Creek lek area. The minute the laying of eggs and hatching of eggs starts, the ravens, hawks, eagles, and coyotes arrive at Desert Creek, and start destroying eggs, chicks, and sage hen as they have done every year in the past. To help the sage hen on this problem, we must immediately contact Mark Jensen of Wildlife Services before the hatch and supply him with the finances to prepare a program which will at least save many eggs, chicks, and sage hen around Desert Creek leks. \$800,000. Has just been taken from the State and Wildlife services and used for mapping and some on the ground tests on sage hen destruction. We already know that predators are our problem. So this \$800,000.00 was wasted and could have been used to greatly increase sage hen numbers. Also, the State has cut three other trappers from our state system. Both NDOW and USFWS have known for years that the common predators were destroying their sage grouse and did nothing. { See Federal Register/ Volume 65 Number 165/ Thursday August 24, 2000, proposed rule. Now NDOW and USFWS are trying to blame the habitat. NDOW is responsible for the livelihood all of the wildlife in Nevada. It is their responsibility to contact Wildlife Services when there are wildlife kills and then they allocate them money to take care of the problem. NDOW is responsible for the sage hen and they could easily fix the predation problem by just making a phone call. Predation is them handled by Wildlife Services. The FS and BLM have

been in charge of managing the grazing allotments for 75 years and range scientists report ranges are in the best shape ever. The drought has had an impact, and is some of the problem, but not all. During the years, permittees have spent millions of dollars on the public ranges. Also during the 60's and 70's we had three times the livestock on our allotments and there were thousands of sage grouse grazing with the livestock. This is when we had our best predator control. We had very few coyotes, badgers, ravens, eagles and bob cats. Now the USFWS and NDOW are trying to blame the problems on the habitat. No way. Our livestock are only on the allotments for a short time and the sage grouse have it to themselves the rest of the year. You must remember the sage hen grazing cycle is mostly on private land about one fourth of the year.

The best management plan to sustain and improve sage grouse numbers and also sustain the farming communities is:

1. Don't list the sage grouse. Dangerous
2. Protect the sage grouse from the hostile environment, mainly the ground animals and birds that destroy them.[You don't have to necessarily destroy all the predators. There are many ways to protect the sage grouse.]
3. There should be wildlife people on the range night and day to protect the wildlife and to find out what is needed. New ideas.
4. There can be structures and water facilities built on the ranges to help to sustain them. The birds will work with us.
5. Those billions of dollars used to stop grazing of livestock should be used to protect and sustain the grouse on the ground.
6. The USFWS working with the FS and BLM is already falsely accusing livestock operators for interfering with the habitat. They don't know that they need livestock to cultivate the range to help wildlife.
7. We should look at the Administrative procedure act and the due process of law.
8. If the bird is listed the FS and BLM will tell the permittee that according to the ESA they have to comply with everything the NDOW and USFWS tell them what to do, as to the management of the allotments.

9. I believe that the casino people are with the agriculture people on this issue, because this listing will affect ALL aspects of the State, not just the Bi-State. Who will produce more game for the State if protection is not guaranteed for the wildlife?

In closing, even if the government passed the regulation which would stress our agriculture community, this is the wrong time to do it, because of the financial difficulties faced by our Federal Government today, and by the difficulties faced by the livestock and agriculture community by the drought. The one thing I regret is that there should have been more permittees on this council who understand their allotments areas better than anyone.

(S)Fred Fulstone _____

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