

Honorable Senator Dean Heller
361-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

SAGEBRUSH ECOSYSTEM PROGRAM

MAR 19 2014

March 13, 2014

Dear Senator Heller,

I am a member of the Eureka County Natural Resources Advisory Commission (NRAC)/70 years old and fourth generation Nevada Resident. My family bought their first Ranch in the Simpson Park Range in Eureka County, Nevada around 1889.

Through all those years we watched the sage grouse ebb and flow. In the early years there were a few birds, as years went by, livestock increased in numbers and so did the sage grouse and mule deer. So much so that in our area by the 1960's there was a huge die off. Sage grouse and mule deer both contracted infected glands. The birds, under the wings (we called it green wing) and the deer, along the throat. The Nevada Fish and Wildlife Services has no record of this ever happening.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, meadows in the riparian areas were small. They also increased in size and numbers because sheep and cattle laid along the stream banks creating open areas for meadows, decreasing erosion by sloping and sodding the banks, contrary to what special interest groups and federal agencies would have us believe.

Sage grouse and other wildlife enjoyed the new grass kept short by grazing. These same things happen in the meadows we use for hay production today.

In review of your new bill which we all hope would prevent the listing of this birds. I found some issues counterproductive to the increase in their numbers.

First, like you I do not believe it is possible to increase their numbers while hunting them. In years past the local game boards closed the seasons in their areas or limited days of the hunt when bird numbers were down. That is not the case today.

That brings me to the next issue, I find no mention in the bill on the subject of predator control. One reason the birds flourished in the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's was the fact that sheep producers in particular practiced it as a way to protect their property and inadvertently in the process enhanced the sage grouse and mule deer populations. That practice is still relevant today.

I am also troubled with section 201. Additions to National Wilderness. Those additions will only make the difficult relationship between permittees and the Department of Interior worse. In the end there will be no livestock in those areas because it is already difficult. Because of the drought several of those areas are closed to grazing anyway.

The other issue of concern is vested stock water rights in those areas. Any taking of them would be counter to the Eureka County Land Use Plan and Nevada State Water Law. Any restrictions because of time and date, not compatible with a vested water right would be a taking.

In closing, let me say I believe for the record removal or reduction in livestock numbers in riparian areas will only reduce sage grouse numbers. I have no college degree in wildlife management but those many years of observation, give me confidence enough to argue my observation with any wildlife biologist.

We commend your hard work on this matter and are thankful to have your voice in the Senate.

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Washington D.C. 20510

March 13, 2014

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leo G. Damele". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and "D".

Leo G. Damele
HC 62 Box 62310
Eureka, NV 89316

cc: Honorable Senator Harry Reid
Eureka County NRAC
Sagebrush Ecosystem Program
Nevada State Governor Brian Sandoval