
October 10, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

Western Governors, through the Western Governors' Association (WGA), write to express our goal to engage the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) in an ongoing and substantive partnership to prioritize conservation actions for at-risk species and preserve the integrity of western working landscapes and communities. To accomplish this goal, WGA proposes to develop the Western Governors' Task Force on Collaborative Conservation (Task Force).

Western Governors are appreciative of your September 10, 2018 Memorandum to DOI Heads of Bureaus and Offices and your July 17, 2018 Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recognizing the authority and expertise of states in managing wildlife within their borders. In addition to reliance on state agency expertise and knowledge in fish and wildlife management, collaboration with states is a necessary component of any successful species conservation effort. Cooperation between states and federal agencies is necessary to address the large-scale conservation needs that span federal, state and private lands and require a cross-boundary management approach. Moreover, efforts like the State-Federal Sage Grouse Task Force demonstrate Western Governors' ability to lead regional conservation efforts.

Western states are home to diverse and bountiful wildlife populations that contribute to economic opportunity and quality of life. At the same time, a working landscape operating on the principles of multiple use is key to the prosperity of western communities. Throughout the history of the West, species conservation and working land development have been characterized as competing interests. The Task Force will challenge this narrative by providing a venue for state and federal officials to engage in solutions-oriented dialogue on policies, programs, data sharing efforts and other actions to collectively identify and prioritize actions to conserve and manage at-risk western wildlife populations and landscapes.

A truly collaborative and proactive approach to species conservation efforts in the West is long overdue. Western Governors propose to build upon ongoing efforts to increase coordination among stakeholders, pursue on-the-ground conservation actions, and improve habitat for at-risk species. Our objective is to create a coordinated regional effort to identify at-risk species and landscapes and direct a multi-faceted response long before the threat of an Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing is imminent. The explanatory statement accompanying H.R. 1625, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-141), recognizes the value of such an approach and notes that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service):

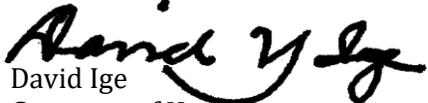
should look to its other programs and its partners to fund and implement conservation activities on the ground. The Service is commended for its efforts in the Southeast to work with States and others to preclude the need to list many of the

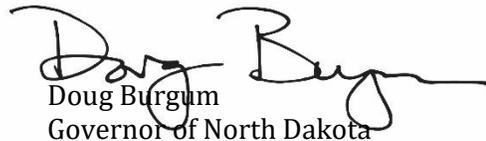
hundreds of species recently petitioned for listing, and is expected to expand this model nationwide.

Through the Task Force, Western Governors propose to partner with the Service and other DOI agencies to fulfill this congressional direction. Few groups are as well situated as WGA to lead such an effort. Western Governors have a proven track record in leading regional dialogues on Species Conservation and the ESA, National Forest and Rangeland Management, and Biosecurity and Invasive Species.

Governors are ready, willing and able to engage with DOI to achieve mutually-identified conservation goals developed in concert with private landowners, local governments, and multiple stakeholders. We look forward to your response and working with you to advance proactive conservation solutions for the betterment of western wildlife and communities.

Sincerely,


David Ige
Governor of Hawai'i
Chair, WGA


Doug Burgum
Governor of North Dakota
Vice Chair, WGA

cc: David Bernhardt, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
Jim Kurth, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service