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To the U.S. Forest Service and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue,

I am a college student at Humboldt State University studying ecological restoration. Over the summer I was lucky enough to participate in a field course in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho, during part of which I conducted field research in sandhills and sagebrush. Sadly, the only greater sage grouse that I saw on my trip was a dead one, whose tracker we returned to the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge office. This experience imparted upon me the need for GRSG conservation.

I appreciate the desire to streamline regulation and management plans, but it seems to me that in the effort to remove red tape the greater sage grouse will suffer. Most of the proposed amendments strip away protections for GRSG habitat, whether it is moving from a net conservation gain conservation model to a no net loss requirement or the removal of the Sagebrush Focal Area designation, which would open up habitat to possible mining ventures. Exceptions and waivers to No Surface Occupancy areas would be much easier to obtain for those looking to develop and exploit GRSG habitat (DEIS, p. 249-250). Both the proposed alternative and the Utah alternative would decrease the total acreage of protected habitat (DEIS, p. 22). The Draft Environmental Impact Statement fails to adequately analyze the potential impacts of the removal of such protections.

I urge you to keep the 2015 Management Plan in action. The current Land Management Plan was a result of collaboration between local stakeholders and both federal and state agencies. There is no need to amend it after consensus was already reached, especially to remove designated habitat and protections for greater sage grouse.

Thank you for your consideration,
Claire Wilhelm-Safian