

Testimony to the  
Montana House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee  
Regarding **Senate Bill 247**  
Provided by:  
**Steven P. Riley**  
**on behalf of the Thirty-three Listed Organizations**  
March 6, 2015

**Thank you for the opportunity to present to you our concerns in opposition to Senate Bill 247 concerning the Sage Grouse Hunting Season.**

Honorable Chairman Kelly Flynn and Members of the Committee:

The sportsmen's conservation groups listed below are writing to express our concerns regarding SB 247: *Prohibit sage grouse hunting in Montana*, currently under consideration in the Montana House of Representatives. Our organizations have extensive experience in wildlife management, science and policy, including sage-grouse, and many of our members are leading authorities on the management of state and federal public lands and wildlife.

The bill poses two important concerns: First, we believe that this bill is unnecessary, as hunting is not a significant factor influencing sage-grouse populations in Montana. Second, we are especially concerned that SB 247 removes the deliberative, science-based and universally successful system of wildlife management by a civilian Commission advised by professional wildlife biologists and establishes the dangerous precedent of making wildlife management decisions in a political venue. Our position is supported by the following:

1. In the 2010 listing decision, the USFWS evaluated the "utilization" (e.g., hunting) of sage-grouse and concluded that "the greater sage-grouse is not threatened by overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes now or in the foreseeable future."<sup>1,2</sup> Research consistently demonstrates that other factors, such as habitat loss and fragmentation, anthropogenic development, and fire and invasive species are important factors influencing sage-grouse populations<sup>3</sup>.
2. There is no evidence that Montana's past or current hunting seasons have significantly impacted sage grouse populations. In 2014, using current data and following its sage-grouse management plan, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks considered hunting season restrictions for sage-grouse in different management zones and adjusted harvest by shortening the hunting season statewide and closing hunting in some areas. Clearly, the state wildlife management agency is utilizing current information and responding in a timely and appropriate manner under their management authority.
3. Closing hunting seasons where biological data do not justify such a management decision could create an unnecessary public perception that sage-grouse populations may indeed require protection under the Endangered Species Act<sup>4</sup>. Conversely, not recognizing real, but biologically unfounded, concerns about hunting impacts generated by industry and other stakeholders could threaten conservation initiatives and/or generate resistance to comply with state and federal land-use stipulations/regulations. We believe Montana FWP has acted appropriately in regard to sage-grouse harvest and there simply is no justification or need for legislative action countering FWP's data, authority and professional judgment.
4. Regulated hunting is the cornerstone of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, a system that keeps wildlife a public and sustainable resource, scientifically managed by professionals<sup>5</sup>. Greater sage-grouse populations can and do support hunting under this model. Regulated hunting, as

recommended and governed by the state wildlife agency, is a sustainable multiple-use activity similar to well-managed grazing and energy development.

5. License fees, taxes on ammunition and firearms, and other state agency funds are used for conservation and management of sage-grouse. WAFWA estimates that from 2000-2012, state fish and wildlife agencies expended nearly \$132 million on greater sage-grouse conservation and management; this includes survey and monitoring, research, conservation planning, and habitat management <sup>6</sup>. It would be difficult to justify the use of such hunter dollars for managing an un hunted species, especially if the sage-grouse populations can support harvest <sup>5</sup>.
6. Habitat is the primary driver of sage grouse populations, not hunting. Numerous anthropogenic and natural factors influence the quantity, quality and function of sagebrush systems in this region <sup>3</sup>, and we encourage the state to remain focused on addressing the real issues affecting sage-grouse and sagebrush conservation and management in Montana.

The history of wildlife management is replete with examples like the greater sage-grouse, where a species and their habitat are impacted to a point where many stakeholders are affected and change is inevitable. The science, however, is clear and the path forward for sage-grouse is through implementation of science-based habitat conservation plans by both the state and federal agencies. There is no scientific evidence to support SB 247 and we ask that you vote NO on this legislation that does no good and sets a bad precedent.

Sincerely,



President, North American Grouse Partnership on behalf of the following organizations

Archery Trade Association	National Trapper Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	North American Bear Foundation
Boone and Crockett Club	North American Falconers Association
Bowhunter's Preservation Alliance	North American Grouse Partnership
Campfire Club of America	Orion-The Hunters Institute
Catch-a-Dream Foundation	Pheasants Forever
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation	Pope and Young Club
Council to Advance Hunting & the Shooting Sports	Quail Forever
Dallas Safari Club	Quality Deer Management Association
Delta Waterfowl	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ducks Unlimited	Ruffed Grouse Society
Houston Safari Club	Texas Wildlife Association
Masters of Foxhounds Association	Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Mule Deer Foundation	US Sportsmen's Alliance
National Wild Turkey Federation	Wildlife Forever
National Rifle Association	Wildlife Management Institute
National Shooting Sports Foundation	

cc:

Members of the House of Representatives  
Governor Steve Bullock

## References Cited

- <sup>1</sup> Federal Register Notice March 5, 2010: 12-Month Findings for Petitions to List the Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) as Threatened or Endangered.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Conservation Objectives: Final Report. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, CO. February 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> Knick, S. T., and J. W. Connelly, editors. 2011. Greater sage-grouse: ecology and conservation of landscape species and its habitat. Studies in Avian Biology No. 38. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- <sup>4</sup> Christiansen, T. 2010. Hunting and sage-grouse: a technical review of harvest management on a species of concern in Wyoming. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne, WY. (ATTACHED).
- <sup>5</sup> Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. 2010. Western Agencies Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Technical Committee: Recommendations, Informational Notes and Subcommittee Reports. Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Unpublished Report to WAFWA Business Meeting, July 2010. Cheyenne, Wyoming.
- <sup>6</sup> Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. 2012. Letter to Director Dan Ashe. Cheyenne, Wyoming.