



**ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION**

*"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"*

February 10, 2014

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq  
Minister of the Environment  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON

Dear Minister Aglukkaq:

**RE: Sage Grouse Partnership support for/concerns regarding emergency order**

We have had a chance to review the details of the emergency order for Greater Sage-grouse.

While supporting the need for the emergency order, the Sage Grouse Partnership has a few concerns regarding some of the provisions and the lack of resourcing and coordination of effort for Greater Sage Grouse recovery in Canada. Some of the issues that are of concern include:

**1. reducing perching of fence posts (spikes)**

While we understand the need to make the landscape less predator friendly and to avoid unnatural perches, we do not believe fence posts are a significant part of that problem. We are further concerned about any devices that would reduce safety of local land managers and we believe that spikes on fence posts represent a potential hazard to people on horseback checking fence lines. We are open to suggestions for devices that may accomplish both (not be hazardous and potentially reduce perches for predators) even though we do not believe fence posts to be a significant issue.

**2. smooth top wire on fences and implications for marking**

We believe that fence marking can play an important role in reducing direct mortality. Advocating for smooth top wires makes that marking more problematical in getting the markers to stay the required distance. We would like to be informed of any known methods for achieving both smooth wire and marker separation.

**3. potential limit to 25% removal of production restriction on grazing**

It is our belief that grazing is not the significant part of the Greater Sage Grouse problem. In fact, we believe that grazing is an essential component of a diverse and productive, fully functioning Northern Sagebrush Steppe that includes self-sustaining Greater Sage Grouse populations. In Alberta, the current removal of annual forage production in native grassland on leased public land is in the 25-35% range. Despite this already low level of forage utilization, we believe that there are tweaks that can be made through ranch planning that benefit Greater Sage Grouse further by increasing cover, e.g. in important habitats for brood rearing and foraging.

This may involve rethinking water developments and duration of timing in some habitats. There is an economic impact from these “tweaks” that we think broader society should contribute to through payment for this ecological service provided by the land managers.

### **Resourcing and Coordination**

The Sage Grouse Partnership believes that land managers (ranchers, industry) will play an important role in Canadian Greater Sage Grouse recovery and that those efforts need to be better coordinated and resourced within an overall conservation framework that will conserve, remediate and steward the Northern Sagebrush Steppe.

We continue to advocate a collaborative organization that can coordinate the efforts of the multiple agencies, land managers and conservation organizations dealing with Northern Sagebrush Steppe conservation, remediation and stewardship in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana. This was a priority recommendation of the recent PHVA on Greater Sage Grouse held at the Calgary Zoo in the middle of January, 2014.

Yours sincerely,



for  
Cliff Wallis  
David Heydlauff  
*Co-Chairs*  
*Sage Grouse Partnership*