



November 26, 2008

Dear President Bush,

As part of our nation's great Thanksgiving tradition, you will save the life of one turkey with a ceremonial Presidential Pardon. This year, we ask that you also pardon the imperiled grouse species of western North America by granting them protection under the Endangered Species Act. Like the American turkey, native grouse are majestic, powerful, beautiful birds.

Your pardon is necessary to prevent western grouse from suffering the same cruel fates as the Heath Hen, which became extinct in 1932 due to catastrophic events and belated protection, and the Attwater's Prairie-Chicken, whose population may have slipped beyond recovery with fewer than 100 birds.

Just as the 60-year tradition of a Presidential Pardon for the Thanksgiving turkey will save from certain death the pardoned turkey, the 35-year tradition of the Endangered Species Act is a vital safety net for fish and wildlife and could save sensitive grouse species from extinction. Please protect the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse, Greater Sage-Grouse, and Mono Basin Sage-Grouse under the ESA.

Saving grouse will require protecting their habitat from further loss and degradation. Like the Thanksgiving turkey you pardon, who will be allowed to live out their lives (at Disney World), we request you mandate improved conservation of federal public lands in the West where native grouse live. Under your Administration, gas and oil development, livestock grazing, road construction, off-road vehicle use, mining, unnatural fire, and invasive species have damaged millions of acres of grouse habitat on public lands.

This is your last opportunity as President to protect native grouse, and there are many important reasons for you to do so:

- ∞ Imperiled grouse should be protected out of the same spirit of compassion that marks the Presidential Pardon of the Thanksgiving turkey.
- ∞ The natural environment would be truly bereft without grouse on the landscape. Aldo Leopold, the great American conservationist, wrote,

The physics of beauty is one department of natural science still in the Dark Ages. Not even the manipulators of bent space have tried to solve its equations. Everybody knows, for example, that the autumn landscape in the north woods is the land, plus a red maple, plus a ruffed grouse. In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or the energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead.

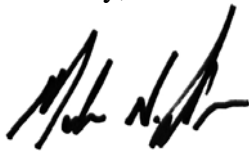
- ∞ The vast majority of Americans – some 86 percent – wish for you to preserve and enforce the ESA. Your Administration is presently considering listing for Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Greater Sage-Grouse, and Mono Basin Sage-Grouse. Your Department of the Interior has wrongly denied protection to Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse and Lesser Prairie-Chicken under the ESA.
- ∞ Smart resource planning goes hand in hand with endangered species protection. Preserving intact ecosystems for imperiled grouse will help conserve natural landscapes and ecosystem services, which benefit human communities in a multitude of ways, including the provision of clean air and water, genetic stocks for food and medicine, and recreational opportunities.

President Clinton listed 65 species per year during his Administration, and your father, President George H.W. Bush, listed 59 species per year. Your Administration has listed only 8-9 species per year, and you were compelled to do so in every case by a federal court. Our failure to protect species facing extinction can lead to disaster, as delays in protection can result in further population declines. Between 1974-2004, some 42 species for which federal protection was delayed vanished forever.

Rather than list species, your Administration has sought to weaken the ESA, even as you prepare to leave office. Your proposal to allow federal agencies to determine for themselves if a project might negatively affect a listed species, and separate administrative action intended to limit ESA protections to a listed species' current range, rather than its historic or potential habitat, will significantly weaken the protective framework of the ESA. We will ask President Obama to reverse these regulatory changes should they become final.

Imperiled grouse in western North America deserve your pardon. Please expedite federal protection for these birds and order protection for their habitat.

Sincerely,



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cc: President-Elect Barack Obama