Opportunity for Gunnison Sage-Grouse Protection in Senator Bennet's Gunnison Public Lands Initiative

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Last July, Senator Bennet came to the Gunnison Valley and gathered with business owners, bikers, outfitters, local elected officials and others to talk about public lands in Gunnison County. He announced his plan to help protect more federal public lands in Gunnison County by facilitating a legislative process and asked for input from the community on how we felt our federal public lands should best be managed. I am helping coordinate on-the-ground efforts regarding this specific initiative.

It is a rare opportunity when a Senator comes to your county to ask how he can help with legislative solutions on public lands management, which is one of the most important and cared about issues in this county. This unique opportunity could be utilized for one of the most pressing lands issues we have at the present moment, the potential listing of the Gunnison Sage-grouse.

Through federal legislation, Gunnison County has an opportunity to showcase proactive protection of the Gunnison Sage-grouse by recommending protection for specific public lands parcels that contain a high density of valuable habitat to be managed for Gunnison Sage-grouse protection. This could help preclude the need for a listing and prevent habitat loss and fragmentation, which are the most threatening factors to Gunnison Sage-grouse.

It is recognized that the county, the strategic committee and federal agencies have already done a lot of work on this issue, and this may just be an opportunity to compliment current efforts if you all are interested in pursuing legislative protection in some way.

Spearheading an effort to help designate public lands with protective, more permanent measures and possibly providing more regulatory certainty would exhibit strong county support for Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat and further show the local commitment to prevent takings of the bird on federal lands, which adversely impact our successful local efforts at maintaining bird populations.

A public lands management recommendation geared toward strong protections for the Gunnison Sage-grouse for particular areas would not have to prohibit or change any current uses, could help to prevent an Endangered Species listing, would further protect the Gunnison Sage-grouse; a win-win for the county, the bird, and all the stakeholders that could be negatively affected by a listing.

It would be up to your committee to decide what lands could benefit from legislative protection or how those lands could be managed. I am not attending the meeting to suggest any specifics (you all are the experts on this), but rather just to present the

opportunity and answer questions about Senator Bennet's initiative and process. You all can decide if you think it is something you're interested in. I don't think it would have to take much extra work because you already have done all of the in-depth work on the lands and management prescriptions, its just whether or not you think legislating something would help.