

Statement of Senator James M. Inhofe
On-The-Record Briefing

Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife

Tuesday, September 29, 2015

I would like to start by thanking Senator Sullivan for putting this briefing together. I'd also like to thank our guests, Director Ashe, and Governor Mead and Governor Bullock. I appreciate your time and participation today, so that we all can get a better understanding of the Endangered Species Act and how we can improve this legislation.

The Endangered Species Act has been in the news often recently. Earlier this month, a federal district judge held that the Fish and Wildlife Service did not fully evaluate ongoing conservation methods in its decision to list the Lesser Prairie Chicken. This is a victory for state and local conservationists who know that they can positively impact species recovery and ecosystem management without the Washington bureaucrats.

Then just last week, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the Greater Sage Grouse is not in need of federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. It appears, however, that the administration will continue to control sage grouse habitat by greatly restricting land use, thereby removing state and local governments from the conservation process. I hope we are able to have a discussion today about the future of state conservation and how we can include more local efforts into the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

Last time Director Ashe joined us for a hearing, we heard from six Senators about their legislation and examined eight different bills to reform the ESA. Director Ashe said that we “could pass legislation to improve the act.” We also heard from other witnesses that the current one-size-fits-all approach does not work. The discussion today will build on that hearing with input from state governors and an examination of the Service’s proposal to change the listing process.

I also look forward to hearing about the work that Western Governors Association has done to address ESA overreach in their states. We are fortunate today to have both a Republican and a Democrat governor talk about how current implementation of ESA works and what problems they have with it in their states. We must address the fact that the Service spends more time and resources fighting lawsuits and listing species than actually recovering and delisting species. If states and local conservationists had a larger role in the process, we could use our resources much more efficiently to ensure that our precious ecosystems continue to thrive.

I hope to work with our governors and the Service to develop a bipartisan legislative proposal to address these needs, and to put the ESA back to work for species recovery. Again, I thank everyone for coming today and I look forward to your testimonies.