

Daniel M. Ashe
13301 Glen Mill Rd
Rockville, MD 20850

May 17, 2011

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Inhofe:

Thank you for your letter of April 19th and for the opportunity to meet in your office on May 4th to discuss the important issues you have raised. I write to confirm the commitments the Secretary and I discussed that I believe address your concerns.

We understand your concerns with the potential listing of the lesser prairie-chicken under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We will work with you to hold listening sessions in Oklahoma on the lesser prairie-chicken, to provide information to stakeholders and hear any of their concerns, to engage them early-on in the initial stages of this process, and to inform them of opportunities for collaborative partnerships, such as Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances that are specifically for private landowners. We are prepared to hold these sessions immediately. Once I am confirmed by the Senate, I will personally attend all of them. In addition, the Service will schedule formal public hearings in Oklahoma, once any proposal has been published for comment.

You also asked that the Service post online the information it uses to make ESA decisions that is subject to FOIA requests. We will do this immediately for the lesser prairie-chicken. Moreover, within 60-days following my confirmation, I will brief you on a comprehensive approach to making such information more readily available and transparent to the public. This is consistent with Administration policy and with my personal commitment to improving Endangered Species Act implementation.

Finally, we understand your concerns with the potential impact of the FWS Climate Change Strategic Plan on the Service's implementation of its mission. As I and the Secretary mentioned in our conversation with you [and in our testimony before the Congress] climate change is not the overarching consideration driving the Service's day-to-day decision-making process. It is an important factor, among other factors, for the Service to consider in assessing the well-being of species, and fulfilling its mission to work with others in conserving fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. You are also concerned that the FWS Climate Change Strategic Plan may be interpreted to require the Service to address the causative factors of climate change through regulatory restrictions on greenhouse gases.

Again, let me reiterate that we do not believe that the FWS is responsible for the regulation of greenhouse gases, nor is it the Service's role to address these causative factors through any of its statutory or regulatory authorities. Indeed, none of its statutory or regulatory authorities provide an appropriate mechanism to regulate greenhouse gases. I will clarify to all FWS employees that the FWS Climate Change Strategic Plan does not require the Service to address these causative factors through any of its statutory or regulatory authorities and you will be able to review the script prior to its delivery. I commit to you that I will personally communicate that message in my initial address to all Fish and Wildlife Service employees once I am confirmed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan Ashe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "A".

Dan Ashe