

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2018

Ryan Zinke, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are writing regarding a letter we wrote on September 22, 2017 encouraging expedited approval of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) agreement with the Institute of Applied Ecology for the Sagebrush in Prisons Project. Having received no response, we are concerned that the critical importance of an ongoing program, known as Sagebrush in Prisons is not well understood by the Department of Interior.

This program has been highly successful throughout seven states. It is an enormously popular and effective project that engages prison inmates in the production of sagebrush plants for post-fire rehabilitation on federal lands. The program's success has been advertised and well publicized by your very own agency and was featured on the cover of the BLM's Northwest Magazine Summer 2017 edition.

The project agreement ended on September 30, 2017, and the Institute for Applied Ecology has still not received formal notice on funding for the project. We have, however, received informal word from BLM staff that project funding has been declined at the Department of the Interior's Washington, D.C. office.

As you are well aware, and as the BLM noted in its Northwest Magazine story, restoring fragile sagebrush habitat is time consuming and challenging work particularly since the plants are localized to different areas, and loss of habitat through wildfire is one of the preeminent risks for a listing of the sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Interior's decision to deny funding to this critical project is incongruous and inconsistent with the agency's work to keep the bird from being federally listed under the ESA.

Given the BLM's public support for the program and the clear efficacy of the Institute for Applied Ecology's Sagebrush in Prison project, we request an immediate reconsideration of this funding denial.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Attachment: Northwest Magazine Summer 2017 cover

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THE MAGAZINE OF OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

northwest

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is the
New
Green



Washington Inmates
Turn the Big House
into a Greenhouse
to Save Sage Grouse

