

Sandoval makes last-ditch appeal to BLM over sage grouse

By Michelle Rindels, AP

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval made a last-ditch appeal to the federal Bureau of Land Management to accept Nevada's recommendations for protecting the greater sage grouse.

Sandoval sent an eight-page letter Friday to BLM Director Neil Kornze, urging him to reconsider Nevada's strategies for preserving the bird's habitat. The BLM rejected some of Nevada's suggestions earlier this summer, saying federal and state plans were in conflict and opting to pursue the federal strategy.

The governor said it would be "inappropriate" for the BLM to proceed with the federal plan and scrap a state strategy that "provides for increased conservation for greater sage grouse, complies with federal law and policies, and is supported by a vast majority of Nevadans."

Sandoval made detailed arguments that the state plan is more solidly based in science and would better protect the bird. It would also avoid the wholesale closure of certain public lands to development.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service faces must decide by Sept. 30 about listing the chicken-sized bird as an endangered species in Nevada and in rangeland from California to the Dakotas. The BLM and Nevada hope to come up with a workable plan together that will help conserve the bird's habitat and will eliminate the need for an endangered species listing, which would involve layers of additional restrictions on land.

The decision carries big implications for oil and gas drilling, livestock grazing and a host of other uses of federal lands throughout the region.

The BLM is expected to publicly respond to Sandoval's appeal in coming weeks.

Sandoval met with President Obama last week in Las Vegas to make Nevada's case for keeping the sage grouse off the endangered species list.