September 29, 2010

Marla Rae
Chair, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission
3406 Cherry Avenue, NE
Salem, Oregon 97303

Dear Chair Rae and Members of the Commission,

We write to respectfully offer our comments regarding the Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (Draft Plan Revision). Oregon Environmental Council shares the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (ODFW) concern for the health of the greater sage-grouse and its habitat. At the same time, we also support efforts to responsibly site clean, renewable energy facilities in Oregon as a critical and necessary step to transition to a low-carbon economy, reduce our dependence upon fossil fuels and help contribute to our state’s commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change.

We are aware of the differences of opinion between Oregon’s renewable energy advocates and some members of the conservation community over the proposed revisions to Oregon’s sage grouse habitat protection plan. While our organization lacks the technical competence to offer an opinion regarding the adoption of the proposed core area strategy, we are concerned about an outcome that does not take into account an evaluation of the benefits of investing in renewable energy and the impacts of climate change in our state, including on the sage grouse. The process lacked effective participation from rural communities, renewable energy industries and climate change advocates which failed to produce a workable plan. The impacts of this plan are far-reaching and should not be viewed in isolation.

Oregon has a track record of finding common ground between constituents who hold different opinions on matters of critical importance to the state. With proper leadership and commitment to an inclusive process, we believe stakeholders can find a way to make renewable energy development and sage grouse protection work together in the state. We hope the Commission will seek a plan that reflects a broader level of agreement, addresses climate change and its impacts, and supports a sustainable strategy for clean energy development in rural economies as we protect sage grouse habitat.

Sincerely,

Jana Gastellum
Program Director, Global Warming