

Take Their Word?

By Jim Beers

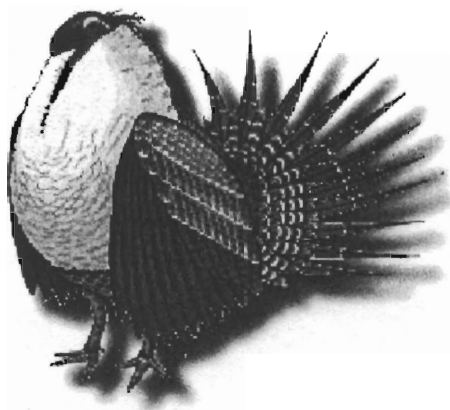
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"Geez Beers, I saw more sharptails and sage grouse than I ever have or probably ever will in the rest of my life." So said a friend who had just returned from an annual, lengthy trip to Canada and Montana to hunt ducks, geese, pheasants, sharptails, and sage grouse. He has been hunting the prairies for fifty years and, like me, he is an educated and experienced wildlife biologist. I am hopeful that I might be invited to a dinner featuring some of those grouse, this fall or winter. The sharptails he served last fall were about as good as it gets.

After I hung up, I thought about endangered species scams and the National Hunting and Fishing Survey scam. I have received several requests, in the past year, to comment on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service push to list the sage grouse as threatened or endangered. The FWS, and their environmental and animal rights sleep-partners, have been touting doomsday for sage grouse for the last 3 or 4 years.

Low populations of sage grouse (like warm summers are to global warming) were the trigger for the usual suspects to murmur the nonsense to forward their hidden agenda. The tune went something like this, "sage grouse are approaching extinction because of overgrazing, roads, and human activities." "Sage grouse are true native indicator species that tell us about an environment in need of preservation." "Sage grouse will need enormous acreages to be set aside, and only through the Endangered Species Act can we do that."

I could go on, but you get the picture. Suffice it to say, that even under "pristine" or "native" or "Pre-Columbian" conditions, sage grouse populations and



distribution went up and down. Some years, Blackfeet and Sioux got belly aches from eating so many one year, and other years, never even tasted them. Today, however, such natural changes are legal reasons for federal seizure of state jurisdiction over these birds and justification for federal bureaucrats to close public lands, buy more private land, stop public uses like camping, hiking, hunting, grazing, ranching, dog hunting, and, probably, a whole list of things that you and I can't even imagine today.

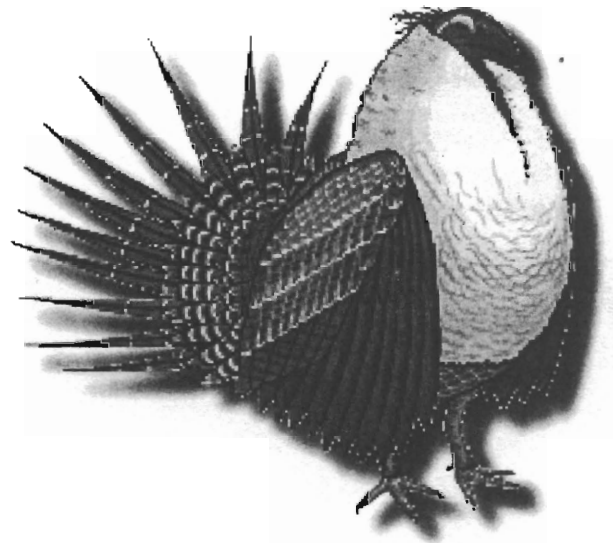
Remember, these guys and dolls making these somber pronouncements about the precarious status of sage grouse and what must be done to save them, are the same ones who told us "wild turkeys need virgin forests" (a lie) and "Canada geese would make nice additions to urban landscapes" (I leave that one to you.) They are also the same ones assuring us about the desirability, and environmental importance, of reintroducing wolves. Oh, they are also the ones assuring you that wolves are harmless, and don't decrease game populations. They sell Brooklyn Bridge shares in their spare time. Which brings us to the National Hunting and Fishing Survey.

For more than 15 years, millions of dollars are set aside each year, from the Pittman-Robertson (excise taxes on hunting equipment, guns, and ammunition) and Dingell-Johnson (excise taxes on fishing tackle) funds, to fund the National Hunting and Fishing Survey. A crew at the FWS pays contractors (some of whom, have in turn become millionaires,) and Bureau of the Census staff, to "analyze"

census data ostensibly regarding "fish and wildlife." There have never been any hunting or fishing advocates on the FWS staff, which has been economists and analysts, who occasionally admit to having hunted or fished, but hunting or fishing advocacy has never been allowed, or present. Advocacy of endangered species and what is termed "non-consumptive use of wildlife," has always been their purpose and guiding philosophy.

While the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and one of their Committees "oversee" the Survey, that oversight has always been perfunctory, and laced with hidden agendas. Convinced as they (state and federal bureaucrats) are that the days of trapping, hunting, and fishing are numbered; the Survey has always been something they point to, when accused of only being only a "hook and bullet" gang. It is something they will point to when we – hunters, fishermen, and trappers – have been banned, like English foxhunters.

While many lower-level state employees will tell you what a load of BS the Survey is, the mid-level and top guys protect it like a puppy. No matter that the questions and analysis have always been slanted to overstate the "eco-tourism, wildlife photography" stuff. The short shrift it has always given hunters, fishermen, and trappers is legendary. One example should suffice. While the funding comes from both P-R and D-J, only P-R funds can be used for non-hunting purposes. D-J funds, by law, can only be used for sport fish activities, but



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that has never proved an impediment for crafty bureaucrats.

Attending one of the Survey Committee Meetings or a Survey briefing has always been like attending a Women and Minority Government Contractor Convention. While someone like George Orwell would immediately recognize how words are used to mean the exact opposite of what they really mean, most people would never pick up on how they talk about a Hunting and Fishing Survey, but they are really discussing a “tissue of lies” about how hunting is dying, and photographers (who pay no excise taxes) will soon rule the world.

The conservation groups, from sport fishing to guns, and all the old line “conservation” groups have known about this, and colluded with them, for years. The FWS Survey crew plays them like a fiddle, giving them chestnuts for their members and making them feel like they are benefiting, too. The whole thing belongs in an old time carnival at a table with a guy in a straw hat, with three walnut shells and a pea.

Hunters are decreasing and birdseed sales are soaring, so what? Hunting is decreasing, in part, because of the expense, entry requirements, and age limits that have been increased beyond all sense, to smooch up to the anti-hunters

and anti-gun folks. State agencies have hired way too many people to do environmental and animal rights mischief in the game and fish departments. Just like the sage grouse “came back” without a bunch of bonus money appropriated for some bureaucrat, our hunting, fishing, and trapping would probably benefit significantly from fewer employees, concentrating on the species that generate funds, and intense interest from citizens, instead of every little nook and cranny of the “ecosystem.”

When hunters decrease, those of us who persist, enjoy more opportunity and less competition. This alone attracts hunters, and future hunters, into the sport. Because we are a “smaller” percentage of the population, we need to worry. Well, you better tell that to the guys who go to boxing matches, or the people who go to symphonies, or people who gather walnuts, or those who collect knives – “if you don’t constitute a majority, you will be erased, by those who object to what you do.” Trendlines, like economic forecasts and population predictions, go up and down, and most often, for reasons unbeknownst to experts.

It is time to quit listening to these self-serving bureaucracies as if they have our best interests at heart. They don’t! In these two cases, the states should demand

that FWS stop meddling in anything to do with sage grouse, and then they (the states who should be spending that P-R and D-J money on hunting and fishing) should stop approving any funding for the Survey, and apportion that funding to the states, where their whining for the past couple of years about not having money has been continuous and irritating. Anyone hear the states standing up? Nope. What about the “conservation” groups? Nope, they just attend the meetings at glitzy locations and get their meals paid for. Anyone hear the FWS say anything? Nope, **not only is the Survey a way for them to get more employees; it is a way to skim “overhead,” and a source of propaganda when they need to justify some acquisition, endangered species thrust, or some particularly egregious harm to the citizenry, or rural area.**

After all, “78.62% of the people support it, according to the National Survey,” and “the sage grouse populations are at all-time lows, and only if that land is bought and those practices are stopped, can they have any hope for recovery.” Baloney.

The last twenty years couldn’t be described by Mr. Barnum as a period when there was “a sucker born every minute,” rather, there were thousands born every minute. ☹

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