

On May 18th, 2015, AAS signed on to the following letter authored by the American Bird Conservancy.

Dear Ms. Schneider and Mr. Bonnie,

The undersigned conservation organizations are writing to commend Bureau of Land Management and U.S.D.A. Forest Service wildlife and minerals staff for their efforts to reduce bird mortality caused by open pipes, such as mine markers, fence posts, and outhouse vents. Much work remains to be done to remove existing hazards, and long-term policies and procedures still need to be established to prevent this form of bird mortality from continuing to occur on public lands in the future.

Small birds often see the opening of PVC mining claim markers and other pipes as a hollow suitable for nesting. The birds enter the holes only to become trapped because the walls of the pipes do not allow them to extend their wings and fly out and are too smooth to allow them to grapple their way up the sides. Death from dehydration or starvation soon follows.

Fortunately, this threat to birds has been identified and some positive actions are underway to eliminate the problem and meet the respective agencies' responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186. This includes the BLM's creation of a flyer endorsed by partners including American Bird Conservancy and the National Mining Association that will be mailed to mine claim holders alerting them to the problem and urging they replace or remediate hazardous marker. And Forest Service staff are covering open vent pipes on outhouses that were trapping birds.

We would like to encourage BLM and USDA to continue efforts to identify priority areas for pipe removal, and further coordinate stake-pulling events as resources allow. In addition, federal agencies need to develop national policy to mitigate or remove existing open pipes, and to prevent their use in federal projects in the future.

In addition to these important steps, mining claimants need to be held responsible for their stakes through federal regulatory action that will require removal of hazardous markers. And to ensure the problem doesn't continue, standards can be set for bird-safe and environmentally friendly mining markers.

We therefore have several recommended actions to help carry out and bolster these efforts that we ask the administration to consider:

1. Issuing national policy directives to remove or modify existing pipes, and to delineate standards to prevent use of open pipes in the future.
2. Initiating a federal rulemaking to require that mining claim holders replace pipes that can cause mortality and to require non-hazardous markers on all current and future claims.
3. Dedicate sufficient resources annually to educate mine claim holders, to coordinate and carry out partnership efforts to remove pipes, and to carry out necessary infrastructure improvements on the Public Lands and National Forest Systems.

Thank you for considering these requests.