



Wyoming  
DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture

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*The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.*

October 19, 2012

Bureau of Land Management  
Pinedale Field Office  
1625 W. Pine St.  
P.O. Box 768  
Pinedale, WY 82941

Dear Mr. Kaiser:

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's (WGFD) Wyoming Range Mule Deer Habitat Management Plan: Big Piney – LaBarge Area (Plan) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Pinedale Field Office, Scoping Notice.

Our comments are specific to our mission within state government: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As this project impacts our agriculture industry, our natural resources and the welfare of our citizens, we believe it is important you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and continue to provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA appreciates the time and energy spent on the Plan to improve mule deer habitat and populations. The Plan addresses site specific vegetation objectives with consideration of soils, erosion issues and invasive species. The Plan has the potential of improving forage and habitat for multiple wildlife species and livestock, which we support. We offer the following comments regarding the proposed projects and process.

We believe the WGFD could have more cooperatively written the Plan with input from other state agencies, BLM, local Conservation District staff with range, reclamation, and wildlife expertise. It is unclear if the Plan is currently in draft form or if the WGFD is open to additional changes, given the WGFD went through the public review process in 2011.

The Scoping Notice is unclear; is the BLM preparing a programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) for all the proposed projects or will each project receive individual attention with its own EA? The WDA requests BLM and the WGFD prioritize the projects based on what treatments will have the most positive effect for mule deer, while considering all potential impacts on the other various multiple resource uses present, such as livestock grazing and recreation. In addition to prioritizing the projects, BLM and WGFD should identify a specific timeline for the entire project/Plan and each individual project in order to properly assess the cumulative impacts.

A major concern the WDA has with the Plan and the lack of project prioritization is the identification of specific impacts on domestic livestock and grazing allotments. If BLM and the WGFD were to implement multiple projects or even one large scale project on one allotment, this could cause undue hardships for livestock operators. The WDA does not support projects in the Plan which may reduce Animal Unit Months on a temporary or permanent basis. We encourage BLM to work cooperatively with all grazing permittees in the project areas throughout implementation.

The WGFD states on page 31 of the Plan, *"However, these issues would be minimized if the project were completed across several years; grazing rest would be required for a much smaller area every two years."* We discourage WGFD

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from implementing or prescribing any domestic livestock grazing management recommendations in the Plan, the project area, or across the state. The WGFD is responsible for managing wildlife, and the BLM is responsible for grazing and habitat/vegetation management.

The WDA encourages BLM to reference the Pinedale Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision section 2.3.11 Vegetation Management, page 53, which states:

*"Treated areas will generally be rested from livestock grazing for a minimum of two full growing seasons after treatment unless the appropriate level of environmental analysis determines that shorter durations are adequate. Analysis could indicate a need for a longer rest period."*

We also strongly encourage BLM to individually assess each project and seek flexibility for deferment of livestock grazing in treated areas instead of rest, using on-site vegetative monitoring before and after treatments. We encourage Pinedale BLM also reference Instruction Memorandum (IM) No. WY-2005-018, "Livestock Management Following Vegetative Treatment." The IM provides specific recommendations when the agency can reconsider the 2 year growing season deferment. One specific point the WDA wants to emphasize in the IM, is *"Two growing seasons deferment is not synonymous with 2 years rest."*

The IM further states, *"Any adjustment that is being proposed must be thoroughly analyzed as a separate alternative in the original NEPA document prepared for the treatment project. It is to be compared to an alternative providing for 2 complete growing seasons deferment."* This statement references our earlier comment regarding BLM's approach to implementing a programmatic EA versus an individual project EA. The WDA would support individual EAs for each project, in order to analyze the impacts on a smaller scale, specifically at the allotment level, while also considering the cumulative impacts throughout the project area.

One final comment regarding project implementation, which the Plan neglects to address, is the inclusion of the Density and Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT) Manual in Greater Sage-Grouse Core Areas. Assuming the projects are in areas of energy development, with preexisting soil disturbance, various stages of reclamation, and fragmentation, the WDA advises the BLM to consider how additional vegetation treatments for mule deer will impact sage-grouse and apply towards the DDCT.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Plan and Scoping Notice. We look forward to reviewing the EA(s) in the near future. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Jason Fearneyhough  
Director

JF/jw

CC: Governor's Policy Office  
Wyoming Board of Agriculture  
Wyoming Stock Growers Association  
Wyoming Wool Growers Association

Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation  
Wyoming State Grazing Board  
WY Association of Conservation Districts  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department