



Wyoming
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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.

September 24, 2013

Bureau of Land Management
Buffalo Field Office
Attn: Thomas Bills, RMP Project Manager
1425 Fort Street
Buffalo, WY 82834

Dear Mr. Bills:

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) comments pertaining to the Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Buffalo RMP Revision Project by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Buffalo Field Office (FO).

Our comments are specific to our mission: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As this Draft RMP and DEIS affects our agriculture industry, our natural resources, and the welfare of our citizens, it's important you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and continue to provide the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns. We offer the following specific comments for incorporation into the Buffalo RMP/EIS.

The WDA requests the BLM incorporate language similar to the following in order to be consistent with EO 2013-3, Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area – Grazing Adjustments, which supplements EO 2011-5:

"The BLM will collaborate with appropriate Federal agencies, and the State of Wyoming as contemplated under Governor Executive Order 2013-3, to: 1) develop appropriate conservation objectives; 2) define a framework for evaluating situations where Greater Sage-Grouse conservation objectives are not being achieved on federal land, to determine if a significant causal relationship exists between improper grazing (by wildlife or wild horses or livestock) and Greater Sage-Grouse conservation objectives; and 3) identify appropriate site-based action to achieve Greater Sage-Grouse conservation objectives within the framework."

We recommend the BLM add the above language as a standalone management action in the preferred alternative.

Table 2.31. 6000 Land Resources (LR) - Livestock Grazing Management, Record #Grazing-6004, p. 167:

The WDA strongly urges the BLM to delete the word "stakeholder" from this management action and add the words "interested publics." "Interested publics" is an established term used in the livestock grazing portions of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and this RMP must be consistent with existing regulations. CFR 4100.0-5 includes a specific definition for interested publics. It is important to cite these regulations in the RMP:

CFR 4100.0-5 Interested public means an individual, group, or organization that has:(1)(i) Submitted a written request to BLM to be provided an opportunity to be involved in the decision making process as to a specific allotment, and(ii) Followed up that request by submitting written comment as to management of a specific allotment, or otherwise participating in the decision making process as to a specific allotment, if BLM has provided them an opportunity for comment or other participation; or(2) Submitted written comments to the authorized officer regarding the management of livestock grazing on a specific allotment.

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Even though there is a definition of stakeholders in the glossary, stakeholders are not included in the grazing portion of the regulations and cannot be used in this RMP. The CFR regulations cited above require U.S. citizens to actively request involvement before being consulted on grazing management decisions and Allotment Management Plans.

Table 2.31. 6000 Land Resources (LR) - Livestock Grazing Management, Record #Grazing-6009, p. 167:

"Implement strategies that best protect rangeland resources during periods of drought. Cooperate with stakeholders for voluntary adjustments in livestock use."

Adjustments in livestock use are not the only appropriate action available to the BLM and livestock producers during drought periods. Other changes in management (such as hauling water, providing supplements, etc.) are effective tools to use during drought to help manage and distribute livestock. The WDA recommends adding "...and/or livestock management" after "...voluntary adjustments in livestock use" to address these possibilities.

3.4.9. Special Status Species - Wildlife, 3.4.9.1. Regional Context, p. 361:

"However, developments to facilitate grazing management often include elements detrimental to Greater Sage-Grouse." Not every development to facilitate grazing management is detrimental to greater sage-grouse, especially those that are carefully planned and well-thought out. We recommend adding "*potentially*" after the word "elements."

In addition, we appreciate the use of peer-reviewed references in this and other portions of the Draft RMP/DEIS.

3.4.9. Special Status Species - Wildlife, 3.4.9.3. Current Conditions, Greater Sage-Grouse, p. 367:

"Changes in land use and land development are the primary causes of habitat loss, while habitat degradation is a complicated interaction among many factors, including drought, livestock grazing..."

The interaction of livestock grazing with other factors does not always result in greater sage-grouse habitat degradation. Reword this sentence to indicate that only improper grazing management practices, such as overgrazing, degrades greater sage-grouse habitat.

4.1.4. Water Resources, 4.1.4.3. Alternative A, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 600:

"Overall, BLM actions could disturb 225,609 acres, mostly through grazing allotment use."

It is unclear what this statement is trying to depict and where the acreage number comes from. It is also unclear how this statement relates to livestock grazing management actions on water resources. The preceding sentences explain that range improvements will have a small impact on water resources and livestock grazing itself is not a surface disturbing activity. Please explain this statement or remove it entirely.

4.4.3. Vegetation – Riparian/Wetland Resources, 4.4.3.3. Alternative A, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 879:

"Alternative A prohibits livestock grazing on approximately 10,000 acres where grazing has been determined to be incompatible with other resource uses, values, and locations. Excluding livestock grazing in these sensitive areas directly benefits vegetation."

It is our understanding that most of the areas currently closed to livestock grazing (Alternative A) are located on steep, inaccessible slopes or around campgrounds and other developed sites. Do these areas overlap riparian/wetland areas? If they do not, this statement should be removed from the analysis since the closures do not impact riparian/wetland vegetation.

4.4.5. Fish and Wildlife Resources – Fish, 4.4.5.2. Impacts Common to All Alternatives, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 950:

The WDA does not agree that current livestock grazing management will have a major adverse impact on fish resources. No data has been presented stating livestock grazing management is currently creating a major adverse effect on fish

resources. In addition, the amount of riparian areas on public lands is minimal and thus it would be reasonable to believe that current management on BLM lands has a lesser effect. In fact, page 1365 (4.6.8. Livestock Grazing Management, 4.6.8.2. Impacts Common to All Alternatives, Fish and Wildlife Resources – Fish) states “...the acres of fish habitat in grazing allotments within the planning area is less than 1%...” creating a negligible adverse effect of fish management actions on livestock grazing management. WDA requests the level of impact of livestock grazing management impacts on fish be re-considered.

4.4.5. Fish and Wildlife Resources – Fish, 4.4.5.2. Impacts Common to All Alternatives, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 950 and Special Status Species – Fish, p. 1070:

“Stock driveways tend to concentrate high levels of livestock use that can cause significant degradation (e.g., near-complete removal of vegetation and soil compaction), impacting wildlife habitats.”

It is our understanding that most, if not all, stock driveways in the Buffalo FO overlap with county roads. It is highly unlikely that the use of these county roads as stock driveways is the cause of “significant degradation” to wildlife habitats, particularly fish habitats. The WDA urges the BLM to remove this statement from the analysis throughout the fish and wildlife sections.

4.4.5. Fish and Wildlife Resources – Fish, 4.4.5.3. Alternative A, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 956:

“Managing Category M allotments to continue the current authorized livestock use on 98 Category M allotments at 43,573 AUMs would continue to affect fish in some areas by continued livestock use of riparian areas.”

This is a poor analysis point in that it assumes category M allotments have poor fish habitat without presenting any supportive data. Careful examination of Appendix E - Livestock Grazing Allotments shows that only one category M allotment is failing any of the Standards for Healthy Rangelands. Thus it is inaccurate to describe livestock use on category M allotments under Alternative A as causing adverse impacts on fish. The WDA recommends removing this discussion from the analysis.

4.4.5. Fish and Wildlife Resources – Fish, 4.4.5.3. Alternative A, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 956:

“Allowing livestock grazing on all public lands...except on approximately 6,000 acres...would have an adverse effect on fish...”

This paragraph assumes that all livestock grazing on public lands has a negative impact on fish yet presents no evidence specific to grazing allotments in the Buffalo FO to support this assumption. It is well known that healthy fish populations can and do exist in riparian/wetland areas where livestock grazing occurs. The WDA recommends removing this discussion from the analysis.

4.4.5. Fish and Wildlife Resources – Fish, 4.4.5.5. Alternative C, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 967:

“Basing AMP goals and objectives on livestock management only in Category I allotments, authorizing permanent increases in forage allocations to livestock grazing as the first priority, allowing increases in livestock stocking rates as a result of vegetative treatments would increase grazing use in riparian areas.”

The actions described may not increase use in riparian areas or have an adverse effect on fish. The combination of these actions and management of livestock and allotments will result in various use levels in riparian areas and thus various impacts on fish. In addition, some vegetative treatments may actually serve to draw livestock away from riparian areas due to an increase of palatable, nutritious forage, resulting in positive benefits for riparian areas and fish.

4.4.6. Fish and Wildlife Resources – Wildlife, 4.4.6.2. Impacts Common to All Alternatives, Land Resources, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 989:

“Stock driveways tend to concentrate high levels of livestock use that can cause significant degradation...”

As discussed above and on page 990 of the document, all major stock driveways are designated county roads and it is highly unlikely they are the cause of “significant degradation” to wildlife habitats. The WDA urges the BLM to remove this statement from the analysis throughout the fish and wildlife sections.

4.6.8. Livestock Grazing Management, 4.6.8.2. Impacts Common to All Alternatives, Livestock Grazing Management, p. 1362:

“Overgrazing by livestock would have a major adverse effect on vegetative communities...”

This section appears to discuss the idea that overgrazing will occur under all alternatives. However, livestock grazing management actions must achieve Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands and it is unlikely livestock grazing practices will result in overgrazing under all alternatives.

4.6.8. Livestock Grazing Management, 4.6.8.4. Alternative B, Land Resources, Recreation, p. 1378:

The DEIS must disclose the number of lost AUMs if the Welch Ranch Recreation Area were closed to livestock grazing.

Appendix D, Best Management Practices, p. 1616:

“Reduce grazing in advance of predicted drought...”

There are many ways to adapt livestock grazing management to lessen the impacts of predicted drought and reducing grazing is only one option. Other management tools, such as altering season-of-use, hauling water, herding or using supplemental feed to alter distribution are just a few of the many options available to the BLM and livestock producers. The WDA requests the BLM recognize the multiple options throughout Appendix D.

Appendix U, Economic Impact Analysis Methodology, U.3. Livestock Grazing, and Table U.8. Estimated Forage Availability, p. 2184:

The WDA recognizes that Table L.8 demonstrates projected, gradual reductions in AUMs over the planning timeline and that projected AUMs vary based on predicted surface disturbance, resource conditions and other variables. We suggest additional explanation to accurately express this. The projected reductions are simply estimations and *do not* signify a reduction of AUMs concurrent with the signing of the Record of Decision. AUM decisions are made on an allotment-by-allotment basis and *not* through the RMP process. This should be clear in Appendix U.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Draft RMP and DEIS. We encourage continued attention to our concerns and we look forward to hearing about and being involved in proposed actions and decisions.

Sincerely,



Jason Fearneyhough

Director

JF/jc

CC: Governor's Policy Office
Guardians of the Range
Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
Wyoming Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
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Wyoming Stock Growers Association
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