Wyoming Department of Agriculture

Dave Freudenthal, Governor

John Etchepare, Director

2219 Carey Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82002 ■ Phone: 307-777-7321 ■ Fax: 307-777-6593
E-mail: wda1.state.wy.us ■ Website: wyagric.state.wy.us

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January 5, 2005

Governor Dave Freudenthal
Office of the Governor
State Capitol, Room 124
Cheyenne, WY 82002

Dear Governor Freudenthal:

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture serves as a cooperating agency on the Black Hills Forest Phase II Amendment Plan. Both we and the agricultural producers of Crook and Weston counties have grave concerns about the proposal to establish four new Research Natural Areas (RNA's) in the Bearlodge District of the Black Hills National Forest. These proposed areas encompass over 4,000 acres of land and would likely take away grazing allotment rights from local producers. With the ongoing complexity and historical dilemma associated with the forest-wide management plan for this area, we do not feel it is in anyone's best interest to further sanction off these multiple-use lands for RNAs. Because these management decisions are not made until after RNAs are approved, it is impossible to predict what may be allowed or be restricted on these lands. Recreation, timber, grazing and other resource users of the forest could be unnecessarily eliminated from these areas. Regarding the specific proposed designations on the Black Hills, there is broad agreement among cooperators about agricultural, forestry and recreation interests that these areas not receive designation.

The Black Hills do not need more RNAs in this forest. The Forest Service has not been able to fund any research projects on their current RNAs and at the present time it appears highly doubtful the Forest Service will be conducting research on these areas in the future. Moreover, there are other areas to consider for this designation that do not currently infringe on grazing rights, recreational enjoyment or private property uses within the Black Hills. We do not feel the proposed RNA areas are unique in their characteristics, as there are other places in this forest ecosystem which share the RNA objectives as currently stated.

We know there is agreement among the varied affected interests that these RNAs must not make it into the Record of Decision. We would like to add our voice with the agricultural producers in this region who are opposed to these designations. There is no need to unnecessarily restrict more multiple-use lands to hands-off management that will put neighboring private property in greater fire danger, impair local area ranchers, and cripple the local agricultural, recreational and timber-based economy of this region.

Therefore, we strongly encourage you to protect the resource uses of these areas and work with the US Forest Service to take these areas out of RNA consideration as we move through the Phase II Amendment Process.

Sincerely,

John Etchepare
Director

cc: Wyoming Stock Growers
Wyoming Farm Bureau
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Wyoming Wool Growers
Wyoming Conservation Districts
Crook County Conservation District
Weston County Conservation District
Crook County Commissioners
Mary Flanderka, Governor's Office
Black Hills Forest Planning Team
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