



Wyoming  
DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture

Dave Freudenthal, *Governor*  
Jason Fearneyhough, *Director*  
2219 Carey Ave. • Cheyenne, WY 82002  
Phone: (307) 777-7321 • Fax: (307) 777-6593  
Web: agriculture.wy.gov • Email: wda1@state.wy.us

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

December 29, 2009

US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Cokeville Meadows CCP/Hunt Plan  
Attn: Bernardo Garza  
PO Box 25486-DFC  
Denver, CO 80225-0486

Dear Mr Garza:

Following are the comments from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposal to prepare a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP), a hunt plan and an environmental assessment for Cokeville Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge).

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 proposal has major impacts upon 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 provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA appreciates the Service's efforts in seeking public comments in the development of the CCP and hunt plan. We have spoken with the staff at the Refuge as well as reviewed the Refuge website. We are pleased to hear how the staff works closely with local landowners and livestock producers to manage the refuge to benefit the wildlife, landscape and cooperators. The website positively states the following:

*"Local ranchers and Refuge managers work together on Refuge projects, including irrigation, weed control, tract cleanup, fence maintenance, and conversion of marginal croplands to permanent native vegetation. Ranchers also provide food plots for wildlife and implement selective haying and grazing activities. In exchange, ranchers receive hay, crop, and grazing shares. This management regime maintains the vigor of wet meadow and other vegetation that is critical for wildlife."*

We urge the Refuge to continue their efforts in positively working with agricultural producers and local landowners. As the CCP is developed we encourage open communication between the Service and their cooperators who use the Refuge for haying and grazing. We are encouraged to hear the open-minded consideration of possibly allowing small grain production on the refuge, which could be beneficial in many ways, including the economic viability of the producers. As the Service develops the hunt plan, we ask for your consideration of the burdens upon the adjoining private landowners that comes with hunting. Some of these may include increased

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Juan Reyes, *District 1* • Jim Hodder, *District 2* • Shaun Sims, *District 3* • Jim Bennage, *District 4* • Joe Thomas, *District 5*  
Bryan Brost, *District 6* • Jim Price, Jr., *District 7*

**YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS**

Patrick Zimmerer, Southeast • Dalin Winters, Northwest • John Hansen, Southwest • Bridget Kukowski, Northeast

12/29/2009

Cokeville Meadows CCP

Page 2

fence maintenance from hunters cutting wire, hunters leaving gates open, or the fence damage from elk. Hunting pressure will inevitably push the elk onto neighboring private lands, which may not only damage fences, but also reduce forage intended for livestock use. We strongly encourage the Service work closely with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to set quotas as well as reducing possible disease transmission between elk and cattle.

A final comment we wish to include is establishing long-term written agreements with your cooperators who use the Refuge for agricultural production. These farmers and ranchers rely on consistent agreements with leases for short-term and long-term planning. The instability of year to year leases creates difficulty in economic and logistical planning. We also hope the Service will continue to promote the positive aspects of working with these cooperators as you have done on the Refuge website.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input in the early stages of development of the CCP. We would like to continue to review and comment throughout the draft stages of the policy and ask for the Service to include the WDA in all future developments and mailings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason Fearneyhough". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jason Fearneyhough  
Director

JF/jw

Cc: Governor's Planning Office  
WDA Board of Agriculture  
Wyoming Stock Growers Association  
Wyoming Wool Growers Association  
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union  
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts  
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation  
Wyoming State Grazing Board  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department