



# Wyoming Department of Agriculture

2219 Carey Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82002 ■ Phone: 307-777-7321 ■ Fax: 307-777-6593  
E-mail: [wda1@state.wy.us](mailto:wda1@state.wy.us) ■ Website: [wyagric.state.wy.us](http://wyagric.state.wy.us)

Dave Freudenthal, Governor

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May 24, 2005

Financial Assistance Program Division  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
EQIP Comments: c/o David Webster  
Room 5231 South Office Building  
14<sup>th</sup> & Independence Avenue, SW.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Webster:

Following are the comments from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) regulation 7 C.F.R. 1466, identification of national priorities.

Our comments are specific to our mission within state government which is to be dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As this proposal will have major impacts upon our agriculture industry, our natural resources and the welfare of our citizens, we believe it's important that we be kept informed of proposed actions and decisions and that we continue to be provided the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The EQIP priorities identified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) cover a broad spectrum of topics to assist farmers and ranchers. We may not be able to expand above and beyond the national priorities the NRCS has provided, but we want to recommend specific projects which may not already be included as a subcategory for how candidates' projects are chosen. Priority should be given to projects that address multiple environmental benefits.

Wyoming offers diverse landscapes and diverse agricultural operations. The Big Horn Basin in the north-central part of the state is known for wheat and barley production. The wheat and barley stubble is burned in the fall to remove a large amount of crop residue and help prepare the field for the following year. There have been multiple attempts for residents and landowners in this area to reduce the amount of smoke from agricultural burning. NRCS could use EQIP money as an incentive for farmers to not burn their crop residue, or to use no-till drilling methods for seeding spring crops. This would address your priorities #2 reduction of emissions and #3 reduction in soil erosion.

Recent work on sage grouse habitat conservation has led landowners to experimentally treat sagebrush along draws and ephemeral streambeds to increase waterflow and ultimately create

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DEQ—Chapter 1, Water Quality

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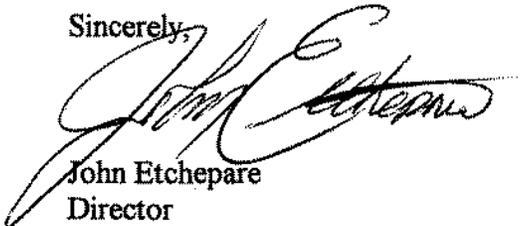
better habitat for sage grouse and their young. The treatment of decadent sagebrush is also being encouraged to create a mosaic of different sizes and ages of sagebrush. Again, this treatment is used to benefit sage grouse and other sage dependent wildlife. We realize the NRCS currently works with landowners on this topic, but we wish to emphasize the need and we urge you to consider these treatments as a high priority. This would address your priority #4, promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation.

The state of Wyoming has been experiencing severe drought conditions for over 5 years. We believe NRCS should use EQIP money to address rangeland conditions and assist ranchers to re-establish their herds to economically productive stocking rates. We have recently heard of ranchers interseeding *Medicago sativa* ssp. *falcata*, a yellow flowering alfalfa with a fibrous root system which tolerates arid range conditions. EQIP money could be used to not only address increasing stocking rates, but also improving range conditions, and increasing forbs production for sage grouse. Genetically grown *falcata* plants withstand heavy grazing without bloating livestock.

Agricultural producers across Wyoming have had to try and ride out the extended drought while being financially incapacitated. We strongly urge the NRCS to assist these producers with new techniques to help them conserve their grazing lands, farmland, and ways of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



John Etchepare  
Director

JE/jw

Cc: Governor's Planning Office  
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  
NRCS State Office  
Wyoming Game and Fish Department  
Wyoming Dept. of Environmental Quality