

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.



Dave Freudenthal, Governor
John Etchepare, Director

October 31, 2008

Wyoming Ecological Services Field Office
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
c/o Brian Kelly
5353 Yellowstone Rd., Suite 308A
Cheyenne, WY 82001

Dear Mr. Kelly:

Following are the comments from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) on the Proposed Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the Black-Tailed Prairie Dog, Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl and Ferruginous Hawk for the 4W Ranch (Applicant) in Niobrara and Weston Counties, Wyoming.

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, it's important you inform us of proposed actions and decisions and you continue to provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

We write in support of the Applicant's CCAA with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). This particular CCAA took many years to complete, but we congratulate both the Applicant and the Service on developing and completing Wyoming's first CCAA. We appreciate the Service recognizing the importance of private lands to black-tailed prairie dog habitat and other grassland dependant wildlife species. We strongly support the Applicant's ability to manage the above mentioned species on their private land with the ability to "maintain the ranch's economic viability and protection of high-value forage areas for livestock." The Applicant also has the assurance to "prevent encroachment of prairie dogs onto important ranch production areas."

This particular CCAA is already being considered as a prime example for future Wyoming CCAs and possibly Candidate Conservation Agreements on federal and state lands for sage grouse. We encourage the Service to continue their efforts to cooperatively work with agriculture producers in developing CCAs for pygmy rabbits, sage grouse and other species of concern.

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Again, we support the Service in making this CCAA eligible for categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act. We thank you for the opportunity to comment and look forward to hearing about the approval of the CCAA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Etchepare", written over a printed name and title.

John Etchepare
Director

JE/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
4W Ranch