

Wyoming Department of Agriculture

2219 Carey Avenue, Cheyenne, WY 82002 ■ Phone: 307-777-7321 ■ Fax: 307-777-6593 ■ Cust. Serv. Hotline: 888-413-0114 ■ Website: wyagric.state.wy.us ■ 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.



Dave Freudenthal, Governor
John Etchepare, Director

December 2, 2008

Rattlesnake Project
c/o Content Analysis Group
172 E. 500 S.
Bountiful, UT 84010

To Whom It May Concern:

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) comments pertaining to the Scoping Notice for the proposed Rattlesnake Forest Management Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Black Hills National Forest, Bearlodge Ranger District.

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 proposed project affects our agriculture industry, our natural resources, and the welfare of our citizens, it's important we be kept informed of proposed actions and decisions and that we continue to be provided the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

This project will impact grazing permittees, agriculture producers, landowners, and other citizens, as well as our natural resources, both in and near this 42,171-acre project area. For these reasons, we are making the following comments.

With the increase of hazardous fuel loads throughout the west, it is necessary to decrease these fuel loads in wildland/urban interface areas. We support efforts to reduce fuel as well as restore the vegetative and age-class diversity of a fire-adapted ecosystem to forests in Wyoming. Thinning dense forest stands and applying prescribed fire will also open up the canopy to allow herbaceous vegetative growth and thus, allow livestock grazing to continue and improve on the allotment. These management actions will increase Animal Unit Months and in turn supplement local economies.

Forest Service (FS) personnel in Wyoming have noted that short duration livestock grazing in burned and thinned areas helps revitalize re-emerging vegetation. We encourage the use of managed livestock grazing in these areas at the first feasible opportunity.

Following are some specific individual effects upon livestock grazing that should be analyzed: introduction and spread of noxious weeds, unsuccessful reclamation of disturbed areas, impacts upon livestock grazing by prescribed burning, impacts of new and modified roads, increased number of vehicles in the area due to timber harvest causing death or impairments of livestock, opened gates, and other detrimental social and economic impacts upon livestock operators and livestock management operations.

BOARD MEMBERS

Juan Reyes, District 1 ■ Jack Corson, District 2 ■ Jim Mickelson, District 3 ■ Jim Bennage, District 4 ■ Joe Thomas, District 5 ■ David J. Graham, District 6 ■ Gene Hardy, District 7

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

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

Rattlesnake Forest Management Project – Scoping

12/2/2008

Page 2 of 2

We strongly encourage Black Hills National Forest officials to continue to work with all livestock grazing permittees who may potentially be adversely affected by this project. Grazing on public lands is of significant value to agricultural producers as well as local communities. The impacts of this project could initially decrease revenues for grazing permittees and other agriculture producers.

We also request that the duration of time needed before grazing can occur on prescribed burn areas be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in cooperation with the grazing permittees, rather than adhering to a predetermined nationwide policy. Additionally, timely and successful reclamation and mitigation are critical to the re-introduction of livestock on treated areas and must be required.

Decisions in the proposed plan should allow FS officials, grazing permittees and private landowners the opportunity to work cooperatively. Flexibility to make the best site-specific, case-by-case decisions that are in the best interests of the affected resources and citizens throughout the life of this plan should also be addressed.

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

Sincerely,



John Etchepare
Director

JE/jc

CC: Governor's Planning Office
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming Board of Agriculture