



May 5, 2016

Public Comments Processing
Attn: Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2016-0042
US Fish and Wildlife Service
MS: BPHC
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803

To Whom It May Concern,

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) comments pertaining to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Proposed Rule to Remove the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) Population of Grizzly Bears from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.

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 project impacts 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 continue to provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA strongly supports the USFWS in their efforts to delist the GYE population of grizzly bear. The State of Wyoming and Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) have worked closely with the USFWS to ensure grizzly bears are protected and are provided suitable habitat. We offer the following comments for the USFWS to address in the Conservation Strategy and delisting process.

Reduce Impacts to Livestock Grazing

The Federal Register on page 23 states "14% of all human-caused grizzly bear mortalities in the GYE between 2002 and 2014 were due to management removal actions associated with livestock depredations." Clearly, livestock grazing does not account for the highest human caused mortality of grizzly bear. However, the USFWS and the US Forest Service (USFS) continue closing both domestic sheep and cattle allotments throughout the Shoshone, Caribou-Targhee, and Bridger Teton National Forests due to predator conflicts and other wildlife considerations.

Page 24 of the Federal Register proudly reads "This has resulted in a reduction of 21,120 sheep animal months, a 91 percent reduction, from the total calculated for the 1998 within the PCA, and is a testament to the commitment land management agencies have to the ongoing success of the grizzly bear population in the GYE." While this statement indicates a complete decimation of the domestic sheep industry in northwest Wyoming, it neglects to include how many cattle allotments the land management agency has successfully closed due to single species management for grizzly bear.

The closure of domestic livestock grazing allotments in the national forests has a significant economic impact to the livestock producers, agriculture industry, and local communities. WDA Board of Agriculture has a policy stating No Net Loss in Animal Unit Months (AUMs). We believe the USFWS absolutely must quantify and reveal the current

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economic loss and future earning potential by systematically eliminating domestic livestock grazing from federal lands.

We believe closing allotments based on current conditions in perpetuity is inappropriate. The ability for future livestock producers to increase their herds or utilize domestic livestock grazing as a tool to manage fine fuels on federal lands is eliminated. New research and livestock grazing or herding practices could provide local livestock producers new opportunities to adaptively manage their herds in grizzly bear habitat, but closing grazing allotments will eliminate these opportunities.

The Proposed Rule states on page 35 *"There are no documented cases of livestock owners or herders actually observing a grizzly bear depredating on livestock since records began being kept in 1975."* WDA is genuinely concerned the USFWS has no actual data regarding depredation of livestock, yet identifies livestock grazing as one of the top causal factors in grizzly bear mortality. We urge the USFWS survey livestock producers who graze their animals in grizzly bear habitat to gather more information. Anecdotal information from these producers is important to have a more comprehensive picture of impacts to livestock from grizzly bears.

We are concerned the recommendation to close allotments will continue well outside the Primary Conservation Area (PCA). As the grizzly bear finds new food sources and expands its territory into suitable habitat, the expectations of domestic livestock producers will increase. We also believe the USFWS has not clearly identified the carrying capacity for grizzly bear in the GYE and other suitable habitat. Already, producers well beyond the PCA have terms and conditions tacked onto their permits to address food storage, carcass removal, and night penning. We recommend identifying this information as part of the Proposed Rule and delisting process.

Address Vegetation and Recreation

The USFWS addresses white bark pine nuts as an important food source for grizzly bear and the potential impact of climate change to this food source. We believe the USFWS should make recommendations of how and where to implement vegetation treatments to improve food sources such as white bark pine nuts, as well as wild berries. These vegetation treatments could improve habitat, and potentially reduce depredation on livestock.

Additionally, we believe the Proposed Rule lacks any recommendation or changes to recreationists. Thousands of people camp, backpack, and mountain bike in grizzly bear territory. The human conflict with grizzly bears could increase as grizzly bears expand beyond the PCA. We urge the USFWS identify how the agency should address these conflicts. We do not support closure to livestock grazing allotments, while not addressing or closing other areas of human caused conflict or mortality, such as designated campgrounds.

Remove Federal Overreach

The 2016 Conservation Strategy is referenced throughout the Proposed Rule. Specifically, on page 16 it states *"Consequently, the 2016 Conservation Strategy will remain in effect indefinitely—beyond the 5 year post delisting monitoring period required by the Act—to facilitate and assure continued successful management of the population and its habitat across multiple land ownerships and jurisdiction."* Later in the Rule on page 38, *"The 2016 Conservation Strategy will remain in effect in perpetuity, beyond delisting and the 5-year monitoring period required by the Act as grizzly bears, like many other species will always be conservation reliant."* WDA is genuinely concerned the USFWS is overreaching its jurisdiction well beyond the intent of the Act, by using the Conservation Strategy as a mechanism to insert federal oversight of state wildlife management agencies. We strongly oppose the USFWS continued involvement beyond the 5-year period, especially indefinitely or in perpetuity as clearly conveyed in the Rule.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment. We support the mission of multi-use on federal lands, including livestock grazing and wildlife management. However, we do not support single species management at the expense of the agriculture industry. We look forward to the delisting of the grizzly bear and providing the WGFD the opportunity to manage the species at the state level. If you have questions, please contact Justin Williams, Senior Policy Analyst at 307-777-7067.

Sincerely,



Doug Miyamoto
Director

DM/jw

CC: Governor's Policy Office
Wyoming Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming State Grazing Board
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming County Commissioners Association