

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

April 25, 2008

Stephen Haydon, Forest Minerals Staff
Bridger-Teton National Forest
P.O. Box 1888
Jackson, Wyoming 83001-1888

Dear Mr. Haydon:

Following are our comments on the Big Piney Ranger District's notice of intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to determine whether and to what extent analysis of new issues and information might alter the oil and gas leasing decision as it relates to the 44,720 acres submitted to BLM for leasing by the Forest Service.

Our comments are specific to our mission: we are dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As these proposed leases affect our agriculture industry, our natural resources, and the welfare of our citizens, it is important that the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) remain involved in all proposed actions and decisions and that we continue to have the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

These oil and gas leases will impact grazing permittees, agriculture producers, landowners, and other citizens, as well as our natural resources, both in and near the project area.

In addition to analyzing these individual impacts, the Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) needs to evaluate the cumulative effects of this and other energy development projects in the area for their impacts on rangelands, forage and habitat, noxious weeds, ground and surface water, riparian areas, and livestock grazing.

Following are specific individual effects that need to be analyzed in the BTNF: off-road traffic, increased road traffic and speeding vehicles; traffic dust and decreased vegetative palatability; destroyed cattle guards and wing ditches; deaths and impairments of livestock; consequences on Animal Unit Months and pastures for grazing; social and economic impacts on livestock operators; cut fences; opened gates; damaged range improvements; introduction and spread of noxious weeds; and the inevitable conflicts with livestock management operations.

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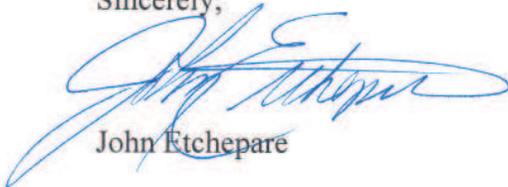
We strongly encourage the BLM and BTFS officials to keep surrounding landowners and affected public land grazing permittees informed and to work with them to learn of their concerns and recommendations regarding the potential impacts of gas and oil leasing in this area.

Grazing on public lands represents a vital economic value to agriculture producers and to local communities. In addition to its economic value, grazing represents irreplaceable environmental and social values, contributing to the preservation of open space, the scenic vista and visual beauty of the area, and the traditional image of the historic rural landscapes of Wyoming and the West. Any loss of these important environmental, historic, and social values of livestock grazing to users and visitors of the area and residents of impacted communities should be included in the analysis of the environmental impact areas.

Decisions in the proposed plan should allow FS and BLM officials, grazing permittees, and energy company officials the opportunity throughout the life of this plan to work cooperatively and the flexibility to make the best site-specific, case-by-case decisions that are in the best interest of the affected resources and citizens. We request you make decisions based on local information and conditions and not rely on nation-wide mandates that commonly do not apply locally.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the scope of the environmental impact associated with gas and oil leasing. 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

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CC: Governor's Planning Office
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming Board of Agriculture