

- WALLY J. JOHNSON, CHAIRMAN
- JOHN K. KOLB, COMMISSIONER
- GARY BAILIFF, COMMISSIONER
- REID O. WEST, COMMISSIONER
- DON VAN MATRE, COMMISSIONER

80 WEST FLAMING GORGE WAY, SUITE 109
GREEN RIVER, WY 82935
PHONE: (307) 872-3890
FAX: (307) 872-3992

Thursday, January 29, 2015

Sweetwater County - Wyoming Legislative Delegation
Wyoming State Capitol
Cheyenne, WY

Re: Sweetwater County opposition to the proposal for the State of Wyoming to take over Wyoming Federal Lands.

Dear Sweetwater County Senators and Representatives:

Sweetwater County is opposed to any legislative action that considers transferring ownership and/or management of Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands (federal lands) to the State of Wyoming for the following reasons:

- **High costs of administering federal lands:** Sweetwater County believes that the State of Wyoming cannot afford the high costs of administering federal lands if they are transferred to the state.

The BLM in Wyoming has 668 full time employees and an annual operating budget of approximately 105 million dollars to manage its 18 million acres of surface ownership and its 40 million acres of mineral estate. The State of Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investment manages approximately 4 million acres of State Trust Lands including both surface and mineral estate. To manage these lands the state employs 101 persons and has an annual operating budget of 18.4 million dollars. From these numbers it is clear that it will cost the state more than 5 times its current budget for managing the proposed additional state lands.

In the latest state supplemental budget, the state has budgeted, for the next year, approximately \$1,000,000 per county and its communities for infrastructure, repairs, replacements and improvements. With this insignificant amount being set aside to provide additional community infrastructure support, Sweetwater County finds it doubtful that the state can allocate \$105 million dollars on an annual basis to properly manage federal lands placed under its control.

- **Loss of Public Access:** Sweetwater County believes that, due to the unaffordable costs of administering acquired federal lands, the state could be forced to sell portions of these lands to private entities. Under private ownership, it would be highly likely that these lands would preclude public access to prime wildlife habitat and public lands that form the foundation of the quality of life we all enjoy in Wyoming.



- **Loss of Multiple Use:** Sweetwater County is concerned that, once federal lands are converted to state lands, the multiple use mission applied to federal lands may be lost. This multiple use mission gives federal public lands their diverse character which includes mining, oil and gas exploration, ranching, recreation, wilderness, hunting, fishing and many others. Unlike federal lands, state lands are managed for the sole purpose of maximizing revenues for Wyoming public schools and other facilities.

If federal lands are turned over to the state, this could create an imbalance between development and environmental protection, thus causing negative impacts for wildlife, endangered species, natural and scenic areas and the public's enjoyment of public lands.

- **Loss of Environmental Protections:** Sweetwater County believes that the state should establish an EIS environmental review that will protect the multiple use character of federal lands. Sweetwater County believes that the intent of the federal EIS is sound, although we feel that the time required to complete this process could be shortened considerably. Currently, the existing Wyoming environmental review process does not contain the same depth of analysis as provided by a federal EIS.

Without an EIS in place, Wyoming may not have the tools to address the environmental challenges of assuming ownership of the vast federal acreage in the State of Wyoming. These include properly balancing land use with environmental protections, maintaining multiple use and ensuring that the environmental integrity of the land is preserved.

In conclusion, with the potential loss of public land access, loss of multiple use management, the lack of state environmental protections and the high cost of administering federal lands, Sweetwater County strongly encourages the Sweetwater County legislative delegation to oppose any legislation intending to place federal lands within Wyoming under state control. In addition, Sweetwater County strongly recommends that any such proposal have extensive opportunity for public input.

If you have any questions, please contact Wally J. Johnson, Chairman of the Sweetwater County Board of County Commissioners, at 307-872-3897.

Sincerely,



Wally J. Johnson, Chairman

cc: Jerimiah Rieman, Natural Resource Policy Advisor, Governor's Office
Sweetwater County Board of County Commissioners
Gregory Cowan, Attorney, Wyoming County Commissioners Association
Kent Connelly, President, Coalition of Local Governments
Mary Thoman, President, Sweetwater County Conservation District
Connie Brooks, Attorney, Coalition of Local Governments

