



SWEETWATER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Mary Thoman, Chairman Thomas Burris, Vice-Chairman Jean Dickinson, Secretary Doug Hamel, Treasurer Bob Slagowski, Member

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July 21, 2009

VIA E-MAIL

Kevin Elliott
Forest Supervisor
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Project Leader
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Re: Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ashley National Forest Travel Management Plan on behalf of the members of the Coalition of Local Governments

Dear Mr. Elliott and Ms. Rutledge,

Sweetwater County, the Sweetwater County Conservation District, Lincoln County, Uinta County, and the Uinta County Conservation District (hereafter the Coalition of Local Governments or Coalition) provide the following comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Ashley National Forest Travel Management Plan (ANF TMP), Roosevelt/Duchesne, Flaming Gorge and Vernal Ranger Districts.

Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area (FGNRA) is located within Sweetwater County and residents of each the Wyoming counties use the roads and trails in the FGNRA and the National Forest frequently. Each county and conservation district has a direct interest in addressing public access for all purposes within and through the NRA and the entire ANF. The roads and trails are used for hunting, fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and motorized recreation vehicles, as well as access to grazing allotments and other commercial enterprises. As the ANF acknowledges, motorized recreation use, which is one of the primary management objectives, has increased between 500% and 616% over the life of the current ANF Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

Due to the close physical, commercial, and social connections between the Utah Counties of Uintah and Daggett, the Coalition incorporates by reference their comments as well. Many of the affected roads and trails continue from Wyoming into Utah. Many ranchers and other

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businesses operate in both Wyoming and Utah. Thus, it is important to view these comments as complementing those of the Utah local governments.

There is overwhelming public opposition to the ANF TMP. The public has continued to use the allegedly unauthorized roads and trails for the last 23 years and, in most cases, for decades before that. By not dealing with these routes specifically, such as displaying them on maps and acknowledging the number of miles of access to now be closed, the DEIS does the public a disservice and further violates the mandates of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to fully disclose and analyze the impacts of a proposed federal action.

It also appears that the ANF is tone deaf to the public comments that they do not want any road or trail closed and that they want at least the current levels of recreation opportunities to be maintained if not increased.

Based on the hearings and public comments received by the residents of the respective counties, it is clear that the proposed TMP closes far too many routes to public use. The result will be to crowd people into smaller areas, resulting in greater traffic on the few routes left open. This will materially detract from the governing objectives of the ANF to provide for all types of recreation use and does nothing to meet the probable increases in motorized recreation use for the foreseeable future.

Our more detailed comments are attached with exhibits. The Coalition looks forward to working closely with the Forest Service on all aspects of the travel management issues, and in consulting with the Forest Service to ensure that the ANF TMP complies with applicable regulations and directives. Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Very truly yours,

/s/Mary Thoman
Chairman, Sweetwater County
Conservation District