

STATE OF WYOMING FOREST CONDITION BRIEFING
BEFORE THE
WYOMING JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, STATE AND
PUBLIC LANDS AND WATER RESOURCES

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – FOREST SERVICE

INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

Nora Rasure, REGIONAL FORESTER

National Forests in Wyoming

Chairman Geis (Gerald Geis), Chairman McKim (Robert McKim) and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon, I'm Nora Rasure, the Regional Forester for the Intermountain Region of the US Forest Service. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before your Joint Committee. It is a pleasure to be here at the table with my colleagues, and I would like to thank State Forester Bill Crapser for inviting me to today's briefing.

The Intermountain Region includes all or portions of four national forests in western Wyoming: the Bridger-Teton, Caribou-Targhee, Ashley, and Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forests. I am pleased to be here today with Dan Jiron,

my counterpart for the Rocky Mountain Region, who oversees the other national forests in Wyoming.

The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. National forests and grasslands are integral to the social, ecological, and economic well-being of the Nation. The forests here in Wyoming play a vital role in providing public benefits and services such as clean air, clean water, minerals and energy, timber, forage, fish and wildlife habitat, and opportunities for outdoor recreation. With continued efforts in restoring and improving forest, grassland, and watershed health, together, we deliver a valuable service to the public. I am pleased to share highlights of our work with you today.

Resources

The Intermountain Region is currently reviewing information on the interactions between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep to determine if additional management actions are needed to conserve bighorn sheep and sustain domestic sheep grazing.

We met with personnel from the State of Wyoming yesterday to discuss how we can coordinate in a more meaningful way and better utilize the Wyoming State-wide Bighorn/Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group Report and Recommendations.

The Forest Service has been working closely with the Bureau of Land Management and the State of Wyoming to identify conservation measures to manage sage grouse and avoid the need to list this species under the Endangered Species Act. Emerging Forest Service guidance to amend four National Forest plans in Wyoming is largely consistent with the Bureau of Land Management and the State of Wyoming Core Area Strategy.

The Intermountain Region has an active hazardous fuels reduction program that utilizes a combination of prescribed burning and mechanical thinning. Overall, the Intermountain Region invests approximately 1.4 million dollars in hazardous fuels reduction work in western Wyoming's wildland urban interface areas each year. In the past three years, we've reduced hazardous fuels on approximately 4,000 acres annually in western Wyoming.

A great example of our shared success is the hazardous fuels reduction work that was credited with protecting the summer homes in the Middle Piney area during the Fontenelle Fire of June, 2012. We have also worked closely with the Teton Area Wildfire Protection Coalition, a group of stakeholders including local, county and state officials and agencies, and private individuals, to complete the planning for additional fuels work in the Teton to Snake Wildland Urban Interface area, which has been classified as one of the highest risk protection areas in the County.

Industry

Last winter, Forest Supervisors met with your State Forester, members of his staff, and a large contingency of timber industry leaders from Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, to discuss ways the Forest Service could modify our timber sales to ensure competitive interest. Based on these insights, we modified the timing and size of sales we offered. Our restoration projects are now being implemented, industry has more access to wood supply, and local economies are supported. Successful examples include the Hams Fork timber sales on the Bridger-Teton National Forest which sold well over minimum base rates and timber sales sold to a local timber company in the Smiths Fork Vegetation Restoration Project.

Over the past few years, the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest has increased their vegetation management program through partnerships with the Uinta County Citizens Coalition, the State of Wyoming and the State of Utah. I want to specifically recognize the additional funding the State of Wyoming has provided to accelerate project planning and timber sale preparation. As a result of these partnerships, the forest is better positioned to seek and obtain additional funding to accelerate implementation of several projects. The region has responded to this opportunity by providing additional funding to hire supplemental crews to prepare several timber sales.

The Forests have identified projects to address insect and disease infestations in the landscapes identified by the Governor of Wyoming as provided for in the 2014 Farm Bill. The map and spreadsheets attached to your copy of my remarks shows the location of projects that combine the State's and the Forest Service's priorities for treatments in western Wyoming.

The Forest Service participated in the Governor's Task Force on Forests and look forward to working with Wyoming to implement recommendations in the Final Report.

Conclusion

The Forest Service and the State of Wyoming have successfully worked together to improve our forests, grasslands and communities. I look forward to exploring new opportunities through open and constructive dialogue. We are honored to be one of the stewards of public resources here in Wyoming, and we seek to ensure these resources continue to meet the needs of generations to come.

Chairmen, I would like to once again thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. As this concludes my remarks, I will turn the podium over to my colleague from the Rocky Mountain Region, Dan Jirón.