

**Testimony of
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**Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
United States Senate**

Concerning

H.R. 1684 – “Ranch A Consolidation and Management Improvement Act”

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding H.R. 1684, the “Ranch A Consolidation and Management Improvement Act”.

The bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey to the State of Wyoming an approximately 10-acre parcel of National Forest System land located on the Black Hills National Forest. The bill also would remove a reversionary interest on land previously conveyed to the State under Public Law 104-276.

Public Law 104-276 directed the Secretary of the Interior to convey approximately 600 acres of the Ranch A property, containing a fish and wildlife facility, to the State of Wyoming for the limited purposes of “fish and wildlife management and educational activities.” Public Law 104-276 also provided that the property would revert to the United States if it was used for other purposes.

H.R. 1684 would remove this reversionary interest to accommodate the desire of the State and the Ranch A Foundation to broaden the purposes of the State’s use of this land to include non-educational events, including weddings and reunions. The Ranch A Foundation was created to protect the Ranch A property while maintaining the ranch as an educational facility. The increased revenue generated from these additional purposes would result in better custodial care and restoration of Ranch A.

Under Public Law 104-276, the United States retained 80 acres of the Ranch A property, and the administrative jurisdiction over that land was transferred to the Secretary of Agriculture. H.R. 1684 would require the Secretary to convey approximately 10 of the 80 acres to the State without consideration. If the Secretary deems it necessary, the exact acreage and legal description of the parcel of land to be conveyed would be determined by a survey that is approved by the Secretary and paid for by the State.

Public Law 104-276 conveyed the Babcock House and other improvements such as a well to the State of Wyoming. But, the land where the house and improvements stand on were conveyed to the Forest Service. Public Law 104-276 also granted a right-of-way to the State of Wyoming for access to use the Babcock House and the other improvements on the land conveyed to the Forest

Service.

The right-of-way has presented a number of management challenges to the Forest Service, the Ranch A Trust and the State of Wyoming. Conveyance of the property would solve issues associated with the State owning the improvements and the Forest Service owning the property the improvements reside upon.

The Department supports the conveyance of this parcel to the State; however, we cannot support conveyance of National Forest System lands without consideration. We recommend that the Bill be amended to require consideration to be determined by an appraisal completed according to the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land acquisitions.

In addition, the Department of Agriculture defers to the Department of the Interior on Section 4. Amendments, which would repeal the use restrictions and the reversionary clause on properties that were conveyed to the State of Wyoming by Public Law 104-276.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I look forward to working with the Committee on this bill. I am prepared to answer any questions from members of the Committee.
