

Office of the Governor

April 9, 2015

Dennis Jaeger, Forest Supervisor
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland
U.S. Forest Service
2468 Jackson Street
Laramie, WY 82070

Re: Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan and the Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Management Strategy

Dear Forest Supervisor Jaeger,

We appreciate your work to address prairie dog encroachment on state and private lands from the Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG). Including cooperating agencies in this process has improved relationships necessary to effectively manage prairie dogs now and in the future.

Last fall you suggested the possibility of forgoing the amendment process and you indicated a preference to amend the Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Assessment and Management Strategy (Strategy) and establish a working group for prairie dog management. We are glad the United States Forest Service (USFS) sees the same flexibilities in the existing Strategy as we do. We are uncertain how this flexibility will be memorialized outside of an amendment delineating the ongoing commitment of those involved and would appreciate clarification.

A successful working group requires sustained leadership from the USFS and we have not witnessed this on the TBNG. Your proposal is a good start and we have carefully reviewed it. We believe it would be strengthened by adding:

- A detailed plan for prairie dog encroachment on state and private lands – no management plan can be contingent on a state/federal land exchange.
- Assurances that the plan will be implemented consistently.
- An implementation plan for an updated Strategy outside of the amendment process.
- Clear guidelines for membership, participation and operation of the working group.

Before we make a final commitment, we need assurance that the USFS will update the Strategy to reflect the goal – effective management of prairie dogs directed at eliminating infringement on

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neighboring lands. We also need a solution that demonstrates this approach will withstand personnel changes within the USFS.

We would like to make sure the USFS has time to examine the merits of your proposal and to respond to this request. We believe postponing the current Strategy amendment to June 30, 2015 will give the necessary time for thoughtful consideration. If the November 2014 proposal has been abandoned, we request that the amendment process begin immediately and proceed judiciously. We look forward to hearing from you on a final recommendation after you have had time to review this letter.

Thank you for your work to date.

Sincerely,

Matthew H. Mead
Governor

Richard Ladwig
President, Wyoming County Commissioners Association
Chairman, Niobrara County Board of Commissioners

MHM:RL:md

cc: Campbell County Board of Commissioners
Converse County Board of Commissioners
Weston County Board of Commissioners