

Dear Governor Mead,

Thank you for the continued outreach as we continue down the path of amending the Thunder Basin National Grassland's (TBNG) 2009 Prairie Dog Amendment (PD Amendment). After considerable discussion in our respective counties, we are writing to provide you with a consensus recommendation.

We are aware of the United States Forest Service (FS) proposal, and appreciate much of what the FS is attempting to accomplish in it. However, we remain deeply skeptical of its ability to carry forward the resulting recommendations provided by the work group. The rationale for this skepticism is twofold. First, we lack assurances by the FS that its newfound understanding of the embedded flexibilities captured in the existing 2009 strategy is durable outside of the amendment process. While we appreciate that the FS has recently begun to view the flexibility in the 2009 strategy in the same manner as we do, we are very concerned that changes in personnel could lead to further changes in opinion. Without the assurance of durability there is a very real risk we will end up pursuing an amendment again in a few years, only this time from a position of greater distrust.

Second, establishing the work group and deploying its recommendations requires committed and intentional leadership from the FS that we have yet to see on the TBNG. We need to know that the FS will not only implement an updated strategy, but do so in the face of strong headwinds – both externally and internally. Implementation of a strategy outside the amendment process will require a level of consistency and fortitude we have not yet experienced at the FS. This is not to suggest that FS personnel at the forest and district level we are currently working with are not up to the challenge. They have provided, for the first time in our collective memory, the opportunity for constructive engagement as partners moving forward on the myriad issues existing in the TBNG. Rather it is the institutional headwinds within the agency itself that have us concerned about the continued commitment by the FS to see its proposal through after the current players have gone.

With this in mind, and recognizing that we like what is represented in the FS proposal, we respectfully recommend that the current FS proposal be reflected in a preferred alternative in the existing amendment process. We hope this letter provides you some additional context as you move forward with making a determination as to which path is in the best interest of the State.