



Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
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October 24, 2017

The Honorable John Barrasso, Chair & The Honorable Thomas R. Carper, Ranking Member
US Senate Committee on Environment & Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6175

RE: *Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017*

Dear Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts, thank you for considering legislation that will allow our natural resources and wildlife habitat to be managed in a responsible and responsive manner by reducing the continued threat of litigation.

Wyoming's 34 local conservation districts are statutorily charged with natural resource conservation, including water, soil, and range and wildlife habitat. §§ 11-16-101 *et. seq.* Further, the conservation districts participate, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, as cooperating agencies and partners with our federal land management agencies both a Forest and Resource Management Planning level as well as the project level. We are the boots on the ground working with our state and federal land managers to ensure a healthy resilient natural resource base that provides economic opportunity and quality of life values that our state enjoys and relies upon.

Specifically, the Association believes that Title I will allow our land managers, after extensive planning and coordination that occurs throughout the planning process, are able to move forward with on-the-ground resource enhancement and improvement projects. These provisions in some aspect mirror the agreement between the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service in terms of advance recognition of the benefits of land management practices to species conservation allowing private landowners to move forward without extensive consultation and delays. It is a relationship that has worked and worked well.

The Association supports as well the intent of Section II in terms of allowing management and treatments of invasive and other threats to Sage Grouse and Mule Deer habitats to occur without the lengthy, often detrimental delays often encountered as a result of litigation. Invasive species impact's to habitat is one of the US Fish & Wildlife Service's identified threats to Sage Grouse habitat. Specifically, Cheat Grass management is paramount not only to providing healthy habitats for Sage Grouse but many other species as well. Successful management requires timeliness, adaptability and flexibility. Providing the ability to implement in this manner will allow the land management agencies to proactively manage the resource rather than wait until infestations have decimated habitat conditions. The Association believes further conversations and language to ensure that certain provisions of this section do not become abused, such as

eliminating certain land use activities such as grazing. Some additional sideboards to this section are recommended to guard against that potential.

Section III of the draft contains measures absolutely imperative to advancing preventative treatment of our forest lands, to advance healthy forests, protect against catastrophic wildfires and protect those watersheds upon which our communities and citizens depend for their water supplies. An example of just how successful these types of proactive management measures are is the Northeast Wyoming Forest Resilience partnership in the Black Hills area of Wyoming. Work between local, state, federal and private industry and landowners, has resulted in positive impacts to forest health through management of Pine Beetle infestations. The results speak for themselves. Where there would otherwise be a red dead and dying forest susceptible to catastrophic wildfire and threatening habitats and watershed health, there is rather a reduced level of pine beetle devastation in comparison to other forests.

The Association urges the Committee to advance the legislation and provide our federal agency partners with the tools necessary to manage our forest resources, wildlife habitat and enhance collaborative resource management opportunities. Increasing certainty will go to great lengths warding off catastrophic fires and helps ensure a health forest, maintain viable wildlife habitats and protect our very critical watersheds and water supplies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bobbie K. Frank".

Bobbie K. Frank
Executive Director