

15 July, 2018

The Honorable John Barrasso, MD
Chairman, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Anyone acquainted with Wyoming knows how important water is for this arid state. The ability to manage water is how much of Wyoming was developed. Wyoming's rural communities as well as its agricultural producers rely on water management in order to live in this arid climate.

Wyoming agricultural producers rely on more than just water management. A number of our commodities rely on the ability to move those items via the nation's water ways. Without this critical transportation infrastructure, the cost of moving those commodities such as wheat and corn would certainly be more costly. This infrastructure also provides agriculture with a critical market benefit over other countries. Road, rail and waterway transportation gives all Americans a competitive advantage over other countries.

That is why it is so important to maintain our nation's water infrastructure both to enable efficient use of water for its citizens as well as maintaining the use of waterways as a transportation network.

"America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018" addresses these two critical water needs.

The Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation represents over 2,600 agricultural producers throughout the state of Wyoming. In addition we have over 10,000 non-agricultural members who support a strong agricultural economy. On behalf of those members we would like to offer our support to the America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA). This legislation will have an important impact on all of our members.

One of the recent critical issues we face in Wyoming is the possible invasion of a non-native species that found their way to the US from other countries. In many of Wyoming's surrounding states, Quagga mussels and Zebra mussels have invaded their fresh waterways. A few years ago, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department with support from the agricultural community and other State agencies helped pass legislation which instituted a watercraft inspection process to try to prevent this invasive species from coming to Wyoming. Unfortunately with a stressed economy, the State is struggling to find the necessary resources to fully accomplish an adequate inspection system. Federal dollars to help shore up this program would be very helpful.

When Wyoming's mineral wealth was being developed, legislators at that time responded to the increased state income brought about by those non-renewable resources by establishing a water development fund to be used to develop water for our citizens. This fund has provided significant beneficial funding for water infrastructure needs in our communities in Wyoming as well as support of

agricultural irrigation projects. However, the main focus of the fund, that of water storage projects has suffered from impediments placed on those programs by federal regulations. We support efforts on the federal level to allow states like Wyoming to more easily develop our water resources so that we are able to continue to grow and expand our economy. The AWIA has some important provisions that will provide relief to states like Wyoming who wish to further develop water resources within their boundaries. These provisions are strongly supported by our members.

Inclusion of non-federal interests in project consultation will be helpful for water resource development as well and something our members support.

Water was developed in Wyoming on a large scale in the early part of the 1900's. This development, primarily through the Bureau of Reclamation provided an important resource to check floods, provide irrigation waters to grow food and provided electrical generation. Current processes have slowed the ability to construct important flood, irrigation and electrical generation facilities. It is critical that we streamline the process to obtain federal approval in a timely period as well as provide for flexibility for the Secretary to address these roadblocks.

Sec. 1046 of the amendment directs the U.S. Fish and Wildlife director to expedite procedures for take permits for depredating eagles. Wyoming producers have suffered from significant losses throughout the years by eagles on lambs and sheep. This impact is one of the contributing factors to the decline in sheep numbers in Wyoming. Eagles are the second leading cause of predation on lambs in Wyoming and over a five year period from 2012 to 2016 a limited number of sheep producers lost 9,700 lambs to eagle predation. Where sheep numbers were almost four million head in 1932, that number has declined to 360,000 head in 2017 according to USDA figures. This is over a 1,000 percent decrease. There is significant frustration on the part of these producers who recognize there are processes in place that can address some of these impacts, but the federal agency in charge drags their feet and uses a bureaucratic process that guarantees nothing will ever be done. Hopefully this section will help to address these issues.

We support the provisions in Subtitle A – Continuing Authorities Programs, which contain important funding mechanisms for the Army Corp of Engineers to continue addressing impacts from storms and hurricanes, small river and harbor improvements, regional sediment management, small flood control projects among others. This section also prioritizes projects in the Upper Missouri River Basin which will provide resources to many of our water structures, particularly the sediment management. Sediment management is also addressed under Subtitle E of the legislation.

We support Subtitle D – Water Supply, section 3301, which provides funding to address critical needs on Fontenelle Reservoir. This section establishes a process where the federal government can work with the state of Wyoming to address infrastructure needs to allow for the full utilization of Fontenelle Dam and Reservoir.

In addition to addressing needs for Fontenelle Reservoir, this subtitle also provides resources to municipalities under 80,000 to address storage needs for their citizens. This will help address critical needs for our smaller communities that support the rural economy.

As we mentioned in our comments on Subtitle A, Subtitle E addresses sediment management in the Missouri River drainage which will affect much of Wyoming. Sediment management is critical to maintain existing water structures and extend the life of these investments which have provided necessary benefits to our members and the citizens of Wyoming.

Subtitle F – Flood Risk Management, section 3501, seeks to address an ongoing issue in some of our rural communities in Wyoming. The issue of ice jams which create flooding in these communities has been an ongoing problem for decades. Addressing these issues will help prevent property losses by individuals in those communities.

In addition to addressing flood risk management, this subtitle also seeks to increase projects to increase flood and drought monitoring in the Upper Missouri River Basin which will also contribute needed resources to address water management problems for our citizens and members.

Subtitle G – River Basins, Watersheds, and Coastal Areas section 3608 addresses long term flood risks in the Snake River Basin in Wyoming. We are pleased that this section also requires coordination with local authorities.

Many of the provisions included in Title G – EPA Related Provisions have important sections which address water quality issues in Wyoming's rural communities and will provide necessary help to those communities.

This legislation has many provisions that will provide important benefits to our members and citizens in Wyoming. It will help support future development of Wyoming's water resources that sustain our state into the future. Wyoming Farm Bureau policies, particularly in the water development area, strongly supports these efforts and once again on behalf of the 2,600 agricultural producers and the 10,000 non-agricultural members we urge prompt action on this amendment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "H".

Ken Hamilton
Executive Vice President

cc Board
SGA
NER