

Fremont County WPLI Advisory Committee Site Visit

October 29, 2016 | 9:00 a.m. | Dubois Badlands & Whiskey Mountain

Meeting called by Douglas L. Thompson, WPLI
Commissioner /Coordinator

Type of meeting Site Tour

Note taker Doug Thompson

Advisory Committee Attendees:

Reg Phillips, Julia Stuble, Nick Dobric, Rick Mickelson, Josh Milek, Andy Blair, Ginger Bennett and Gary Horton and Travis Becker. Ginger Bennett was absent.

Agency:

Gregory Cowan (WCCA Staff Attorney); Jared Oakleaf (BLM); Greg Anderson (Wyoming Game and Fish)

Other Attendees:

Lynn Stewart, Logan Milek, Helen Milek, Sally Wulbrecht, Brigid Slaven, Steve Kilpatrick, Cynthia Boyhan, Dick Inberg, Mark Hirschberger, Larry Lewis, Bill Sincavage, Aline Phillips, Trudy Trevarthen, Eyvette Becker, River Pilot, Cody Booth, Greg Anderson and Vic Augustine

AGENDA TOPICS

Welcome | Commissioner Thompson

The group met at the Dubois Bighorn Sheep Center in preparation for the site visits to the Dubois Badlands WSA and the Whiskey Mountain WSA. Numerous citizens from Dubois, agency personnel, and the staff attorney from WCCA also attended. Thanks were extended to Reg Phillips and Nick Dobric for arranging the logistics for the tour. Jared Oakleaf, BLM, addressed WSA management, WSA size criteria, and various management options. Greg Anderson, Wyoming Game and Fish, discussed a wildlife map of overlapping crucial ranges and explained the various wildlife management coalitions and agreements affecting the two WSAs.

Chairman Thompson took some time to reiterate the fact that the WPLI is in no way connected to any effort to transfer public lands to State ownership or to private ownership. He explained the legislative study was to study the costs associated with managing the federal lands. He also discussed the options for Natrona County involvement with the site visit and draft recommendation for the Sweetwater Rocks complex. The range is from a whole new joint committee to using Fremont County's as a base and supplementing per Natrona County's desires. A final item was outside communication. As Chairman he is to communicate with individual committee members, but no decisions will be made outside of official meetings.

Site Visits | Commissioner Thompson

The site visit began with a stop along the Torrey Lake Road. From this vantage point, we were able to view the Dubois Badlands north of the highway as well as Whiskey Mountain WSA. Jared Oakleaf and Greg Anderson pointed out features of the Badlands and discussed activities there. Mason Draw, Bird Draw, Table Mountain,

Carson Draw and Windy Ridge were located. The WSA is bordered by the Dump Road to the west and state and private land to the east. There are some legacy fences and a reservoir inside the WSA from the Parker Ranch. Bighorn sheep winter in the Badlands, about 100, and they summer north of the WSA. There are deer throughout the Dubois Valley and 2,000 elk winter north of the WSA around Table Mountain. It receives light livestock grazing from occasional spring use and no fall use, mainly due to dry conditions. Weeds are not a big factor. This is a roadless area, but some illegal encroachment on the west end does occur from ATV use. There is some biking on this end also. Illegal dumping is also a factor on the west end.

The Bighorn sheep herds associated with both WSAs, as well as the surrounding area, were discussed in relation to their national significance. At one time, the Whiskey herd was used as a foundation for transplanting and reintroduction, but none are currently used for these purposes.

Members of the local Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation discussed the possible economic benefit to the Dubois economy by enhanced access and interpretation for national and international tourism. Currently, motorized touring is prohibited in both WSAs. Greg Anderson stated that predation of the sheep population is not significant and that there are no domestic sheep permits in the area.

The second stop was the north end of the Ross Lake Jeep Trail. It was stated that the Whiskey WSA was more user friendly for viewing sheep and landscapes. The WSA was described and tour participants oriented as to the WSA and surrounding federal lands. It was noted that neither WSA was recommended for Wilderness. In the 1980's, the area was logged, using horses, and the logs windrowed. There is not livestock grazing in this WSA. In 1984 a water guzzler was installed in the WSA. This WSA is managed in coordination with surrounding Forest Service, BLM and Game and Fish lands under the Whiskey Mountain Cooperative Agreement (attached). The objective is to improve resource conditions to support the optimum bighorn sheep population. The management focus of this whole area, including the WSA, is support of the resident bighorn sheep herd. Although this herd summers south of the area, there is some connectivity with the two herds north of the highway. It was also noted that there is a small grazing allotment in the Forest Service Wilderness south of the WSA. Also noted is that this area is closed to winter motorized travel. The Game and Fish and BLM discussed regulatory enforcement and stated it was not problematic in the WSA as the management strategy for the surrounding area is fairly strict.

The site visit participants then returned to Dubois, had lunch, and then made several stops on Table Mountain overlooking the Dubois Badlands WSA from the north. Various historical (wooden cattle guards) and cultural features in the area were viewed and discussed. There was a cultural inventory done in the WSA. The Game and Fish described the various big game herds and their activities in the area. Table Mountain supports several thousand wintering elk from the north. Bighorn sheep utilize the WSA and adjoining private land for their winter habitat. Deer frequent the whole Dubois valley with no crucial fidelity to the WSA.

On the return to Dubois, the tour stopped on the west end of the WSA to discuss illegal dumping and motorized entry. Various strategies for prevention were posed. The idea of possible commercial tours and an interpretive kiosk just outside the WSA were discussed. Local tour participants believed that some economic benefit to the community could accrue while respecting the integrity of the WSAs.

Adjourned | Commissioner Thompson

The tour ended at 3:30 p.m.