

**Wyoming Public Lands Initiative (WPLI) Fortification Creek
Committee Meeting
January 9, 2017**

Present: Commissioner Rusty Bell , Campbell County; Commissioner Bill Novotny, Johnson County; Todd Anderson, Sportsman, Dave Clarendon, Conservation; Karlon Knudson, Ag/Ranching; James Hansen, Energy; Barry Hayden, AG/Ranching; Debra Hepp, Conservation; Levi Jensen, Recreation; Wallace Leastman, General Public; Carrie Little, AG/Ranching; Jeremy Murphy, Sportsman; Commissioner Matt Avery, Campbell County; Commissioner Clark Kissack, Campbell County; Commissioner Micky Shober, Campbell County; Ivy McGowan-Castleberry, Information Coordinator for Campbell County Commissioners; Brenda Schladweiler, Core Resource Solution; BLM – Megan Taylor, Duane Spencer, Rachel Woods, Chris Durham and Bill Ostheimer

Attorney Gregory Cowan, Natural Resource Staff Attorney Advisor for Wyoming County Commissioners Association

Mr. Cowan called in to explain the background behind the development of the WPLI. Congress recognized certain lands should be preserved for their historical, educational, and aesthetic values beyond protections already provided by other statutes. Congress passed various acts designating special areas of land for management in accordance with preservation principals. Those acts generally identified lands to be preserved, the agency charged with managing them, and set out mandates and baseline requirements for how those lands are to be managed. The Wilderness Act of 1964 created the National Wilderness Preservation System. The only entity that can designate wilderness across all public land is Congress. In 1976 the Federal Land Policy & Management Act (FLPMA) which is also the Organic Act. FLPMA stated BLM had 15 years to inventory the landscapes and identify land for potential wilderness and recommend to Congress what lands should be included. In 1991 BLM of Wyoming provided Congress their recommendations on the WSA. Congress has not acted on these recommendations. Different organizations started brainstorming on how they could re-engage Congress. Advisory Committees were formed with people that are using the landscapes.

The Advisory Committee's mission is to advance the recommendations for what can occur at Fortification Creek and to tell us what you think is the most appropriate management scheme for that landscape. WCCA will provide direction and technical assistance in helping communicate these processes and recommendations. Whatever the advisory committee recommends WCCA will stand behind. WCCA would like to introduce a legislative package to Congress in 2-4 years. WCCA would like to have an aggregated package with the nine (9) Wyoming Counties and present this as one bill in early 2019. Mr. Cowan gave guidelines for the committee to draw from in their process. He also gave recommendations on what organizations to talk with or invite to their meetings.

Johnson County Commissioner Novotny stated that Utah and Nevada successfully submitted a public lands package. The collaborative process works the best with a broad group of people you bring different opinions and perspectives. In the state of Utah, they expanded some national monuments, added some wilderness areas and they released some areas. In the state of Nevada it was primarily used for freeing up some mining assets. The Commissioner anticipates the timeframe for the collaboration to only take 6 months to a year, but they encourage the group to take as long as they need. The Commissioners will not change what the group does, but may make recommendations. Many organizations will be brought in to help identify flora and fauna, State Lands will help on the school section, and Wyoming Game and Fish on wildlife management practices. When the weather

clears we will go to the area and do some grounds truthing. We are looking into doing an aerial view of the area.

Campbell County Commissioner Bell told the group that if they need specific maps or information to please let them know and they will get the information to the group.

BLM Presentation

Buffalo Field Office

Rachel Woods, Outdoor Recreation Manager

Ms. Woods spoke on the 3 WSAs that fall within the Buffalo Field Office. She showed a map that includes Sheridan County, Campbell County and Johnson County and the 3 wilderness study areas. The laws and regulations are on the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative website. The laws and regulations that guide our management of the WS's, some of the wilderness characteristics that define wilderness and make the land area qualify as wilderness, the 3 WSAs that are within the Buffalo field office and some of the things that guide us and our management decisions and what is going on with the WSA today.

The first law that was past that guides us is the Wilderness Act of 1964 it defines what wilderness is and what characteristics a wilderness area has. Next was the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) that created Bureau of Land Management and gives us guidance on land inventory and wilderness study. In 1979 the BLM conducted inventories of different BLM lands to determine if the characteristics were present. Then in 1980 it was proposed 42 different areas in the state of Wyoming. The WSA's were analyzed through environmental impact statements. Buffalo was completed in 1986. And in 1991 the whole state of Wyoming did a report making more recommendations and they recommended that some of those areas be designated as wilderness and some be released from wilderness study.

What qualifies as wilderness?

- It has to be an area of at least 5,000 acres of road less areas.
- An area of outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.
- Undeveloped federal land that is affected primarily by the forces of nature.
- Protected to preserve the natural conditions with no permanent improvements.

Wilderness is managed under the non-impairment standard. The uses in the area are temporary and cannot create any surface disturbance. You cannot have motorized or mechanized use in the wilderness area.

Of the three WSA Fortification Creek is the largest. There is a 640 acre inholding of state land. This has rugged terrain and the vegetation is slightly different with moderate to heavy strands of juniper, sagebrush and grasses. The area is crucial winter range for elk. There are some auditory and visual intrusions which include railroads, views of high voltage power lines, county roads and adjacent oil development projects. Also 99 percent of the WSA is considered crucial yearlong range for elk as designated by the Wyoming Game and Fish. The BLM is monitoring and documenting the WSAs once a year. They are guided by the decisions of Congress.

If it does get release from the WSA designation there are 3 different classifications that it can take. The Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is special management attention needed to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historical, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources. Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) is a public lands unit identified in land use plans to direct

recreation funding. Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA) is a public lands unit identified in land use plans containing all acreage not identified as SRMA. BLM is managing Fortification Creek as if it has been designated WSA.

Mr. Ostheimer stated that Fortification Creek was part of a resource management plan amendment 5 years ago as proposed to oil and gas development. There was about 100,000 acres that had a resource management plan revision. The Buffalo office revised their resource management plan in 2015. This was revised to state how BLM would manage the land with oil and gas in the area.

The Committee was told they can have an alternate if they are unable to attend the meeting. The alternative needs to be identified ahead of time and must represent the sector the original committee member was assigned.

On March 23rd in Lander all the groups that are engaged in the WPLI will meet. They are asking for a County update. So at our next meeting we will see if someone from our group is interested in going to present information to all the interested parties throughout the state about where we are in the process.

Next meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 6 at 6:30 p.m. in the Campbell County Courthouse in the Commissioners Chambers.