



WYOMING WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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July 12, 2014

The Honorable Mike Enzi
United States Senate
379A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso
United States Senate
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
113 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Enzi, Senator Barrasso, and Representative Lummis,

The proposed closure of the U. S. sheep experiment station (USSES) near Dubois, Idaho is very concerning to our Wyoming sheep producers who fear that years of research at the station, as well as any new projects planned at the station, will be lost if the closure will be permitted. While it is true the station requires an investment of federal resources, the data developed at the station provides value not only to our producers but also to policy makers tasked with addressing a host of other important natural resource issues. We would ask each of you to work to prevent this shutdown and maintain this valuable research facility. The sheep industry is under tremendous assault these days and this would be yet another blow to our important industry.

The USSES is nearly 100 years old with very unique datasets and capabilities that cannot be substituted for elsewhere anytime soon. This includes 90 years of pedigree data on major sheep breeds, three of these breeds were developed at the USSES. It also includes an ongoing 90-year history on vegetation in response to fire and grazing and more than 40 years of historical and ongoing data on sage grouse with regards to fire in recovering sagebrush communities. I have listed below some examples of the kind of research and information that will be lost if the station is closed:

1. *The "Original" Sheep and Genetics Database.* The most common breeds of sheep in Wyoming are Rambouillet, Targhee and Columbia. The USSES developed the Columbia, Targhee, and Polypay sheep breeds and maintains the complete pedigrees for these breeds as well as for the original Rambouillet sheep from which they were developed. The USSES pedigree database is over 90-years-old, which makes it one of the oldest and most

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comprehensive active databases for sheep in North America. Production traits for all animals in the database have been recorded.

2. *"The Standard" for measuring the sagebrush steppe.* In the 1930s, USSES scientists established "the standard" of how to measure vegetation in the sagebrush steppe so that resulting data are scientifically valid and meaningful. To date, numerous researchers and multiple agencies worldwide still use these methods and guidelines to accurately monitor shrubland vegetation. Recently, USSES scientists, working with other labs and universities, have published new techniques that have adapted these methods for use in remote sensing applications, such as for images from satellite and aircraft.
3. *Nearing 100 years of fire, vegetation, and climate monitoring.* Beginning in the 1920s, USSES scientists began **monitoring fires, vegetation, and weather on the sagebrush steppe property**; this monitoring is active today. From these data, scientists have described how sagebrush steppe responds to drought, fire, and grazing. Multiple agencies throughout the West use these findings to develop management plans for lands undergoing extensive drought or recovering from fire. Combined with the weather monitoring data, scientists and cooperators are now beginning to describe sagebrush steppe response to climatic trends over the last 100 years.
4. Almost 50 years of **sage grouse monitoring**. Beginning in 1966, USSES scientists and cooperators starting monitoring sage grouse lek populations. It was not until the 80s that other agencies began to do the same. When combined region wide, these records enable biologists to estimate the status of sage grouse populations of the Upper Snake River Plain; USSES submits annual lek counts to Idaho Fish and Game. Currently, the USSES sage grouse records are being combined with the USSES Rangeland and Climate Databases. Efforts are underway to study the effects of fire, climate, and grazing management on sage grouse lek populations from the 70s to present day. The results of these efforts are needed to identify factors most associated with sage grouse presence and viability, which in turn will be used to craft science-based strategies for effective and responsible management of rangelands.
5. *USSES research helps combat exotic noxious weed invasion.* Using data from vegetation-monitoring efforts, USSES scientists first documented invasive plant species in the Upper Snake River Plain in 1923. Since then, scientists have **developed various grazing and land-rest protocols to combat invasive weeds after fire or drought**. These recommendations are used to combat cheat grass, leafy spurge, and spotted knapweed, which are some of the most aggressive and noxious weeds in the West. New studies are underway to determine the combined effect of grazing and insect biocontrol on abatement of spotted knapweed.
6. *Informs plans for coexisting with wildlife.* Since the USSES lands were withdrawn from the Public Domain from 1915 to 1922, the USSES has grazed sheep on the lands. Grazing management plans were tested to determine the most appropriate grazing rotation that is profitable for the sheep producer yet healthy for the rangelands and ecosystems. During the 100-year history of grazing at the USSES,

both wolf and grizzly bear have recovered. Although the grizzly bear was relisted soon after it was delisted in 1997, it has continued to increase at 7 to 9% each year; the USFWS predicts delisting in 2017. **Sage grouse populations thrive on USSES lands.** Annual USSES leks counts often exceed regional counts. When considered together, this documented information demonstrates that domestic and wild species can successfully co-utilize range/forest lands. Efforts are underway to enhance current monitoring programs for grizzly bear and sage grouse on USSES properties.

As you can see, this facility is not only a valuable resource to the American sheep industry but also for the nation, especially our policy makers and our land managers. We would greatly appreciate any help you could provide to ensuring its continued operation. If you have any questions or need further information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy W. Hendrickson".

Amy W. Hendrickson
Executive Director

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