

WYOMING WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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August 14, 2014

U.S. Department of Agriculture

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Amy W. Hendrickson
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**RE: WWGA Comments Opposing the Closure and Reprograming Request
of the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station**

On behalf of the Wyoming Wool Growers Association, I am writing with respect to the future of the USDA Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, ID. We are very concerned over the proposal to close the research station and reprogram its funding. The USSES has a rich history of important research on a wide range of important topics that provides significant value to the sheep industry and to the American public. The historical work done on sheep disease and genetics is invaluable and has helped not just Wyoming sheep ranchers but sheep producers throughout the country to improve their wool genetics to the point that we now have some of the finest wool in the world. Wool that is now sought after by major apparel manufacturers like Nike and Ralph Lauren.

In addition, the sheep station houses valuable fire and vegetation data important to our efforts to address a host of public policy issues, including sage grouse needs, wildfire events, and climate changes. Nearly 100 years of fire, climate and vegetation monitoring has produced ongoing valuable data that provides federal agencies with important information regarding conservation, forages and wildlife habitat. For example, the research done at the station on the effects of grazing practices provides land managers and scientists with tools to address a host of rangeland health issues. Another example is the collection of sage grouse population monitoring data housed at the station, which can serve to inform policy makers as the nation debates the future of the Sage Grouse and whether it should be listed as a threatened or endangered species. These examples show how nearly 50 years of historical information on USSES lands coupled with variables such as fire, grazing and drought will provide very valuable tools to land and wildlife managers in the future.

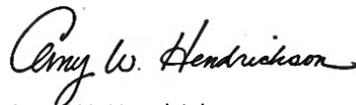
Some who argue in favor of closing the station assert that grazing sheep and wildlife cannot exist together. We disagree with this characterization and feel the experience at the USSES proves it to be a false assertion. Grazing management plans began to be researched soon after the USSES was established in order to define grazing systems that are both appropriate and profitable for sheep production as well as healthy for the rangelands. The stable and increasing populations of sage grouse, elk, grizzly bear and other species on the USSES lands where sheep have grazed for almost 100 years is evidence of the ability for wildlife and sheep to coexist.

The USSES is unique. There simply isn't another research facility of its type anywhere in the U.S. The work done at this one-of-a-kind research station provides USDA the ability to honestly and objectively address many hotly debated issues, including potential conflict at the livestock/wildlife interface. Given this, we believe the USDA should not only continue but enhance the station and hold it up as a world class facility where research can be conducted in a natural environment, on a reasonably large scale, and where objectively designed and managed experiments can yield results that are meaningful to all stakeholders including the general public.

The station clearly meets USDA's strategic goals. The rural community surrounding it supports the station and has invested significantly in it. Closing the sheep station and transferring its work to another location will not result in a lower federal budget impact. In fact, it could quite possibly increase the agency's budget impact. We do know that closing the station will result in a significant loss in years of valuable ongoing research and the potential for future research. Furthermore, USDA would undermine an economically significant industry that the Department is purposed to help protect. We respectfully urge you to keep the station open, withdraw the request to reprogram funding and take steps to protect its future.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment. We are ready to assist the Department in any way we can to ensure the future of this important research station.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Hendrickson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Amy W. Hendrickson
Executive Director

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