June 16, 2016

Attn: Andrew C. Hammond
Area Director, ARS, Pacific West Area
800 Buchanan St.
Albany, CA 94710-1105

RE: U.S. Sheep Experiment Station Grazing and Associated Activities
Project 2016 Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Director Hammond,

The Wyoming Wool Growers Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station (USSES) draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Since 1905, the Wyoming Wool Growers Association has represented Wyoming's sheep and wool industry. We serve to protect the interests of sheep and livestock producers throughout the state and advocate for the businesses, communities, and families that constitute the agricultural industry in Wyoming. Part of our objective is also to help ensure sound management and enhancement of Wyoming's natural resource base.

The WWGA is deeply appreciative for the continuing work done by the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) at the USSES in furthering research that benefits the United States sheep industry. This research has led to substantial changes and innovations within the sheep industry. In addition, research at the USSES has provided valuable information on rangeland health, wildfire recovery, and sage grouse habitat. The Sheep Experiment Station is unique because it models a working ranch and allows for the study of real world problems and development of practical solutions related to complex ecosystems of western rangelands. The USSES is a vital asset that contributes to best management practices within the sheep industry as well as an increased understanding on the management of a working landscape.

Below we have outlined a few points about the EIS that we feel are significant and deserve to be underscored. In addition to these comments, we are aware that the American Sheep Industry Association has submitted extensive comments and we lend our support to those comments.
The Wyoming Wool Growers Association fully supports Alternative 1 and is please that ARS has selected it as the preferred alternative. This alternative will allow the historical grazing and associated research activities to continue. The EIS acknowledges that ARS grazes sheep below the carrying capacity of the rangeland and fully addresses mitigation measures under this alternative that fully compensate for the limited impacts that could occur under these low levels of grazing. Additionally, in our opinion, Alternative 1 provides the best path for achieving the Station's mission of research and development, as well as providing a model of sustainability that helps maintain the health and longevity of the rangeland. We do not believe that ARS could effectively meet these objective under any of the other alternatives.

The draft EIS fully considers the potential effects that the preferred alternative would have on species such as grizzly bear and big horn sheep and appropriately concludes that the impacts will be minimal and mitigatable, if not completely non-existent. The EIS bases this conclusion on evidence supported by historical data that show current ARS grazing practices have little to no overlap with these species' core habitat.

Similarly, the draft EIS adequately addresses the potential direct and indirect impacts of grazing on ARS lands with regard to soil and water quality under each alternative and concludes that ARS soil quality conditions under current grazing practices have remained constant and even improved in some cases. We agree this further supports the selection of Alternative 1 as the preferred alternative.

In conclusion, the Wyoming Wool Growers Association would like to reiterate its support for Alternative 1 as the preferred alternative. It is our opinion this alternative would allow ARS to continue their research without unreasonable impacts to ecology, aesthetic, culture, or health.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft EIS and the opportunity to express our high regard for the ARS Sheep Experiment Station in furthering research and innovation within the sheep industry and their ongoing efforts to improve the western rangeland.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Hendrickson
Executive Director

mr/awh