



The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.

September 20, 2024

BLM Kemmerer Field Office
430 North Highway 189
Kemmerer, Wyoming 83101-9711
ATTN: Project Manager, Kelly Lamborn

Dear Ms. Lamborn

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) comments regarding the Dry Creek Trona Mine Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Kemmerer and Rock Springs Field Offices.

Our comments are specific to our mission: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life. As the proposed project could affect our industry, citizens, and natural resources it is important that you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and continue to provide the opportunity to communicate pertinent issues and concerns.

We appreciate the continued coordination with Cooperating Agencies throughout the development of the Dry Creek EIS. We believe the BLM has made numerous modifications through the development of the alternatives and analyzed the affiliated changes. We offer the following comments for inclusion in the future Draft Record of Decision and implementation.

Chapter 2 Alternatives Table 2/5-1: Comparative Summary:

WDA believes the BLM inconsistently analyzes the impacts of the Dry Creek Project across resources. For example, the Proposed Action for sage-grouse indicate an indirect impact across 202,599 acres, 213,312 acres for Alternative C, and 152,693 acres for Alternative D. Yet the EIS completely fails to identify any indirect impacts to the livestock grazing industry. The EIS focuses solely on direct impacts, which include loss of Animal Unit Months (AUMs), fugitive dust, and collision on rail line or roads.

While we appreciate the inclusion of those direct impacts, we urge the BLM to expand indirect, direct, and cumulative impacts to the livestock grazing industry. We encourage the EIS to broaden the impact from the expanded rail line and the need for additional fencing to reduce

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potential collisions. The EIS divulges the potential risk of collision on rail lines, but does not adequately mitigate the risk.

Additionally, the EIS does not adequately analyze the impacts to livestock grazing or grazing management during construction. The EIS indicates the project proponent will develop in stages, but the analysis does not include how current grazing management is impacted during the construction phase.

We also encourage a broader analysis occur on the impacts to the allotments themselves. While the AUMs losses are estimated and acknowledgement of potential changes to historic trailing routes, the EIS does not analyze how livestock grazing permittees must change grazing rotations or pasture uses due to the placement of the facilities and affiliated fences, roads, rail line, etc. The project could directly sever a pasture or allotment, making access to remaining forage difficult to access.

Chapter 3, Section 3.4.2.7 Cumulative Impacts:

The EIS states the following: “There are reasonably foreseeable trends and future actions within the analysis area that may impact the same community types impacted by the construction and operations of the Project described herein (including soil resources). Ongoing landscape-scale phenomena and activities, such as climate change, drought, and grazing could lead to further strain, encroachment, alterations, and/or degradation to soil resources... (pg. 3-44).” WDA adamantly opposes including grazing under a cumulative impacts analysis in conjunction with climate change and drought. The EIS completely singles grazing out and no other resources or resource uses are included under this analysis. We insist on removing “grazing” from this section. The BLM has existing regulations to manage for meeting standards and guidelines under Land Health Standards.

Chapter 3, Section 3.9 Vegetation Resources

“Construction and operations under Alternative B would disturb approximately 6,481 acres of previously undisturbed vegetation. Areas that have been subject to surface disturbance are susceptible to infestations by noxious and invasive plant species. Once introduced, these species can infect large areas and spread by wildlife, water, wind, humans, vehicles, and increased traffic. In addition to the Project disturbance areas, several noxious weed species have been observed within the Project area, including cheatgrass, tamarisk, Russian olive, perennial pepperweed, foxtail barley, common reed, and wild licorice. Impacts from the spread and establishment of noxious and invasive plants include decreased resilience in native plant communities.

However, invasive annual grasses and weeds (e.g., cheatgrass and pepperweed), even with implementation of the Noxious and Invasive Weed Management Plan, are much harder to control

with chemical and physical methods (Zouhar 2003). As such, these annual invasives pose the potential to permanently alter the existing vegetation communities. (pg. 3-98)”

WDA commented and wrote in support of the High Desert District Herbicide Vegetation Management using Herbicides on Public Lands Environmental Assessment (EA). We believe the EA analysis and the Dry Creek EIS analysis directly conflict regarding the ability to manage invasive species such as cheatgrass utilizing chemical methods. We recommend the EIS incorporate the EA by reference and the associated analysis and insist the project proponent of Dry Creek Trona utilize the approved chemicals.

In conclusion, while the WDA is not identifying an agency preferred alternative, we do emphasize the BLM’s Preferred Alternative D has the highest impact on the livestock grazing industry of all action alternatives. We support the local livestock grazing permittees to weigh-in on the impacts from the project and for the BLM to ensure the impacts are reduced to the extent possible.

We look forward to working with your staff on this project. If you have questions, please contact Justin Williams, Senior Policy Analyst at 307-777-7067.

Sincerely,

for 

Doug Miyamoto

Director

DM/jw

- CC: Governor’s Policy Office
Wyoming Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
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