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OCT 29 2013
LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OFFICE

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL
PO BOX 201704
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1704
(406) 444-3742

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Custer

SJ-15 SURVEY OF MONTANA COUNTY COMMISSIONS

This official state survey is required by the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 15 by the 2013 Legislature for a study evaluating the management of certain federal lands in Montana, assessing risks, and identifying solutions. Your county was selected for this survey because 15% or more of the land in your county is managed by a federal agency.

Surveys returned by Aug. 23 will be distributed to the EQC for the September meeting. If it is not possible to meet that deadline, please return the survey by Nov. 1. Attach any supplemental explanations, comments, suggestions, or other information your board finds pertinent.

PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

1. Do ~~current~~ Summer wildfire conditions on federal lands within your county pose a significant threat to:

__X__ Public Health and Safety __X__ Public Property __X__ Private Property

2. Do you believe fire hazard on federally managed lands should be reduced to protect public health and safety within your county?

__X__ Yes _____ No _____ Unsure

3. Regarding the water supply your citizens use, does current federal land management of watersheds:

____ Optimize water yield ____ Diminish water yield __X__ ~~Have no impact~~ UNKNOWN

4. How important is it for people of your county to have motorized access to public lands for sustenance activities such as gathering wood, picking berries, harvesting wild game, etc.?

__X__ ~~Very~~ Important ____Not Important ____Unsure

5. Is there an adequate supply of motorized roads on federal lands in your county to accommodate emergency ingress/egress, facility maintenance, public access, and resource management?

__X__ Yes ____ No ____ Unsure

6. Regarding multiple-use recreational access routes on federal lands, does your county desire:

____ Increased Multi-Use Access ____ Reduced Multi-Use Access __X__ Keep

Access As Is

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

7. Do you believe current fuel loads on any of the federal lands within your county could result in severe, uncontrollable, or catastrophic wildfires? (If so, provide geographic location in attachment)

_X_ Yes ____ No ____ Unsure

8. Is a high intensity wildfire on federal lands likely to cause a loss of important fish & wildlife habitat or harm Threatened or Endangered Species in your county (e.g. grizzly bears, lynx, sage grouse, black-footed ferret, bull trout)?

_X_ Yes ____ No ____ Unsure

9. Are environmental threats such as noxious weeds and bark beetle adequately controlled on federal lands within your county?

_X_ Yes ____ No ____ Unsure

10. Does the air quality in your county fall below acceptable health standards due to smoke originating from fires on federally managed lands?

____ Yes _X_ No ____ Unsure

ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

11. Is the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT revenues) your county derives from federally managed lands equivalent to the amount that actual land taxation of these lands would bring? SEE ATTACHED

____ Yes _X_ No Please estimate PILT as a percentage of county budget.

12. Is the amount your county derives from the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funds equivalent to the amount that your county could derive from responsible harvest or extraction of natural resources? N/A

____ Yes ____ No Please estimate SRS as a percentage of county budget.

13. Is the economic productivity and number of related private sector jobs commensurate with the resource production capacity of the federally managed lands within your county?

____ Yes ____ No _X_ Unsure

14. Are federal policies for Threatened or Endangered Species adversely impacting private land owners, businesses, industries, or citizens within your county? SEE ATTACHED

____ Yes _X_ NOT YET ____ Unsure

15. Has federal land management resulted in ~~adverse~~ NEGATIVE impacts to your county's economy?

_X_ Yes ____ No ____ Unsure

16. Do you believe changes in federal land management are necessary to increases your county's economy, employment opportunities, or tax base?
__X__ Yes _____ No _____ Unsure

CONSISTENCY WITH STATE AND LOCAL OBJECTIVES: (Attach explanation for each response as needed)

17. Are federal land management actions consistent with your county's objectives?
_____ Yes _____ No __X__ Unsure

18. Would your county like state assistance incorporating local government objectives into federal land management actions?
_____ Yes _____ No __X__ Unsure

OWNERSHIP AND JURISDICTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

19. Has your county experienced conflicts with federal ownership or jurisdictional responsibilities?
_____ Yes __X__ No (Please attach detailed description of conflicts)

20. How much influence do you believe special interests have on the ability of federal agencies to develop and implement effective land and resource management plans on federal lands in your county? SEE ATTACHED
_____ None _____Moderate (please explain) __X__Significant (please explain)

21. On a separate sheet, please describe your county's most significant concerns with federal land management, including current and past relations and communications with federal agencies and other relevant factors you believe legislators should be aware of, and provide any ideas that may help reduce risks or resolve concerns.

Thank you for your assistance. Please return your County Commission's response to:

Environmental Quality Council
ATTN: Joe Kolman, SJ15 Survey
Room 171B, Capitol Building
P.O. Box 201704
Helena, MT 59620-1704

Submitted by: Keith Holmlund

Date: 10-25-13 Attested by: [illegible]

If you have questions or would like more information please contact Joe Kolman, staff for the EQC, at (406) 444-3747 or jkolman@mt.gov or Sen. Jennifer Fielder, the sponsor of SJ15, at (406) 210-5944 or by email at Sen.JFielder@legmt.gov

SJ-15 SURVEY

I have made a few changes to your questionnaire that in my opinion fit Custer County better than the original questions. I hope this is OK.

1. Replaced current with **summer**

2. Added **unknown**

3. Removed **very**

4. Removed **very**

11. 2013 PILT was 11% of our totaled levied budget. Custer County is very dependent on PILT

14. Added **not yet**, but if Sage Grouse are listed it will have an adverse effect

15. Replaced **adverse with negative.** Every time the Federal or State Government purchases a piece of land it comes off the tax rolls. Example: BLM has taken over 30 sections of Ag. Land out of production by making a trade with private landowners in the Miles City area. In 2012 our area had a lot of severe fires, and **without** all the red tape of government, this large parcel of land would have been a perfect place for these burned out ranchers to put their livestock short term. To have it grazed would have been the best thing that could have happened to this land, but by the time the red tape was cut it was too late. All that has been accomplished is to create a tremendous fire hazard for the neighbors so a few people can recreate. In my opinion, if this land is not grazed, it will become a haven for Noxious Weeds. By grazing this land, water sources will have to be maintained, and water will be more readily available for birds and wildlife as well.

20. This is a hard question to answer, and the individual's answer is going to depend on whether they lean toward Agriculture, Recreation, The Big Open or other special interest. Two years ago there was a lot of Block Management land for hunting in our area, but with the movement toward Free Roaming

21. I have to say our relations with our area BLM office have been great. They are a wonderful partner in Wildland Fire and are more than willing to help train other firefighters in proper techniques and safety on the fire ground. I have been involved in the Wildland Fire Programs in Custer County for over 25 years and want to give KOODOs to their fire fighters.

I have commented on my thoughts on BLM buying or trading for private land in No. 15, so no use to ramble on more here.

Our local BLM office has been open with the RMP's for the Eastern End of the State, and I realize they are required to follow Federal guidelines as far as time frames go on challenges to their decisions. However, it took congressional support to get BLM (not locals) to give more time on final input. **More red tape**. Bureaucracy is something we all deal with every day, but it is very counterproductive, as is most government.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to whine,
Keith Holmlund
Custer Co. Commission Chair

Bison a lot of private land in the Miles City area has been closed to hunting. This puts more pressure on Public land. However I do feel Special Interest Groups have the biggest pot of money, and money buys high powered attorneys, and thus the direction flags fly. It is impossible for the average individual or small group to compete with big money.

The threat of listing Sage Grouse has everybody scarred to death. If allowed to happen it will have far reaching negative effects. This is another example of special Interest. As long as predators, ground and air, are abundant there will be a threat to Sage Grouse populations. If left alone, nature has a way of taking care of itself. When deer get too populated they get diseases, when prairie dogs get too thick they get the plague, so---- let's hope the predators get the plague and sage grouse can flourish. Man is not going to make a very significant impact here.