



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

RECEIVED

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AUG 20 2013

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Fergus

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 wildfire conditions on federal lands within your county pose a significant threat to:
 Public Health and Safety Public Property Private Property

2. Do you believe fire hazard on federally managed lands should be reduced to protect public health and safety within your county?
 Yes ___ No ___ Unsure

3. Regarding the water supply your citizens use, does current federal land management of watersheds:
___ Optimize water yield ___ Diminish water yield Have no impact

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.?
 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?
___ 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 ___ 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)

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)?

Yes *To Sage Grouse* No Unsure *on others*

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

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 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?

Yes *AT Full funding* 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?

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 Unsure

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

Yes No Unsure

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

Yes No Unsure

See Sheet

16. Do you believe changes in federal land management are necessary to increase your county's economy, employment opportunities, or tax base?
 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 Unsure

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

OWNERSHIP AND JURISDICTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

19. Has your county experienced conflicts with federal ownership or jurisdictional responsibilities?
 Yes 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?
 None Moderate (please explain) Significant (please explain)
See sheet

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: *Fergus County Commissioners with input from Fergus County Sheriff/Fire Warden*

Date:

Attested by:

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

August 12, 2013

#15 We feel the word adverse is misleading. Federal Land Management has resulted in impacts such as the near elimination of grazing on the Charles Russell Nation Game Range (CMR). Closing roads that impact Emergency Services Access and the lessee's ability to manage their interests, and now regulations pertaining to Sage Grouse will have an impact on getting our natural resources (oil, gas, and wind) to market.

#20 Our federal agencies are in constant lawsuits over decisions made trying to manage their lands. Some of those lawsuits are also putting a financial burden on our landowners. Landowners cannot financially afford the constant pressure of well-funded outside interest groups put on their livelihoods and businesses.

#21 We have three main Federal Agencies the Bureau of Land Management(BLM), Charles Russell National Wildlife Refuge(CMRNWR), and the United States Forest Service(USFS). We have good communications and relationship with the BLM, fair communications with the Forest Service and very POOR communications with the CMR, until recent management changes.

Our concerns with Federal Land Agencies is the longevity of road closures. This makes it extremely difficult for the aging population of our County to enjoy the Public Lands within Fergus County. It also makes it difficult for our Emergency Services to access many areas. As an example we had a foreign tourist lost this summer who still has not been found. We believe more access may have helped find this gentleman or may have alleviated him getting lost in the first place. Again, the pressure of closing more roads is not coming from our constituents but from outside influence groups.

Another concern is the new restrictions that will follow species. The threat of moving buffalo to different Public Lands will have a negative impact. The possible outbreak of brucellosis in cattle and trying to keep the buffalo contained on those lands will be a challenge. Possible Sage Grouse listing is already having implications with restrictions on grazing and Natural Resource Development.

Just recently outside interest groups sued the BLM on grazing and road closures within the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument citing inadequacies in the UMRBNM plan. Counties and landowners had to hire an attorney and file as interveners with the BLM to protect our interests. Then the Counties and Landowners had to hire an attorney to represent us when the BLM and CMR water compacts were being negotiated. We can only afford so much and recently it seems there are more and more threats from outside interest groups and Federal Agencies that are forcing us and our landowners to defend our customs, culture and heritage.

One clear solution is to give local elected officials more say in Federal Land Management. We are often invited to the table and then are not listened to. We had successful communications in the Upper Missouri Breaks Management Plan but then ignored in the CMR CCP Plan process. A good example would be if they wanted to bring buffalo into a County then would hold a public hearing would be held to gather the facts and the County Commissioners would then make the determination.