

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



www.tetonwyo.org

February 20, 2018

The Honorable Liz Cheney
2120 Capital Avenue Suite 8005
Cheyenne, WY 82002

Re: H.R. 4697

Congresswoman Cheney,

As you know, Teton County is home to some of our nation's most stunning and iconic natural resources, and these resources are a critical component of the quality of life in Teton County, as well as extremely important drivers of our local and regional economy. Aside from the incredible recreational value of these assets, they provide critical wildlife habitat and ecological value, as well.

In 2012, our community adopted the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan. This plan was crafted with extensive outreach and effort and is a testament to the level of engagement of Teton County residents and stakeholders. Focused on ecosystem stewardship, growth management, and quality of life, the vision statement of the plan is to "Preserve and protect the area's ecosystem in order to ensure a healthy environment, community, and economy for current and future generations." This plan and vision guide all our efforts, including the management of public lands.

Teton County's Wyoming Public Lands Initiative (WPLI) committee has been diligently working to find a balance between access, use and environmental protection on our County's public lands. An incredible amount of work has gone into determining the appropriate type and amount of human traffic and congestion and the associated effects on game populations, fisheries, and critical habitats.

We are concerned that H.R. 4697 does not adequately incorporate the local knowledge and efforts that are embedded in the WPLI process. Our goal is to facilitate the efficient and responsible management of our public lands in a way that reflects local values and consensus as much as possible.

We believe a more long-lasting, durable resolution to the question of how to manage public lands in Teton County - lands that include substantial portions of the Palisades and Shoal Creek Wilderness Study Areas - will be generated by the WPLI committee. We believe this process will lead to a resolution rooted in consensus and compromise that will honor the perspectives and interests of all stakeholders, and ultimately provide the highest benefit for our community. Please find the enclosed January 12, 2018 letter to the Wyoming County Commissioners Association from 18 members of our WPLI committee. The County Commission does not have a position for or against the specific provisions of H.R. 4697 at this time. We do believe the introduction of this bill seriously discourages our community effort. We respectfully request that you withdraw this bill and let the WPLI process provide a local community recommendation.

Mark Newcomb, Chair
Natalia D. Macker, Vice Chair
Greg Epstein
Smokey Rhea
Paul Vogelheim

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With gratitude for your hard work and efforts on behalf of Teton County and Wyoming,

Mark Newcomb, Chair

Smokey Rhea

Natalia D. Macker, Vice Chair

Paul Vogelheim

Greg Epstein

Cc: Senator Mike Enzi
Senator John Barasso
Pete Obermueller, Executive Director, WCCA
Rob Hendry, President, WCCA

Attachment: Wyoming Public Lands Initiative letter to Wyoming County
Commissioners Association

January 12, 2018

Mr. Pete Obermueller
408 W. 23rd Street
Cheyenne, WY 82001

Dear Mr. Obermueller,

As members of the citizen advisory group for the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative (WPLI) in Teton County, we write to ask for your help in encouraging other organizations and elected officials to give the WPLI process time and space to complete its work. We are aware that outside actions—e.g. a lawsuit about winter travel rules, or Representative Cheney’s proposed WSA bills—could have some impact on the work our advisory group has invested in the Wyoming County Commission Association’s initiative. We believe additional WCCA leadership can strengthen the resolve of citizens participating in these county-specific groups and increase the likelihood of success; we ask that WCCA communicate in writing or in person, to Representative Cheney and perhaps others, encouraging them to await the outcome of the WPLI process.

Nearly two years ago, the WCCA invited any interested county to develop and oversee a multi-year, collaborative process in which diverse stakeholders would work together in good faith toward a set of consensus recommendations to address future management of wilderness study areas, and any other public lands in that county. The WCCA developed guidelines and encouraged counties to consider best practices that, if adopted, offered the best chance of success for the citizens and counties involved. No single interest group was to have any more influence than any other.

In Teton County, our commissioners have faithfully adhered to all of the WCCA’s guidelines. They solicited applications, conducted interviews, selected some twenty residents to participate in its process, and committed to spending a significant amount of money for professional facilitation.

Our group first met in October 2016. Since this initial meeting 16 months ago, we have made assumptions about one another that at times have led to misunderstandings and mistrust. We have been frustrated and impatient with the process, and uncertain whether it was worthwhile. We have been worried that what we value will be lost. But recently it feels like we’re beginning to make progress. Our conversations of late have been honest and challenging. We’re starting to trust each other more. We continue to defend the process to our constituencies, some of whom accuse us of selling out just because we agreed to participate in the initiative at all. None of this is easy, but the potential to arrive at a consensus set of recommendations for public lands in our county is a worthwhile goal.

It is because we all love our public lands—and love how we use and experience them—that we remain committed to the process. We will continue to work diligently not only in the formal

meetings, but also outside of the meetings in ongoing conversations with each other and our constituents to try to find consensus on recommendations for future management of Palisades and Shoal Creek WSAs, and other public lands in Teton County.

We realize you have no control over the actions of various interest groups—whether they be wilderness advocates or snow machine enthusiasts—and you have no control over Representative Cheney’s decision to introduce legislation. But WCCA’s role cannot be overstated.

We ask for your leadership and support in defending the process you initiated. We look to the WCCA to advocate a fair process, one that provides adequate time for groups to come to consensus. We ask that no stakeholder group be singled out or disparaged. We ask you to communicate the challenges, obstacles and small successes being made in counties across the state to any interested parties, including Representative Cheney. These steps can unite and empower the citizens involved, and will support us in our desire to reach recommendations all stakeholders can support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike Brennan (general public)
Gregory Buchko (summer motorized recreation)
Amanda Carey (mountain bike recreation)
Lloyd Dorsey (national conservation)
Bruce Hayse (general public)
John Heberger, Jr. (oil and gas)
Steve Kilpatrick (wildlife/sportsmen)
Lisa McGee (statewide conservation)
Abby Moore (general public)
Mike Mielke (winter motorized recreation)
Don Saner (backcountry horsemen)
Rob Shaul (general public)
Dan Smitherman (national conservation)
Dave Sollitt (tourism)
Harry Statter (firewise)
Siva Sundaresan (regional conservation)
Tom Turiano (non-motorized recreation)
Jim Woodmency (heli-skiing)