

High Country Flies \* Images of Nature \* New World Stone Inc. \* Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance \*  
The Wilderness Society \* Greater Yellowstone Coalition \* Wyoming Wildlife Federation \* Wyoming  
Outdoor Council \* Upper Green River Valley Coalition \* Biodiversity Conservation Alliance \* Wyoming  
Chapter of the Sierra Club \* National Outdoor Leadership School \* Wyoming Wilderness Association

April 4, 2005

Kniffy Hamilton  
Forest Supervisor  
Bridger Teton National Forest  
P.O. Box 1888  
Jackson, WY 83001

Dear Kniffy,

We remain concerned about any effort to reinitiate oil and gas leasing in the Wyoming Range of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Last September, you and Regional Forester Jack Troyer decided to pull a proposal for leasing in late 2004 and early 2005, which would have included nearly 175,000 acres of the Wyoming Range. This decision was broadly supported at the time, including expressed support from Governor Freudenthal, Senator Craig Thomas (R-WY), local elected officials, and many potentially affected businesses in Jackson, Bondurant, and Alpine. At that time, however, it was clearly stated by your office that this decision was temporary and would be revisited in 2005. Now that we are in April, we are writing to ascertain where your agency is in this process.

In your decision to stop the leasing proposal from going forward last fall, your agency expressed that new information and concerns had been brought to light that it wanted to understand and try to address. As Regional Forester Troyer wrote at that time, "Based on various discussions we have had with the Forest Supervisor and Governor Freudenthal, issues and concerns have been identified relative to our leasing and as the Governor stated 'maybe it's time to apply the carpenter's rule – measure twice and cut once.' ...while we are not withdrawing our consent to lease, we have decided to delay implementing that decision until we can meet with State and Federal personnel and fully understand, if not resolve, the concerns identified."

Since then, it has become quite clear that the concerns of the state of Wyoming with leasing in the Wyoming Range have not diminished in any respect. Recently, at a conference in Jackson, Governor Freudenthal stated that he was opposed to any leasing in the Bridger Teton Forest at this time, explaining, "I am a clear supporter of oil and gas, but I am not a supporter of oil and gas in the Bridger Teton.... I believe over time, its contribution to the state, and not just economically, is such that we don't need to lease it right now."

We fully agree with the Governor's conclusion and at the very least feel that the Forest Service must update its environmental analysis before going forward with giving its consent for leasing in the Wyoming Range. As the attached letter from the Earthjustice law firm makes clear, there is significant new information that needs to be taken into account in considering the cumulative and long-term impacts that could come with any leasing in the Wyoming Range. This includes unanticipated levels of emissions from oil and gas activity that both the BLM and Forest Service have recently acknowledged.

Given last year's leasing proposal, the stated intent to revisit the issue and the sensitivity of this issue to thousands of people in Wyoming as well as the broader national public, the Bridger-Teton National Forest

should communicate to us how it expects to proceed. Thus, we request that you provide us with any information pertaining to these questions:

- During 2005, is the BTNF planning to consent to leasing any of the parcels in the Wyoming Range identified by the Forest in 2004?
- Will the BTNF update its analysis on the impacts of leasing given the new information that has been brought to light (including the attached letter)?
- What opportunities will be offered for the public and concerned citizens to learn more about the Forest Service's plans for leasing in the Wyoming Range? For example, will there be any open houses, hearings or other opportunities to involve, inform and engage the public?

In closing, we want to emphasize that we sincerely appreciate the openness and leadership that you and the Forest Service have shown in listening to the concerns and ideas expressed by the affected public. Further, we understand the difficult position the Forest Service was in last year with the lease sale slated for October and with BLM ready to proceed to auction. The broad group of Wyoming hunters, hikers, anglers and the business community remains just as concerned and engaged this year as in 2004. We would like to discuss these issues in greater detail and find out more about your agency's intentions as you revisit this very important issue concerning our national forest.

Sincerely,

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