



New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc.

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August 31, 2016

Sarah Browne
Cibola National Forest All Units
Elaine Kohrman, Forest Supervisor
2113 Osuna Rd. NE, Suite A
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Attention: sarahbrowne@fs.fed.us

RE: Cibola Forest Revision Plan / Comment deadline August 31, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of New Mexico Wool Growers Inc., the state's oldest livestock trade organization, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Cibola Forest Revision Plan. Our primary concerns are that the recommended wilderness areas will not meet the definition of wilderness under The Wilderness act and will be managed as such, that domestic sheep have been pushed out of current and potential bighorn sheep habitat without reference to sound science and the increased risk for fire danger if these lands eventually become designated wilderness or are treated as such.

NMWGI is greatly concerned with the pushing out of domestic sheep on the Cibola National Forest within the plan.

Grazing of domestic sheep and goats should not be authorized in areas of current and potential bighorn sheep habitat to prevent the spread of disease between domestic and wild populations.
(pg 81, Lines 42 - 43)

The United States Sheep Experiment Stations has previous and ongoing research regarding the co-mingling of wild and domestic sheep. NMWGI recommends reaching out to the United States Sheep Experiment Station and the American Sheep Industry to get a firm grasp on the science of disease transmission between domestic and wild sheep before eliminating domestic sheep grazing from the Cibola National Forest.

The strongest evidence of the multifactorial nature of bighorn disease is the fact that clinically healthy bighorn sheep carry the very bacteria known to be associated with pneumonic disease in bighorn sheep. Adding to the evidence of the multifactorial nature of this disease phenomenon is that bighorn sheep pneumonic outbreaks have occurred in locations having no known/probable contact with domestic sheep or goats. (PLC-ASI Research Proposal, D. Knowles and M. Highland, August 20, 2014)

We believe that all constructed and man-made features are indeed evidence that areas have been "trammed by man" and are "permanent improvements or human habitation" and, therefore, should

not be considered as recommended wilderness areas. Lands identified as potentially suitable for wilderness would be managed under the non-impairment policy and would result in greatly reduced access for resource management and multiple uses.

The definition of wilderness under The Wilderness Act is:

(c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

This potential inaccessibility could affect grazing allotment permit holders. It is vital that your staff consult and coordinate with all affected grazing permit holders in the Cibola National Forest throughout this process to ensure agricultural producers retain their maximum permitted grazing animal unit months (AUMs) and unrestricted access needed to maintain range improvements and manage livestock grazing on their allotments.

- For permitted livestock grazing activities in recommended wilderness areas, annual operation instructions shall be updated to reflect any motorized or mechanized use which may be required to administer terms and conditions under the term grazing permit (such as repair or reconstruction of fences, water developments) that may have been approved under exceptions outlined in Forest Service Manual 2320–Wilderness Management, section 2323.22.

- When motorized transport and mechanized use associated with grazing allotments is authorized in recommended wilderness areas, it shall be limited to that needed to carry out management activities of practical necessity and reasonableness, following the rationale of Forest Service Manual 2320–Wilderness Management, section 2323.2, and shall not degrade the wilderness character of the area. (pg. 80, Lines 23 - 32)

This non-impairment policy extends the protection of congressionally designated wilderness areas to recommended wilderness areas identified in this process. It is beyond the authority of USFS to manage an area as wilderness unless and until Congress actually designates such areas pursuant to the Wilderness Act of 1964.

We would also like to point out that the USFS lacks any authority to manage groundwater or to place any conditions on groundwater and the property rights thereof under New Mexico law. It is not within the purview of the USFS to manage groundwater withdrawal activity or evaluate applications for water rights. All groundwater management activities should be accomplished through the coordination of the water right holder and the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer, not the USFS. Water used for livestock is put to beneficial use by the owner of the livestock and is not for use by the USFS. Though wildlife often will use these watering sources, their primary function is for livestock.

New and existing water developments should be designed for both wildlife and livestock use and if practical designed and/or retrofitted to provide a year-round watering source for wildlife.

- Overflow from troughs should be diverted to allow for soil moisture recharge and creation or maintenance of wetland habitat features.

- New livestock troughs, tanks, and holding facilities should be located out of riparian areas, archeological sites, and areas that may impact habitats associated with species of conservation concern and/or core threatened or endangered species habitat to reduce concentration of livestock in these areas. Existing facilities in water resource features should be modified, relocated, or removed where their presence is determined to inhibit movement toward desired riparian or aquatic conditions and consistent with existing water rights, water quality and quantity. (pg. 81, Lines 31 – 41)

Consistent with existing water rights, Forest Service and permitted water uses, diversions, or 18 obstructions should at all times allow sufficient water to support the associated ecosystem and, in 19 streams, to preserve minimum levels of water flow that maintain aquatic life, aquatic habitat, and 20 other purposes of national forest establishment. (pg. 63, Lines 17 – 20)

Based on the information available at this time, NMWGI supports Alternative C.

Here are the reasons for we are support of this alternative:

- This alternative appears to be the best approach for preventing further and future catastrophic fires. More designation of wilderness will only lead to increasing over-growth with no way to address fires because of the “untrammeled by man” mandate in the Wilderness Act of 1964.
- Alternative C removes all Management Areas
- Alternative C does not discriminate against those who must travel by a wheeled devise due to physical disability.
- Any additional designations dramatically impact current tax status of lands, severely hammering the counties who are responsible for the safety and welfare of those residing in the county or visiting counties.
- Alternative C provides for the use of federal lands by the greatest amount of the population.
- Alternative C minimizes the number of law enforcement and other personnel needed by the government to manage additional designations. It is clear that current funding is inadequate to manage lands now under federal designation. Every effort must be made to reduce the \$19 trillion debt that shadows Americans.
- Alternative C respects the custom and culture of all New Mexico ranchers, wood gathers, hunters, fishermen and many others who routinely utilize these lands.
- Alternative C respects the investments of both federal natural resources agencies and land stewards in infrastructure that supports both wildlife and domestic animals.

General comments:

- Impacted allotment owners who pay for their access and improvements on their allotments have not been included or consulted in this process that can have dramatic consequences for their families and small business.

- There is an overall lack of clarity in this document and its' potential on allotment owners and land stewards.
- Allotment owners have a legal contract with the U.S. government and hold waters rights under New Mexico state law.
- All other alternatives create additional unfunded mandates to allotment owners.
- All other alternatives present access issues for land stewards to their contracted allotments, working facilities and watering facilities.
- The location and close proximity to public highways, communities and facilities of Alternatives B, D and E are impractical to be considered wilderness and special designation options.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to comment. NMWGI urges you to re-evaluate the recommended wilderness areas and speak with those potentially affected if these designated lands were to become wilderness designation. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the office at (505) 247-0584 or at nmwgi@nmagriculture.org.

Sincerely,



Punk Cooper, NMWGI President