



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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November 22, 2023

WER 14581.01
U.S. Forest Service
Bighorn National Forest
Public Scoping Notice
Tensleep Canyon Climbing Management Plan
Washakie County

Kelsey Bean
Bighorn National Forest
1415 Fort Street
Buffalo, WY 82834
307-684-4623
kelsey.bean@usda.gov

Dear Ms. Bean,

The staff of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) has reviewed the Scoping Notice for the Tensleep Canyon Climbing Management Plan in Washakie County. The Department is statutorily charged with managing and protecting all Wyoming wildlife (W.S. 23-1-103). Pursuant to our mission, we offer the following comments for your consideration.

Terrestrial Recommendations:

Greater Sage-Grouse Considerations

The management plan area is located outside of habitat designated as sage-grouse Core area and, in Sections 12, 13, 23, 26, and 27, T48N, R87W, is within 2 miles of the B-Carter Cabin non-core, occupied, sage-grouse lek. Future development of the Tensleep Canyon Climbing Management Plan should reference Wyoming's Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area Protection Executive Order 2019-3 and management efforts should align with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Management Plan Amendment currently under review.

Big Game Considerations

Proposed project activities in the western portion of the management plan area are located in mule deer and elk crucial winter-yearlong range. Impacts to big game species should be addressed in the proposed Management Plan. To minimize impacts, we recommend avoiding the development of trails and other construction or maintenance activities from November 15 to April 30 in project areas which overlap with big game crucial winter range.

Raptors

There are two documented Peregrine Falcon nests within the project area. Impacts to peregrine falcon should be addressed in the proposed Management Plan. The Department recommends the consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to develop a plan to protect nesting and brood rearing falcons and their nests. Additionally, we encourage the USFS to consider forming an advisory group which includes the Service, Department, and non-profit climbing associations to determine buffers and route closures seasonally based on peregrine nest activity and route locations. This type of collaborative effort is currently being used to determine seasonal route closures in the Sinks Canyon area.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

There is modeled distribution for several Tier I and Tier II SGCN within the project area. SGCN should be addressed in the proposed Management Plan. An inventory of sensitive species that may be impacted by trail use and designation, as well as infrastructure development (i.e., camping areas, staging and parking areas and waste disposal areas) may assist in the assessment of the need for specific avoidance and minimization measures.

Terrestrial Enhancement Priority Areas

The Department has identified several Terrestrial Enhancement Priority Areas for at-risk aspen communities on both sides of Highway 16. By developing trails for climbing and directing people from parking and camping areas to their climbing destination, the USFS should be able to reduce impacts to both riparian areas and aspen communities in Tensleep Canyon.

Noxious Weeds and Invasive Annual Grasses

Noxious weeds and invasive annual grasses (IAG) can cause significant harm to the ecosystem when introduced by reducing the quality of wildlife habitat and increasing the probability of catastrophic wildfire. Climbers and other recreationalists are potential vectors for the spread of these species. The control and management of noxious weeds and IAG should be addressed in the proposed Management Plan.

Aquatic Recommendations:

Tensleep Creek and Leigh Creek are red ribbon streams under the Wyoming Trout Stream Category classification and contain 300-600 pounds of trout production/mile. The Department appreciates the USFS efforts to limit regulate dispersed camping and provide an adequate buffer between designated camping areas and important fisheries in the Tensleep Climbing Management Plan. To minimize impacts to these two creeks, we recommend construction activities use best management practices to control erosion and prevent sediment from reaching these important waterways.

The Department supports the USFS efforts to improve conditions and help protect important natural resources in the Tensleep Canyon Climbing Management Project area. We look forward

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to working with the USFS to reduce terrestrial and aquatic habitat impacts as the management plan continues to develop.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Chris Henkel, Habitat Protection Biologist, at 307-777-2533.

Sincerely,



Will Schultz
Habitat Protection Supervisor

WS/ch/kgb

cc: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Chris Wichmann, Wyoming Department of Agriculture