DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE and NATURAL RESOURCES
3305 WEST SOUTH STREET
RAPID CITY SD 57702-8160
danr.sd.gov

January 22, 2025

Dan Svingen
District Ranger
Fort Pierre National Grassland
1020 Deadwood St.
Fort Pierre, SD 57532

RE: Draft Environmental Assessment on US Highway 83 Snow Fence Project

Dear Mr. Svingen,

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) has reviewed the US Highway 83 Snow Fence draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and supports the proposed action (Alternative 1) with preference towards the installation of the living snow fence.

The project's purpose and need is to improve highway safety by reducing the amount of snow drifting across the highway; the successful use of living snow fences to accomplish this goal has been very clearly demonstrated in a 1982 study by Martinelli, Schmidt, and Tabler. This 15-year study on I-80 in Wyoming showed that snow fences are extremely effective in preventing drifts. Prior to the installation of the snow fence some locations showed nearly 16 feet of snow drifted onto the highway with only minimal snow accumulation occurring after the snow fences were installed.

Another benefit of the snow fence was the improved visibility and road surface conditions in fence-protected areas. This study found that snow fences prevented 54 accidents and 35 injuries. (Tabler, 2003, Martinelli, Schmidt, and Tabler 1982).

DANR thinks the selection of the living snow fence better aligns with the scenic integrity objectives for the Fort Pierre National Grasslands, by providing a more scenic view than that of an artificial fence. Additionally, DANR agrees with the finding that the proposed action would have minor effects on the prairie grouse habitat as supported by the 2021 Nebraska National Forest Monitoring Report. It estimated that 99% of the Fort Pierre National Grassland qualified as prairie grouse habitat and both prairie grouse species' populations are trending upward in the Fort Pierre geographic area.

DANR also supports the use of pollinator plots in conjunction with a living snow fence. The combination of flowering pollinator species with the proposed tree and shrub species will work together to provide habitat and food for pollinators. The addition of the

pollinator plants will contribute to meeting vegetation structure objectives and providing for floristic diversity.

DANR agrees with the EA's analysis and findings of consistency with relevant laws, regulation and policy and finds alternative 1 to be consistent with the Nebraska National Forest and Grassland Land Management Plan, page 1-29 Guideline 10 of Special Uses, bullet 1 which states:

10. Act on special -use applications according to the following priorities:

- *Land and land-use activity requests relating to public safety, health, and welfare, e.g., highways, power lines and public service improvements.*

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Amanda Morrison

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XC: Marcus Warnke, State Forester
Bill Smith, Division Director

Literature Cited:

Martinelli, M. Jr., R. A. Schmidt, and R. D. Tabler. 1982. Technology transfer in snow control engineering. Journal of Technology Transfer 6(2): 27-37.

Tabler, Ronald D. 2003. Controlling Blowing and Drifting Snow with Snow Fences and Road Design. 345 p.