

OWYHEE INITIATIVE

CHAIRMAN, Brenda Richards; VICE-CHAIRMAN Craig Gehrke

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The Wilderness Society, Craig Gehrke; Owyhee Borderlands Trust, Inc., Dennis Stanford; Idaho Rivers United, Bill Sedivy; Owyhee Co. Soil Conservation Districts, Chris Black; SIDRA (Southwest Idaho Desert Racing Assoc.), Bill Walsh; Owyhee County Cattlemen's Assoc., Frank Bachman; Owyhee County Farm Bureau, Tim Lowry; Sierra Club, Edwina Allen; Backcountry Horsemen of Idaho, Phil Ryan; The Nature Conservancy, Lou Lunte; Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, Herb Meyr; Idaho Outfitters & Guides Assoc., Grant Simonds; Idaho Conservation League, John Robison

March 1, 2013

Mr. Steve Ellis, Director
BLM Idaho State Office
1387 S. Vinnell Way
Boise, Idaho 83709

Dear Steve,

The Owyhee Initiative would like to take this opportunity to share with you concerns regarding the recent proposed decision for Group 1 grazing permit renewals in Owyhee County, Idaho.

The Owyhee Initiative incorporated in 2010 to continue its collaborative efforts, which started in 2001, to promote the ecological and economic health of Owyhee County. To that end, the specific goal of the Owyhee Initiative has been "to develop and implement a landscape-scale program in Owyhee County, Idaho, that preserves the natural processes that create and maintain a functioning, unfragmented landscape supporting a flourishing community of human, plant and animal life, that provides for economic stability by preserving livestock grazing as an economically viable use, and that provides for protection of cultural resources."

Several elements of the goal may be affected by the Group 1 proposed decisions. A functional landscape depends on implementation of effective grazing management, the unfragmented landscape depends on continued use of private rangelands by the ranching community, the flourishing community of human, plant and animal life depends on complementary uses of intermingled nonfederal lands, and economic stability depends on grazing management strategies that are economically feasible and effective in sustaining resources into the future. All elements of the goal depend to a significant extent on the use and application of the best available science for assessment, monitoring, and management strategies. To that end the OI has established their Science Review Program in which the BLM participates through an MOU. The OI is currently pursuing development of a number of publications addressing important science issues that we believe will assist all land managers in applying science to achieve effective grazing management. Every effort should be made to assure that sufficient collaboration has occurred to assure that the best available science leads to the best possible decisions for the users as well as resources.

It is with this shared vision for Owyhee County that we request your careful consideration of these specific suggestions regarding implementation of the proposed grazing decisions for the

Group 1 permit renewals. These same considerations will likely apply to the upcoming release of proposed grazing decisions for Owyhee Field Office administered permits.

The Owyhee Initiative has been recognized across Idaho and indeed in many parts of the West as one of the most successful models of collaboration. It is important to all the members of the Owyhee Initiative that the collaborative process that has served our groups so well to this point continue on its proven, productive path. We are concerned that implementation of the proposed grazing decisions may preclude opportunities to develop more collaborative solutions for meeting Idaho's standards and guidelines for rangeland health while keeping rural economies healthy and resilient.

We fully understand the BLM's obligations to comply with the court's decree, implementation schedule and the agency's standards for rangeland health. We encourage you to seek opportunities consistent with these obligations to engage interested parties, including permit holders, in an evaluation of management options to meet applicable objectives and standards. Because of the potential significant impact the proposed grazing decisions and those in process will have on the economy and communities of Owyhee County, we ask that the BLM affirm the information used and consider credible options to implement these decisions. We have often found that making the effort to explore ways to minimize the impacts of decisions like these can produce more durable, successful results – an outcome we all hope to achieve.

Steve, we hope you accept these comments in the spirit in which they are offered, which is to share insights gained through more than a decade of working collaboratively through thorny issues in Owyhee County. As Chairman of the Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors I am sending this letter with the approval of all Board members listed below.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brenda Richards

Brenda Richards, Chairman, Owyhee Initiative Board of Directors

The Wilderness Society, Craig Gehrke

Owyhee Borderlands Trust, Inc., Dennis Stanford

The Nature Conservancy, Lou Lunte

Idaho Rivers United, Bill Sedivy

Owyhee Cattlemen's Association, Frank Bachman

Owyhee County Farm Bureau, Tim Lowry

Owyhee Co. Soil Conservation Districts, Chris Black

Southwest Idaho Desert Racing Assoc., Bill Walsh

Idaho Backcountry Horsemen, Phil Ryan

Wild Sheep Foundation, Idaho Chapter, Herb Meyr

Idaho Outfitters & Guides Assoc., Grant Simonds

Idaho Conservation League, John Robison

Sierra Club (out of town and unavailable at time of letter)