

March 5, 2014

Dennis Neitzke
Dakota Prairie Grassland Supervisor
United States Forest Service
240 West Century Blvd
Bismarck, ND 58503

Dear Mr. Neitzke,

I write to request that the North Billings County Allotment Management Plan Revision Draft Record of Decision (ROD) be amended as part of the formal objection process to incorporate the commitments that you made to the ranchers of Billings County. In multiple communications with my office, the U.S. Forest Service has reiterated its commitment to working with ranchers in western North Dakota when formulating policies for the Dakota Grasslands. Honoring these commitments in writing is critically important to maintaining a cooperative environment between your agency and stakeholders.

I understand the Forest Service will soon publish the North Billings County Allotment Management Plan Revision Draft Record of Decision in the Federal Register. At a meeting on February 20, 2014 in Fairfield, ND, you met with the Medora Grazing Association and the affected members on the North Billings Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Draft Record of Decision. During that meeting you stated that under the proposed plan, reductions in grazing access would only occur in the event the Association failed to produce Implementation Plans for each grazing allotment. I and the Association are supportive of this approach which does not immediately reduce grazing allotments and strikes a balance to meet both ecological management and grazing access goals. That is why I am concerned by reports that the Draft Record of Decision does not reflect this approach.

The Medora Grazing Association members have noted many discrepancies in the Draft Record of Decision and I understand that you agreed the wording needed to be changed and clarified. Additionally, I understand that you conveyed to the Association that during the "objection period" in the CFR 218 pre-decisional administrative review process for proposed actions of the Forest Service you would consider all their comments as objections for correcting and clarifying the Draft Record of Decision for the North Billings Project. I am therefore requesting that you honor your commitment to the Association and its members and make those corrections and clarifications in the Final Record of Decision. The corrections and clarifications I am referring to are:

1. The reductions outlined in Alternative 4, the Forest Service preferred alternative will not be used in the Associations' Implementation Plans.
2. Appendix B authorized use (reductions) will not be used in the Associations' Implementation Plans.

Honorable Senator Heitkamp

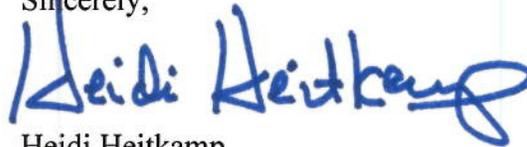
March 5, 2014

Page 2

3. Since Appendix D – Design Criteria is to be used for all Implementation Plans, including the Associations, clarify or remove the reductions section for the Associations Implementation Plans.
4. Biased data will not be used – such as Visual Obstruction Rating (VOR) data taken in a drought and after a snow storm – as part of the monitoring in the future.
5. Monitoring will be done cooperatively and the Medora Grazing Association will be included in collecting the data.
6. The management of livestock is not the primary factor affecting resource conditions in the project area.

Amending the Draft Record of Decision to reflect these changes is necessary for the Forest Service to honor the commitments it has made to the Medora Grazing Association. If you or your staff have questions or require any additional information or assistance, please contact Jack Huerter in my office at 202.224.9894 or jack_huerter@heitkamp.senate.gov. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator