

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Proposed

Teton Wildlife Habitat Management Area

DISPOSAL

**Involving Lands Owned by
Wyoming Game and Fish Commission**

Teton County, Wyoming

Prepared by

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

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PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Teton Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) is located approximately 10 miles northeast of Jackson and provides quality winter range for elk and bison. There is currently no vehicular access (admin access) to this WHMA but it is accessible by foot from the National Elk Refuge which lies directly to the west or the National Forest which lies to the east. Vegetative communities on the 320 acres consist mostly of a perennial grassland mountain shrub mixture. The area also provides habitat for antelope, coyotes, and various species of songbirds and raptors. The purpose of the property acquired is to preserve and manage wildlife habitat and provide public hunting opportunities in the vicinity of Jackson, Wyoming area.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission acquired the 320 acre property in 1965 for \$80,000 with Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Funding (WSFR Funding).

Figure 1. General Location of Parcel Proposed for Disposal in Teton County.

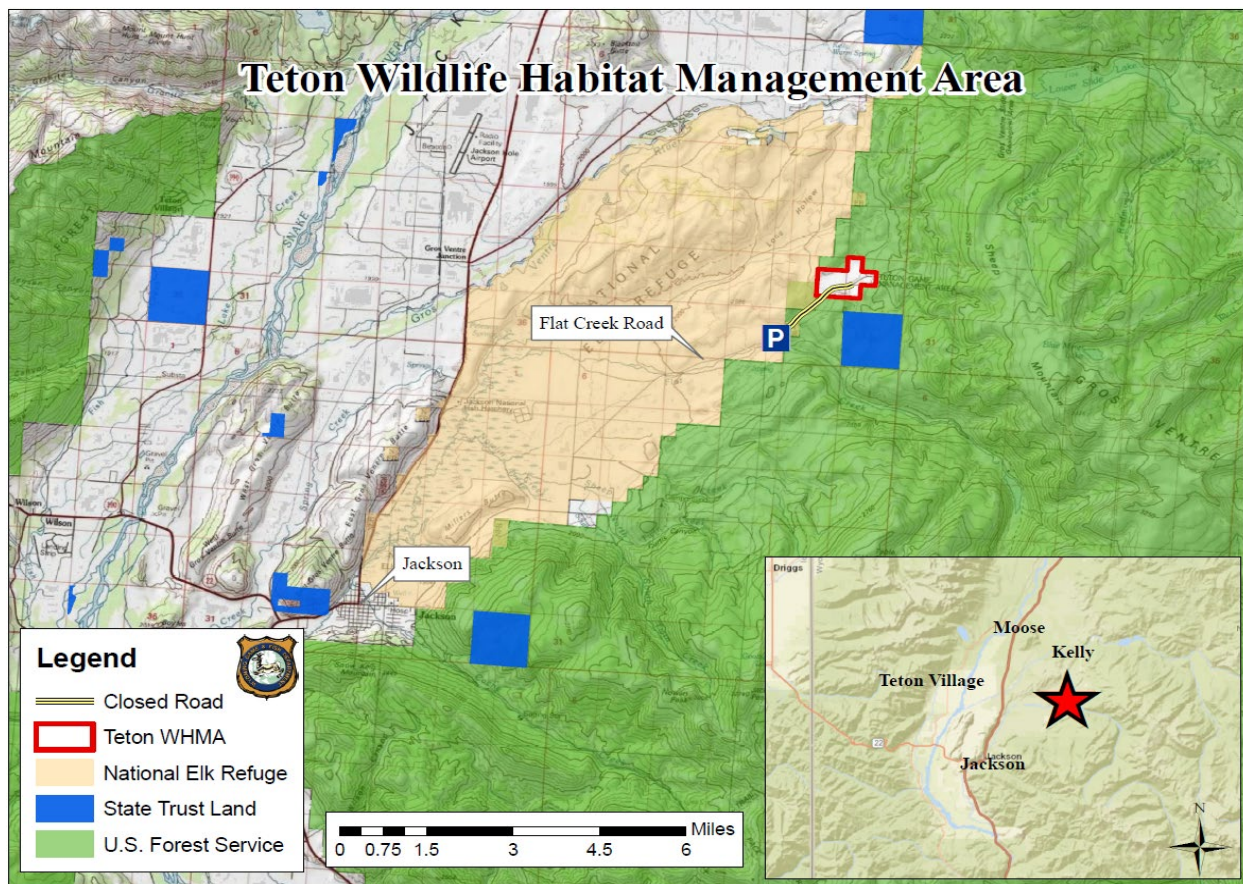
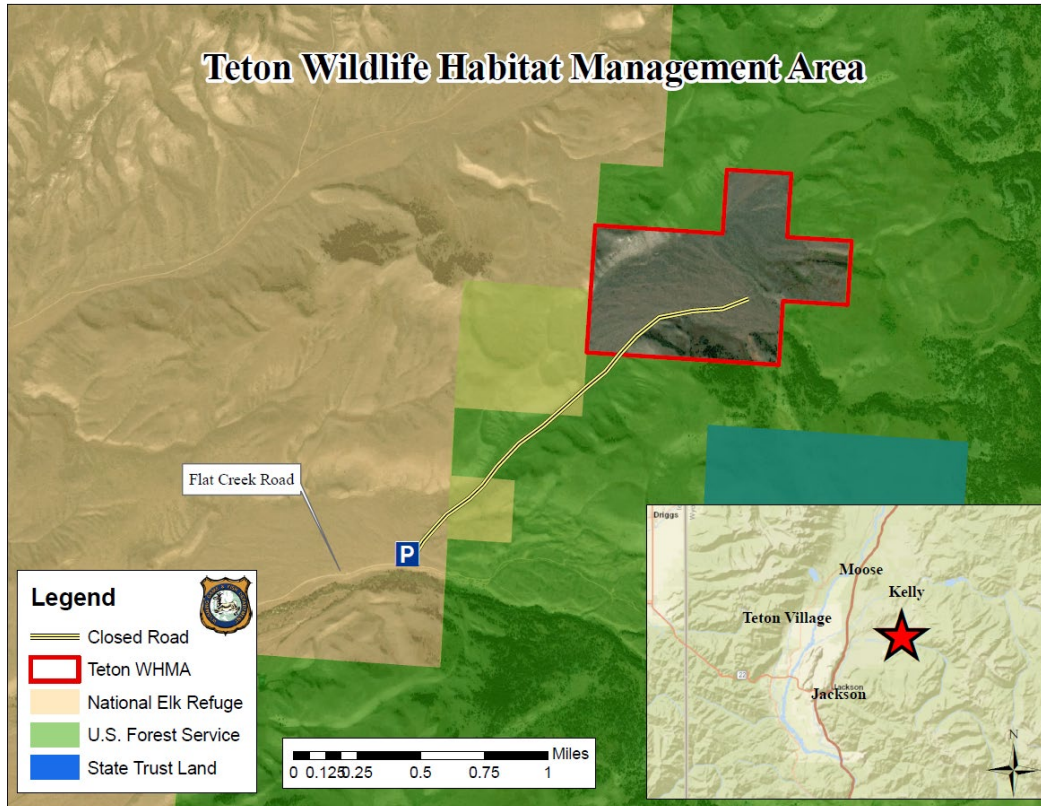


Figure 2. A More Detailed Map of the Disposal Parcel Location



The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has determined that a sale of the subject property to the United States Forest Service would ensure the property continues to be conserved in perpetuity, while also providing much needed funds for participation in conservation of other properties for wildlife habitat and public access by the Commission.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A: Preferred Action

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission sells the 320 acre tract to the United States Forest Service, to continue to be conserved for wildlife habitat and added to the Gros Ventre Wilderness Area. The USFS would be required to pay market value for the property, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service would either be repaid their portion of the revenue, or the revenue would be used to purchase and conserve other properties for ownership and management by the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

The acquired land will be managed as Desired Future Condition (DFC) 12 according to the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). DFC 12 is: Backcountry Big Game Hunting, Dispersed Recreation, and Wildlife Security Areas (an area managed for high-quality wildlife habitat and escape cover, big game hunting opportunities, and dispersed recreation activities). The area will be managed as crucial winter range designation, similar to adjacent National Forest System lands. Per the Bridger-Teton National Forest (Teton Division), crucial winter range is closed to all human entry annually from December 1- May 1 to protect wildlife on big game winter ranges.

Alternative B: No Action

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission does not sell the 320 acre tract, and maintains ownership and management of the property.

THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Location

The 320 acre parcel of the Teton WHMA proposed for sale to USFS is located approximately 10 miles northeast of Jackson (Figure 1). The parcel abuts the National Elk Refuge which lies directly to the west and the National Forest which lies to the north, east and south. Property location is the West half of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ and the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ and the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 25; and the South half of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and the N $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 26, all in Township 42 N, Range 115 W, 6th P.M., Teton County, Wyoming.

Historic Use and Current Management

The land comprising the Teton WHMA was acquired by Wyoming Game and Fish Commission in 1965 from Kenneth K. Miller and Beatrice B. Miller. This parcel provides very important habitat to a variety of Wyoming's wildlife and furnishes crucial winter range for big horn sheep and elk. Present access to the parcel is achieved on foot or horseback from May 1st to November 30th. Motorized vehicle use is prohibited. Recreational opportunities available are fishing, hunting, hiking and wildlife viewing. Due to the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the surrounding Gros Ventre Wilderness Area, Teton WHMA is closed to all human use from December 1st to April 30th every year.

Physical Environment

Landscape

The property is mountainous and partially tree covered, with rolling terrain.

Soils & Topography

The parcel proposed for disposal is characterized by various slope percentages and the site soils classify mainly as Aquic Cryoborolls-Aquic Cryoboralfs complex, Greyback-Thayne complex, Starley-Tetonia association, Tetonia-Lantonia silt loams, and Tetonia-Tineman complex (Web Soil Survey).

Water Resources

There are no known water resources on the property.

Floodplains & Wetlands

The parcel proposed for disposal does not include any wetlands or lie within a floodplain.

Biological Environment

Vegetation

Antelope Flats section is a dry section dominated by mountain big sagebrush and the Kelly Warm Springs section is a mix of aspen, mountain shrub communities and abandoned agricultural fields.

Wildlife

The Teton WHMA is just east of the National Elk Refuge and surrounded by the Bridger-Teton National Forest and contains valuable wildlife habitat. The parcels are within bighorn sheep and elk crucial winter range. Crucial winter range is considered the essential habitat component to maintain the long-term persistence of big game populations. The Department recommends avoiding functional loss of crucial range. Other common big game species in the area include mule deer, antelope, bison, and moose. The Teton WHMA provides habitat for all listed big game species.

The Teton WHMA is also within a State of Wyoming designated Greater Sage-Grouse Core Area. An integral component of sage-grouse management in Wyoming is the designation of core areas, which have enhanced protections supported by Wyoming's Sage-Grouse Executive Order 2019-3. Core area protections are provided for approximately 80% of the state's population, including a large portion of the Teton WHMA.

The parcels provide habitat for additional special status species, outlined below.

Special Status Species

The following are the Federally-listed endangered, threatened, proposed, or candidate species that may occur near the Teton WHMA in Teton County, Wyoming (IPaC: Explore Location Resources).

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| • Canada Lynx (<i>Lynx canadensis</i>) | Threatened |
| • Grizzly Bear (<i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i>) | Threatened |
| • North American Wolverine (<i>Gulo gulo luscus</i>) | Proposed Threatened |
| • Yellow-billed Cuckoo (<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>) | Threatened |
| • Monarch Butterfly (<i>Danaus plexippus</i>) | Candidate |
| • Whitebark Pine (<i>Pinus albicaulis</i>) | Threatened |

There is no suitable habitat present for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo so they are unlikely to be present. The other species may occur within the Teton WHMA.

In addition to Federally-listed species, the distribution of 72 additional Wyoming Species of

Greatest Conservation Need overlap the Teton WHMA. We have included a list of those species and the likelihood of their presence in Appendix A.

Archaeological, Historical, & Cultural Resources

As outlined in the letter from the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) dated April 26, 2023, the proposed disposal of this property to the United State Forest Service “does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming historic properties were present.” The letter is attached hereto for reference as Appendix B.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The Proposed Action would not negatively impact wildlife or cultural resources and would not limit public access. The USFS will continue to protect this property as part of the Gros Ventre Wilderness Area after acquisition.

Table 1. Summary of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

	Effects of the Proposed Action	Effects of No Action
Physical Environment	No aspects of the physical environment (landscape, air quality, geological & soils, topography, & water) will be directly impacted by this disposal.	No aspects of the physical environment will be directly impacted by no action.
Wildlife	No potential big game (deer and elk) or small animal species would be impacted by this land disposal. Wildlife habitats will remain the same.	No potential big game (deer and elk) or small animal species would be impacted if no action is taken. Wildlife habitats will remain the same.
Special Status Species	No known federally protected species will be impacted with the land disposal as all habitats will remain untouched.	No known federally protected species will be impacted if this disposal does not occur.
Hunting	Hunting and fishing access opportunities will still exist to the public in this area.	Original hunting and fishing access opportunities will still exist to the public in this area if this action does not occur.
Cultural Resources	No known cultural or historical resources will be directly impacted by this disposal.	No known cultural or historical resources will be directly impacted by this action.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The transfer of ownership in the 320 acre parcel from The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission

to the United State Forest Service ownership (i.e., the Proposed Action) would not interfere with the purpose of the property or the use of the property. The property was purchased with WSFR Grant Funds originally for wildlife habitat, and this use is also the intended use for the United States Forest Service. This transfer will not result in cumulative loss of wildlife resources or public hunting on the property.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department advertised in the Jackson Hole News & Guide newspaper and the Casper Star Tribune statewide newspaper for a total of four weeks prior to the completion of this EA document, with a deadline for comments at 5:00 pm on July 28th, 2023. The Department received the following comments:

Last Name	First Name	Comment Only
Longobardi	Jerry	Makes sense, should be pursued.
GROSSMAN	JUDD	I support the preservation of this parcel. I do not support the use of revenues from a sale for a housing development, unless it is clear that the location of the housing development is appropriate.
Harris	Charles	I support the sale of this Parcel to the USFS. It would be the "highest use" for this parcel, is currently used by LOTS of Elk and would support the goals of the State and the WYGFD.
Hoover	Michael	There is no justified reason to be selling this land other than for a back yard deal later on.
Northrup	David	I object to selling it to the forest service and would rather see it sold to the state. There needs to be a no net gain of federal land in Wyoming, and by selling it to the Forest service it becomes federal land.
Northrup	David	I object to the land being sold for federal government, and believe that it should be sold to the state of Wyoming instead. If it is already in the State holdings, meaning that the state owns it, and I believe it should stay in the state's possession. The federal government recently bought a large ranch outside of Casper, the Martin ranch, and as such has gained almost 40,000 acres of private land. I believe that the approximate 40,000 acres of federal land needs to be traded back to the state so that the state does not become a land trust for the federal government.

LIST OF AGENCIES AND PEOPLE CONSULTED

- Habitat Protection Biologist & Staff
- Wyoming State Historical Preservation Office
- US Geological Survey
- US Fish and Wildlife Service

LITERATURE CITED

- Web Soil Survey. <https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>
- IPaC: Explore Location Resources. <https://ipac.ecosphere.fws.gov/location/N3P3OJGYDFCALHN5OFHOH4G2QI/resources>

COMMENT PERIOD

- The draft Environmental Assessment will be posted for public comment for 30 days. Please submit any comments to Kayla Barrett, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, US Fish and Wildlife Service (kayla_barrett@fws.gov).

APPENDICES

Appendix A – All Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need with distributions that overlap the Teton WHMA and the associated 1 mile boundary.

Group	Common Name	Scientific Name	Occurance	Abundance
Amphibians	Columbia Spotted Frog	<i>Rana luteiventris</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Amphibians	Western Tiger Salamander	<i>Ambystoma mavortium</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Amphibians	Western Toad	<i>Anaxyrus boreas</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Black Rosy-Finch	<i>Leucosticte atrata</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Birds	Black-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides arcticus</i>	Likely to occur	Unknown
Birds	Black-chinned Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Boreal Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Birds	Brewer's Sparrow	<i>Spizella breweri</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Calliope Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus calliope</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Birds	Clark's Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga columbiana</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Common Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Franklin's Gull	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon

Birds	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Grasshopper Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Great Gray Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Greater Sage-Grouse	<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Birds	Lewis's Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	MacGillivray's Warbler	<i>Geothlypis tolmiei</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Northern Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium gnoma</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Sage Thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	Known to occur	Common
Birds	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Birds	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Birds	Williamson's Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus thyroideus</i>	Likely to occur	Unknown
Birds	Willow Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax traillii</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Fishes	Bluehead Sucker	<i>Catostomus discobolus</i>	Known to occur	Unknown

Gastropoda	Ash Gyro	<i>Gyraulus parvus</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Gastropoda	Glossy Valvata	<i>Valvata humeralis</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Gastropoda	Marsh Ramshorn	<i>Planorbella trivolvis</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Gastropoda	Mossy Valvata	<i>Valvata sincera</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Gastropoda	Rotund Physa	<i>Physella columbiana</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Gastropoda	Tadpole Physa	<i>Physella gyrina</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Gastropoda	Woodland Pondsnaill	<i>Ladislavella catascopium</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Malacostraca	Pilose Crayfish	<i>Pacifastacus gambelii</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Mammals	American Pika	<i>Ochotona princeps</i>	Unlikely to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Bighorn Sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>	Known to occur	Locally Common
Mammals	Canada Lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Mammals	Fringed Myotis	<i>Myotis thysanodes</i>	Unlikely to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Long-eared Myotis	<i>Myotis evotis</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Long-legged Myotis	<i>Myotis volans</i>	Unlikely to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Moose	<i>Alces alces</i>	Known to occur	Abundant
Mammals	North American Water Vole	<i>Microtus richardsoni</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Mammals	Northern River Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	Known to occur	Uncommon
Mammals	Sagebrush Vole	<i>Lemmyscus curtatus</i>	Likely to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Mammals	Uinta Chipmunk	<i>Neotamias umbrinus</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Western Little Brown Myotis	<i>Myotis carissima</i>	Known to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Western Spotted Skunk	<i>Spilogale gracilis</i>	Unlikely to occur	Unknown
Mammals	Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>	Unlikely to occur	Rare
Mammals	Yellow-pine Chipmunk	<i>Neotamias amoenus</i>	Unlikely to occur	Unknown
Reptiles	Northern Rubber Boa	<i>Charina bottae</i>	Likely to occur	Unknown
Reptiles	Valley Gartersnake	<i>Thamnophis sirtalis fitchi</i>	Likely to occur	Unknown

APPENDIX B – Cultural Resources SHPO Response



April 26, 2023

Roy Weber, Lands Branch Chief
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
5400 Bishop Blvd.
Cheyenne, WY 82009

Re: Sale of a 320 Acre Tract to the U.S.D.A. Forest Service (DBPR_WY_2023_301)

Dear Mr. Weber,

Thank you for consulting with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the above referenced undertaking.

Per 36 CFR § 800.3(a)(1) we find that the proposed undertaking “does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present”. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service has no further obligations under Section 106 for this undertaking.

Please refer to DBPR_WY_2023_301 on any future correspondence dealing with this project. If you have any questions, contact me at 307-777-5497.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Currit".

Richard L. Currit
Senior Archaeologist

Mark Gordon | Governor
Darin J. Westby, PE. | Director
Sara Needles | SHPO Officer



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State Parks & Cultural Resources