UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8
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OCT 6 2011

Ref: 8EPR-N

Mark D. Booth, District Ranger, Powder River Ranger District
Clarke M. McClung, District Ranger, Tongue Ranger District
Dave Hogen, District Ranger, Medicine Wheel/Paintrock Ranger District
c/o Laurie Walters-Clark
Bighorn National Forest
2013 Eastside 2nd Street
Sheridan, WY 82801

RE: EPA Comments on Final Environmental Impact Statement, Livestock Grazing and Vegetation Management on Five Project Areas ("Big 6"), CEQ # 20110308

Dear Messrs. Booth, McClung and Hogen:

In accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4321, *et seq.*, and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 7609, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 (EPA) has reviewed the August 2011 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Big 6 Project. This FEIS was prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) Bighorn National Forest to analyze the environmental impacts of continued authorization of 43 allotments across approximately 400,000 acres of the project area, and how best to utilize adaptive management to meet Forest Plan objectives for the area.

Three alternatives were analyzed in the DEIS, including no action. The two action alternatives evaluated included: Alternative 2 (a continuation of grazing under current management on the 43 allotments) and Alternative 3 (a continuation of grazing on the 43 allotments using adaptive management). The EPA provided comments on the Draft EIS (DEIS) in an October 18, 2010 letter. Our primary concerns with the DEIS were related to disclosure of existing water quality conditions, adequacy of wetlands protection, and frequency/responsibility for monitoring to ensure effective use of adaptive management strategies across the three Ranger Districts.

To address comments received on the DEIS, the FEIS includes additional narrative in Appendix B, Proposed Actions by Allotment. This new language describes and/or clarifies the development of desired conditions and monitoring frequencies. In addition, supplemental information is provided in Appendix E, Comments and Responses. This information is helpful for clarifying existing water quality conditions and design criteria to ensure wetlands protection, and it provides additional description of intended adaptive management implementation and monitoring.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this FEIS. If we may provide further explanation of our comments, please contact me at 303-312-6925, or your staff may contact Amy Platt at 303-312-6449.

Sincerely,

Suzanne J. Bohan
Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation