

WHITE PAPER

In 2015 the Wyoming Legislature passed Senate File 56, *Study on Management of Public Lands*, which directed the Office of State Lands and Investment to commission a study and provide a report addressing the management of certain specified federally administered public lands in Wyoming.

The study will identify, gather data, and assess the management (and only the management) of certain specified public lands. No transfer of ownership of public lands is contemplated by this study. The study excludes lands administered by the National Park Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, all current congressionally designated wilderness areas, and national conservation areas as well as land under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Department of Energy, and the Defense Department.

The study will gather information and document where these lands are, what resources are on them, what revenue they currently generate, and the current cost to manage them. The economic analysis will examine what additional revenue could be generated and factors affecting costs including but not limited to differing land management practices and objectives.

The study and any proposed plan for improved administration and management practices on these public lands shall be conducted under the principle of multiple use and sustained yield that includes, but is not limited to, the continuation of all existing public access to the lands for hunting, fishing, and recreation pursuant to SF 56.

Traditional cooperative and cost sharing opportunities and programs will be identified. The history and issues related to critical but unsecure federal payments made to the State and counties based on the presence of federal lands which cannot be taxed by local authorities will also be examined, including payments in lieu of taxes (PILT), Secure Rural Schools (SRS) payments, and US Forest Service receipts. Other federal policies and actions which impact revenues to Wyoming due to federally managed lands will be considered.

In essence it is a feasibility and efficiency study of federal land management practices and of federal versus state practices. However, the information will be useful in a variety of ways beneficial to the people of Wyoming should the State not undertake management of any of the public lands currently administered by federal agencies ó including facilitating better management of public lands within Wyoming by those agencies and using the information to craft practical ways to balance the issues that currently exist.

The idea behind the study, in part, stemmed from the recognition that certain western states have a disproportionate level of federal public lands compared to eastern, mid-western, and central plains states. Over forty eight percent (48%) of Wyoming is federal land. Communities across the west and many citizens have grown frustrated with the management practices of the federal agencies tasked with ösustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.ö On the ground land managers in federal agencies with the best of intentions are routinely burdened by their own agencies' bureaucracy and practices that seem to invite confrontation over collaboration leading, in some instances, to öanalysis paralysisö and litigation. Whether it is oil and gas, grazing, hunting or recreational uses ó the lengthy and protracted permitting processes and issues have become a concern.

At the same time many western states, in particular Wyoming, have effectively and responsibly managed their own state school trust lands far more efficiently and with greater financial returns despite the challenge of the checkerboard pattern of most state lands. While the differing management objectives are a significant reason for the difference, it is not the only reason. The BLM and Forest Service manage with a mandate of multiple use while states have a fiduciary duty to manage state trust land to generate long term financial returns for the benefit of public education and other beneficiary entities.

Federal management practices have a direct effect on the lives of citizens and the economies of communities with large tracts of federal lands. Decisions drastically

affecting western communities are heavily influenced at the national level sometimes without regard to local needs and concerns.

The aim of this study is to analyze the management of federal lands and the complexities that accompany that management. The study will contemplate a variety of mechanisms that could be implemented to help federal land managers meet management goals and objectives.

This feasibility study will be completed by September 2016 in conjunction with the State of Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments. For more information, contact Susan Child, Deputy Director, at susan.child@wyo.gov.