

November 9, 2016

Senator Bebout & Representative Kasperik
Select Natural Resource Management Committee
Wyoming Legislature

Subject: Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance comments on Public Lands Constitutional Amendment 17LSO-0179

Senator Bebout, Representative Kasperik, and members of the Committee,

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance (Alliance) is a grassroots advocacy organization in Teton County, Wyoming, that works to protect the wildlife, wild places, and community character of Jackson Hole. The Alliance represents over 2,000 people who strongly support keeping our American public lands in public hands.

We write to express our strong opposition to the Public Lands Constitutional Amendment (17LSO-179) and urge you to vote “No.”

Nearly half of Wyoming is public lands and 97% of Teton County is publicly held. These public lands are what make our county and state special. They include iconic landscapes and provide abundant and diverse recreation opportunities including hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, boating, skiing, camping, horseback riding, and more. These lands provide critical wildlife habitat to many species of our state’s and nation’s spectacular wildlife. Further, these lands are the basis for our economy, drawing visitors and tourists from across the state, nation, and world.

For these reasons, Teton County and the Town of Jackson both recently and overwhelmingly passed resolutions, “recognizing the value of federal lands to the Town and County’s economy, heritage and quality of life; and opposing any proposal for the state of Wyoming to take ownership or control of federal lands within the state of Wyoming.”

The Alliance strongly opposes this Public Lands Constitutional Amendment (17LSO-0179) for several reasons.

First, this amendment proposes a solution to a non-existent problem and presents a waste of time and resources for no apparent reason.

Second, we view this amendment as a thinly veiled attempt at transferring public lands to state ownership – an idea that is overwhelmingly opposed by diverse people across our state.

Third, the legislature-commissioned study that was just released clearly outlines why

state management of federal lands is a bad idea. Why not take the time to understand the conclusions of that study before embarking on a wasteful venture against our public interest?

Fourth, we believe that this amendment and the motivation underlying it are directly contradictory to Wyoming's constitution, where Wyoming disclaimed all rights to these federal lands.

Fifth, the proposed bill contemplates an uncertain future where Congress acts to transfer federal lands to the state. Even this committee's Chairman agrees that this is unlikely in the near future ("Not in my lifetime" – Sen. Bebout). Further, Attorneys General from eleven western states, including Wyoming, concluded that there was no legal basis on which to force Congress to transfer lands to the states. Why is this amendment necessary for an unlikely future scenario?

Finally, the proposed bill has several key undefined concepts: "Multiple Use Sustained Yield" and "public access." Vague notions of these critical issues are not a sound basis for such drastic legislative proposals.

In all, just like the concept of transferring federal lands to state control, the proposed bill is a bad idea and appears in direct opposition to the public interest of Wyoming.

We urge you to vote "No."

Sincerely,



Craig M. Benjamin
Executive Director