



# Greater Yellowstone Coalition

America's Voice for a Greater Yellowstone | LANDS • WATERS • WILDLIFE

September 29, 2014

**Idaho's Federal Lands Interim Committee**

Sen. Chuck Winder, Co-Chair

Rep. Lawerence Denney, Co-Chair

Sen. Bart Davis

Sen. John Tippets

Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll

Sen. Michelle Stennett

Rep. Mike Moyle

Rep. Eric Anderson

Rep. Stephen Hartgen

Rep. Grant Burgoynie

Rep. Terry Gestrin, Ad Hoc

Dear Members of Idaho's Federal Lands Interim Committee,

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposal of the State of Idaho to acquire and control public lands that are currently managed by the federal government.

For 30 years, GYC has worked to protect the lands, waters and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). Whether it is Yellowstone or Grand Teton National Park or the millions of acres of national forests and BLM lands that surround these parks, our public lands support the wildlife, clean water, wilderness and incredible recreation that make the Greater Yellowstone so special.

GYC has many concerns with the concept of Idaho taking control of federal public lands. First, the economic impacts of Idaho assuming the responsibility of nearly 28 million acres of federal land will quickly outstrip Idaho's capacity to provide sound management and essential services. Idaho has struggled to provide necessary funding to our state parks. With the addition of millions of more acres to manage, there is great concern that the state will not be able to effectively manage for the multiple uses currently allowed on federal lands and would then be forced to sell newly acquired lands to private interests. This potential loss of public access and the negative impacts on Idaho's hunting and angling heritage should not be underestimated. It will also have detrimental and long-term impacts on Idaho and local communities by compromising the strong recreation industry that eastern Idaho enjoys. Finally, the loss of thousands of federal jobs will have significant impacts on local communities such as St. Anthony/Island Park, Idaho Falls, Teton Basin, Pocatello and Soda Springs.

We have long cooperated with federal agencies to educate the public and conserve the natural resources that maintain the integrity and function of the GYE for present and future generations. Currently, GYC is a partner on the Island Park Sustainable Fire Community, which is committed to helping Island Park homeowners prepare for wildfires by creating defensible space around properties, providing information on fire resistance and improving access for fire vehicles and evacuation. This

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partnership with federal, state and local governments as well as NGO's like GYC is not unique and demonstrates the value of various stakeholders working together toward common goals. If the state were to take responsibility of federal lands, many of these partnerships and the resources we bring collectively would be compromised in the short-term and may take years to re-establish, leaving local communities like Island Park without much needed resources.

Finally, and most concerning to GYC, is the focus on short term economic gains of timber harvesting without considering many of the ecological values that Idahoans and Americans cherish. Non-market resources such as clean water, clean air and native biodiversity are benefits a healthy ecosystem provides to humankind and are priceless when compared to a simple profit-maximization approach of resource extraction. The investments that GYC has made over 30 years to maintain ecosystem health and protect special places such as the Upper Snake, Centennial Mountains or the Caribou Highlands will be at risk if those lands are sold to the highest bidder.

We urge the Federal Lands Interim Committee to comprehensively examine the values of our public lands, not just for Idahoans, but for all Americans, and we request a thorough, unbiased economic analysis of the costs of acquiring federal lands in Idaho

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and we look forward to working with you on this important issue. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Kathy Rinaldi  
Idaho Conservation Coordinator  
Greater Yellowstone Coalition

**Introduction:** Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Committee today. My name is Kathy Rinaldi and I am the Idaho Conservation Coordinator for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. Aside from my work with GYC I am also a Teton County commissioner and business owner in Driggs. I'd like to first present my comments from GYC and then would like to provide comments as a commissioner and business owner.

Read GYC Letter

**Commissioner:** I've been a county commissioner for almost 6 years and in that time I've learned firsthand the challenges confronting commissioners from day one that they take office. It takes an amazing amount of effort, and there are often many barriers, for counties to plan strategically for the long-term. Too often, decisions are reactive and don't consider long-term impacts. I'm afraid his idea has too many pitfalls and unintended consequences that will amount to short-term gain for long-term loss. This is not fiscally conservative and would cripple rural communities like mine that are dependent on our national forests for freedom, access and prosperity. Sure, there are legitimate frustrations with land management and as a commissioner I would like to see those frustrations addressed, but this radical idea does nothing to solve the real problem on our forests. In fact, if Idaho were to take control of federal lands, it would entail the largest expansion on state government and taxes since statehood. I imagine in addition to privatizing lands to make ends meet that many fees such as grazing, fire fighting and recreation user fees would also increase dramatically.

We need to focus on solving problems, not exploiting them. We need to work as neighbors with everyone at the table to address real problems such as implementing a plan to secure consistent and fair PILT and SRS payments. Finally, and most importantly, we need to ensure that whatever we do leaves behind a better world for our children and the next generation.

**Business Owner/Permittee on the Forest:** My husband and I are owners in a backcountry retail shop in Driggs and have a backcountry ski guiding business that is permitted through the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Our business is dependent on our national forest as many are in Teton and Fremont counties. This is where we ski, hunt, fish, camp, and ride. These lands contribute to our business, our community's economy and our quality of life and any attack on them, such as this, is an attack on our way of life. As someone who lived through a real estate boom, I've seen enough trophy homes, private hunt clubs and exclusive fishing streams. These are public lands and they need to stay that way. I feel good knowing that my boys get to grow up in place that has clean water and wild rivers, big mountains, quiet streets and wildlife that is not in a zoo. I'm proud to be able to share our lifestyle with our nieces and nephews who live in areas dominated by traffic, concrete and indoor play. Finally, I love our state's motto, *est per perpetua*. Let's make sure we keep that mind because it's not just about us today, but for forever.

Thank you.