

## THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

*South Dakota Chapter*

1112 Westwood Drive

Pierre, SD 57501

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Ft. Pierre National Grasslands  
Dan Svingen, Acting District Ranger  
1020 N. Deadwood Street  
Ft. Pierre, SD 57532

RE: Fort Pierre National Grassland (FPNG) Southwest Fence Relocation and Water Project Review of Draft Environmental Assessment (EA)

Dear Dan Svingen:

The South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society submits comments on the proposed Southwest Fence Relocation and Water Project. We commented during the original scoping period in 2008 and feel that the Draft EA incorporated most of our previous concerns and provided a more thorough explanation of the project goals. We support a mix of alternatives 2 and 3.

Adding dependable water sources through installation of underground waterlines and 5 tanks will improve range utilization by livestock and allow for better management of resources in impacted pastures. The removal of the Horsethief West fence and construction of a new fence north of US Forest Service road 227 is a good idea, as long as the fence design mitigates impact to nearby grouse lek(s). The fence should balance out pasture size in this area.

The FPNG is a world class "public land" grouse hunting destination for both greater prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse, largely due to the range management plan that annually rests a minimum of 10% of the grassland along with the grazing rotation that is used. The diverse mosaic of different stages of grassland cover on FPNG are essential in providing the habitat needs of prairie grouse throughout their life cycle. Any new infrastructure developments should consider grouse and other wildlife impacts, as directed by the Management Plan with monitoring plans for these developments!

The addition of a water tank in the Dry Hole pasture will increase wildlife habitat value by allowing it to be incorporated into a grazing rotation. Fourteen years without being grazed is not productive for wildlife habitat. Grasslands in central SD are most beneficial as wildlife habitat in the early successional stages of growth. If they are left undisturbed for more than 2-3 years they start losing wildlife habitat value.

We support the use of big game friendly fence with a smooth bottom wire and 16" off the ground. Pronghorn frequent this part of the grassland and will benefit from this fence type. As indicated above, we support avoidance of sharp-tailed grouse lek locations when constructing all new fences. The use of fence markers is a good idea on the portion of a fence closest to a lek. Should the fence prove to be an impediment to safe grouse movements, additional mitigation may be necessary.

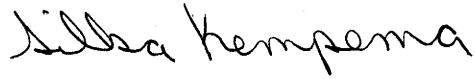
We cautiously support removing the fence between Horsethief East and Horsethief I.T. #25 pastures only if this would better distribute grazing pressure of non-native vegetation. We encourage the FPNG to lean towards management of range vegetation as a priority over what may be easiest for the livestock operator, in this case. We are very concerned that an increase in pasture size will not allow for improved range conditions if livestock are not used as a tool to target non-native vegetation. Once smooth brome has become mature, which can be in June, livestock will select native vegetation and allow non-natives a more competitive advantage.

We oppose removal of the dugouts and dams as planned under alternative 3 because it appears that this alternative was designed only to meet the "no net increase" in developments, a plan guideline. What is more important to resource management, is that these 5 developments are now created wetlands and provide important early spring breeding habitat to many upland nesting ducks including, mallards, American widgeon, northern pintail, and blue-winged teal. Later in the growing season, they provide excellent brood habitat for prairie grouse and pheasants. The moist soil conditions grow vegetation that provides shade and an abundance of invertebrates, critical to chick growth and survival. This will be lost with reclamation to a grassland mix that is already the dominant habitat on FPNG. We remind the FPNG of the entire content of the guideline: "Allow no net gain in the number of water developments, while maintaining or increasing the surface area covered by ponds providing brood habitat for waterfowl and fisheries."

We are not enthusiastic about additional fences to restrict livestock (due to possible impediments to wildlife movements and added fence maintenance through the years) but fencing out the 3 dugouts that still hold water, and the headwaters of Booth Dam, should be an adaptive management or design criteria. If these dugouts and dams no longer fit their intended purpose for livestock, it could be as simple as removing them from the inventory of classified livestock developments and reassigning new uses.

The South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to provide comments. Please continue to send correspondence to our Chapter. If you have any questions regarding the above comments, please contact our Public Lands Committee Chairman at [downtoearth15@rap.midco.net](mailto:downtoearth15@rap.midco.net); 4012 Oiler Lane, Rapid City, SD 57701.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Silka Kempema". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Silka L. F. Kempema, President  
South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society