

Appendix C Response to Comments

PREFACE: ALL SECTION NUMBER REFERENCES REFER TO THE PREDECISIONAL EA. This appendix includes a summary of the comments submitted for the Predecisional Deadman Bench EA and the Forest Service's response to those comments. The commentors include American Wildlands (AW), Chuck Neal (CN), Cody Lumber (CL), Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC), Park County Commissioners (PCC), Wyoming Game and Fish (WGFD), Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and Wyoming State Engineer's Office (SEO). Two other letters were received after the comment deadline: US Fish and Wildlife Service and Wyoming Outdoor Council (WOC). Those comments are not responded to in this appendix, though the IDT and decision maker reviewed them. WOC's comments were essentially the same as GYC's, so the responses to the WOC letter would be the same as the GYC letter.

1. CL comment: Project document needs better maps. Those provided are insufficient for any detailed analysis.

Response: To illustrate the project proposal and spatial relationships, nine maps were included in the EA. The maps are products from the Geographical Information System and are computer-produced maps. On maps that are feasible for publication in a document, map scale and level of detail is limited. In the case of detailed analysis, it may be necessary to visit our office or review project maps at a more suitable scale.

2. CL comment: The predecisional EA document in Alternative II contains language that blends both stewardship/service contract elements and timber sale contract elements. Cody Lumber, Inc. may be interested in either type of contract, but prefers not to be forced into accepting a stewardship or service contract containing activities not directly associated with log production. Separate and distinct types of contracts should be used.

Response: The timber sale purchaser will not be required to complete all work identified. The timber sale contract will be kept separate.

3. CL comment: It is our contention and concern that emphasizing aspen on the suitable base is not in accord with the forest plan as amended and is therefore illegal. The first paragraph (Page 13 1.11.1 Issue 1 Vegetative Diversity) is most troubling. Aspen is being pushed for management on the suitable base.

Response: Timbered lands in the project area that are mapped as part of the suited timber base contain small area inclusions (i.e., aspen, riparian, etc.) that have separate management goals that emphasize uses other than commercial timber production. These small inclusions were too small and scattered to be mapped at the forest planning map scale. These non-suited areas were identified for this project area as a part of this analysis.

The Forest Plan specifically indicates that aspen is to be managed for retention wherever it occurs (FP III-21), unless justified by one of three criteria. The Forest interprets this to mean that you can only choose not to manage for aspen if one of the criteria applies. This direction is written so that it provides a choice and not a requirement.

One of these criteria deals with managing aspen on conifer sites with a high site index. A review of the Deadman aspen treatments indicates that five acres occur on high sites. The Forest has chosen to manage those acres for aspen. The reasons for managing aspen are discussed in the EA (sections 3.3 to 3.3.4). The short-term effect on the ASQ is negligible, given that only five acres are involved. As noted below, Forest Plan revision will assess the long-term effect of these actions across the Forest. On the remaining acres of aspen emphasis, the criteria do not apply.

As a further means of addressing the commentor's concerns, future EAs will identify if aspen emphasis is occurring on conifer sites with high site indexes. In addition, the potential effects to the suitable timber base and resulting Allowable Sale Quantity will be assessed as part of Forest Plan revision starting in 2004.

4. CL comment: Cody Lumber, Inc. recommends that the ‘silviculture’ package of Alternative 4, and the ‘roads package’ of Alternative 3 be combined and selected in the Record of Decision.

Response: The decision maker will consider your recommendation.

5. GYC/AW comment: The Shoshone National Forest must respond to the four action items identified in the Ellsburly Timber Sale appeal process.

Response: The Forest did address the four appeal points.

- The Biological Evaluation for sensitive species is integrated into the EA document (see Chapter 3). The biologist signature page is in the project file/record. The Biological Assessment for proposed and listed species that received concurrence from the Fish and Wildlife Service is in the project file/record. Effects on proposed and listed species are summarized in the EA (sections 3.5.13 and 3.5.14)
- The new watershed analysis was more comprehensive concerning the effects of the Clover Mist Fire and current watershed conditions. The watershed analysis is discussed in section 3.6.1 of the EA. The Clover Mist Fire’s effects on the Deadman watershed and current watershed condition are discussed in section 3.6.1 of the EA.
- The map in section 1.7, Figure 4, of the EA shows exact locations of wetlands within the project area. This map also shows the treatment (harvest) units. Larger scale maps and photos are included in the project file.
- The analysis did include baseline information provided by a no action alternative, Alternative I. A no action alternative was included and analyzed in depth. In addition, the EA analyzed three other alternatives to the no action alternative.

6. GYC/AW comment: For the Deadman project, the Shoshone chose not to rescope this project.

Response: This proposal includes a portion of the area analyzed in the Ellsburly EA. Following in-depth review of previously identified issues and concerns for this particular area, it was determined additional scoping was not necessary. The previous list of issues and concerns relative to vegetative management projects in this area covered all pertinent aspects relative to this area and this type of proposal. The decision maker felt that the comments received on the predecisional EA would provide a final verification of the issues.

The EA was released as a predecisional EA for a 30-day public comment period, so the public was given an opportunity to comment. The details of past public involvement efforts and scoping are described in Section 1.10, and leads into a discussion of how the significant issues associated with the proposed action were determined (Section 1.11).

The Deadman Bench project has been listed on the Forest’s SOPA report, with a cross-reference to the Ellsburly Timber Sale. In addition, Forest Service personnel met with Tim Stevens of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) and Kelly Matheson of the Wyoming Outdoor Council (WOC) on May 29, 2002 at 2:00 p.m. at the Wapiti Ranger District to discuss North Zone NEPA projects. Specifically, Forest Service personnel (Brent Larson, Dave Cawrse, and Marty Sharp) talked about the Ellsburly Sale and the fact that it had been replaced with a new proposal that was listed on the SOPA as the Deadman Bench Vegetation Project and that the EA is forthcoming.

7. GYC/AW comment: The ability to include new issues has not been offered. This opportunity has not been granted for people to get involved.

Response: The 30-day comment period did not yield issues that had not been considered previously. The lynx was included in the EA as a listed species. Analysis of lynx habitat and the effects of proposed activities to lynx were completed and included in the predecisional EA (see section 3.5.14). All proposed activities are consistent with the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. A Biological Assessment (BA) for proposed and listed species was completed. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the BA's determinations; the concurrence letter is in the project file. The public was given an opportunity for involvement; see previous response.

8. GYC/AW comment: This project has another new issue that should have been analyzed - the fact that this project has doubled in size - both acreage to be logged and board feet.

Response: The difference in acreage and volumes is because this proposal addresses multiple resource restoration, prevention, and enhancement opportunities (i.e., aspen enhancement). In addition, the insect mortality is considerably more widespread than when the Ellsbury EA was prepared. The volume has increased due to the increased salvage component and restoration/enhancement opportunities.

9. GYC/AW comment: CEQ requires that "There shall be an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action . . . before the scoping process the lead agency shall publish a notice of intent in the Federal Register" and that states that the agency will "indicate the relationship between the timing of the preparation of environmental analyses and the agency's tentative planning and decision making schedule." The Shoshone has failed to comply with this requirement.

Response: The Shoshone is not out of compliance, since a notice of intent applies to an EIS, not an EA. The public was kept informed of the status of the project. The status of environmental analysis/document preparation, planning, and decision making schedules were included in the Forest's quarterly SOPA report, which has been sent to GYC and AW every four months. Further, the SOPA report is posted on the web for unlimited Internet access by the public (see previous response related to public involvement/scoping.)

10. GYC/AW comment: How can the Forest attempt to justify this timber harvest in the name of actually improving wildlife habitat, when it is removing the very thing that makes it a refuge for wildlife.

Response: The purpose and need for the Deadman Bench project was designed to meet direction in the CEQ Regulations (1502.13). The EA, in section 1.5, Purpose and Objectives of This Action, and section 1.6, The Need for This Action, describes the rationale for this project and the need to consider this action at this time because of the area's high vulnerability to forest health issues, including insects and wildfire. The EA also describes the opportunities to meet resource objectives such as restoring, maintaining, and enhancing habitat.

The Forest is not proposing to remove more than five mmbf of green trees from the diversity unit. Most of this volume includes dead and dying trees, since maintaining as many green trees as possible is part of the sanitation and salvage prescriptions that remove primarily dead, decadent, and highly vulnerable host trees (see sections 1.5, 1.6, and 1.7 of the EA).

The NEPA implementing regulations state the NEPA document shall "briefly specify the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding." Adequate information for the project was provided in the purpose and need discussion. In addition, the purpose and need relates to the forest-wide management direction contained within the Forest Plan.

The silvicultural prescriptions for the proposed harvest in green stands are designed to maintain adequate big game thermal cover and hiding cover as well as complying with other applicable Forest Plan standards and guidelines. Specific supporting evidence regarding this comment can be found in discussions in the EA that pertain to Forest Plan management area direction (see Section 2.3).

The proposed action, Alternative II, will harvest, using conventional tractor methods, 336 acres of dead and high-risk commercial coniferous sawtimber-sized products using a sanitation and salvage harvest system. Sanitation harvest includes removal of green trees that are damaged, diseased, decadent, or highly vulnerable to insect attack

based on known characteristics. Salvage harvest removes dead trees. This is a means of reducing serious, long lasting hazards and risks from pest organisms and fire using both a prevention and restoration strategy. More specific discussion of forest vegetation diversity, wildlife habitat, tree cover types, tree age class and Forest Plan goals are found in the EA (see sections 1.6, 2.6.2, and 3.2 to 3.3.4).

11. GYC/AW comment: It appears that the draft EA has failed to meet the standard set forth in the ASQ EIS in at least two areas. That is in relation to the Forest Plan direction on III-49, which requires that habitat for each species be maintained at 40% or more of potential. It appears that, in at least two areas (habitat at 40% for grizzly and elk), and there could be more, the draft EA has failed to meet the stipulation in the ASQ EIS, which requires that forest standards and guidelines be met. Provide much more detailed accounting of how this project will meet the stipulations in the ASQ EIS.

Response: The agency tiered to CFR 219.2 and the Forest Plan (management direction, goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area direction) in developing the project purpose and need sections 1.5 and 1.6. When conditions are below the minimum standards within the Forest Plan, the agency charge is to restore conditions to at least the minimum condition per CFR 219.27; Forest Plan Goals Chapter III, pages 6 to 10; Forest Plan direction, standards and guidelines; and the project purpose and need sections 1.5 and 1.6. When conditions are at or above the minimum standard, the agency charge is to enhance conditions toward more optimum conditions when opportunities exist. To meet Forest Plan direction, the Forest has decided to initiate management actions that 1) strive to bring conditions up to minimum standard (restoration), 2) prevent conditions (many times caused by natural disturbances) that cause conditions to decrease below minimum standard (prevention), and 3) capitalize on opportunities to attain desired conditions above the minimum (enhancement).

Under the Forest Plan direction for grizzly bears, the project area is presently below the 40% standard with only 37.7% of the area in secure habitat in season 1 and 35.2% in season 2. Under the proposed action, secure habitat will be increased in both seasons. Since the Forest Plan condition at present is below minimum, and the proposal will move toward the desired condition (CFR 219.27, Forest Goals III 6-10), implementation of the restoration action will improve habitat effectiveness. This is why road closures to move toward the 40% minimum standard are proposed. Implementation of the proposed action will also move elk habitat effectiveness above the 40% minimum.

12. GYC/AW comment: We found nowhere in the EA where the issue of compliance with the Clean Water Act was discussed in any detail, nor did we see a list of “extraordinary mitigation measures” stipulated in the ASQ EIS. Please provide the mitigation measures the Forest considers “extraordinary,” as well as assurances that this project will meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act in the final EA.

Response: The site-specific planning avoided areas prone to mass movement or landslides. Prudent design and upfront mitigation and avoidance of sensitive areas resulted in a project that did not require extraordinary measures and is in conformance with watershed standards and guidelines.

During the planning and design of this project, the forest hydrologist spent a considerable amount of time in the field and the office working with other staff to develop a project that meets the stipulations set forth in the ASQ EIS. Considerable energy went into road and unit layout and design to ensure that activities with the potential to produce sediment will be disconnected from streams and wetlands. Considerable energy also went in to discussions on operation timing to ensure activities will occur when they are least or not likely to have negative effects on soil and water resources. Section 3.6.3 of the EA contains narrative to this effect.

In regard to validated watersheds of concern and delayed harvest areas, harvest could still occur in such areas prior to the end of the period of deferment if site specific analysis demonstrated all the Forest Plan standards and guidelines could be met. This mitigation need is fully discussed and referenced in ASQ ROD, page 4, and Chapters III and IV of the ASQ EIS.

An in-depth, site-specific analysis for the Deadman Bench proposal was completed and it was determined that timber harvest could occur and the Forest Plan standards and guidelines could be met by project design and mitigation measures. This analysis determined what mitigation was necessary based on the analysis of the existing conditions and the effectiveness of project design/mitigation. This mitigation is discussed in section 2.6.2. The

discussion of environmental consequences, section 3.6.3, demonstrates effects on soil and water resources are minor to non-existent, which indicates compliance with the Clean Water Act. This compliance is reinforced with the cumulative effects discussion, section 3.11.5.

13. GYC/AW comment: As we understand it, the current sale proposal constitutes a violation of the no increase in roads provision in the forest plan.

Response: The road closures proposed under the action alternatives will benefit bears and elk. Road-related activities and the grizzly bear were major considerations that shaped project design.

The 0.49 miles of road to be reconstructed are already on the system, are presently closed, and will be closed to public motorized use immediately upon reconstruction; this is not a newly constructed road. The new road construction of 0.69 miles will be negated by decommissioning of 0.78 miles of existing classified road that is presently open to the public and 0.32 miles of unclassified road (two-tracks that people have made and are using) - for a net decrease of 0.41 miles of road within the project area.

14. GYC/AW comment: The public has still not been supplied with stand inventory maps, which delineate distribution of Douglas-fir by age class and stand density. What is the level of infestation and what does success look like (in treating insects)? The EA itself gives contradictory information about the bug situation. If the beetle outbreak reached its peak in 1991, why are we deeming it a crisis 11 years after it reached its peak?

Response: In section 1.6, Figure 3 is a map showing the Douglas-fir bark beetle risk (high, medium, low, and none), the Douglas-fir type, and where infected stands are likely to occur. Information that is more specific is not possible to depict in a map of this scale. More detailed stand information was used in this analysis, including the insect and disease evaluations, GIS data base layers, and field observations – all of which are available at the Wapiti Ranger District office. To illustrate the extent of the problem, Appendix B contains photos of existing conditions for insects and disease.

Relative to epidemic versus endemic levels of insect infestation, the scale of infestation must be considered. Insect infestation reached epidemic proportions over a large landscape area immediately after the fires of 1988. In the areas first infested, the infestation has run its course with mortality of the vulnerable host trees having occurred. Portions of some stands contain susceptible host trees, which are continuing the epidemic in those areas. There are ebbs and flows of insect levels dependent on the location, the speed of insect dispersal, and the vulnerability of stands.

The desired condition as specified in the EA (section 1.3), describes success.

15. GYC/AW comment: We also question the assertion that trees that die cause a crisis in fuel buildup. Is it not, rather, the fine fuels which are the primary fuel of concern, and not the large boles of dead trees?

Response: While still standing, the dead trees themselves do not cause a crisis in fuel buildup. Over time, these standing trees will begin to fall to the ground and add to the already high to extreme fuel loading that currently exists. Recent fuel inventory data collected this fall indicate that there is quite a range in fuel loading, from five to 104 tons/acre with an average of 34 tons/acre. A fuel loading map and additional data will be included in the final EA.

16. GYC/AW comment: We are unclear what stewardship objectives the EA is referring to on page 41, and would appreciate a more complete explanation of which objectives the EA is referring to.

Response: Stewardship objectives relate to objectives for National Forest System lands, such as restoration/maintenance of diversity, maintenance/enhancement of habitat for wildlife indicator species, etc. Timber harvest for stewardship purposes is described in the Timber Sale Program Information Reporting System as “. . . sales being made primarily to help achieve desired ecological conditions and/or to attain some non-timber resource objective that requires manipulating the existing vegetation – for example, improving forest health or reducing forest fuels.” The intent of this statement was to make the point that extremely large fires, such as occurred in 1988, may be within the range of natural variability; however, they are not compatible with attainment of management objectives and maintenance of existing uses on a smaller landscape scale.

As stated in section 3.4 of the EA, forest health relates to a general condition of the land and its related resources. The goals of stewardship management are to maintain the land and the related resources in a healthy condition in order to maintain sustainability of the total ecosystem over time. This implies management in which natural processes, structures, and functions are fully functional. It also implies maintaining vegetation and other resources in a condition that minimizes the risk of catastrophic natural disturbances.

17. GYC/AW comment: Commercial timber harvest is a major causative factor in forest health problems, not the solution to them. Unmanaged lands are typically “healthier” than managed lands.

Response: The Forest does not agree that timber harvest is a major causative factor in forest health problems or that unmanaged lands are typically healthier than managed lands. In the EA, the no action alternative (Alternative I) presents a valid alternative that addresses no timber harvest and the aspect of unmanaged lands, so it was a viable alternative analyzed in the EA. Alternative I is found in the EA, beginning in Section 2.6.1 and is carried through the analysis. The EA analysis did not demonstrate that unmanaged lands are healthier than managed lands or would be the best alternative to meet the project purpose and need.

The Forest agrees that large-scale stand replacement fire and insect outbreaks at long-term intervals based on climatic conditions and other natural factors are natural disturbances in these areas. However, in many high value areas of the Forest, management direction per the Forest Plan is to manage for desired conditions through management actions and not a hands-off approach. The scope of activities to achieve timber age class goals or protection from insects and disease must be regarded as local in nature rather than of Forest-wide consequence (FP III-6).

It is interesting to note that the wilderness areas adjacent to the area of concern, where vegetation was not managed except by natural disturbance factors, experienced a natural stand replacement fire in 1988. The unmanaged watersheds (i.e., Crandall drainage) are now more fragmented than managed areas, vegetative changes are much more dramatic than areas managed over the past half century, riparian areas within the burn area are not healthier than in managed areas, and hydrological regimes were disrupted by the fires. All of this may be natural, however a disturbance of this large scale is not what is desirable.

18. GYC/AW comment: The Forest has arbitrarily narrowed the definition of “forest health” for the sole reason that it will make it possible to log virtually any timber stand that the Forest wishes to cut. It is also apparent that the Forest has failed to use the available science on the issue.

Response: The Forest used widely accepted concepts relative to forest health. The interdisciplinary team used the best available information that fits this particular site and situation. Professional literature and research was cited throughout the EA to support predicted effects and conclusions. A detailed bibliography was included in the EA. However, much of our analysis is based on site-specific analysis, on-the-ground knowledge, and professional judgment. In cases of conflicting scientific research, specialists used their professional experience and judgment to decide the most applicable information or course of action for the forest health situation within the Deadman Bench project area.

19. GYC/AW comment: Because this sale will be ineffective against bugs, and given the fact that the big dead logs are not the real fire threat, there’s only one other reason to do the sale ...

Response: Timber harvest can be used as a management tool for restoration or enhancement opportunities relative to insects, where infestation has peaked and salvage is the primary option. It should be noted however, that in infested stands where infestation has not peaked, removing infested trees and remaining potential high-risk host trees (larger trees) by sanitation harvest will reduce the number of smaller trees that will be attacked, and reduce the potential for recurrent insect infestation in the long term (see the EA Purpose and Need, sections 1.5 and 1.6). Forest health (insects and fuel loading), including Forest Plan direction, existing conditions, enhancement opportunities, and effects of the alternatives are discussed in section 3.4.1.

20. GYC/AW comment: Please provide a clear, concise section comparing Forest Plan standards as they relate to wildlife needs, and how this project will or will not meet those standards.

Response: This was included in the EA. Standards were stated up front in each section of Chapter 3, and in other portions of the EA where appropriate. The standards were included up front in order to clarify the applicable Forest Plan so that the reader could compare the existing conditions to the applicable standards and determine the differences. The intent of this format was to allow this comparison to clearly demonstrate whether the existing condition is below the minimum standard (minimum acceptable condition) or complies with the minimum standard. When comparing the existing condition to the minimum standard and desired condition, restoration opportunities for bringing below standard conditions up to minimum acceptable conditions and enhancement opportunities for moving conditions toward the more optimum desired conditions are surfaced.

See section 3.2.1 and section 3.5.1 in the EA for standards relating to diversity and wildlife. A discussion of the existing conditions relative to standards is also included in Chapter 3 relative to each resource component or wildlife species.

21. GYC/AW comment: We request that the Forest use past area timber sales to assess whether the Deadman Bench proposal will be effective at bringing the insect outbreak to an “endemic” level.

Response: Six biological evaluations documenting the progression of the outbreak population of the Douglas-fir beetle and the resulting tree mortality on the Clarks Fork Ranger District have been completed, as identified in the EA, section 3.4.2. Based on past timber sales (Cathedral Sanitation and Salvage) near the proposed project area, where Douglas-fir beetles were addressed, proposed treatment activities have proven to be effective. It is important to note that when the majority of vegetation is in the latter stages of succession and stressed by climatic and other conditions, such areas are highly vulnerable to epidemic levels of insect infestation over large areas. There is no means of control over the total area – one can only treat high value areas such as Deadman Bench on a small scale (i.e., stand or group of stands) and this is what the action alternatives are intended to do.

22. GYC/AW comment: While the EA provided a couple of statistics of fuel loading in selected areas, it did not contain any overall assessment of fuel loads in the diversity unit.

Response: There was no intent to assess fuel loading over the total diversity unit. Our major concern relative to this proposal was the fuel loading and fire risk on the Deadman Bench, a high value area, because of its importance to wildlife and other resource values. As mentioned, the average fuel load in the project area is 34 tons/acre with a range of five to 104 tons/acre. Appendix B contains photos of existing conditions for fuel loading to illustrate the extent of the problem.

23. GYC/AW comment: Given the fact that fire likelihood is lower than it was in 1988, and the fact that almost 30% of the diversity unit has burned within 14 years, where is the real fire danger?

Response: The final EA provides further explanation of the fire danger. The intent of the statement was that with the acreage burned in 1988, the probability of a fire start occurring and burning within the diversity unit is reduced, as 30% of the diversity unit burned fairly clean. If a fire start should occur within this area, the probability that it would burn a large area or burn intensely is low. Even a fire start near the burn potentially would have less opportunity to burn large acreages if slope and wind direction were to move the fire into the old burn. However, the presence of the 1988 burn would have little to no effect on a fire start along the Clarks Fork River or Highway 296. The area of concern along Deadman Bench, as well as private property along the highway would be at risk and the 1988 burn would do little to decrease the probability of this area burning.

24. GYC/AW comment: The EA fails to include an analysis of old growth resources. The EA failed to discuss this ecologically important habitat quality. You must inventory old growth and impacts must be disclosed and analyzed.

Response: Analysis of mature forest, late succession forest, older structural stages, canopy closure, snags, and dead and down (i.e., characteristics related to old growth) as well as the wildlife species associated with these habitat components were included as part of the analysis. These old growth characteristics are found in section 2.6.2 of the EA. See section 3.2.2 of the EA for a table that displays the existing percentage of old growth in the diversity unit as compared to the Forest Plan standard. Effects on old growth and diversity are displayed in Chapter 3 of the EA beginning in Section 3.2.4. As stated in section 3.2.4, the percentage of old growth stands within the project area that would receive no treatments is the same for all alternatives. These untreated stands of

old growth remaining in the diversity unit are of sufficient amounts to meet the Forest Plan minimum requirement of 10% and distribution of old growth stands within the project areas are sufficient to provide adequate habitat for old growth dependent species that use the project area. Section 3.5.13 to 3.5.14 of EA includes a discussion of wildlife species and the effects of this proposal on species related to mature forest and the components of old growth.

25. GYC/AW comment: Please provide detailed information regarding the need to cut trees out of the meadows, other than simply stating that eventually succession may happen.

Response: As stated in section 3.2.1 in the EA, the Forest Plan (III-76) directs that natural shrub and grassland openings be maintained. The intent of this direction is not to make more meadows but to maintain existing interior and adjacent meadows that are converting to a conifer type and are at risk of disappearing from the landscape. Many of these meadows contain wetland or shrub vegetative types and species that are very limited in amount or distribution within the landscape.

26. GYC/AW comment: Please provide reasons why succession is a bad thing that the Forest must guard against.

Response: Succession is a natural ecological process. It is not good or bad. It must be viewed from the context of long-term sustainability of the land when considering maintenance of natural processes and functions as well as objectives for management of a particular piece of land. Comments in the EA (Section 3.2.4) such as “*Without disturbances in these areas, these important vegetation species would continue to decrease due to vegetation succession,*” are meant to be a disclosure of effects and not a characterization of succession as unnatural. Again, it depends on what vegetation objectives and desired conditions the Forest is trying to achieve.

One of the major charges (36 CFR219.26 & 27) for management of National Forest System lands is to provide for and maintain diversity of plant and animal communities to meet overall multiple use objectives. A diversity of types, seral stages, and patch sizes distributed over a landscape is essential to have a diversity of wildlife species (species richness), and the positioning and scale of these patches determines their value as wildlife habitat. This is what is lacking or out of balance in the existing conditions and what the project is attempting to address.

27. GYC/AW comment: The EA has failed to provide any information regarding a lack of any particular habitat component. Where is the information in the EA that tells us which Forest component is lacking and what resources are suffering for the lack of that particular habitat component? We found no information to support the “need “ to create more aspen or other deciduous species.

Response: Aspen, deciduous species, riparian corridors, and lodgepole pine are identified as lacking habitat components (see sections 3.2.4, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.5.3, 3.5.4, and 3.5.12). Examples of what resources are suffering are indicator species such as ruffed grouse and moose.

28. GYC/AW comment: The EA failed to show any forest health “problem” in relation to fire and insects.

Response: Forest health problems with insects and disease are described in the project purpose and need, sections 1.5 and 1.6. Standing dead trees do not burn as intensely as standing green trees, but in time, these trees will fall to the ground. The kindling is already on the ground in the way of fine fuels that will ignite and carry fire; the large dead trees, when jackstrawed on the ground, will only add to the current high fuel load, producing a high intensity surface fire or crown fire depending upon fuel moisture and weather conditions. A recent report, “Effect of Fuels Treatment on Wildfire Severity”(Omi and Martinson 2002) found that treated stands experience lower fire severity than untreated stands that burn under similar weather and topographic conditions.

In the last two years, four lightning-caused fires have occurred within the diversity unit. One of the fires occurred within the 1988 burn and the other three occurred in areas outside the burn. Due to availability of resources and cooperative weather conditions, these three fires were limited to < ½ acre. However, had resources not been available and the weather not cooperative, all three of these fires had the potential to burn large acreages as they occurred within forested areas with heavy fuel loading. The final EA includes further explanation of forest health impacts to fire.

29. GYC/AW comment: According to the EA, there's a nice breadth of diversity, with a split between forested and non-forested, and within the forested component, a nice mix of young and older stands. How much more diversity is needed and for what purpose?

Response: Diversity is composed of many components other than forested versus non-forested and a mix of younger and older stands. See section 3.2 that briefly summarizes the concept of diversity in terms of the regulations as well as the known science. See the entire response to your concern about succession, diversity, and aspen above for a discussion of how much diversity is needed and for what purpose.

30. GYC/AW comment: The only action related to this project that could be remotely interpreted as restoring or enhancing wildlife habitat are the road closures. If the Forest truly wanted to improve wildlife habitat, it would simply embark on a road reclamation effort and leave the old growth alone. Overall, we feel the EA does not provide adequate justification for the project.

Response: See response #10.

31. GYC/AW comment: We are concerned that control of Doug-fir beetle using baiting and trapping was not more thoroughly considered, as we understand it to be an effective method of control in beetle outbreak areas. Thoroughly detail why this alternative was dismissed and also include a discussion of the research regarding the effectiveness of using this technique.

Response: Insect baiting and trapping were considered, and were dismissed as a viable means of dealing with insects in the Deadman area as they not effective methods of control over large areas, and they are primarily a short-term measure. Ecologically, economically, and socially, the use of insecticides, baiting, and trapping were ruled out as a cost-effective, efficient and effective means of control of the Douglas-fir bark beetle. Baiting and trapping are efficient and effective methods only in small areas. They are presently being used quite successfully around high value areas such as campgrounds, resorts, and other developments. In addition, this alternative did not meet the intent of the proposal as stated in the objectives as many of the trees in the area have already been attacked or succumbed as a result of the infestation, and salvage of merchantable materials was one of the objectives.

32. GYC/AW comment: What detriment would there be if succession were allowed to move forward?

Response: As stated previously, succession can be judged beneficial or detrimental only in the context of stated goals and objectives. Goals and objectives for this area as stated in the Forest Plan relate to timber production, wildlife habitat, aspen enhancement, etc. When considering the existing state of succession relative to these management objectives, allowing succession to move forward will not contribute to attainment of Forest Plan desired conditions, standards and guidelines, and objectives.

As more trees die and fuel loading increases, so will the risk and severity of potential wildfires. In the absence of fire or other succession-reverting disturbance, the following trends and detrimental effects can be expected: 1) reduced amount and distribution of aspen; 2) diminished meadows/openings, decreased in size or disappear; 3) reduced diversity and patchiness; 4) increased vulnerability to insect epidemics (until the epidemic has run its course); and 5) increased vulnerability to intense stand replacing fires.

As discussed in Section 3.2, diversity is a factor of not only the variety, but also the distribution and abundance of different plant and animal communities and species. As such, succession and its interconnected components are the basis for diversity. Effects may be judged detrimental when they are contrary to long-term objectives as stated in the Forest Plan. For example, advancing succession that leads to a loss of a vegetative type such as aspen, or a seral stage of that type on a landscape is not compatible with multiple use management or the attainment of desired conditions. The project is proposed to rejuvenate decadent or over mature aspen stands, deciduous shrub communities, and wetland complexes, which will benefit early succession and deciduous habitat dependent species. Several clones presently in very poor condition (decadent with few remaining stems) would most likely die within the next decade. The majority of clones would likely disappear in the long term without a major disturbance. This is the existing condition and the problem with the aspen/deciduous species in the project area as described in the purpose and need and throughout the vegetation, diversity, and wildlife sections of the EA.

33. GYC/AW comment: We are concerned that allowing for harvest activity because of this decision to extend over a period longer than three years would be a violation of the timing stipulations related to grizzly bear situation 1 habitat please assure the public that this requirement in situation 1 habitat will be met by this open-ended allowance for aspen harvest.

Response: Aspen regeneration is not timber harvest, and is therefore not subject to timber harvest stipulations required in situation 1 areas. The Forest does however share your concern relative to duration of activities in the area. The duration and timing of wildlife habitat improvement work such as aspen regeneration can, and will, be closely scheduled and controlled such that activities have no effect on bears. Aspen regeneration will be allowed over an extended period because such actions will be a minor disturbance, occur over a very limited time (several days), and be scheduled in a period that will minimize conflicts with other resources. This was described in the EA, section 2.6.2.

34. GYC/AW comment: Please provide assurances that this project is providing for the retention of aspen as per Forest Plan goals. Please provide more detailed information related to the goal the Forest is trying to achieve in this area in relation to aspen. Please provide detailed information about which stands are declining, as it is represented in the EA that there is a good mix of young and old aspen.

Response: Many of the aspen clones can be retained in this area only by purposeful treatment or by natural disturbance. Aspen retention is one of the objectives of this proposal. See the earlier discussion of the aspen component under response #26.

35. GYC/AW comment: Please provide information regarding how this action will meet the Forest Plan standard for vertical diversity, and also justification by the Forest Service as to why it must remove the very forest component that is in shortest supply. The only justification we have found thus far is that bugs and fire will convert them to even-aged stands, and that would set them back to early seral stands.

Response: The forest is below Plan standard for vertical diversity at present in the Deadman Bench diversity unit. The Forest Plan standard for vertical diversity is 20%; existing condition is below 10%. The justification for implementing an action alternative is for restoration purposes in the project area. Implementation of a restoration alternative will accelerate moving toward the standard sooner than would a no action approach. It is this shorter-term, restoration approach to meet diversity goals and move toward plan standards that is the justification for the action. The action is best suited to the multiple-use goals for the area and provides the most practical means for the desired effect on wildlife habitat. If existing situations are below the standard, then a restoration approach is needed to move in a positive manner toward the standard in the most expedient manner possible.

Heavy insect infestation and stand replacement wildfire would convert most stands back to even-aged stands if such disturbance occurs. This is already occurring in the Douglas-fir type. Vertical diversity will continue to decline no matter what the Forest proposes, and attainment of Forest Plan standards relative to vertical diversity will be a long time in coming no matter what alternative is chosen. The action alternatives provide actions to accelerate regeneration and increase or restore vertical diversity in the shortest time possible. Sanitation treatment reduces vulnerability to major disturbance, thus allowing vertical diversity (cover standards) to be achieved in a shorter period over the long term than does the no action alternative.

The older spruce/fir stands in the Deadman Bench area are also highly susceptible to insect infestation and loss of vertical diversity as evidenced by epidemic (unprecedented) levels of spruce bark beetles in many areas of the Forest (i.e., Carter Mountain). The Forest is proposing a sanitation and salvage treatment for the Deadman Bench in order to restore as much vertical structure as possible. It is our intent to leave as many healthy green trees in these stands as possible. It must be noted that the higher the basal area, and the higher the numbers of old-age vulnerable trees available, the more damaging the infestation is relative to the mortality of all age classes of trees, including the smaller and more healthy trees.

36. GYC/AW comment: Please provide assurances that the Forest Plan standards regarding maintenance along streams and rivers will be met. Specifically, “hiding cover will be maintained along at least 60% of streams and rivers” (FP III-50).

Response: Hiding cover will be maintained along at least 60% of streams and rivers by leaving sufficient amounts of existing cover to meet the standard in the short term. In those areas where there are only narrow stringers of coniferous forest on the slopes adjacent to the riparian (as well as those narrow timbered stringers dissecting the large meadow area), those stands will not be treated in order to maintain high quality travel linkage corridors for wildlife. Over the long term, hiding cover will be enhanced in these areas as the dominant resulting vegetation will be tall, dense, deciduous species such as alder, willow, birch, etc. These species not only provide hiding cover, but also meet many other habitat needs and provide many additional niches. As these riparian areas are very important and potentially vulnerable areas, treatment will occur during the winter period when the area is frozen and snow covered and use whole tree removal as appropriate (see sections 2.6.2 and 3.4.4).

In section 2.6.2 of the EA, project design provides for habitat cover along streams. In Alternative II, treatment of a portion of stands will be deferred because they provide essential wildlife corridor linkage, special habitat such as old growth, or else they are not reasonably accessible using conventional tractor logging methods without major road construction. The limited riparian area along portions of Deadman Creek will also be set back successional to mid-seral deciduous condition by removal of merchantable and unmerchantable conifer trees, using group selection harvest methods.

The treatment area map (Figure 4) and the continuous corridors provided by the untreated areas through project design should be noted. Marking guidelines require that trees offering bank stability not be removed for harvest, thus they will contribute to cover along the streams (section 3.6.3).

37. GYC/AW comment: The EA states that 6 to 10 snags per ten acres will be retained “where biologically feasible.” Please provide assurances that this meets Forest Plan standards regarding snag retention.

Response: Where snags exist, sufficient numbers will be maintained to meet the standard.

38. GYC/AW: The EA does not discuss this activity in light of the large-scale fires and post fire logging and the ensuing loss of cover, and assess the cumulative effects of all these activities on area wildlife.

Response: Both temporal and geographic bounds were described for the cumulative analysis. A thorough analysis of all past activities, as well as present and foreseeable future activities, and their cumulative effects on wildlife species was completed for this project and is documented in section 3.11 of the EA. The cumulative effects analysis is not just another process, but a holistic look based on the diversity unit as a spatial boundary and a 30-year projection into the future. Adverse cumulative effects on wildlife were found to be insignificant, and it was determined that the proposal provided a significant contribution toward beneficial cumulative effects for wildlife in the long term. The proposed activity was discussed in light of the large-scale fires and post-fire logging activity. See section 3.11.2 for a listing of past activities that were considered in evaluation of cumulative effects, including past, large scale fires and post-fire logging activities, as well as many other activities. The discussion of these activities and their cumulative effects on wildlife are addressed in section 3.11.4.

39. GYC/AW comment: We would like additional assurances and mitigation measures to assure that logging will not cause landslides, as apparently happened following logging in the Cathedral Cliffs area.

Response: The risk of landslides is discussed in section 3.6.3 of the EA. It is recognized that portions of the project area are prone to mass movement. Thus, much care went into the location and design of both roads and harvest units. A considerable area within the project boundary was avoided primarily due to the mass movement concern. Road needs were kept to an absolute minimum. Winter logging using snow roads is prescribed, as are atypical skid distances.

40. GYC/AW comment: On page 91, the EA refers to a table (Figure 21), which reviews effects of this project on sensitive plants. Unfortunately, this table does not appear in the EA.

Response: The sensitive plants table does appear in the EA in section 3.9.1. The reference was in error and should have been to Figure 20 instead of Figure 21. It was changed in the final EA.

41. GYC/AW comment: Does the EA give information about the total acres by forested habitat structural stage?

Response: The EA, section 3.2.2, displays the plant communities in the diversity unit in terms of vegetation composition and structural stages. These figures served as the comparative basis for determining compliance with Forest Plan standards relative to the diversity unit. All alternatives meet the minimum standards for structural stage requirements for the diversity components of horizontal diversity, grass/forb stage, and old growth. It should be noted that the amount of acres treated with this proposal when considered in the context of the diversity unit results in very small changes relative to percentages affected. The vegetative data used for calculating acreages and percentages and those figures that were used for the analysis are included in the project file.

42. GYC/AW comment: The EA failed to provide, by map or description, identification of the 5,000-acre security area, as provided for in situation 1 grizzly habitat.

Response: One adjacent secure area is located in the upper Reef Creek/Windy Mountain area located south and west of the project area, and another is located in the Table Mountain area north of the project area. A map is located in the project file.

43. GYC/AW comment: Given the relative importance of this area, and the additional loss of secure habitat that will be sustained by this project, it seems clear that this project would affect grizzly bears to a degree that the SNF should be consulting with the USFWS.

Response: The USFWS has been involved with this project from its initiation. On September 11, 2002, Darrell York from the USFWS, Forest biologists, and Doug McWhirter, wildlife biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish visited the Deadman Bench area. A biological evaluation process relative to proposed and listed species for this project was completed, and received concurrence from the USFWS. The Biological Evaluation and the concurrence letter are in the project files.

Secure habitat will not be lost. Figure 13 in the EA displays the results of our analysis relative to road density and secure habitat. All action alternatives result in a decrease in open road densities, a decrease in total road densities, and an increase for secure habitat.

44. GYC/AW comment: The EA is lacking population trend information for most species. The EA contains very little information about sensitive species and how they will be impacted by the proposed project.

Response: Although in-depth statistical surveys were not completed for many species in the area, the wildlife biologist for this project spent over 20 days in the field in the project area (during all seasons) and has familiarity with the area over the past 25 years. Observation, hair sampling, and snow tracking surveys have occurred recently, as noted in section 3.5.14 of the EA.

Forest population trends are included in the final EA for all indicator species as required by policy, and for all sensitive species where data exists to support a conclusion on trends. Sensitive species are analyzed in depth and the effects of the project on these species are described in detail in section 3.15.13 of the EA.

45. GYC/AW comment: Comments related to the Ellsbury EA. The proposed Deadman Bench project will further eliminate what little secure elk habitat that remains in the area.

Response: The Deadman Bench proposal is a different proposal than the Ellsbury proposal, and a new and more in-depth analysis has been completed. The intent of the Deadman proposal is to complement and reinforce natural processes (both structure and function) within the project area, based on principles of restoration ecology (section 1.1 of EA).

On September 11, 2002, two wildlife biologists from the Forest Service, Darrell York from the USFWS, and Doug McWhirter, Wyoming Game and Fish wildlife biologist, visited the Deadman Bench project area to evaluate wildlife concerns. One of the major considerations was maintaining elk habitat. As evidenced in the Wyoming Game and Fish comment letter, their concerns over elk security and migration corridors were alleviated.

46. GYC/AW comment: It is interesting to see that the Deadman Bench EA portrays the elk situation in the analysis area as being one of a lack of forage rather than a lack of thermal and security cover.

Response: The EA did not portray lack of forage as a concern for elk. The key resource concern for elk in the EA is related to secure cover and travelways, as pointed out in section 1.11.3. In addition, the discussion of effects on wildlife habitat in general (sections 3.5.1 to 3.5.12), and effects on elk specifically (section 3.5.12) clearly indicate that cover is one of our primary concerns.

47. GYC/AW comment: It is not known how this project will impact moose populations in the analysis area.

See section 3.5.12 for effects on moose populations. This section indicates that moose, an early succession species, will benefit from this proposal.

48. GYC/AW comment: Deadman, Reef, and Camp Creeks are Class 1 streams because they are tributaries to the Clarks Fork, a Class 1 Stream. Yet, the EA classifies them as Class 2 and 3. The Shoshone FS has again utilized faulty information in the EA.

Response: Based on the classification process used by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the Clarks Fork River, from the Forest boundary upstream to the Montana state line, is indeed a Class 1 water. However, this does not imply tributaries to the Clarks Fork are Class 1 as well.

Classifications described in section 3.6.1 of the EA are correct and can be confirmed by review of Wyoming Surface Water Quality Standards found at <http://deq.state.wy.us/wqd/index.asp?pageid=137>, or by contacting Mr. Bill DiRienzo, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, at 307.777.7081.

As discussed in section 3.6.3, logging in riparian and wetland areas will occur while the ground is frozen or covered with snow. Best Management Practice reviews of other timber sales on the Forest indicate winter logging of riparian and wetland areas provides adequate protection.

The discussion of environmental consequences in section 3.6.3 demonstrates effects on soil and water resources are minor to non-existent, which indicates compliance with Wyoming water quality standards. This compliance is reinforced with the cumulative effects discussion in section 3.11.5.

As discussed in previous responses, an extraordinary amount of time went in to the planning and design of this sale. This included considerable field time conducting ocular watershed health assessments and validating that proposed road and harvest unit locations are adequate to protect soil and water resources.

49. GYA/AW comment: It is nearly impossible to determine where the proposed logging units are without maps. It is not easy to determine if harvesting units are adjacent to Reef, Camp, or Deadman Creek.

Response: Treatment units are shown in Section 1.7, Figure 4, of the EA. It is not possible to display maps of the scale you desire in the EA. Large-scale maps and photos are available in the project file. Harvest units are located on the bench 100 yards from Reef Creek at one point, at least ¼ mile from Camp Creek. Deadman Creek is within harvest units.

50. GYA/AW comment: We are not comfortable taking your word that no adverse effects can be expected from working in the wetlands with harvest equipment.

Response: The predecisional EA was sent to State of Wyoming Office of Federal Land Policy. No concerns, comments, or issues were received from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality regarding the Clean Water Act and Wyoming Water Quality Rules, Regulations and Standards.

The intent of project design is to reduce disturbance to wetlands, riparian habitat, and the stream channel. This is accomplished by Best Management Practices (BMPs) to lessen sedimentation. Harvest in sensitive areas will be conducted when the ground is frozen or snow covered to protect the soil from disturbance. A major emphasis in project design is to promote the protection of soil and water resources. This will be accomplished by the use of BMPs in preparation and implementation of the timber sale contract. BMPs implementation and effectiveness rates on similar landforms have been found adequate to prevent sediment delivery to streams (reference BMP review Lodgepole II Timber Sale, 7/01 and SNF Annual Monitoring Report, 1998-2001).

51. CN comment: I do not find either alternative as described acceptable. I fully support the Aspen/Deciduous Species enhancement and the Wetland/Riparian and Interior Meadow enhancement as described under Alternative II. Some

judicious logging could be beneficial, but an output of 5.6 MMBF in an area already heavily burned by the fires of 1988 is ecologically unacceptable.

Response: The anticipated effects associated with implementation of the project are disclosed in the EA, Chapter 3, and were evaluated in the context of the 1988 fires. The basic data and relationships are sufficiently well established in the respective sciences. The project is similar to many past actions on the Forest. Based on the results of past actions and technical and professional insight and experience, there are no unique characteristics about the area that would indicate an unknown risk to the environment, unacceptable adverse impacts, or be ecologically unacceptable. An analysis of the no action alternative and alternatives was conducted in the EA, using the best information available and analysis of data by resource professionals in their respected disciplines. Throughout the process, public comments varied in their recommendations on ways to best manage resources within the project area. Public acceptance of the proposal also varied, with some strongly supporting the proposal and others intensely opposed to the proposal. However, the effects of the proposed alternatives on the various resources are not considered to be highly controversial by professionals, specialists, and scientists from associated fields of forestry, fire management, wildlife biology, hydrology, etc.

52. CN comment: I fully support the road closures under Alternative IV. Closure of all roads in the Project area would be an excellent action that could be taken by the Forest to enhance wildlife habitat values. There should be no logging that does not have direct wildlife habitat enhancement. I recommend that you combine elements of Alternative II and Alternative IV as described above.

Response: The decision maker will consider your input.

53. PCC comment: The depth of discussion of wildlife issues strikes us as more than necessary.

Response: Based on our commitment to implement successfully an ecologically sound and viable project using timber harvest as one of the tools, it was felt that this level of analysis and attention to detail was necessary. Based on past controversy and a multitude of conflicting opinions with vegetation management or timber harvest proposals in the area, it was obvious that a complete and thorough analysis would be required if the analysis were to withstand appeal and litigation. With the multitude of laws, regulations, policies, and legal precedents, it is necessary to describe and analyze in detail proposals such as the Deadman Bench project, especially for wildlife.

54. PCC comment: It almost seems as if the ID Team is afraid to use the terms “timber sale” and logging.”

Response: Timber sales or logging are legitimate tools for manipulating forested areas. Although it may appear to be a technicality relative to the choice of words, we feel that it is essential to differentiate between land management goals and objectives, and the tools used to accomplish those objectives.

55. PCC comment: We are opposed to any additional restrictions on motorized recreation, as well as closing any existing roads.

Response: (Also see the response to the GYC/AW comment on road closures and grizzly bears). The management of roads is a contentious issue. Some of the public comments we received called for closure of all roads. As this area is primarily within grizzly bear situation 1 habitat and is an important habitat for many other species, roads and wildlife are major considerations relative to this issue. In striving to balance this issue, we have to meet standards such as the no net road increase and management of security areas and acceptable road densities. We are also concerned about providing a balance of motorized and non-motorized opportunities as well as assuring quality of recreation experiences in national forest settings. Three miles of open road per square mile in this area is not compatible with this balance. To achieve this balance, we are proposing a reasonable mix of permanent closures, seasonal access, roads available for administrative use and power line maintenance, and roads available for future forest management needs.

56. PCC comment: In addition to improving the forest environment the proposal would harvest 5.6 million board feet of sawtimber from approximately 340 acres. That amounts to over 16.5 thousand board feet per acre. We don't know of many timber stands in the Camp Creek – Reef Creek area that contain that volume of green timber. Is an undetermined amount of the proposed 5.6 million board feet volume already dead and thus may not be suitable for sawtimber, particularly if it takes too long (appeals, Forest Service internal delays, etc.) to get the logging underway?

We urge you to move forward on the project as rapidly as possible to avoid additional tree mortality and the resulting loss in timber value.

Response: The intent was not to indicate that there was that amount of green sawtimber-sized products. A more appropriate choice of words to indicate available products would have been “wood products of sawtimber size.” There are tremendous amounts of gross volume in this area. The volumes shown are attributable to the fact that this proposal reflects the widespread tree mortality caused by insects and a large salvage component. With the tree mortality, loss of diversity, and deteriorating condition of trees for merchantable value in the project area, we are striving for project implementation as quickly as possible (spring or summer of 2003).

57. PCC comment: What steps will be taken to protect the aspen regeneration from elk?

Response: Elk damage to aspen sprouts is a problem in many areas of the west; however, based on past aspen regeneration projects on the Forest, we have not found overgrazing of aspen by wildlife to be a significant problem on the North Zone of the Forest.

58. PCC comment: We note that this is a predecisional document. The District Ranger apparently intends to wait until he reviews comments on this document before he decides whether to do an EIS or to issue a Decision Notice with a Finding of No Significant Impact. We support the Proposed Action subject to our comments above. We look forward to having the opportunity to review the comment letters submitted to the Forest Service regarding the project EA.

Response: Releasing a predecisional EA and considering public comments are a procedural requirement. Per NEPA and Forest Service policy requirements, the Forest Service released the predecisional EA for a 30-day public comment period. Comments are reviewed and responded to and any necessary changes to the EA made before a decision is documented in a Decision Notice with a Finding of No Significant Impact. The Decision Notice provides the rationale for the decision made by the Deciding Official. A forty-five day appeal period for the decision is also required.

59. WGFD comment: Deadman Creek is a tributary of the Clarks Fork River. We are concerned with increasing sediment into the Clarks Fork, a stream of regional importance with 100 to 500 pounds/mile of trout production.

Response: Sediment was discussed in section 3.6.3 of the EA. Proposed roadwork and log landings do not carry a substantial risk of new sediment delivery to the streams because the design involves disconnecting these disturbances from streams and wetlands through the use of natural grade sags or constructed drainage that will divert sediment-laden runoff to buffer strips. In addition, current impacts from the existing FSR 144 low water crossing (unarmored ford) through Deadman Creek would continue to be a concern under Alternative I. Implementation of any of the action alternatives would resolve the concern because this crossing would be armored.

Appendix B of the EA contains photos of existing conditions for roads and access management to illustrate the extent of the erosion and sedimentation problem. These types of unacceptable road conditions contributing to sedimentation will be addressed in project implementation. The stream channel and bed/bank stability discussion is found in section 3.6.3 of the EA. Timber sale contract language does not allow heavy machinery use near stream channels. Marking guidelines require that trees offering bank stability not be removed for harvest. Thus, no negative effects on bed and bank stability are expected.

60. SHPO comment: Management of cultural resources on USDA Forest Service projects is conducted in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Advisory Council regulations 36 CFR Part 800. These regulations call for survey, evaluation, and protection of significant historic and archeological sites prior to any disturbance.

Response: All the above will be followed to comply with procedures established in the regulations. The proposal meets laws for protection of heritage resources. A letter from SHPO (#1196TPT033) is located in the project file. As described in the EA, section 3.8, heritage resources will not be affected by the proposed activities.

61. SEO comment: A review of our records shows that there are water rights located in the vicinity of the Deadman Bench Vegetation Treatment Proposal. The SEO recommends the Forest Service consider the possibility that road

closures may hamper a water right holder's ability to manage irrigation, and that the Forest Service confer with land owners in the area to determine if there may be inconveniences, and try to coordinate road closures, etc. with land owners.

Response: Since there is administrative use and authorized use for permit holders, etc. the Forest will be able to coordinate and accommodate access needs.

Comments from USDI United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Comments from Wyoming Outdoor Council (WOC)

Letters from USFWS and WOC were received after the comment deadline. Those comments were not responded to here, though the IDT and decision maker did review them. WOC's comments were essentially the same as the Greater Yellowstone Coalition's.