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NEVADA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

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USDA – Forest Service
Content Analysis Enterprise Team
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Dear Sirs:

We are writing today to provide Nevada Farm Bureau comments to the proposed policy of a "Unified Federal Policy For Ensuring a Watershed Approach to Federal Land and Resource Management."

Nevada, a state dominated with 87 percent federally managed lands, will likely fit into the qualifying "priority watersheds" especially based on the factors of "percentage of the watershed under federal management." Because of this likelihood we are extremely interested and concerned with the development of on-the-ground implementation steps for the proposed policy.

Based on the February 22nd Federal Register Notice and the question/answer format the preceded the actual proposed policy, the opportunity for public input was requested for these questions. We will attempt to follow this format in expressing our input with additional comments to follow.

- **Whether this proposed policy takes the right approach to coordinating Federal land and resource management activities in a watershed;**

We support the use of a consistent and scientific approach, as part of the guiding principles that were outlined in the policy. At the same time we want to express our belief that the emphasis of this policy must take place within the context of on-going multiple use management activities.

We are seriously concerned that with this increased emphasis on "managing watersheds", federal land management agencies will use their watershed management objectives to limit and restrict multiple use activities, such as livestock grazing. We are worried that "Best Management Practices", intended as tools for sound resource management will become regulatory hammers used as excuses for continued reductions in livestock grazing and other multiple use activities.

The proposed policy alludes to federal land managers playing a larger role in BMP's for the watersheds involved in this process. What jurisdiction do these land managers have in the establishment of BMP's? Also, will this establishment take the form of mandated BMP's?

We call attention to the concepts of BMP's being voluntary management tools used to address specific concerns in an attempt to address non-point source pollution. From what we read in the proposed policy, "voluntary" does not appear to be a concept that is under consideration. Our experience of working with federal agencies suggest that BMP's will become prescriptive actions, implemented with full force and effect.

The approach, proposed in the policy builds on the biased mind-set of the Clean Water Action Plan, particularly when it relates to "identify specific watersheds in which to focus our budgetary and other resources and accelerate improvements in water quality and watershed condition."

The Unified Watershed Assessment, requested of States and Tribes, by the Clean Water Action Plan asked for "identifying all watersheds as being in one of four categories:

1. Not meeting, or facing an imminent threat of not meeting, clean water or other natural resource goals;
2. Meeting goals but needing action to sustain water quality;
3. Having pristine/sensitive aquatic system conditions on Federal, State, or Tribal lands; or
4. Needing more information to assess watershed condition.

This assessment did not provide for an option of classifying a watershed as meeting goals and needing no action – everything is fine the way it is. As a result, the end outcome of the assessment is slanted to taking action, whether science and management consistency requires a need to fix things or not.

A missing principle, of the six outlined in the proposed policy, is an over-riding one that directs action to address watershed concerns when identified problems require attention. This attention to watershed needs will greatly increase the return on investment of budget and other resources.

The stated intentions to expand collaborative opportunities fall short of what we expect for effective resource management. Emphasis is placed on government-to-government collaboration with public participation (including private property owners) treated only as a passing thought.

Another aspect worthy of note is the unwarranted duplication of the proposed policy.

As part of Rangeland Reform Regulations, water quality concerns were addressed in the required Standards and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing on public lands. Similar requirements are part of Forest Service managed land Standards.

Adding another level of Watershed Management requirements, stemming from adoption and implementation of the proposed policy will either reduce the effectiveness of existing programs or complicate authority on which set of agency mandates take priority.

The policy also states the idea that the federal land management agencies will "help the States and Tribes develop science-based TMDL's. This process is outside the jurisdiction of federal land management agencies and rightfully belongs, by law, with state officials.

In summarizing our thoughts on whether this proposed policy takes the right approach, we would strongly suggest that the policy is unnecessary and should not be pursued. Use of current management approaches with an emphasis on working within existing programs and authorities (including Resource Advisory Councils) would better serve the long-range success in achieving improved watershed resources through cost-effective measures.

- **Whether the content of the proposed policy is effective and appropriate;**

As we have indicated in our previous comments, we do not believe the proposed policy is effective or appropriate. If anything, the content suggest federal agencies engaging in activities which are carried out more for the sake of expanded authority than improved water quality or watershed health.

- **How restoration and protection activities on Federal lands can best be coordinated with other activities in high priority watersheds identified by States and Tribes or other regionally applicable programs;**

The best approach to effective watershed management would be establishment of collaborative working groups at the local level with federal land managers participating as equals to address specific concerns that need attention in the watershed. More government and command/control approaches, which lie at the heart of the proposed policy, will not achieve the long-range goals stated as desired outcomes.

The emphasis on "protection" causes further concern on our part. Conservation efforts to improve natural resource conditions do not automatically imply "protection" or non-use of resources. Yet the concentration on this approach raises the question of whether (or what type of) scientific approaches will be used to manage watersheds under this proposed policy.

- **What the best way is to develop partnerships with others when the Federal agencies begin implementation of this policy;**

As we indicated in the last comment area, we believe effective partnerships can best be established at the local level, working through true collaborative endeavors with federal agency representatives participating as equals in addressing resource issues and accomplishing shared objectives.

By virtue of our experiences and thoughts, we don't believe it is in the best interest of achieving the stated goals, implementing the proposed policy.

- **What are the most effective processes that would ensure a meaningful Tribal consultation process during the public comment period and during the implementation of the policy; and**

We are not able to share any input on this question, although <u>we repeat our contention that the proposed policy should not be implemented.</u>

- **What criteria should be considered in selecting watersheds for the special protection designation.**

We believe that watershed management should be carried out in a balanced fashion with "special protection" not perceived to be a natural pre-determined outcome by any federal agency.

Criteria for determining the most effective management approach and activities should be established by local collaborative working groups involving interested stakeholders (including federal agency representatives who are equal participants in the process).

Summary:

We hope that from our comments you will recognize that we are strongly opposed to the direction and tone of the proposed policy.

We believe a very thoughtful consideration should be given to what current law provides and who is rightfully responsible. This policy should not be used as the means to expand federal agency control and mandates into areas of authority, which do not belong in the jurisdictions of those this policy is directed at.

We hope that our input will be considered and the entire approach will be redirected to locally based, collaborative efforts, which engage and empower sincerely committed stakeholders to evaluate needs of respective watersheds. Based on conditions and resource requirements of the local watershed we believe conservation programs should be implemented, which enhance resource conditions in a balanced fashion.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the proposed policy.

Sincerely,

Doug Busselman

Doug Busselman,
Executive Vice President