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Category: Wildlife

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**Comment:**

Without exception, recreational OHV use is cited as having adverse affects on wildlife and adjoining habitat. Habitat fragmentation and animal stress seem to lead the discussion. Lets examine impacts on wildlife through OHV use within the data you have furnished in the EIS and accompanying appendices. Appendix E; sec. E1.4 Big Game Populations (plan area) Pronghorn Herd Unit Populations 10 of 12 herd units display stable to increasing population trends. Mule Deer Herd Unit Populations 11 of 15 herd units display stable to increasing population trends. Whitetail Deer Herd Unit Populations 3 of 3 herd units increasing. Elk Herd Unit Populations 10 of 10 herd units display stable to increasing population trends. What management challenges do these herd units share? The answer is all of them, regardless if a big game unit is decreasing, stable or exploding, as is the case with elk herds. A typical comparison would include ATV recreation with off road travel violations contributing to the decreasing Mule deer trends in the Upper Powder River and to the increasing Elk populations in the Muddy Mountain area. Which is it? We are over simplifying the ATV impact because the EIS is exaggerating the impact. ATV recreation has a negligible impact to Big Game habitat in comparison to drought, grazing and development. We point this out to remind analysts that these trends are occurring using current management strategies reflected in Alternative A (no action). Whichever new alternative is adopted should result in an improved condition for the wildlife resource. Section E1.6: Greater Sage Grouse The identification of current sage grouse leks, habitat and accompanying buffer zones, combined with future discoveries may end most recreation activities during late spring and early summer. In addition these areas encompass large blocks of accessible public lands typically sought by OHV recreation use. This buffer zone is a major factor in our reluctance to endorse Alternative E and explains our complete opposition to Alternative B. Does designating Bates Hole as a SMA just restrict recreation activities? Are you going to prohibit surface disturbing activities within the 2 mile buffer zone just for recreation until mid-July and exempt agricultural or industrial activities? That is how it appears. Furthermore, much of this area consists of particularly rugged terrain. The type that is popular for OHV recreation. A review of the map associated with Alternative E places a large majority of this accessible terrain under these restrictions. Most of what remains is private, fragmented, developed and un-inspiring. Any designation of Bates Hole as a SMA should require a comprehensive designated trail system (not road system) for enjoying the resources in the area. Thank you.