

Testimony of Russell Boardman
Shoshone Conservation District Supervisor
Frannie, Wyoming
April 25, 2013

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Napolitano, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Russ Boardman, an elected Conservation District Supervisor from the Shoshone Conservation District in Northwest Wyoming. I am also a former educator and an agriculture producer, raising cattle and hay in one of the driest places in the United States. I live in Frannie, Wyoming; population 157, located two miles south of the Montana Border. Wyoming's Conservation Districts are local units of government formed under Wyoming state statute (*see WYO.STAT.11-16-101 et. seq.*). There are 34 local conservation districts in the state and each district is governed by 5 elected officials. Our statutory responsibilities include the stabilization of the agriculture industry, protection of natural resources including but not limited to data and information, conservation of soil and water resources, control and prevention of soil erosion, flood prevention or the conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water within the district utilizing a watershed approach.

I am pleased to be here today to share with you the on-the-ground watershed work being implemented in our local districts and the potential implications a Yellowstone River "National Blueway" designation may have on our efforts. We do not believe the Blueways designation is necessary as we have locally driven watershed efforts in place to address multiple resource issues and benefits.

I reside within the Big Horn Basin and our sub-watershed is the Shoshone River watershed. These fall within the Yellowstone River watershed. The Shoshone River watershed consists of 950,262 acres and makes up 2.15% of the Yellowstone River watershed. The portion of the Yellowstone River Watershed that falls within the borders of the state of Wyoming consists of 21,676,484.48 million acres, which equates to 49 % of the Yellowstone River watershed being within the state of Wyoming. The entire Yellowstone River watershed is over 44 million acres.

The landownership in the Shoshone River watershed consists of 46% private, 39% BLM, 5% State, 9 % Bureau of Reclamation and other ownership makes up the last 1%

For perspective, the District of Columbia lies within the Potomac watershed as you are aware; it consists of a little over 10 million acres. One could fit four Potomac Watersheds in the Yellowstone River watershed.

Also, for a frame of reference on the importance of water in our area, the Big Horn River watershed receives 6-10 inches on average of annual precipitation. In comparison, the Potomac receives 30-60 inches. My area of the Big Horn Basin is actually drier than Death Valley, receiving only 5 inches of precipitation a year. As you can imagine, there really isn't anything more important than our water resources. It is the lifeblood of our communities.

Our local conservation district, along with the 33 other districts in Wyoming have taken our leadership roles and responsibilities for local natural resource conservation efforts very seriously, especially as it pertains to watershed restoration and protection. Our constituents depend on good quality water for drinking water, recreation and agricultural production. When the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality identified segments of 6 waterbodies as impaired, out of approximately 250 waterbodies within our district, due to elevated E. coli in 2000 and 2002, our district immediately convened local stakeholders and gathered input on the issues and based on their direction and input we initiated a local watershed planning and implementation effort. Our district monitored the water quality on all 6 of the waterbodies, in 2006 completed a watershed implementation plan which included the implementation of best management practices.

Our district and other districts across the state are actively working on watershed improvement projects. As of this past fall we have invested, \$1.112 million dollars of funding provided by private, state and federal sources, into watershed restoration work. We work closely with our state and federal partners. From late 2009 until today, we have partnered with the local NRCS to develop and implement 40 separate cooperative projects in our district. Projects implemented include, the installation of 32,089 ft. of gated pipe, 13 acres of brush management, two forage harvest management plans were developed on 638 acres to manage vegetation cover on irrigated hay lands, 39 acres of irrigation land leveling, 2,333 acres were affected by the installation of irrigation efficiency and water management practices to promote water conservation and reduce nonpoint source pollution, along with 5,218 ft. of fencing to promote better grazing management in adjacent uplands. 25,471 ft. of pipeline and 2,816 of concrete ditch lining were installed, 5,200 acres of prescribed grazing were managed, and 1 pumping plant and 24 water control structures were installed. We are also focused on septic rehabilitation projects. Since 2004, the district has completed 26 septic rehabilitation projects and closed 6,236 feet of open drain. These efforts have improved water efficiencies and working towards improved water quality.

We are active in other aspects of water quality management. We are active members of a technical steering committee guiding the development of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) as required by the Clean Water Act. As we have also participated, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, as a “cooperating agency” in the DOI Bureau of Land Management’s Resource Management Plan processes for the Big Horn RMP, the USDA Forest Service Forest planning processes for both the Shoshone and Big Horn National Forests.

We are involved in all of these efforts for two primary reasons. We are committed and concerned with the health and quality of our natural resources with our communities. We depend upon them for our livelihoods and our quality of life. Secondly, there are federal laws and state laws that require these processes and we have deemed it a priority to participate.

We understand that there is some consideration being given to nominating the Yellowstone River Watershed as a “National Blueway,” designation, created through a Secretarial Order. Until our counterparts in Montana thankfully contacted us to seek our input and thoughts, I and our local conservation district were unaware that such a designation existed. After we were asked for our input, we researched this designation. I will share with you some concerns we have with this process.

First, the Secretarial Order does not require the federal government to notify the public or allow them to comment on proposed designations. This is disturbing to say the least. All of the efforts we have initiated, or are involved in related to water resource management have a public notice and input process. It is unfathomable to me that I and my neighbor's properties and our watershed could be federally "designated" without any formal opportunity for input.

In a May 24, 2012 press release issued by the Department of Interior, the statement is made that the "[e]stablishment of a National Blueways System will help coordinate federal, state, and local partners to promote best practices, share information and resources, and encourage active and collaborative stewardship of rivers and their watersheds across the country."

(<http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/AMERICAS-GREAT-OUTDOORS-RIVERS-Secretary-Salazar-Creates-National-Blueways-System-Designates-Connecticut-River-and-Its-Watershed-as-First-National-Blueway.cfm>)

I would ask how a designation that requires no public notice, no comment opportunity and was created without coordination or consultation with affected landowners, local governments or State's, could result in increased coordination. As explained above, our district and all others in Wyoming are already coordinating with private, state and local entities and we are already promoting best practices, and we are already sharing information and resources. We fail to see how a Blueways designation will enhance this. In fact, we are concerned in Wyoming that this designation will hamper these efforts by creating fear, confusion and controversy. Real conservation occurs at the grassroots level. If there is a commitment to grassroots conservation then local efforts like the ones implemented by our conservation district should be supported, rather than trumped by a Secretarial edict.

The press release goes on to explain that the national "Blueways designation" is part of the Great Outdoor Initiative and is to "establish a community-driven conservation and recreation agenda". We aren't sure what that means, but know from past experience that **federal designations** does not correlate to **"community-driven conservation"**. Instead they correlate with a top-down Washington directive with little to no input from those affected on the ground. Our conservation district on the other hand practices "community-driven conservation" everyday. We know what it looks like and this isn't it.

Lastly, as a local government we have spent a tremendous amount of time and energy participating in federal land management processes. We partner with the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service to develop their long term management plans. These plans are intended to provide for the multiple uses of our resources. Contrary to multiple-use management, this designation appears to focus solely on recreation uses. We share concern for recreation, but we are also concerned about municipal water supplies, agriculture, hydropower and the many uses of our water resources important to sustain our communities. My concern is if this designation appears to focus primarily on recreation.

Secretarial edicts such as this do nothing but interfere and detract from thoughtful, informed processes that result in quality resource management. We are pleased to see that the Secretary has communicated to Wyoming's Congressional Delegation that no designation would occur affecting Wyoming, without the support of our state because frankly, I don't see how we can call

a federal designation of over 44 million acres without any public notice or input process
“community-driven conservation.”

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.