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News Release

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Thunder Basin National Grassland Public Workshop Set for April 12 in Newcastle, Second Cooperative Working Group Meeting is April 13

(DOUGLAS, Wyo.) April 5, 2017 – The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) will host two collaborative meetings next week in Newcastle, Wyo. The first will be a public learning workshop on Wed., April 12, from 1-4 p.m. at the Weston County Senior Center. Second will be a cooperative working group meeting on Thurs., April 13, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., also at the Weston County Senior Center.

Both events will primarily focus on prairie dog colony management on the Thunder Basin National Grassland (TBNG), and both will be facilitated by the University of Wyoming Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources. Both are open to the public, however, only government representatives may participate in the working group on Thursday, as is detailed below.

The meetings are part of a USFS effort which encourages open, inclusive, transparent, and consistent communications with all interested parties, specifically neighbors to and users of USFS-managed lands. Discussions will use the Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan, as well as associated plans and strategies as guiding documents.

Planned agenda topics for the public session on April 12 include an overview of the Douglas Ranger District, review of recent prairie dog management actions, discussion about last year's learning series and this year's first working group meeting, as well as an active work session surrounding changes to prairie dog colony management.

USFS staff will be present to interact and listen, and interested public who have ties to the National Grassland or somehow utilize these public lands are encouraged to attend. The purpose of these public learning sessions is to provide substantive and place-based information to the U.S. Forest Service, as well as the cooperative working group.

Two additional public learning sessions are planned for August and December of 2017. These public engagement sessions will mirror three workshops held in 2016.

The land management and resource cooperative working group meeting on April 13 will be the second of six scheduled gatherings for 2017. In order to meet Federal guidelines regarding cooperative working group meetings, only local, state, Federal, and tribal government representatives may participate in this particular group. These other government agencies have shared responsibility and interest in the Thunder Basin National Grassland. The meeting is open to the public and anyone interested is encouraged to attend and observe the dialogue.

It is anticipated that in each meeting the cooperative working group will primarily share information, discuss options, and problem solve. The agenda for the second meeting will focus on Forest Service information sharing, charter formation and the legal standing of the group, Prairie Dog Strategy and Grassland Plan discussion, as well as future treatment locations and methods.

The Forest Service hopes that eventually both the cooperative working group meetings and the public events can discuss a wide array of topics pertaining to the TBNG.

Both outreach efforts by the USFS are in response to requests from state and local governments, as well as a summary report from last year's public engagement sessions, for the agency to establish multiple collaborative venues for community-based information sharing.

Online information on Thunder Basin Prairie Dog Colony Management by the U.S. Forest Service can be found here, fs.usda.gov/goto/MBRTB/PrairieDogs. Online information from the Ruckelshaus Institute on Thunder Basin Collaboration can be found here, uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/collaborative-solutions/thunder-basin/.

The Douglas Ranger District administers the Thunder Basin National Grassland.

For more information about management of the Thunder Basin National Grassland, call (307) 358-4690 or stop by 2250 East Richards Street in Douglas between 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Mon.-Fri.

The University of Wyoming Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources has a history of assisting agencies with land and resource management issues. Their collaborative solutions program supports natural resource stakeholders, policy makers, and managers in making decisions about the future.

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