

Larsen Ranch Company

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Wyoming Environmental Quality Council
122 West 25th Street
Herschler Building, Room 1714
Cheyenne, WY 82002

RE: Proposed Revisions to Wyoming Water Quality Rules and Regulations Chapter 2, Appendix H

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My family owns and operates a commercial cow/calf operation near Meeteetse. I am the fourth generation of my family to devote my life to cattle ranching. Larsen Ranch is situated primarily in Park County, but also extends into Hot Springs County. We currently employ 5 full-time people, pay a significant amount of money in property taxes, and contribute in multiple ways to our local economy. The cattle we produce are our sole source of income.

Larsen Ranch has been blessed with produced water discharged from a traditional oil and gas facility for more than forty years. This water has been invaluable to us. The discharge water flows in a streambed that would normally only run water for a few days during spring runoff and during cloudbursts. The discharge water allows us to utilize forage that would otherwise be unavailable due to lack of water. This pasture is a critical part of our range management plan. We are able to use it in the winter due to the running water; we use it for a couple of weeks in the early summer as a holding pasture when we are moving cattle to high mountain pastures for summer grazing; and we use it for a couple of weeks in the fall as a holding pasture while gathering and sorting cattle before shipping. None of these uses would be possible without the discharge water. Our cattle are healthy and we have no unusual sickness or death loss associated with the discharge water. This discharge water eventually flows into Gooseberry Creek, where Larsen Ranch continues to benefit from this water. As it flows through Larsen Ranch property, Gooseberry Creek is a perennial stream during years of normal precipitation. However, under the severe drought conditions we have been experiencing, Gooseberry Creek went dry about June 20, 2006 and remained dry until about October 20, 2006. The only water in Gooseberry Creek was the discharge water, which allowed livestock and wildlife to drink for a two mile stretch. The discharge water also benefits Larsen Ranch through irrigation. Because of the addition of the discharge water to Gooseberry Creek, we are able to irrigate our hay meadows more often and more thoroughly. Our water right is not very early, and without the additional water provided by the discharge, most years we would not be able to irrigate at all. The discharge water has also proven beneficial in fighting wildfires. In August 2001, lightning sparked a wildfire that raged out of control for several days and burned up several thousand acres. The helicopters that were used to make aerial water drops were able to fill their buckets in the beaver ponds fed by the discharge water.

The discharge water is extremely beneficial to a wide variety of wildlife. Deer, elk, antelope, moose, coyotes, wolves, bobcats, mountain lions, weasels, beaver, prairie dogs, eagles, ducks, sage chickens, suckers, and other aquatic life benefit from the discharge water. Gooseberry Creek has a very healthy riparian habitat due to the discharge water. The creek bottom has an abundance of desirable trees and shrubs, such as cottonwood, birch, willow, and silver leaf. This healthy riparian habitat is beneficial to the wildlife and livestock, which are able to use it as shelter and as a food source.

I am gravely concerned over the proposed changes to the existing Chapter 2, Appendix H rules. The proposed reduction of the effluent limits found in the existing DEQ standards would effectively halt the discharge of any produced water. This would severely hinder the operation of Larsen Ranch. We would suffer an immediate drop in weaning weights on our calves due to the increased distances they would have to travel to water. We would be limited in our ability to utilize several of our pastures and certainly would put an end to any irrigated meadows. It would be very difficult to replace the discharge water in a cost effective manner. Well drilling is extremely expensive and there is no realistic way to haul or pipe water from another location. The effects on the wildlife and the riparian habitat would be devastating, as well. In the event that we were unable to continue our ranching operations due to lack of water and we were forced to sell out, the land values would be considerably less.

Before making the proposed changes to the rules that would negatively impact many ranches and large numbers of wildlife, I request that you demand scientific data and carefully consider all of the options. If there are legitimate problems with a few landowners, perhaps those situations should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis rather than implementing comprehensive changes that will be detrimental to many.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kelly A. Graham". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Kelly A. Graham

Attachment – Photos (2 pages)



A duck in the discharge water approximately 3/4 mile downstream from the discharge point. 8/18/06



The discharge water at the point where it enters Gooseberry Creek. 8/18/06



Gooseberry Creek 1/2 mile above where the discharge water enters Gooseberry Creek. 8/18/06
(dry)



Beaver ponds 1/4 mile downstream from where discharge water enters Gooseberry Creek. 8/18/06