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Sheep Station Lawsuit Settled

A settlement to resolve a lawsuit filed last summer was reached between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and two anti-livestock groups. The settlement requires the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station (USSES) to analyze the environmental effects of sheep grazing under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the impacts of the sheep grazing on threatened and endangered species.

"The American Sheep Industry Association's (ASI) decision to support the USDA by intervening in the litigation was very well received by officials and positively impacted the settlement," stated Peter Orwick, executive director for ASI.

"This case was settled and dismissed because the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) does not have a clear exemption from NEPA for federal research," continued Orwick. "The significance of this lawsuit is what applicability NEPA has to federal research. The sheep station is the only range sheep experiment station in the United States

"This case sets a precedent with anti-livestock groups attacking agriculture research. This unit is just one of more than a 100 ARS research farms and ranches across the country.

"American agriculture is the most efficient and advanced food production system in the world, which is largely due to agriculture research. Restricting field research on food production, animal diseases and breeding management ought to be a concern to consumers and food suppliers as well as agriculture producers," concluded Orwick.

NEPA requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions.

The USSES has 48,000 acres managed by the agriculture department and is located about 45 miles west of Yellowstone National Park near the town of Dubois, Idaho. The station manages an additional scattered 54,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service land and Bureau of Land Management land, some in southwestern Montana.

Under the settlement agreement, the environmental analysis is required to be completed by Nov. 28, 2008.