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Taylor Ranch Wilderness Research Station
Air Star Route
Cascade, Idaho 83611
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Dean John Hendee
College of Forestry, Wildlife, and Range
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University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83843

Dear Dr. Hendee:

Jim and I were pleased that you and Fran could visit Taylor Ranch. I am glad we had the opportunity to show you the facilities and discuss past and current research projects at Taylor Ranch. We look forward to developing a long term research program with you and seeking financial support for this plan.

Taylor Ranch Wilderness Research Station has tremendous potential for wilderness related research and the study of unaltered ecosystems, within the 2.3 million acre Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. Taylor Ranch is the ~~only~~ research station operated by a university within wilderness in the continental United States. The facility itself provides logistical support for researchers, including fully furnished log cabins and a recently remodeled field laboratory, complete with plant and animal reference collections, as well as a private airstrip for year round access or aerial radio tracking, and horses and camp gear for spike camps in remote areas. Several research proposals are currently being prepared for research at Taylor Ranch. The Wilderness Research Center and the College of Forestry will be testing a selection of ecological indicators to develop a program to assess natural and human related conditions in wilderness. A long term monitoring program for Taylor Ranch will be established in conjunction with this project. Professional expertise and leadership for expanding Taylor Ranch research capabilities are already existent in the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences. Funding is the major obstacle for Taylor Ranch Wilderness Research Station in achieving its potential as a nationally renowned wilderness research station.

Foundations and potential research sponsors are not aware of Taylor Ranch. If these groups knew about the unique research opportunities, particularly in wildlife research, I am certain that Taylor Ranch could get funding for many of the projects that should be done here. The indigenous population of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep provides a prime research opportunity.

The bighorn sheep, as well as mule deer and elk winter at Taylor Ranch and in adjacent wilderness. I am getting ready for my second field season this winter. As I mentioned, for my masters thesis in wildlife resources I observe bighorn sheep, elk, and mule deer behavior and locations from a vantage point at Taylor Ranch. I hope to determine if and how these species affect each other's distribution and behavior during winter. With a greater level of funding for radio instrumenting and areial monitoring much more information could be obtained in a short period of time about habitat requirements, behavior, and migration throughout the year. During fall rutting rams can be observed, and heard from the cabins. Last Thanksgiving we counted 69 sheep across Big Creek from Taylor Ranch, including 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ -curl to full curl rams displaying and head butting 30 meters from us! Another wildlife study Jim and I feel is a top priority is a bull elk project to assess habitat use in an unaltered environment by two wintering bull elk herds 2 and 12 miles from Taylor Ranch. Other large mammals in the area which could be studied include moose, white tailed deer, mountain goats, black bears, mountain lions, bobcats, lynx, coyotes, red fox, and a small population of wolves. Dr. Maurice Hornocker has been studying mountain lions from Taylor Ranch for hearily two decades. He is presently involved in two projects at Taylor Ranch, one on mountain lions and one on bobcats. Several research projects have been dome from Taylor Ranch on nongame species, including songbirds, owls, and rattlesnakes. Other nongame species of interest are river otters, wolverines, and boreal owls. The pristine plant communities of the wilderness serve as an ideal outdoor laboratory for vegetation studies and comparisons with managed forest and range lands. Only a few cursory investigations have been done on plant community classifications and evaluation of range conditions. A major need is assessment and long term monitoring of vegetation types and big game range conditions. Taylor Ranch is located on Big Creek, a tributary to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Big Creek provides spawning habitat for salmon and steelhead and is also a blue ribbon native cutthroat fishery. Long term water and fisheries research is necessary for understanding natural conditions and monitoring irregular occurrances of water quality degradation due to unstable soils and mining accidents within the Big Creek watershed. Most of these research topics can only be studied in wilderness. The Taylor Ranch Wilderness Research Station provides the logistical support and close proximity to study areas that would otherwise be unavailable in other wilderness locations.

At Taylor Ranch there is a special feeling of being part of the old "backcountry". I think it is important for potential financial backers to visit our research facility and experience the Taylor Ranch atmosphere. Unlike most field stations, Taylor Ranch provides good quality facilities while retaining its backcountry character - like the historic log buildings built by Cougar Dave Lewis, still without electricity, and being a

working ranch where hay for horses and mules is put up by a mule team, and where local hunting outfitters stop in to visit. Being 21 miles from the nearest neighbor and 36 miles from the nearest road, Taylor Ranch provides a remote setting for researchers to concentrate on their research problem. Besides providing access to the wilderness for research, Taylor Ranch also blends into the backcountry environment.

Jim and I are enthusiastic about the plan for increased research at Taylor Ranch. We are pleased that you have a special interest in developing the potential of Taylor Ranch as a wilderness research field station. There are plenty of research ideas being discussed in the College of Forestry and at Taylor Ranch; what is needed now is a financial base to make ideas reality. We invite you to come into the wilderness again soon, and bring along someone who may be interested in providing funding for research projects. We can show them the facilities, describe ongoing projects, and view the scenery! We are looking forward to working with you to make Taylor Ranch Wilderness Research Station a model research facility.

Sincerely,

Holly Akenson

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