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October 12, 2009

North Dakota Farm Bureau Statement

To the Northern Plains National Heritage Area Board of Directors

Regarding the management plan for the NPNHA

Thank you for the opportunity to express our comments and concerns regarding the Northern Plains Heritage Area Management Plan. We hope that the board of directors will carefully consider all comments provided by individual landowners and interested parties. North Dakota Farm Bureau has policy opposing National Heritage Areas in our state. We were extremely disappointed that the Northern Plains National Heritage Area (NPNHA) was included in the Omnibus Land Management bill passed March 30, 2009.

We, as landowners and North Dakota citizens, are now burdened with making sure the management plan does not adversely affect the property rights of those owners whose land is within the boundaries of the NPNHA. The boundaries, according to the law, are within the five county region of McLean, Mercer, Oliver, Burleigh and Morton counties.

We are aware that private land within those boundaries is not considered part of the NPNHA unless the landowner specifically requests the land be included. We applaud Senator Dorgan for getting that amendment attached to the Interior Department appropriation bill. We were pleased when the Senate passed the amendment and are confident the House will concur.

But our work does not stop there. A carefully crafted management plan that addresses the needs and concerns of landowners must be developed. Private land that is adjacent to properties included in the NPNHA must not be burdened in any way by the management plan. Language must be included in the management plan that specifically prohibits any interference with private land development, usage of that land or restriction on the 'viewshed' by the NPNHA. If the NPNHA wishes to encumber private land in any way, they must negotiate a fair and equitable compensation contract with the landowner. The contract needs to have a time limit not to exceed ten years.

If a landowner chooses to opt land into the NPNHA, a provision must be included in that document to allow the landowner to remove the land from the NPNHA solely at his or her discretion.

Provisions must be included in the management plan that specifically prohibits any property included in the NPNHA ever being designated as a National Park or part of the National Park system. National Parks are well known for placing restrictions on adjacent private property.

The development of the management plan must be truly transparent and must reflect the wishes of the people. We insist that public input meetings be held in each of the five counties mentioned earlier. Once the input has been received and compiled, we request a copy of all comments be made available at no cost to anyone interested. Only then can development of the management plan begin.

Once the plan has been drafted and public input has been included, a second round of meetings will be necessary to ensure public buy-in. The draft may have to be amended several times before it meets the needs of the public and landowners within the designated area. This may seem cumbersome, but that is the reason that three years have been given for the completion of the management plan.

Thank you again for the opportunity to voice our concerns. We look forward to future public meetings as the process moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Aasmundstad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "A" at the end.

Eric Aasmundstad, President

North Dakota Farm Bureau