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RE SMITH
Director

STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE

2302 Fruitvale Blvd., Yakima, WA 98902 • Tel (509) 575-2740

May 15, 1992

Doug Hildebrand
U.S. Department of Energy
325 Jadwin Av.
Federal Building
Richland, WA 99352



Dear Doug:

Subject: McGee Ranch

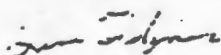
As I am sure you are aware the amount of native shrub steppe vegetation in Washington is dwindling rapidly. The Hanford Reservation and the Yakima Training Center (YTC) are the two largest tracts of native shrub steppe remaining in Washington. The property, which connects these two installations, runs along the Columbia River west of highway 240 and north of highway 24. It is commonly called McGee Ranch.

Corridors, such as the one between Hanford and the YTC, allow wildlife to move between larger sections of habitat. Benefits, such as immigration of wildlife to new areas and increased genetic diversity of a population, ultimately add strength to an ecosystem. In addition, habitat corridors may allow for proliferation of a species which would be unable to survive in isolated tracts.

I was greatly concerned when I learned of the planned soil removal from the McGee Ranch area. This habitat corridor may be vital to the protection of some species. For example the sage grouse, a state and federal candidate for threatened or endangered status is known to utilize the McGee Ranch area. As habitats on the YTC improve grouse populations may expand allowing birds reoccupy historic habitats on Hanford. Numerous other species such as pygmy rabbit (state endangered), white-tailed jack rabbit (state monitor), and elk, might also utilize this corridor.

Ultimately Washington Department of Wildlife would like to see a permanent corridor between the Yakima Training Center and Hanford. We are currently pursuing funding sources for potential acquisitions in this area. Perhaps in the future a connection of these two installations may allow a few shrub steppe wildlife species to continue to be part of Washington's fauna. Please contact me if Department of Energy plans to continue with any construction in this area.

Sincerely;



Lisa Fitchner
Area Wildlife Biologist