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22 November 2017

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Secretary Ryan Zinke  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear President Trump and Secretary of the Interior Zinke:

We, the American people and the undersigned organizations representing them, petition you to minimize the impact of livestock grazing on federal public lands, including but not limited to national forests and Bureau of Land Management lands, to address ecological problems caused by commercial livestock grazing. Ecological problems are occurring in instances where:

- livestock grazing displaces wildlife, reduces wildlife populations through competition for forage, or degrades wildlife habitats;
- degradation is occurring to the land (for example, erosion or soil compaction);
- transmission of pathogens is occurring from livestock to wildlife populations;
- degradation is occurring to plant communities;
- native wildlife are killed to advance the interests of public lands ranchers;
- livestock are damaging to sensitive wetlands or riparian areas; or
- damage is occurring to streams and aquatic habitats for sensitive fishes and amphibians.
- Ruminant grazing contributes to the nitrogen load in streams as well as nitrous oxide gasses also a greenhouse gas.

With this petition, we seek reductions in the numbers of commercial livestock on public lands that are sufficient to prevent further damage to native ecosystems, and allow the recovery of currently degraded lands to a natural state. On some lands which evolved in the absence of large grazers, such as the low-elevation shrubsteppes and deserts of the Great Basin, where soil productivity is dependent on fragile biological soil crusts, the appropriate maximum stocking rate for commercial livestock may be zero.

Poorly managed livestock can cause dustbowl effects through overgrazing. Removal of native grasses and trampling and compaction of soils paves the way for invasive weeds such as cheatgrass, which burn with unnatural frequency and convert native desert and shrubsteppe vegetation to cheatgrass monocultures of no habitat value to wildlife. This increase in range fires and the cheatgrass invasion that follows in their wake cannot be successfully stemmed or reversed through the construction of fuelbreaks or an increase in direct attack. In an increasingly flammable West, firefighters have a poor

record of extinguishing all ignitions. Furthermore, during windy, drought conditions when large fires are most likely to occur, fires commonly spot a mile or more ahead of the flame front, even leaping interstate highways and major rivers. It is necessary to stop ignoring the root cause of this cycle of cheatgrass and fire - the domestic livestock that spread cheatgrass seeds and destroy the native perennial bunchgrasses and biological soil crusts that are nature's best defense against cheatgrass invasion.

Commercial livestock grazing on public lands is a taxpayer-subsidized program that costs the American people not only the loss of the quality of our public lands and waters, but also loss of wildlife.

The subsidies for livestock grazing outweigh the fees collected for public lands grazing by approx \$1.4 billion annually. *(based on Bureau of Land Management 2014 income from Grazing program and 2013 Subsidies)* So there is no financial advantage for the nation to underwrite subsidies for this program, but setting these important limitations would have a positive impact on our budget, because it would reduce many of the subsidies to be paid.

We also pay for an agency whose only mission is to deal with predators of livestock, which creates population issues of cervids and other animals. So limitations would also remove the need for Wildlife Services, and saving a further \$100 million annually.

This would also remove the migratory problems and injuries we see with fencing. Reopening migratory routes will help keep some species off the ESA list. Injuries to special status species like the greater sage grouse would be greatly reduced by removing fences and limiting grazing in any areas of critical concern.

Cattle grazing on public lands in the western states is putting a domestic species adapted to moist, northern European ecosystems into an arid environment where they are ill-suited to survive. As a result, cattle concentrate along streamsides, springs, wetlands, and lakeshores that under natural circumstances are oases of biodiversity with rich and productive vegetation communities, but under heavy grazing and trampling become denuded and degraded. This damage results in the loss or reduction of the large majority of native wildlife that depend on rich riparian habitats for some or all of their life cycles; notable among such species are rare jumping mice, sage-grouse, songbirds, and beavers which are the ecological keystone of western stream systems. We also see a serious decline in water sources or riparian areas due to the lingering nature of livestock near water sources in this type of climate, and the habit of defecating in those waters.

Livestock grazing also has devastating impacts on stream and river systems, and the fishes and other aquatic life that they support. Bank trampling by cattle breaks down overhanging banks that under natural conditions provide shade and cover for fishes, and convert stream profiles from deep and narrow to wide and shallow. This, together with the removal of overhanging natural vegetation and the resulting loss of shade raises water temperatures, often to levels outside the thermal tolerance zones of native trout and salmon. Cattle concentrating along, and wallowing in, streams and rivers results in radical increases in erosion and siltation, turning crystalline waters into turbid flows, and smothering trout and salmon spawning gravels with silt.

Domestic sheep cause additional problems by transmitting pathogens which induce deadly pneumonia in wild bighorn sheep. Pneumonia outbreaks commonly result in losses of 30 to 70% of an affected bighorn herd, with total mortality and local extirpation occurring in some instances. Following a

pneumonia outbreak, lambs born to surviving ewes typically die shortly after weaning, resulting in depressed recruitment rates which may inhibit herd growth for years to follow. Despite decades of translocation and restoration efforts to reverse the effects of a precipitous crash in which an estimated 98% of all bighorn sheep were lost, populations Westwide remain at less than 5% of historic numbers. Disease events resulting from contact with domestic sheep are the primary limiting factor in the recovery of this iconic native species.

In summary, by limiting the livestock in areas of conflict or degradation you can: save money, save wildlife, and save the value of our lands and water.

Respectfully yours,

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Signing on behalf of:

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Cc: Members of Congress