

For Immediate Release

Contacts:

Mary Geiger, 202-879-9138 or mgeiger@beef.org
Theo Dowling, 202-879-9135 or tdowling@beef.org

PLC Encourages Senate to Retain Wild Lands, EAJA Funding Blocks

WASHINGTON (Feb. 22, 2011) – The [Public Lands Council](#) (PLC) Executive Director Dustin Van Liew said blocking funds to implement the Department of the Interior’s “Wild Lands” Secretarial Order 3310 (the Order) and halting payments authorized under the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) are encouraging signs members of the U.S. House of Representatives are listening to the concerns of public lands ranchers. These funding limitations were attached to H.R. 1, a continuing resolution (CR) approved by the U.S. House of Representatives to fund the federal government through the end of the fiscal year. The CR has now moved to the Senate for consideration.

Last month, PLC submitted a letter to Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar voicing opposition to the Order, which directs the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to designate areas with wilderness characteristics under its jurisdiction as “Wild Lands” and to manage them to “protect” their wilderness values.

“Shifting the BLM’s focus from multiple-use management to management for wilderness characteristics, as the Order would do, presents a threat to the longstanding multiple-use activities on public lands, including livestock grazing,” Van Liew said. “The Order would have far-reaching negative effects on public lands ranchers and the communities that rely on a thriving ranching industry. The administration should not be allowed to make decisions of such magnitude without getting input from local stakeholders or Congress’ consent.”

With regard to EAJA, Van Liew also said Representative Cynthia Lummis’ (R-Wyo.) amendment is a win for livestock producers.

“For years, radical environmental extremists have abused EAJA to fund petty lawsuits designed to bring down the public lands livestock grazing industry and other multiple-use industries,” Van Liew said. “As it stands, ranchers impacted by these suits must pay crippling legal fees to defend their land, business or way of life against the lawsuit. At the very same time, their own hard-earned money is being used to help pay the attorney fees for the very groups attacking them. It’s a true injustice.”

The Lummis amendment would put a six-month moratorium on all payments from EAJA to give Congress the time to study the issue and make necessary changes. Van Liew added that, while there has been no real oversight of EAJA, the cost to taxpayers reportedly exceeds \$37 million in payments to radical environmental groups, many whose net worth exceeds \$50 million.

“While the CR is not a done deal and still faces tests in the Senate before it can be sent to the President, it is encouraging that the House has included these two critical funding limitations,” Van Liew said, “PLC encourages the Senate to retain both the block on funding to implement the Order as well as the halt on EAJA payments.”

###