



Public Lands Council

News Release

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Administration Denies Petitions to Raise Public Lands Grazing Fee

WASHINGTON (Jan. 20, 2011) - The Obama Administration issued final responses this week denying petitions to increase the grazing fee on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Forest Service (USFS) grazing allotments. The decision was made in response to the petitions and a lawsuit filed by five environmental activist groups asking the government to address the grazing-fee formula and adjust the fee in order to, in their words, “cover the costs of the federal grazing program.”

The responses, issued by BLM Director Bob Abbey and USFS Deputy Chief Joel Holtrop, outlined the administration’s decisions to deny the petitions, citing more pressing demands on the agencies’ resources. Abbey also noted that in his conversations with members of Congress and congressional staff regarding budgetary restrictions for the Department of the Interior and the BLM, increasing the grazing fee has not been discussed.

Dustin Van Liew, executive director of the Public Lands Council (PLC) and director of federal lands for the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), said the current grazing-fee formula is fair and accurately reflects current private grazing land lease rates, beef cattle prices and the cost of livestock production.

“We are glad the Administration has recognized the equitability of the fee and the importance of the viability of federal lands ranching to western rural economies and the entire cattle and sheep industries,” Van Liew said. “Raising the grazing fee would result in many ranchers across the West going out of business. And while we often hear misleading statements that federal lands provide only a small percentage of the nation’s cattle and sheep, the reality is that more than 40 percent of cows in the western states and about 44 percent of the nation’s sheep spend some time on public lands. Putting that forage off limits by raising the grazing fee would impact the industries greatly.”

While some claim ranchers who graze livestock on public land pay an artificially low price, Van Liew said federal lands ranchers actually pay much more than just the fee itself.

“When one takes into account the hidden costs of range improvements and maintenance; managing on rocky and less productive terrain; and the cost of complying with various government regulations, the current grazing fee is actually relatively high,” Van Liew said. “We are pleased BLM and USDA have denied the petitions to pursue rulemaking to increase grazing fees. PLC and NCBA will continue working with these agencies and others to do what’s in the best interest of ranchers, and thereby our nation’s natural resources, to ensure a sustainable future for our industry.”

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The Public Lands Council (PLC) has represented livestock ranchers who use public lands since 1968, preserving the natural resources and unique heritage of the West. Public land ranchers own nearly 120 million acres of the most productive private land and manage vast areas of public land, accounting for critical wildlife habitat and the nation’s natural resources. PLC works to maintain a stable business environment in which livestock producers can conserve the West and feed the nation and world.