



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 2018-02

Public Lands Grazing

A. BACKGROUND

1. Range livestock operations were established decades ago, with many operations using forage on private, state and federal lands. These family-based operations are important contributors to the customs, cultures and rural economies of the West.
2. These operations also maintain open spaces and important habitat conditions (e.g., year-round water sources) benefiting wildlife and recreation. Water rights, which are granted by the states for livestock grazing, will not benefit other uses if the agricultural operation ceases to maintain the beneficial use.
3. Ranching operations provide valuable, active management of public lands including responsible grazing, maintenance of fences and other infrastructure, managing fuel loads, engaging in wildland fire monitoring and suppression, and cooperative management of noxious and invasive weeds.
4. Ranching operations and public land grazing provide needed food for a growing population.
5. Federal land management agencies' actions in recent years have resulted in reductions or removal of domestic livestock from federal lands.
6. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have permanently closed, left vacant without reissuing a grazing permit, and converted into forage reserves or "grass banks" some grazing allotments in recent years. In many instances, the allotments are technically available based upon forage availability, but permits are not issued for reasons including unmaintained range improvements and uncompleted National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation by USFS or BLM.
7. USFS and BLM continue to receive pressure to close domestic sheep grazing allotments due to concerns about disease in bighorn sheep.
8. Restrictions and closures have dramatic negative economic impacts on ranchers and ranch dependent communities. Ranchers who have used the same federal grazing allotments for generations are abruptly forced to find new forage for their livestock when allotments are restricted or closed.
9. Restrictions and temporary closures, when implemented to mitigate natural events like drought, wildfires and wildlife impacts, should be factored into ongoing, regular reviews and renewals of individual livestock allotments, individual livestock operators' use of the allotments or the total amount of grazing allotments available for ranchers.
10. Inconsistent interpretation of operational policies across the West by local and regional federal land managers compounds difficulties in managing livestock grazing on public lands.

For example, federal policy on acceptable types of supplemental feed, feed placement, and watering of livestock is interpreted without regard for localized range conditions or the economics of local ranching operations. Failure to adapt policies to local conditions affects the ability of livestock grazing permittees to properly manage their livestock herds while achieving permit standards, goals, and objectives.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support the continued responsible use of federal lands for grazing.
2. We support sound, science-based management decisions for federal lands – including adaptive management – and believe these decisions should be based upon flexible policies that take into account local ecological conditions and state planning decisions for wildlife and other human needs.
3. Federal and state land managers should identify opportunities to improve flexibility and integration of grazing management and targeted grazing as tools to achieve restoration and land management goals, including wildlife habitat improvements, drought and wildfire mitigation and resilience, water quality and watershed health, soil health management, promotion of perennial plant health, and control of invasive species such as cheatgrass. They should also promote grazing allotment flexibility on federal lands, within USFS and BLM permitting systems and across ownership boundaries, to respond to changing range conditions and environmental considerations.
4. Livestock grazing on federal lands is compatible with recreation and wildlife management and fulfills the multiple use and sustained yield mission of both the USFS and BLM. Policies, analyses, or planning decisions that lead to closing allotments must be based on documented threats and causal factors consistent with state policies and programs as well as federal multiple use missions.
5. Decisions to reduce or suspend grazing should only be made assisted by an appropriate quantitative assessment of long- and short-term trends in range conditions on specific allotments. If, after consultation with the state, the federal agency decides to reduce, suspend, close, or modify an allotment due to documented harmful wildlife impacts, an alternative allotment, properly authorized pursuant to NEPA, must be made available to the displaced operator prior to adjustment of the original allotment. In order to fully implement this policy, the BLM and USFS must have alternative allotments properly authorized under relevant planning documents. This ensures that suspensions or modification of grazing permits will not result in a net loss of Animal Unit Months (AUMs) and that appropriate alternative allotments are available.
6. Grazing permit renewal decisions should be assisted by current site-specific, quantitative data. Federal agencies should engage in meaningful consultation, coordination and cooperation with livestock grazing permittees prior to initiation and throughout the entire permit renewal process.
7. Federal land management agencies' decisions to reduce or close allotments should only be based upon completion of a full and complete administrative review and analysis, including a complete review under the provisions of NEPA. The decision process must include opportunities for states, livestock grazing permittees and other stakeholders to provide

input. Allotments should not be closed due to a pending NEPA review without allowing authorized use of the allotment pending a final decision, or the use of an equivalent amount of forage at reasonably equivalent cost to the operator.

8. Federal range specialists should have an understanding of the economics and management of ranching operations dependent upon federal lands, and should receive the necessary training to comprehensively monitor rangelands, conduct objective analysis, and write sound environmental documents.
9. Clear directives and accountability throughout all levels of the USFS and BLM should be required so that interpretation and implementation is practical and predictable from office to office and individual to individual, and informed by an understanding of localized range and ecological conditions, and economic health of ranch operations.
10. Federal land management agencies should give interested state agencies an opportunity to fully participate in or provide input to grazing permit actions – prior to their initiation – including: generalized review of livestock operations on federal lands; any assessment of grazing conditions as part of a federal planning process; and individual allotment reviews. Grazing permit decisions should not be finalized until after this opportunity for meaningful consultation with the states, local governments, and the affected permittees.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct the WGA staff, where appropriate, to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction and the Executive Branch to achieve the objectives of this resolution including any necessary funding, subject to the appropriation process, based on a prioritization of needs.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to develop, as appropriate and timely, detailed annual work plans to advance the policy positions and goals contained in this resolution. Those work plans shall be presented to, and approved by, Western Governors prior to implementation. WGA staff shall keep the Governors informed, on a regular basis, of their progress in implementing approved annual work plans.

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