

Testimony of

The Honorable Brad Little

Lieutenant Governor

of the

State of Idaho

Given before the

House Committee on Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

at the hearing titled

**The Essential Role of Livestock Grazing on Federal Lands and
Its Importance to Rural America**

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Good morning. Thank you, Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Brad Little. I am the Lieutenant Governor of Idaho, and a cattle and sheep rancher. I am also a longtime member of the Public Lands Council, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and the American Sheep Industry Association. In the past, I have been involved in volunteer leadership for these organizations, and have advocated on their behalf here in Washington, D.C.

My grandchildren will be fifth generation Idaho ranchers. I cannot help but wonder what the ranching landscape will look like when they are ready to take the reins.

With our private lands scattered within public lands, my family has always believed in providing access to all kinds of recreationists and other multiple use activities. There are thousands of acres of the family ranch lands open for public use and hunting throughout five Idaho counties. My family founded the Little-Gem Cycle Park, one of the largest off-road vehicle parks in America. Near Boise, our private land is part of the city trails system. In both areas, we work with local, state and federal agencies to deliver access.

I am here today to better define the benefit to America of our public lands ranchers and guide you through the livestock industry's rich history of stewardship for our western lands.

I urge you to address the burdensome regulatory environment which threatens our way of life and those rural communities where ranching is the year-round

backbone that sustains our schools, health care, and economies. Additionally, we provide access to individuals who seasonally visit our public lands.

While current efforts by this administration and Congress give me great optimism for future generations of ranchers, we still have a ways to go. More work is needed to create a regulatory environment where federal lands ranchers can survive.

In the conservation world, nearly all grand scale successes are a result of public-private partnerships. I would argue that grazing is the original public-private partnership. Livestock producers provide a myriad of benefits to the land. With the reduction in AUMs being grazed, there is a huge cost due to the abandonment of these allotments.

Ranchers are indispensable in the successful management of our public lands. Unlike government administrators, who are only there for a few years, ranchers have been on the land for generations. They are the public lands management infrastructure across the West. If ranchers are regulated off, our country loses the most effective and efficient public lands managers, and the private inholdings are likely sold for development.

As Lieutenant Governor, I have seen these benefits most prominently during fire season. Grazing reduces the fuel loads and prevents the catastrophic, fast-moving fires that Idaho has experienced more frequently in recent years.

BLM's Targeted Grazing program is an example of how ranchers and federal land managers can work together to prevent these natural disasters. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, the average cost of fuels management *(including prescribed fire, manual removal by chainsaw, and herbicide application)*

comes to \$150 an acre. Ranchers provide this service at virtually no cost to the taxpayer.

Ranchers don't just prevent fires, they also fight them. Six years ago, Idaho created Rangeland Fire Protection Associations. These volunteers, totaling about 330 ranchers through 9 RFPAs, extend protection to 1.8 million acres of private land and nearly 7.1 million acres of adjacent public land. All their work is done at a mere fraction of the traditional costs to the taxpayer. If you want to save money, this needs to be duplicated across the West, in rangelands and in timberlands.

Ranching activities also provide benefits to other multiple uses. For example, our cattle grazed a large Forest Service allotment in central Idaho. As part of that permit, we maintained miles of trails throughout the forest. A substantial side benefit was recreationists benefited from our efforts. This service was provided at no cost to the taxpayer. Because of the regulatory pressure, we have had to abandon the allotment. Ultimately, the area has burned and most of the trails have been abandoned, leaving no access for recreationists.

My situation is not unique in Idaho, nor is it rare across the West.

The Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act are the usual suspects. While well-intended when enacted in the seventies, ESA and NEPA have evolved into weapons for habitual litigants, and the regulations they produce are as ineffective as they are burdensome. Species conservation doesn't work from the top-down.

In Idaho, the Governor's Office of Species Conservation has worked since 2000 to protect and recover 33 different plant and animal species using the framework of

the ESA. We tried using the same tactics to recover the Greater Sage Grouse, but were blindsided in 2015 when the Obama Administration imposed range-wide mandates that did not allow for adaptive management.

Luckily, the BLM and the Forest Service are working to put us back in the driver's seat, so we can resume our efforts through means that work in our unique areas. Efforts are also underway in Congress to increase state involvement in ESA implementation. Sen. Barrasso's recent legislation, crafted after the Western Governors' Association bipartisan resolution last year, would give states a greater role in species recovery and decision-making.

In short, America's goal should be to perpetuate our beautiful and productive western landscapes, while fostering the next generation of western ranch stewards.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, ranchers with grazing permits provide an irreplaceable service to the land, the taxpayer, and to those who enjoy our public lands. The regulatory environment from Washington, D.C. plays a critical role in determining the efficacy of not only those benefits, but also the economies and communities that depend on them.

Mr. Chairman, thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.