

Responses of Jeff Young – President, Utah Cattlemen’s Association

For the legislative hearing of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands on November 19, 2024.

Dear Chairman Tiffany:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in the recent hearing on an assortment of lands-related bills. Enclosed are my responses to the questions posed by Representative Vasquez.

1. In your experience, what are some types of range improvements that would trigger a lease renegotiation?

*Answer:* For the vast majority of federal grazing permittees, range improvements are built into the agency’s expectations for how the permittee manages and maintains the grazing allotment. These expectations are built into the “Terms and Conditions” (T&Cs) associated with the permit, and those Terms and Conditions must be met in order for a permittee to maintain their “good standing” status. The Terms and Conditions agreements are really the documents that guide how grazing is carried out on allotment – so while it’s not the lease itself, it’s the primary governing document.

When a permittee needs to do more extensive work – or install a new improvement – to improve the management condition of the allotment, it’s often a lengthy negotiation process to change the Terms and Conditions of the permit. These T&Cs are usually negotiated and approved at the beginning of a grazing year, so waiting for new T&Cs is already a lengthy delay. In the event that the agency feels that the range improvement goes beyond the ability to include in updated T&Cs the following year, then the permittee may be required to go through cumbersome, extensive assessment processes and face a decreased functionality of their grazing allotment.

These can be things like a supplemental water line to bring water to a new part of the allotment during drought, or a new water tank for the same reason. It could be temporary fencing or a temporary corral to address a livestock movement need, or a culvert to address water runoff. These are things that a permittee needs to maintain on an allotment to maintain functionality and are required to maintain so they meet the requirements of their grazing permit.

2. What does it mean for a rancher’s bottom line to wait nine months to repair a fence?

*Answer:* In ranching, you need to act quickly to ensure your livestock, the wildlife, and the land and water resources stay safe and healthy. If I can’t repair my fence for nine months, it means I can’t use that pasture for nine months. I have to provide alternative feed for my cattle, I have to make sure no one else comes through that fence. It’s a safety issue for my livestock and any neighboring livestock, but it also has a negative impact on my ability to manage the full acreage under my care in the most efficient way.

It's also worth noting that in a lot of cases, delayed repair of infrastructure like a fence or a water line makes the repair much more expensive. Constant upkeep on infrastructure reduces long-term repair and replacement costs. For things like fences and water infrastructure, it is especially important to have constant maintenance because without those things, grazing allotments become unusable for current and future permittees.

3. Would reducing the wait time when trying to make minor range improvements benefit ranchers in your community?

*Answer:* Reduced wait times would not only benefit ranchers in my home state of Utah, but for ranchers in your district in New Mexico and across the West. Ranchers should have the ability to meet the Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) of their grazing permit without overly burdensome federal requirements – requirements that don't provide any benefit to the rangeland, our management, or the agency. This bill would make the entire process more efficient, saving government time and money in staffing and paperwork, saving ranchers time that could be spent reinvesting in to the landscape, and making the entire grazing allotment management system more responsive to on-the-ground needs.

Sincerely,

Jeff Young