

## Rebel Creek Ranch LLC

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ron Cerri and I am a 4<sup>th</sup> generation rancher in Humboldt County Nevada and a Humboldt County Commissioner. Like just about every other rancher in Nevada, my family ranching operation is heavily dependent on the use of federal lands, as I have both BLM and USFS grazing permits. As a County Commissioner I can tell you that our county's economic well-being is heavily dependent on the use of federal lands as 80% of Humboldt County is federally owned. Gold mining and agriculture are the two major economic drivers and job creators in the county and both these businesses could not exist without the use of resources on federal lands.

In the last 30 to 40 years Nevada has experienced approximately a 43% reduction in cattle numbers, going from a little over 700,000 in the 1980's to a little over 400,000 head today. The biggest contributor to this reduction in livestock numbers has been the reduction in allowable grazing use on public lands.

When you ask a rancher who's running cattle and whose family has been running cattle for generations what they believe to be the major reason for this decline, most will tell you they saw the pendulum swing after the passage of Rangeland Reform 94 created when Bruce Babbitt was the Secretary of the Interior. Rangeland Reform 94 not only added new regulations and changed a lot of old ones, but more importantly, it has hamstrung the Bureau of Land Management as well as resource users when it comes to making decisions and adapting to changes on the range. Rangeland Reform 94 requires that prior to making any changes, the BLM must consult with the public (or the term they use is Interested Public) before any land management decisions can be made. Anyone in the United States can call themselves an interested public. Someone from Chicago who has never been out West, and may never come out West, can protest a decision and even appeal a decision made by the land management agency and tie up the agency for years preventing them acting on a time sensitive manner.

Allow me to give you an example.

On July 4<sup>th</sup> we had a fire start here in Humboldt County as a result of someone setting off illegal fireworks. As of today, the fire has burned 440,000 acres, 700 square miles. It is 57 miles long, 31 miles wide, and as of last night it was about 48% contained. Right now it is the biggest fire in the United States. There are many factors that led into this fire becoming this large, but one of the major reasons is fuel loads on the range. On the BLM ranges in Humboldt County, according to the BLM's own figures, fuel loads are on average 230% of normal and some places are over 1000%. That is about 2.5 tons of dead, dried grass (fuel) per acre. The range that has burnt and is still burning was some on the very best Sage Grouse habitat we had in Humboldt County. Because Sage Grouse are on the verge of being listed as a Threatened and Endangered Species, ranchers everywhere have worked very hard to prevent a listing and the ranchers whose ranges that are now burning are no different. They have been doing everything the BLM required them to do; such as protecting riparian area and meadows by reducing herd size and increased herding of their livestock to prevent possible over utilization of any area. Ranchers have been

warning BLM and US Fish and Wildlife Service that there was just too much grass and fuel being left on the range and a fire like what happened here in Humboldt County was inevitable. To date the fire has burnt over 40 known Sage Grouse leks and, without a doubt, burnt up many birds and other wildlife. The fire was advancing at over 11 miles an hour on many occasions in very rocky, steep terrain. Permittees will now be required to stay off the range for 3 to 5 years in an effort to let the range recover from this fire. I don't have an exact number of livestock that will be displaced by the fire yet, but based on my knowledge of ranches in the area and the numbers of livestock permitted in the area that burned, it could be as high as 6,000-8,000 head. It will take decades for the Sage Brush to come back and, in many cases, it will never come back because of the rapid growth of cheatgrass, which is an invasive species. Cheatgrass has taken over much of our ranges in Northern Nevada, out-competing and choking out most of native species of grasses and forbs.

We are early in our fire season in Nevada there will most certainly be more fires both weather and man caused. Please don't misunderstand, everyone knows regardless of anything we do, we are going to have fires. What I am saying is that we can reduce the size and intensity of fires by removing or reducing the fuels and the best and cheapest way to do that is with livestock grazing. I believe the majority of our land managers agree with me on this but their hands are tied by the processes they are required to follow and the lawsuits that they will have to deal with mostly coming from anti public lands grazing groups.

I want to thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to enter this written statement into the record.

Sincerely,

Ron Cerri  
Humboldt County Commissioner (Nevada)