Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for holding a hearing on H.R. 7099, a bill to provide for the conveyance of a small parcel of Coconino National Forest land in the State of Arizona.

On behalf of the University of Arizona, I thank the Chairman for his leadership on this issue and for introducing this important legislation, as well as his staff for the time and energy they provided in this effort.

The University of Arizona

Established in 1885 by the Morrill Act of 1862, the University of Arizona (UA) is the state’s land-grant institution. Widely recognized as a student-centric institution, and designated as an American Indian and Alaska Native-Serving Institution (AIANSI) and Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) by the U.S. Department of Education, the UA is one of the nation's top public universities, according to U.S. News & World Report.

With $687 million in annual research expenditures in 2018, the National Science Foundation ranked the UA in the top 20 public universities for research expenditures, and number 1 ranked AIANSI and HSI. The UA is the only AIANSI- and HSI-designated university in the U.S. that has the distinction of being ranked a Research 1 institution by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, and a member of the Association of American Universities, which is comprised of the 65 leading public and private research universities in the U.S. and Canada. As the UA advances the frontiers of interdisciplinary scholarship for our state’s 15 counties, our entrepreneurial partnerships have an estimated direct economic statewide impact of $4.1 billion annually.

As the state’s land-grant institution, the UA has the responsibility and opportunity to provide relevant, quality scientific research and practices to all communities throughout Arizona. One of the many ways we accomplish this mission is via the Cooperative Extension System (CES), established by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, with its federal mandate to bring education to all Arizonans not matriculated into the UA, and by bringing the entire range of UA science directly to the private sector statewide to solve practical problems and directly grow Arizona’s economy. The CES delivers all of Arizona’s federally-mandated Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education
Program, and Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program. Arizona’s CES delivers education and scientific advances ranging from agriculture production, breastfeeding, early childhood development and dental health, to osteoporosis prevention, watershed management, and natural resource use and conservation.

The University of Arizona also has the federal mandate and responsibility to deliver the 1887 Hatch Act purpose, which is realized today by the Arizona Experiment Station (AES). The AES is an integrated and networked system of 11 federally regulated STEM research facilities located around Arizona. It can provide infrastructure support for any UA education, research, and CES mission. This includes over 50 biomedical research laboratories; advanced data and information technology support, including Wi-Fi access, web development and data processing, and an Emmy-award winning documentary team; 2,600 acres of irrigable land and equipment to manage it; 122,000 acres of rangeland; 73,600 square feet of greenhouse space; 340 range cows each with full genome typing; 21,000 square feet of engineering fabrication space; 17 meetings rooms; 49 dorm beds, and all staff. This infrastructure is essential to generating and disseminating critical, sustainable agricultural and natural resources knowledge and technologies for Arizona, the United States, and the world.

Background and History of V-V Ranch

The V-V Ranch (read “V bar V”) is one of these research centers within the Arizona Experiment Station, addressing environmental, wildlife, and domestic livestock issues applicable to Arizona and the Southwest. In 1995, the University of Arizona acquired the nearly-350-head cattle ranch located in the Coconino National Forest, along with the associated Walker Basin Grazing Allotment from the Zink family. Prior to the University’s acquisition, the V-V Ranch had been privately owned and operated for over 100 years.

Renewed in 2011, the Walker Basin Grazing Allotment allows our cattle access to 70,000 acres of rangeland, largely owned by the United States Forest Service, except for 43 acres owned by the Arizona Board of Regents. The grazing allotment runs about 30 miles in length east to west, cutting across the Mogollon Rim, and varies from 4-5 miles in width.

The ranch’s operations are conducted from two different locations: the primary headquarters, or winter headquarters, near Camp Verde, AZ which rests at a lower elevation in the mountain range; and Mahan Park, or the summer headquarters near Happy Jack, AZ at a higher elevation.

The 13.3-acre parcel of land on which the V-V Ranch’s primary headquarters is located is owned by the U.S. Forest Service.

The Land Exchange

It is this land which the University of Arizona seeks to own in exchange for a parcel of land of equal monetary value, portioned from the higher elevation property, Mahan Park. Mahan Park is a 43-acre property owned by the Arizona Board of Regents, several acres of which are contiguous with Forest Service property.

In 2015, the U.S. Forest Service gave the University notice that it was in a state of “unauthorized occupancy” on the V-V Ranch winter headquarters land, and that a Special Use Permit would be necessary to continue operating.

The discovery that the headquarters was not private land came as a surprise to the Coconino National Forest and to the University of Arizona, as both parties had operated under the false assumption that the
UA owned the 13.3-acre headquarters. For example, between 1998 and 2008 the UA built and installed buildings (classroom, shop, office, lab, dormitory, water well, portable housing trailers, and improved corrals), and although the Forest Service was aware of the construction projects, they did not require permits or oversight of the installations.

Based on title record searches, it is clear that the University does not hold title to these 13.3 acres and continued occupancy would require a Special Use Permit, or a transfer of land title to the Arizona Board of Regents.

After deliberation, the University decided it was in its best fiduciary interest to own the land outright if it was to continue the uninterrupted operations of the ranch and allow the UA full discretion of infrastructure investments and maintenance without the constraints of a Special Use Permit from the Forest Service. This decision is also in keeping with the assumption by both parties that the headquarters was privately owned, and the extensive improvements made at the headquarters were based on that assumption.

In 2017, the University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences submitted a proposal for an administrative land exchange to the Coconino National Forest Supervisor, Ms. Laura Jo West.

In 2018, Supervisor West responded that an administrative exchange would not be possible due to Forest Service policies and regulations, including 36 CFR Subpart A, 254.3(b)(1), which aims to prevent the creation of isolated parcels of private land within public land. In addition, Supervisor West determined that the land exchange would not be in the public interest.

The University appreciates the concerns expressed by Supervisor West, and her discretion to deny the administrative process for the land exchange. However, the University’s pursuit of legislative authorization for the land exchange contends that a “new” private inholding is a minor point given the presence of other inholdings already in the general area. In fact, there are two other privately-owned land parcels within 1.5 miles of the V-V Ranch, which are also cattle ranch headquarters.

On the second point, regarding public interest, the V-V Ranch provides valuable services, education, and extension programming to the surrounding community, which is only projected to grow over time, particularly with the addition of the UA’s College of Veterinary Medicine (detailed further below).

In fact, the proposed federal land exchange has received the support of the Arizona Cattle Grower’s Association; Yavapai Cattle Growers Association; Coconino County Farm Bureau Cattle Growers; and the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation.

Furthermore, should this land exchange take place, it would allow for the preservation of important wildlife habitats and recreational camping use by preventing residential and commercial development in Mahan Park, which has significant development value.

The College of Veterinary Medicine

This year, the University of Arizona will open the state’s first public college of veterinary medicine (CVM) with 110 Professional Doctor of Veterinary Medicine students. The V-V Ranch is a critical and central component of the college’s education and accreditation. In the planned curriculum, every student must complete their clinical rotation in food animal medicine at the V-V Ranch.

The college’s accreditation is contingent on the planning and construction of new infrastructure at V-V Ranch. As such, the University has already begun preliminary planning efforts to construct a new building on the property, including classrooms, offices, and a dormitory, pending the passage of H.R.
This further illustrates the UA’s commitment to continual investment in V-V Ranch, as part of our 1887 Hatch Act responsibility.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we believe it is clear that the work of the Arizona Cooperative Extension System, the Arizona Experiment Station, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the College of Veterinary Medicine collectively demonstrate the value of the University’s continued and hopefully permanent presence at the V-V Ranch.

Again, I thank the Committee for holding a hearing on this important legislation. The University of Arizona has proudly served the people of the State of Arizona for 135 years. And with the ultimate passage of this legislation, we look forward to continuing to serve the ranching community in the Coconino and Yavapai counties, the students of our Veterinary Medicine program, and the people of Arizona.