

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
UNDER SECRETARY MEMORANDUM**

**To: Tom Schultz, Chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service.**

**Date: June 12, 2026**

**RE: Line Officer Implementation of the Advancing Grazing on Forest Service and BLM Lands Memorandum of Understanding and the USDA–DOI Grazing Action Plan.**

On March 31, 2026, Secretary Rollins and Secretary Burgum of the Department of the Interior signed the [Advancing Grazing on Forest Service and BLM Lands Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) affirming the cooperative implementation of the [USDA–DOI Grazing Action Plan](#) (the Grazing Plan). This action fulfills the policy commitment to streamline and expand livestock grazing on federal lands, elevates grazing as an Administration priority, and strengthens support for America’s ranchers. The MOU describes the essential role ranchers play in maintaining national food security. The Forest Service has initiated several of the items outlined in the MOU and is preparing to implement the Grazing Plan. Grazing on National Forest System (NFS) lands is critical to the health of our landscapes; to providing sustainable beef, lamb and wool for America’s food and fiber supply; and for maintaining the fabric of rural America.

The Grazing Plan reaffirms grazing as a core component of federal land multiple use management. Through the MOU, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have committed to coordinated actions consistent with applicable laws that strengthen support for grazing permittees, improve communication, modernize grazing management practices, and expand the use of tools such as targeted grazing, outcome-based grazing, and shared stewardship. These policy efforts, including enhanced wildfire liaison functions, streamlined NEPA processes, and improved data transparency, are designed to support ranching communities while advancing active land management and sustaining rangeland health in a multiple use context.

It is in that spirit that I ask the Forest Service (or “Agency”) to take the following steps consistent with applicable law and regulations to further support ranchers and remove barriers to grazing on their units starting now. This includes:

- A. Expanding access to prioritize permitting vacant and closed allotments,
- B. Maximizing grazing flexibilities to keep working lands working,
- C. Eliminating delays by streamlining permitting and allotment authorizations,
- D. Elevating rural Americans by giving ranchers a better voice, and
- E. Improving service by setting expectations for positive engagement with ranchers.

The Forest Service should take steps consistent with applicable law and regulations to expedite the following actions related to prioritizing livestock grazing on National Forest System lands. All line officers of the Forest Service should integrate the MOU and the Grazing Plan into

multiple use management to the maximum extent possible under their respective job titles and authority with appropriate leadership involvement and consistent with applicable federal law and regulations.

**Issue 1:** The Natural Resources and Rangeland Management staff will convene a virtual Grazing Action Plan Implementation Summit on June 22 and 23, 2026 to provide guidance and direction on carrying out the Plan and to ensure consistent implementation across the agency. This Summit will be both for range management staff and line officers who administer grazing programs on their units.

**Line officers should attend the Implementation Summit upon scheduling.**

**Issue 2:** The Grazing Action Plan Implementation Summit will include guidance on offering temporary grazing opportunities that are provided in 36 CFR 222 and the Rangeland Management Directives. Due to an increasingly dry 2026 grazing season, the Agency has seen a significant increase in requests to use unallocated forage on NFS lands.

**Line Officers should review and implement the authorities provided under 36 CFR, Subpart A, 222.3(c)(2)(i) and 222.3(c)(2)(ii) to the maximum extent possible, particularly when approached about these opportunities and as a proactive measure to assist existing permittees and other ranchers.**

**Ahead of each grazing season, line officers and field staff should audit allotment information to identify resource needs, determine appropriate active management strategies, and gauge interest from the ranching community. Additionally, prior decisions should be reviewed to determine whether any previously approved head months can be reinstated.**

**Issue 3:** Over the past several decades, grazing on National Forest System lands has steadily declined not only in numbers and season of use, but also in acreage or number of allotments grazed. Often, reductions in numbers or in season of use are intended to be a temporary measure in response to changing rangeland conditions and should be restored when resource conditions improve. However, the data demonstrates these reductions are not restored when rangeland conditions improve. For example, due in part to these reductions, along with catastrophic wildfire and variable moisture levels, between 1966 and 2022 authorized Head Months (HMs) on all National Forest System lands declined by nearly one million HMs. Consistent with applicable laws and regulations, the Forest Service should take appropriate measures to restore at least 500,000 HMs across the National Forest System over the next two years with additional incremental increases for the outyears.

**Line officers should:**

- a. Take appropriate actions to restore HMs within their jurisdiction to the maximum amount possible.**
- b. Take appropriate actions to implement a standard of no net loss of AUMs within allotments.**
- c. Make vacant and closed grazing allotments available and solicit interest/applications from the eligible ranching community, consistent with**

the grant processes found in the Forest Service Grazing Permit Administration Handbook, to the maximum extent possible.

- d. Prioritize the use of appropriated funds to support implementation of the Grazing Plan and ensure that available resources are directed effectively and in alignment with agency objectives. This includes leveraging resources to invest in required infrastructure; any analysis to increase the extent to which vacant and closed allotments are available for long-term stocking and term permits; directing interdisciplinary staff time toward priority allotment work, sequencing NEPA, and permit administration tasks to match available funding; ensuring timely obligation of appropriated resources; and coordinating with partners to leverage complementary funding sources.
- e. Utilize the [National Active Forest Management Strategy Funding Portal](#) to submit proposals for rangeland improvements that support the Grazing Plan.
- f. Take appropriate management actions to mitigate issues where possible before permanently reducing HMs or vacating an allotment. Mitigation may include, but is not limited to, reconfiguration of allotments and pastures or offering a wider range of grazing opportunities and management flexibility.
- g. Improve coordination with grazing permittees and incorporate beneficial management flexibility.
- h. Maximize the use of targeted grazing, considering vacant allotments, as an active management tool to achieve cost effective resource improvements utilizing the [Targeted Grazing Toolbox](#).
- i. Expand and implement as appropriate outcome-based grazing practices across NFS lands to improve the management of federal lands grazing. This may include permitting for variable seasons, variable numbers, and flexibility in grazing rotations.
- j. Review all Land Management Plans and Allotment Management Plans that are currently being revised or will be implemented after the effective date of this Memorandum to ensure consistency with this Memorandum and the goals stated in the Grazing Plan and MOU.
- k. Ensure Annual Operating Instructions and grazing permits issued after the effective date of this Memorandum are consistent with this Memorandum and the goals stated in the Grazing Plan and MOU.
- l. Prioritize rural economic vitality and resilience when considering grazing decisions.

**Issue 4:** The Forest Service should strive to streamline permitting and authorizations processes; examine opportunities to employ additional NEPA efficiencies, such as programmatic environmental analysis for permitting vacant/closed allotments and targeted grazing projects; and utilize emergency authorities that enable the agency to expedite authorization of livestock use.

**Line officers should:**

- a. Actively use the [Term Grazing Permit Issuance White Paper](#) and the [NEPA Efficiencies for Livestock Grazing FAQs](#) found on [WO Rangeland Management SharePoint site](#).

- b. **Rely on experience and expertise to recommend to Forest Service leadership ways to accomplish the goals set forth in this Memorandum**
- c. **Appropriately use Categorical Exclusions (including but not limited to those found in FLPMA Section 402(h)) and procedures/tools for expediting NEPA compliance.**
- d. **Use grazing where appropriate for implementing or supporting activities authorized under the IIJA Emergency Actions authorities, such as removing hazardous fuels.**
- e. **On applicable units and consistent with applicable laws and regulations, develop a plan to provide additional flexibilities to manage prairie dogs, including analyzing opportunities to limit prairie dog habitat on allotments; increase buffers between colonies and private lands; and continue to work with ranchers and grazing associations on mutually agreeable solutions.**

**Issue 5:** To maintain the working relationship between the local unit and grazing permittees during and after a fire incident, the Forest Service should ensure communication and coordination with livestock grazing permittees for each incident that impacts their allotment.

**Line officers should:**

- a. **Include a Grazing Permittee Wildfire Liaison as part of every response by a party to a wildfire incident where permitted grazing may be affected. The Grazing Permittee Wildfire Liaison will provide consistent communication with affected permittees and work to eliminate issues surrounding livestock retrieval and access.**
- b. **Communicate, in writing, with any grazing permittee before billing a permittee for a fire. This should include a discussion about the likely amount of the bill so that the permittee may contest the amount prior to being billed by the Forest Service.**
- c. **Prior to initiating any prescribed burns, communicate and coordinate with permittees. Ensure the written burn plan considers the potential need to fund and rebuild any damaged infrastructure and improvements such as: fences, corrals, water infrastructure, etc., consistent with federal laws and regulations.**
- d. **When fire destroys or damages physical fences and barriers, consider the use of virtual fencing and other alternatives that may allow grazing of non-burned areas on allotments, while working with ranchers to ensure that the physical infrastructure is restored, as appropriate. In general, virtual fencing should not permanently replace the need for rebuilding damaged and destroyed infrastructure.**

**Issue 6:** Our multiple use mission in rangeland management depends on strong, professional working relationships with the ranchers and permittees who steward these federal lands every day. Recent permittee concerns include long-term harassment, disparate treatment, or retaliation after filing complaints against Forest Service employees. Many complaints assert permit cancellations, reductions, or excessive demands for repairs and maintenance, or claims that requirements are arbitrary, punitive, or not equally enforced. There is a need to bridge the gap

between federal multiple use management, Forest Service personnel, and on-the-ground realities of the ranching community. To maintain public trust, ensure fair and effective program delivery, and support rangeland health, the Forest Service will re-commit to the highest standards of courtesy, predictability, and respectful communication in all interactions. The Forest Service will also create and implement a training program for employees directly interacting with permittees or implementing the agency's range program to ensure consistent application of federal law, regulations, and policies. Finally, the Forest Service will initiate ranch immersion and training programs at a National Forest level for new and existing federal employees addressing daily life, decisions, and dilemmas of ranchers. Examples include, but are not limited to, a mentor (rancher)/mentee (FS employee) program, and the inclusion of actual ranchers in training sessions to provide perspective on rangeland management and administration.

**All Forest Service employees should:**

- a. Treat ranchers with courtesy and respect at all times. This includes listening actively, responding promptly to reasonable inquiries, using professional language, and avoiding condescending or dismissive tones – whether in person, on the phone, in writing, or in the field. Remember that we serve them and we are their neighbors.**
- b. Respond within three business days of receiving correspondence confirming receipt. Respond within the subsequent week with a substantive response. If a substantive response hasn't been provided, respond with a status update every week thereafter until resolved.**
- c. Provide predictability and consistency. Apply rules, policies, and enforcement actions uniformly and transparently. Communicate expectations clearly upfront, explain the basis for decisions, and follow established processes without arbitrary or selective application.**
- d. Focus on collaboration over confrontation. Ranchers are key partners in rangeland stewardship. Approach interactions with a problem-solving mindset, recognizing permittees' on-the-ground knowledge, economic dependence, and investment on these lands. Offer guidance and technical assistance before escalating to enforcement whenever appropriate. When evaluating and considering compliance, enforcement actions, instances of regulatory ambiguity, or technical discretion, consider the point of view of the permittee so long as the permittee is acting in good faith.**
- e. Eliminate retaliation and/or targeted enforcement and avoid even the appearance of such behavior. Decisions must be based solely on objective facts, compliance history, and resource conditions – not personal feelings, past disagreements, or external pressures. Document interactions thoroughly and neutrally. Before taking any adverse action, the question should not be whether the action is permissible, but rather, if the adverse action is reasonable and prudent under the circumstances.**
- f. Supervisors are directed to reinforce these expectations in team meetings, field reviews, and performance discussions. Any reports of unprofessional conduct should be reviewed promptly and addressed.**

**Issue 7:** Both Shared Stewardship and Good Neighbor Authority agreements have a track record of success in addressing shared land management goals across multiple jurisdictions, while accessing and benefiting from local knowledge and resources. Some States have existing Shared Stewardship and/or Good Neighbor Authority agreements in place that provide an overarching framework to implement “step-down” agreements more specific to grazing related issues and goals.

**Line officers should proactively seek and explore opportunities to implement Shared Stewardship and/or Good Neighbor Authority agreements with the ranching community, as well as state, local and tribal governments to assist in achieving the goals of the Grazing Plan and MOU.**

## CONCLUSION

Chief Schultz, you are responsible for implementing all aspects of this Memorandum, in coordination with the Office of General Counsel. Please consider incorporating the policies set forth in this document for inclusion in the Forest Service manual.

This Memorandum and any resulting report or recommendations are not intended to, and do not create, any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party, including permittees, against the United States, its Departments, Agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person. This Memorandum is intended to facilitate multiple use management of NFS lands and does not amend or revise any land management plan nor authorize, fund, or carry-out any decision. The direction in this Memorandum will be implemented in accord with existing federal laws, regulations, and policies. To the extent there is any inconsistency between the provisions of this Memorandum and any Federal laws or regulations, the Federal laws or regulations will control.

Sincerely,



Michael Boren

United States Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment