

Fighting for the U.S. Cattle Producer!



R-CALF United Stockgrowers of America
P.O. Box 30715
Billings, MT 59107
Fax: 406-252-3176
Phone: 406-252-2516
Website: www.r-calfusa.com
E-mail: r-calfusa@r-calfusa.com

September 16, 2010

Robert Abbey
Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW, Rm. 5665
Washington DC 20240

Hand-Delivered and Sent Via Facsimile: 202-208-5242

Re: Opposition to Proposals by the Federal Government to Acquire or Control Additional Land to Restrict or Eliminate Grazing

Dear Director Abbey:

R-CALF USA is a national, non-profit trade association that represents the interests of United States farmers and ranchers in 46 states who raise and sell live cattle. R-CALF USA is deeply concerned with the content of the memorandum purportedly leaked from the U.S. Department of Interior concerning the proposed creation of a 2.5 million acre bison range/preserve that would include Montana and at least eight other states in the United States and extending to and adjoining Canada.

R-CALF USA stands steadfastly opposed to this or any other proposal by the federal government to remove lands from production that are suitable for, and that have historically been used for, livestock grazing. This steadfast opposition is extended to include any action by the federal government to acquire or otherwise control land under the Treasured Landscape Initiative or by the creation of national monuments under the Antiquities Act.

The acquisition or control of land suitable for grazing and other agricultural endeavors by the federal government conflicts directly with the stated goals of President Barack Obama and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack, both of whom have indicated a desire to restore the economic foundations in Rural America. The removal of productive land from production that continues to be properly cared for and managed by private landowners and by private individuals who graze federally-controlled lands would further exacerbate the ongoing erosion of economic opportunities in Rural America. Such removal would adversely impact both U.S. livestock producers and the myriad of related, rural businesses whose solvency depends on a critical mass of livestock producers operating in their marketing region.

Not only has Rural America been decimated by an evaporation of economic opportunities for U.S. livestock producers – resulting in their exodus – but also, the nation's food security is

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now at risk. For example, the U.S. cattle industry continues to shrink at an alarming rate. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture data, over 500,000 cattle operations have exited the U.S. cattle industry just since 1980 and the size of the U.S. cattle herd has now fallen to the lowest level since the 1950s. *Alarmingly, this contraction continues even while the United States' cattle industry is unable to keep pace with the growth in domestic beef consumption.*

If the federal government is serious about maintaining an adequate, domestic food production system to guarantee for the citizens of the United States domestic food security, then the federal government must, at a minimum, immediately cease any further actions that would effectively remove any additional land from production, either by acquiring private land or restricting the use of land currently controlled by the federal government.

Attempting to acquire or control additional land for the purpose of limiting or prohibiting livestock grazing is irresponsible and, in our view, a violation of the sanctity of private ownership and private property rights protected by our Constitution.

R-CALF USA respectfully urges you to forego any plans to amass any additional, federally-controlled lands and to, instead, begin working on a national strategy to foster an economic climate that restores economic opportunities for U.S. livestock producers so the United States can begin rebuilding its depleted cattle herd. Importantly, the federal government must, as a guiding principle associated with such a national strategy, provide full and complete protection to each of its citizens' private property rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R. M. Thornsberry" followed by a small flourish.

R.M. Thornsberry, D.V.M.
President, R-CALF USA Board of Directors