

12/6/17

My name is Todd Harding, my family has been here on Minnesota Creek above Paonia since 1904. My grandson is the sixth generation to live on our ranch that was homesteaded by my great grandfather. We also have a grazing permit on the Dry Fork allotment.

I recently read the GMUG draft assessment written by the Forest Service. Frankly I was surprised at how slanted, unfair, and contradictory this document was written. The tone is negative toward livestock grazing and simply not appropriate for a forest service system that is multi-use. This paper is saying with words how the ground is in a downward trend but the same paper has maps and charts that show we are in an even or upward trend. The map on the last page, along with the chart on page 10, shows 547,165 acres are unknown in the trend, that's 20% of the total lands.

The forage utilization as a standard would put us back some 25 years. We've proven this is not a primary consideration when measuring range conditions. We have also proven, with the ex-closures that are close to our ranch, that rest and not enough stock density effects the range in a negative way.

The monitoring sites we established with forest personnel, show the trend to be much better then what is in this document. This information is recorded in our forest files.

As a permittee we are committed to range improvement, why wouldn't we be, it is in our own best interest. We have made huge strides over the last thirty years in how we manage cattle on public lands. All of the permittees in our allotment have taken multiple range betterment classes given by the college, BLM , USFS and others.

As a permittee we are the boots on the ground people. We make the trails for the recreationalists to travel. We make the water improvements that our cattle along with the wildlife use. There is hardly a pond on the mountain that doesn't have a tree stand nearby. With the proper grazing we are doing we are managing wildfire as well. Noxious weeds are also addressed on the ground, many of which were introduced by the hay that was brought in by the hunters. Non the less we, the permittees provide the manpower to help control them. Much of the time it is grazing that helps the control, not weed spray. We are managing the smooth brome with grazing, we all know what would happen if we didn't.

Economics plays a role in the public land grazing. We buy fuel, fence material, salt and minerals, tires and many more products locally. All adding to the bottom line to the

counties in which we live. Last year we built a new fence that cost us, the permittees, over \$13,000. My neighbor was the contractor.

In 2011 Delta county alone had an estimated total economic impact of \$139,234,830. Agriculture is big business, and we are doing a good job and yes we realize there is still more room for improvement, but we are up to the task.

Our base properties and the private land we lease provide a buffer for the big game to winter on. Without the public lands many of us would be forced to sell and plant houses instead of hay.

I hope you will consider my words when the final draft is written, and please contact me if you have questions.

Thank you for your time, respectfully,

Todd Harding