

Flat Canyon Allotment

I wrote a comment letter during the designated “comment period” but emailed it to Brian Monroe. I am again writing a letter to address my concerns with your recent decision with the Flat Canyon Allotment.

There are some issues you have not addressed or considered. First, this is a huge AUM loss for ranchers, especially for the sheep rancher. AUM's are being lost in the sheep industry which is very damaging to our operations. They are not being replaced.

Secondly, in Sevier County, there is a policy that you must coordinate with the county before conversion of permits. When the County Commissioners were told there was not anyone who applied for these permits, it was dishonest, misleading, and incorrect. The commissioners specifically noted that they did NOT want any loss of AUM's. With the decision to put this allotment into cattle, there is a loss of 38% AUM's. This violates what the county wanted done with this allotment because AUM's are being cut.

Third, it was said that “nobody applied for the allotment.” As a sheep rancher, I have inquired about this permit to Brian Monroe. He has always given me different reasons (now I recognize they were inaccurate excuses) why it was unavailable or not available to be used. There were 4 applicants who applied for this allotment. Your claims that no sheep ranchers were interested in this permit are false and misleading.

Fourth, in the environmental analysis (EA) you stated that the Flat Canyon Allotment was best suited for cows. How is this the case? If you feel that is correct, why is there such a loss in AUM's? It was also stated that there was very little water available. Yet, you are putting cattle on the allotment from May-October, where are they getting their water, especially during the summer months? It seems contradictory to say there will be sufficient water in the summer for cattle but not enough water for sheep in the winter. Sheep can use snow as a sufficient water source. This allotment is NOT best suited for cows. The terrain and water situation is ideal for sheep. Getting your “expert opinion” from one person who had this permit is inadequate to base findings on. Especially when this person surrendered the permit back to the forest service yet he received huge financial benefits from a special interest group after doing so. If you ask other ranchers who ran on that permit, they will tell you the permit was the best for sheep in the state of Utah. That is a huge conflict of interest to get your expert opinion from someone who received financial compensation from the special interest group who are wanting to put bighorn sheep on that allotment. Once the allotment was surrendered by this individual it was no longer available to anyone else, until the bighorn sheep special interest group wanted to acquire it.

Fifth, the state of Utah has a policy that does not allow any AUM's to be used for the increase of wildlife. This is a concern with such a huge loss when converting from sheep to cattle usage. It has been told to us that an organization will be putting bighorn sheep on this allotment. This is against Utah state policy.

Sixth, there are two individuals (ranchers) who trail their sheep by the Flat Canyon allotment. One individual trails them through Clear Creek to the West Desert. The other rancher uses the canal easement right by the allotment. I have used this trailing access as well. I also have a piece of deeded ground right across from the freeway from the Flat Canyon allotment that I use for my bucks during the late spring and early summer. We have sheep in Sevier County all year long. Putting bighorn sheep in Flat Canyon is a huge concern for me since bighorn sheep and domestic sheep are not to cohabitate with each other. This is for the benefit of both animals so as to not pass diseases from one to another. Why would the interest of a "special interest" organization be more important than my ranching operation?

Lastly, the biggest concern I have is the way the Forest Service has conducted themselves through this whole process. It has been dishonest, misleading, and violates their own policies and procedures in Sevier County, the state of Utah and their own forest grazing handbook. Lines of integrity have been crossed by employees, and decisions are being made that will benefit them directly. They are misleading representatives of the county and state. It was alarming how fast the NEPA study was pushed through in record time for a big money group, yet most NEPA studies take on average 5 years. The loss of AUM's has a negative impact on sheep and cattle ranchers. Sevier County and the state of Utah has always been a supporter of agriculture. The forest is part of that agriculture mindset and supporting each other is vital to everyone's success.

I strongly urge you to consider these 7 points of concern and reconsider your decision by following the successful policies already set forth by the county, state and in your forest handbook.

Sincerely,

Richard Nielson
R Woolies