August 5, 2019

Ms. Jan Cutts

District Ranger

Bridgeport Ranger District

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

HC 62 Box 1000

Bridgeport, CA 93517

Submitted via email: comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us

RE: Notice of Proposed Action Bridgeport Southwest Rangeland Project

Dear Ms. Cutts:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest’s Proposed Action (PA) for the Bridgeport Southwest Rangeland Project (Project). The Project proposes to reopen old sheep grazing allotments that have not been utilized since 2009 for cattle grazing. It is important to note that cattle have never grazed on these allotments.

I have been recreating in the Twin Lakes and Mono Basin areas for over 50 years. I have been a Mono County resident for over 20 years and own a home in Mono City and a cabin at Twin Lakes. I am very familiar with this area.

I do not support cattle grazing on any of these allotments.

My specific comments are as follows:

* The current PA does not adequately evaluate the impacts of cattle on these areas. Specifically, mitigations do not go far enough to address impacts to fragile high elevation meadow vegetation, seeps, springs and ephemeral creeks that will be significantly impacted by cattle grazing.
* The PA proposes that cattle will be controlled and trailed by “range riders” instead of fences. I find it hard to believe that cattle can be herded and moved in this way. The possibility of individual cattle straying from the rest of the herd seems high which will then result in damage to sensitive areas and recreational user conflicts.
* The allotments span a geographic area from south of the Virginia Lakes Road to southeast of the Twin Lakes basin. The Virginia Lakes and Twin Lakes areas are very popular with a variety of recreationists. Camping, fishing, backpacking, hiking, photography, hunting, approved off highway vehicle use routes, bird watching, wildflower viewing and more are popular in this area. In the past 50 years I have witnessed a sharp increase in the number of people that frequent the area. Cattle grazing would definitely impact all of these recreational activities.
* Endangered and sensitive species depend on these areas as noted in the PA but I do not think the PA has sufficiently evaluated the impacts to these species. I am especially concerned for Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep and impacts from cattle on the availability of sufficient winter forage for them.

* I am concerned that the monitoring described in the PA will not be sufficient to ensure that all of Bridgeport Ranger District’s (BRD) management strategies and requirements of the lessee will be achieved. I have witnessed first-hand destructive ATV use in the Kavanaugh Ridge area every spring with vehicles driving off-road and around snow berms (on fragile, newly emerging spring vegetation) and no apparent enforcement from the BRD.
* I do not believe that cattle grazing and recreational uses are compatible, at least not for the people recreating. In the past, I would frequently go to Buckeye Canyon to hike, fish, and camp. I haven’t been to that area for some time because of the grazing impacts. Most people I know are not interested in recreating in those areas now.

This area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is a gem and the increase in visitation over the years and diverse activities enjoyed there prove it. Approving these areas for cattle grazing leases will forever change that and our recreating public, which is so important to Mono County’s economic health, will suffer.

If the BRD continues to proceed with this proposal to authorize cattle grazing on these allotments, I strongly request that a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared. The fact that cattle have never grazed on these lands and the significant impacts touched on in the PA justify further, in-depth review.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Lisa Cutting

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