June 7, 2018

Ms. Leeann Murphy

Acting District Ranger

Bridgeport Ranger District

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest

HC 62 Box 1000

Bridgeport, CA 93517

Submitted via email

RE: Public Scoping Notice for the Bridgeport Southwest Rangeland Project

Dear Ms. Murphy:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bridgeport Southwest Rangeland Project. I have been a permanent resident of Mono County for 20 years. I have a primary residence in Lee Vining and a cabin at Twin Lakes (Bridgeport). I enjoy hiking, backpacking, fishing, camping, and birding. The Dunderberg, Tamarack, Cameron Canyon, and Summers Meadow allotments are areas that I have recreated in for many years. My love of this area started when I was a young child through camping trips to Twin Lakes and fishing Robinson Creek. Before I became a resident I returned every year.

My comments will focus specifically on the Cattle Creek section of the Tamarack allotment, but the principles that I discuss for this allotment are transferable to all of the allotments being considered. I know the Cattle Creek area intimately, and I suspect that other commenters may not address this allotment area in much detail.

I work professionally on the restoration of Mono Basin streams, so I have knowledge of damaged systems, whether that is from water diversions or grazing impacts. I have specifically used the Cattle Creek riparian system as a reference point and an example of a fully functioning, healthy stream system to guide me in my understanding of stream restoration. The creek meanders through meadow and forest, gaining water through accretion from the adjacent canyon slopes. The meadow in that canyon is always wet, even during the recent extended drought. In the Mono Basin, we have a term that we use for that phenomenon – “sponge bob” – meaning that when soils are healthy the snow runoff is stored in meadows and released slowly, extending groundwater supply into summer and fall until the next snowfall. Grazing activity tramples soils, compacting them which in turn significantly decreases the water storage capacity of a meadow. Water runs off more quickly and is not available when plants need it in late summer. Meadow health is compromised.

The diversity of plants, birds, and wildlife is extensive in Cattle Creek. I often see bears when I’m hiking in the area. These are not the marauding bears that plague Mono Village below, raiding campers, but wild bears that according to Tim Taylor, wildlife biologist for California Department of Fish and Wildlife, are a separate population from the Mono Village bears. I vividly remember on one hike coming up over a rise and seeing a bear in the creek, his back to me, bathing or playing (who knows). I watched for a while and then quietly left, leaving him in his peaceful home. Bears and wildlife need these refuge areas.

I have significant concerns related to the proposal to reoccupy these grazing allotments with cattle. All of the allotments being considered in this proposal are at high elevations (8,000-10,000 feet above sea level). Meadow plants at this elevation are especially delicate and easily damaged. Throughout all of these allotments are seeps, springs, and headwater creeks. This combination of wet soils and fragile vegetation make these areas vulnerable to grazing activity, especially cattle grazing. As native plants are damaged and areas of bare soil are exposed, invasive plants such as cheatgrass will move in and outcompete native vegetation.

I am not convinced that there are any mitigation measures – fencing, water exclusions, or herding that will prevent irreparable damage to these public lands. I have seen firsthand the impacts of cattle grazing in similar landscapes just to the north, specifically in Buckeye Canyon and Eagle Creek. There is no doubt cattle grazing has significant impacts on the landscape.

Historically, the allotments under consideration have only been grazed by domestic sheep. Cattle have never been grazed on these allotments. Extensive studies are needed to evaluate this request adequately.

In addition to the proposed action and a no-action (no grazing) alternative, I urge the Bridgeport Ranger District to include additional alternatives, specifically ones that further reduce allotment size (eliminating sensitive areas), and/or eliminate specific allotments altogether to protect sensitive habitat and water resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lisa Cutting

Lisa Cutting

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