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Comments: NEZ PERCE-CLEARWATER NF, FOREST PLAN REVISION

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest should focus on multiple-use in any forest plan revision alternative, including grazing, logging, mining, and recreation. Multiple-use implies a sustained yield of rangeland, timber, water, recreation, and wildlife.

As a long time, established ranching family who has managed grazing before the creation of grazing permits, we have seen firsthand the benefits livestock grazing provides. Grazing is a necessary tool for a sustainable ecosystem. Proper grazing is an effective line of defense against fires and noxious weeds, as well as providing quality wildlife habitat. Over the years, we have watched wildlife habitat decrease on public lands where grazing is no longer allowed; but substantially increase on deeded ground where livestock grazing is still utilized. We have witnessed catastrophic wildfires that could be prevented all together or slowed if grazing had been utilized as a fuels reduction method.

Permittees who own livestock and large chunks of land, are the primary protectors of open space in the west. In Idaho, where well over half of the land is federally-owned countless rural communities rely on public lands grazing for their tax base, commerce, and jobs. If forced out of business, a rancher's private property likely becomes developed and urbanized, causing large areas of wildlife habitat to be lost. More land developments bring more unpermitted livestock, such as hobby horses, goats, sheep, llamas. These animals range freely over grazing allotments, taking grazing forage away from permittees who paid for allotment AUM's, with minimum recourse from official land managers.[bull]

Grazing regulations should only be a guidance document promoting sound management and allowing on-the-ground decisions to be made at the local level, not pre-determined on a broad basis. The grazing regulations should allow for greater flexibility in grazing permits, both in AUM numbers and seasons of use, to enable more nimble management based on seasonal conditions, fuels buildup, and forage availability; as all landscapes differ.

Idaho and the general public benefit from our national forests when they are properly managed and used. The Forest Service is expected to develop/revise the forest management plan in a way that fully embraces the principle of multiple-use and active management of our public resources, without further designations restricting the full use and enjoyment of the forest's resources, such as wilderness areas or wild and scenic river corridors.