

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/1/2020 10:00:00 AM

First name: Ty

Last name: Checketts

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The fourth Thursday in November is a day we all plan for and look forward to. A menu is planned, a little extra money is set aside in the family budget, the guestlist is prepared, and our favorite Thanksgiving Day recipes are dug out and dusted off. Traditional foods and seasonal specialty items are secured to make the day memorable. The big day arrives it starts before the crack of dawn to make way for preparations and to make sure everything is in perfect order. The turkey goes in the oven, the stuffing is mixed and tasted until it is just right, and the rolls are rising on the counter next to the homemade pies. Dinner time arrives and everything is set out on the table to provide a beautiful feast. Just as Dad finishes the blessing, there is a knock on the door. Uninvited 'Ol Uncle Hank lets himself and his 10 rowdy children in. Before the family can react, they belly up to the table and elbow the family out of the way so they can help themselves to the best parts of the dinner. They are loud, annoying, and don't show cause or concern for anyone else there. Hank's family leaves destruction in its wake. Hank and his family are our prairie dogs. They leave pieces and scraps, and scars on the land. But, after all of my time, effort, and resources have been expended, I get the leftovers?!?

My name is Ty Checketts. I own the historic Fiddleback Ranch. My family and I love this ranch. It is comprised of roughly 5,000 acres deeded, 41,000 acres forest service, 2,500 acres private lease, and 2,000 acres of state land. We make our living, we raise our kids, we care for our cattle, and we build memories on this land. We are very grateful to live the life we do. It is made possible through the use of the grass allotted to us by the forest service and grazing association.

We have been severely impacted in multiple ways, by prairie dogs. The prairie dogs have eaten our grass-intended for our cows. Due to their mayhem, we have had to buy extra hay and protein supplements. More impactful, however, are the lower weaning weights, lower pregnancy rates, and having to run fewer cows than our permits allow.[comment end] (\*see below)

In my immediate family, we have had multiple horses chasing cows at quick speeds and step in prairie dog holes. In two of these cases, the horses stumbled and fell all the way to the ground. It endangers the horse and my children who ride them. Thankfully, everyone was just shaken up and not seriously injured. [comment end][comment:184-3]Also, I have chased dust storms thinking they were smoke. I have stood up fences that have been blown over for more than 200 yards by tumbleweeds coming off prairie dog towns.[comment end][comment:184-4] I have been completely embarrassed to take visitors to tour my ranch, due to a lack of forage. It appears to friends, neighbors, and guests that I am a poor steward of the land. The National "grassland" should never look like the surface of the moon. There should be grass, wildlife, and a healthy, thriving ecosystem. [comment end][comment:184-5]Recently, our prayers for some relief were answered. The prairie dogs plagued out. For the past two years we've had abundant and timely rains and the grass has grown back. It is beautiful.

I have worked continuously and spent many hours collaborating with government officials. From our local office in Douglas, to the Regional Forester, to the US Secretary of Agriculture, and many in between. I am grateful for their help. I'm grateful they have listened and had true interest in making needful changes. On the government side, we have worked with county commissioners, senators, congressmen & congresswomen, governors, and more. Ultimately, however, the NGO's are a formidable force. I have tried to work with them and find some middle ground that we can all live with. They have time, talents, and money. A single rancher or even a group of us don't stand a chance to face them head on. We need your help to make a plan that is sustainable, that protects the prairie and all the species who call it home, and protects the ranch that I love. All of these objectives can be realized. It's important to me to protect my family, my cattle, my way of life, and my livelihood that helps me to provide for my family. We have debt on the property, and we have to have grass to feed our cows to meet

our obligations.

Thank you for redoing this plan. Below are some points that I feel should be included in the new plan.

The plan MUST provide for the long-term sustainability of the prairie.

I believe:

[bull]Grazing cattle and wildlife are important to a healthy grassland. To graze, they must have grass. Ultimately, this complicated plan could be that simple. Take steps to ensure each ranch has ample grass for their allotments, which we pay for.

[bull]The smartest thing to do is to go with the proposed action, alternative 2 and take in some of alternative 3. My reasoning is, there has been a lot of inputs from all sides. I think it will be the most defensible, the most easily passed, and quickest to implement.

[bull]Prairie dog colonies should be managed between 7,500-10,000 acres, maximum. After they reach 10,000 acres grassland wide, prairie dogs need to be controlled. I also believe that any prairie dog town that meets the goals of the 200 acres (grassland wide) for the associated species habitat should be counted towards the 10,000 acres.

[bull]No single rancher should have to support the proposed 7,500+ acres.

[bull]No single pasture should have to support more than 15% of its total acreage to prairie dogs. In my experience, the pastures heavily populated with prairie dogs make it impossible to use a rotational grazing plan.

[bull]All tools of control should be available in MA 3.67. I strongly support, and respectfully ask for, a one-mile barrier around our residence for the health and safety of my family.

[bull]My private property, my state land, my private leased lands should have a mile buffer zone around it, without any prairie dogs.

[bull]Permittees should have permission to control prairie dogs on their allotments outside of MA 3.67 without having to gain permission from the forest service.

[bull]Ranchers should have the ability to cross fence large pastures to maximize forage growth. It is supported by sound scientific studies that rotational grazing is an effective tool for healthy grasslands.

I support:

[bull]The change of management area 3.63 to MA 3.67, with an emphasis on protecting the vegetation. I also support changing the Cheyenne River special interest area to a riparian emphasis and believe it should extend up Antelope Creek. It is the same topography, has the same ecosystems, and is the major tributary to the Cheyenne River in this area.

[bull]Density control in all prairie dog towns, including those in MA 3.67.

[bull]All types of rodenticides, fumigants, and anti-coagulants for proper use to aid the population control of prairie dogs.

[bull]Recreational shooting, especially in MA 3.67, as it helps with density control and boosts the local economy.

As a rancher, I know I am expected to have sufficient funds to keep my animals in good condition and where they should be. I respectfully ask that no plan is passed that doesn't have ample funding in place for the forest service to take care of the condition of the land and the

I feel like my efforts to collaborate with multiple entities have been extensive and generous. Compromising to have any prairie dogs on my ranch is a substantial contribution and needs just consideration.

Thank you for your time and your help. Please give us a plan that protects the land we love so we can continue to graze our cows and provide for our families. Don't let Uncle Hank's family (the prairie dogs) leave us with the leftovers, we deserve better. Family ranches are being plagued out by corporate entities, catastrophic weather, trade wars, prices, and new faux meat competition. Ranchers do not need any other problems to fight. We should protect ranchers as vehemently as we do prairie dogs or any other vanishing species.

\*1 cow and calf ingest 780 pounds of forage per month during the summer (1 AUM)

1 prairie dog eats about 8 pounds of forage per month during the summer. Thus

780lbs divided by 8lbs equals 97.5 PD's, the equivalent of one cow /calf or one AUM

Using information from Economic Importance of Federal Livestock Grazing in

Converse County By: David T. Taylor, May 2011: One AUM of Federal Grazing under the Ranch Viability Column shows that one AUM supports up to \$220.30 in Ranch Production, \$358.81 in Total Economic Impact and \$120.38 in Labor income.

In very simple terms, for every 100 PD's a Rancher has in any given pasture or grazing allotment of his ranch unit, be it deeded land, State of Wyoming Lands or Federal Lands, those 100 PD's consume the same amount of forage that one cow with a calf at her side (one AUM) would consume during the summer grazing season. Those 100 PD's reduce the Ranches Production value by \$220.30

See Letter Submission: Table of ECONOMIC LOSS TO RANCH UNITS WITH PRAIRIE DOG'S IN THE 2020 PLAN AMENDMENT WITHIN MANAGEMENT AREA 3.67