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I am writing to express my strong opposition to revisions to the US Forest Service Rangeland Management Directives proposed under the administration of former President Donald Trump. If allowed to go forward these changes to the livestock grazing program would substantially and negatively impact millions of acres of public lands, including dedicated Wilderness.

Domestic cattle and sheep are currently authorized to graze about 8 million acres of National Forest Wilderness in the lower 48 states, mostly in critical watersheds particularly unsuited to grazing. Over 2.5 million acres of that total is within vacant (unused and unallocated) allotments. And while the original authors and supporters of the Wilderness Act of 1964 wanted to end grazing in Wilderness because grazing is fundamentally at odds with Wilderness, the politics at the time wouldn't allow it. Today the negative impacts of livestock grazing are much more clearly understood, including but not limited to degraded water quality and soils, the spread of invasive weeds, destruction of riparian and other important habitats, reduced forage for and displacement of native wildlife, and destruction of native plant ecosystems.

The USFS proposed revisions would expand grazing across our National Forests and within Wilderness by directing vacant allotments to be fully restocked and by returning grazing to the excessive levels permitted in the 1960s, despite conditions that cannot support increased grazing. This is the opposite direction the USFS should take-instead of increasing livestock grazing on public lands, the agency should allow vacant allotments to be permanently closed and should protect Wilderness, other public lands, and wildlife by limiting, rather than increasing, inappropriate livestock grazing in National Forests.

This leftover Trump administration proposal poses other problems as well. It fails to hold livestock grazers accountable by not setting proper standards to adequately monitor conditions on the ground, and it excludes the public from some grazing decision processes. Moreover, increased grazing will not only fuel livestock contributions to the climate and biodiversity crises, but runs directly counter to the Biden Administration's 30x30 land conservation agenda by sacrificing what could be protected lands to the commercial livestock industry.

I can tell you from personal experience of 40 years hiking and backpacking in the Western public lands, including Wilderness Areas in multiple states, the impacts of cattle grazing are obvious and damaging to native plant and wildlife ecosystems, and to human enjoyment of Wilderness and back country, both of which are core values of the Wilderness Protection Act as it was envisioned. I strongly urge the USFS to abandon this modern land grab to benefit the exploitive interests of a few ranchers over its responsibility as steward for the best interests of the whole American people.