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Comments: I have been hiking and backpacking in the Uinta Mountains, including the High Uintas Wilderness, for over 50 years and have commented several times in the past on domestic sheep grazing in the range. In my opinion, it's high time it ended, as it has in, for example, the Wind River Mountains. And for essentially the same good reasons.

I have spent much time in areas of the Uintas where sheep are trailed and grazed yearly and also in nearby areas of the Uintas where sheep grazing was discontinued 30-some years ago. The difference is stark, particularly along the streams. In the Blacks Fork drainages, for example, there are areas along the creeks that look like they have been carpet bombed: caving banks, few if any native fish, little or no overhanging vegetation, dead trees on the banks, no wild flowers, no hummingbirds, hardly any birds at all except robins for that matter, etc. Similarly for the alpine zones in the upper elevations. Stubble heights of plants are typically low, with many areas of bare ground. Wildlife is hard to find--unsurprisingly. I have seen all this firsthand several times. On the other hand, the Middle Fork of Beaver Creek now looks pristine and wild. The meadows sport hip high grass, the creek runs deep and cold and harbor fish; elk and moose are often visible in the meadows, and you might even see a mountain lion start his nightly hunt at dusk, as I did a few years ago. By contrast, the Blacks Fork streams are quite ugly in contrast with the stunning peaks and it is hard to imagine a native species such as a bighorn sheep sauntering by, let alone an elusive lynx (I know they visit the Uintas fairly frequently from tracking data). Frankly, this doesn't just seem wrong, it seems morally wrong, since it doesn't have to be this way, which is bad.

Nevertheless, the FS continues to grasp at laughably fantastical explanations for the poor habitat conditions, such as pocket gopher invasions (what a crock!), century-old tie hacking (didn't even occur within the upper drainages), avalanches, etc. What will be next, aliens? Frankly, I find all this hogwash insulting to my intellect and I take it personally, as thousands of other people do as well.

None of these hypotheses are well-supported by the evidence, but seem invented just for the purpose of obfuscation in order to continue with the status quo for the sake of a few families. It is tiresome and burdensome to revisit this issue every several years when nothing ever changes and I know that the best available science does not support the official decisions. This time should be different. Let's have real wilderness, complete with native carnivores and their prey species, instead of sacrificing it to one small special interest group. Terminate the sheep grazing leases!

I agree with comments submitted by my colleagues at Yellowstone to Uintas Connection, Western Watershed Project, and Wilderness Watch. You may refer to their comments as a supplement to mine here, plus citations to relevant literature in support of them.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments.

Sincerely,

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