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First name: Cindy

Last name: Smith

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The State of Utah (State), through the Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office (PLPCO), in collaboration with the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) and the Division of Water Rights (DWRi) has reviewed the Environmental Assessment, Finding of No Significant Impact, and Draft Decision Notice. The State provided scoping comments on November 29, 2023, and incorporates the scoping comments by reference. The State supports the signing of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and encourages the implementation of these projects without delay. The State submits the following comments for your consideration.

Division of Water Rights

The applicant will need to contact the DWRi southeastern regional office to ensure that water rights for the proposed range improvement project are in order before implementation. The southeastern regional office may be reached at (435) 613-3750.

Department of Agriculture and Food

The proposed projects will contribute to healthy rangelands and sustainable multiple use activities for years to come. The affected allotments include Reeder Ridge Sheep & Goat, Ridley Ridge Sheep & Goat, Monument Peak Sheep & Goat, Trough Springs Ridge Sheep & Goat, Ferron Cattle & Horse, Emery Cattle & Horse, and Trail Mountain Cattle & Horse allotments. These allotments contribute significantly to the economic sustainability of the surrounding communities.

The proposed range improvements will occur on allotments throughout Sanpete, Sevier, and Emery counties. Farm employment consists of 7.2% of all jobs in Sanpete County, 5.5% in Sevier County, and 11.7% in Emery County. Additionally, these three counties produce over \$376 million each year in cash receipts from agricultural production with a large portion coming from livestock products. This shows the importance of livestock grazing on public lands not just for the health of the rangeland, but also for economic benefit to the State and counties.

The proposed range improvements will benefit livestock grazing, wildlife, and rangeland health. Increased and improved watering sources distribute livestock more evenly across grazing pastures due to livestock tendencies to congregate close to water. Providing additional infrastructure reduces overgrazing in and around water sources and riparian habitats. Distribution of grazing from in and around riparian habitats also helps improve water quality through the filtering performed by healthy riparian vegetation. Evenly distributed livestock also graze pastures less intensely and allow native grasses and brush an easier recovery. These benefits extend beyond livestock to improve wildlife access to fresh water. Overall, increased watering sources greatly benefit rangeland ecosystems, wildlife, and domestic livestock grazing.

The State appreciates the opportunity to provide comments, and we look forward to continually working with the Forest Service to improve rangeland health and ensure sustainable multiple uses on public lands.