Testimony of Julian Joseph (J.J.) Goicoechea on behalf of the Nevada Department of Agriculture

For the hearing entitled:

"Examining the Biden Administration's Efforts to Limit Access to Public Lands"

House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the subcommittee, my name is J.J. Goicoechea. After serving as interim state veterinarian in 2022, a position I held from 2016 to 2019, I was appointed by Governor Lombardo of Nevada to serve as the Director of the Nevada Department of Agriculture in January of this year. I had the opportunity to appear before another House Natural Resources' subcommittee in 2018, when I was Chairman of the Eureka County Board of County Commissions. I testified on issues related to the stewardship of public lands and how the decisions made by federal agencies have direct and lasting effects on people, communities, economies, and ecosystems in the West. It is my pleasure to appear before you today to discuss challenges of the same nature.

In addition to my current role as Director of Agriculture, I am a past president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, serve as a regional Vice President for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, am a member of the Board of Directors of the Public Lands Council, and am a past board member of the Nevada Association of Counties. I served under three Governors on the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, chairing that body for 10 years until my appointment as Director of Agriculture. I have operated a mixed animal veterinary practice for more than 20 years, and have spent my life – as my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather did before me – stewarding the lands that today are part of my family ranch and the lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Forest Service (USFS).

When federal agencies develop policy or issue directives, Nevada is often the bellwether for its success – or failure. More than 85 percent of the state is owned or managed by the federal government. The BLM owns or administers more than 63 percent – 48 million acres – of my home state. The remaining percentage can be attributed to the USFS, National Park Service, Department of Defense, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This means that for the 3 million people who call Nevada home, and for the tourists who come to see more than the incomparable lights of Las Vegas, access and utility of those landscapes is managed by policies developed here in Washington.

Nevada is home to a productive mining sector, a diverse energy portfolio, and an agriculture industry that has weathered incredible hardship over the last several decades and continues to contribute more than $1 billion[1] to the state's economy annually. In Nevada, as is the case in much of the West, it is impossible to separate oil; natural gas; recreation; agriculture; hunting; fishing; solar, wind, and geothermal energy, and environmental stewardship from public lands.

[1] Nevada Department of Agriculture, 2017 Economic Impact Summary.

To have success in any one of these spaces, federal policy must be predictable, consistent, and flexible enough to allow managers to adapt to changing conditions.

As a county commissioner, I managed people. As a rancher, I managed land and all the factors that affect land health. As a veterinarian, I managed animals – and the people making decisions about their pets and livestock. As a state official, I manage all these things. The BLM is tasked with similarly complex challenges: managing landscapes and the people who use them, for sustained productivity, and it is often the implementation of this directive that is the greatest source of conflict on federal lands.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) governs the BLM's administration of lands under their purview. After nearly a century of piecemeal management of each of the multiple uses of federal lands, FLPMA was enacted to coordinate the many uses of lands at that time, including mining, recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife, and fish.[2]

For the last 50 years, FLPMA has been amended by Congress and federal agencies have developed guidance to provide greater clarity on how the federal land managers should create a balanced multiple use landscape, but the underlying directive of the 1976 act has remained the same: manage these landscapes under the "multiple use" mission, meaning "*…the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.*"[3] Today, I'm here to share a few examples where the BLM has diverted from their FLMPA directive to the detriment of the landscape – as well as the present and future benefits of the American people. For the purposes and scope of today's discussion, I'd like to highlight three components of "public access" as directed under FLPMA:

- individual benefit – that is, the public's ability to access and directly benefit from landscapes;
- involvement in the planning process – stakeholders' ability to engage in the planning and management process to ensure agencies are maximizing benefit; and
- societal benefit – ensuring that agencies are considering all factors and optimizing the benefit to society writ large.

BLM Public Lands Proposed Rule

On April 3, 2023, BLM published a proposed rule entitled "Conservation and Landscape Health."[4] In the days immediately following the announcement of the rule, the contents have been described as a "seismic shift in lands management,"[5] as the proposed rule seeks to

[2] 43 U.S.C. §1702(c)
[3] 43 U.S.C. §1702(c)
[4] Conservation and Landscape Health; BLM Proposed Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 19583-19604 (April 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 U.S.C 1701 *et seq.)*
[5] S. Streeter, "BLM proposes seismic shift in lands management", *E&E NEWS PM,* 2023, https://www.eenews.net/articles/blm-proposes-seismic-shift-in-lands-management/

fundamentally alter the expectations of how multiple uses are balanced on public lands. The proposed rule seeks to codify and promote the agency's process around designating Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), adds an entirely new use to the balance of uses managed under FLPMA, and establishes a new, non-competitive leasing system for conservation. The agency proposes to do all this without having advanced discussions or consultation with the State of Nevada, our local governments, and Nevada stakeholders and in failing to conduct analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Process – States, Stakeholders, and Public

The BLM has fundamentally failed to meet their statutory obligations under the regulatory process. Understanding the BLM is currently accepting comments on the proposed rule, the agency has been negligent in adequately consulting with the State, stakeholders, cooperating agencies, and the public in its development of this rule.

Stakeholders first learned that the agency was considering promulgating a rulemaking during publication of the semi-regulatory agenda this spring. Further hints were given in the White House's notice of summary action following President Biden's "Conservation Summit" at the Department of the Interior (DOI) on March 21, 2023.

Outreach to the BLM to determine what would constitute the "proposed rule that will…. Modernize the agency's tools and strategies for managing America's public lands" [6] yielded no information. Stakeholders, including the federal lands grazing community, received no advanced notice of publication. Similarly, the State of Nevada, despite the significant BLM footprint, broad impacts of such a rule on the State, and ongoing discussions about other BLM failures to collaborate, also received no advanced notice.

Advanced notice, consultation, and stakeholder engagement plays an essential role in drafting a durable rule. The BLM has mechanisms in place to conduct stakeholder outreach, such as issuing a Request for Information (ROI), an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR), or a Notice of Intent (NOI) to accompany development of a NEPA analysis. The agency has elected to use these tools in a number of other regulatory changes to existing programs that affect significant swaths of public lands:

- Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Revision of Grazing Regulations for Public Lands, January 21, 2020
- Notice of Intent to Conduct a Review of the Federal Coal Leasing Program and to Seek Public Comment, August 20, 2021
- Notice of Intent to Amend Land Use Plans Regarding Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation and Prepare Associated Environmental Impact Statements, November 22, 2021
- Notice of Intent to Amend Multiple Resource Management Plans Regarding Gunnison Sage-Grouse (*Centrocerus minimus*), July 6, 2022

[6] White House Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Takes New Action to Conserve and Restore America's Lands and Waters. March 21, 2023.

- Notice of Intent to Prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to Evaluate Utility-Scale Solar Energy Planning and Amend Resource Management Plans for Renewable Energy Development, December 8, 2022

These actions are among the thousands of other examples when the BLM has elected to use an NOI to gather relevant information related to rulemaking prior to promulgating regulatory change.

Notably, in each of these cases, the proposed regulatory change was offered as part of a robust NEPA analysis. In most cases, the agency elected to use the most comprehensive NEPA analysis, an Environmental Impact Statement. The agency's approach appears consistent: changes to a national program that would affect lands and stakeholders in multiple states rise to the highest level of NEPA analysis, even if there would be individual Records of Decisions or subsequent actions.

In the case of the proposed Public Lands Rule, however, the BLM elected to forego NEPA altogether, claiming that despite the creation of an entirely new use under FLPMA, the codification of a land designation tool, and the establishment of a new leasing system, the rule was not significant enough to warrant environmental analysis.

By moving straight to publishing a proposed rule, the agency bypassed their responsibility to truly evaluate potential impacts of such actions, eliminated the opportunity for anyone, other than those employed by senior BLM leadership, to meaningfully contribute to the proposal, and reduced stakeholder confidence in the implementation of a final rule.

Further, the BLM appears intent to avoid substantive discussion with the public, stakeholders, and state and local governments under the agency's 75-day public comment period for the proposed rule. The BLM has scheduled only five public information sessions. The first session was a webinar, during which BLM staff provided a briefing on the contents of the rule and offered additional narrative to give shape to their interpretation of how the rule would be implemented, if finalized. A significant portion of the narrative was based not on the components of the rule, but clearly spoke to the agency's contemplation of subsequent guidance that would guide how the rule would be applied to federal lands. BLM presenters answered a limited number of attendee questions that were typed into the chat box, many of which did not address substantive questions about the rule. There was no opportunity for discussion with any attendees.

At this time, BLM has announced just three in-person public information sessions. These sessions are in Denver, CO; Reno, NV; and Albuquerque, NM. I appreciate the opportunity for Nevadans to attend the meeting in Reno. However, the schedule for meetings precludes many rural Nevadans as well as stakeholders in Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Arizona from having an accessible meeting to attend, especially provided the connectivity challenges in rural areas that limit virtual engagement.

The meeting schedule, coupled with the unidirectional briefing style, has left stakeholders, some of which will be most impacted by the proposed rule, and federal partners alike with the

impression that this process is designed to tell the multiple use community what is happening to them, rather than being an active, transparent, and collaborative partner.

In this process alone, BLM neglected public input in the development of the rule; and thus far, is limiting public engagement through the meeting structure and limited availability of meeting locations.

Process – Congress and Federal Agency Oversight

BLM is alleging that the proposed rule would not have an economic effect on a substantial number of small entities; and therefore, is not subject to review under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA)[7], and that the proposed rule does not constitute a major federal rulemaking and is, therefore, not subject to the Congressional Review Act (CRA).[8]

The Nevada Department of Agriculture fundamentally disagrees and interprets this as BLM circumventing Congress' ability to represent the best interests of their constituencies and denying other federal agencies the opportunity to ensure BLM is adequately considering the full breadth of stakeholder impacts.

The proposed rule contains actions that could substantially alter the multiple use balance on public lands, including substantial revision or elimination of mining, grazing, energy development, and other activities that the agency could deem incompatible with the new use established under a final rule. In the state of Nevada, economic output derived from BLM lands totals $29.3 billion (from Fiscal Year 2021):[9]

- Recreation: $554.2 million
- Renewables: $607.1 million
- Nonenergy Minerals: $27,630.1 million
- Oil and Gas: $19.9 million
- Grazing: $206.2 million
- Timber: $1.5 million
- Other: $314.2 million

In addition to the direct and labor revenue generated from grazing on public lands, cattle production in Nevada generates an additional $66.2 million in total ecosystem services on an annual basis, which is approximately $356.81 per cow.[10]

[7] 5 U.S.C. §601 *et seq.*
[8] 5 U.S.C. §804(2)
[9] Bureau of Land Management, *Socioeconomic Impact Report 2022,* https://www.blm.gov/about/data/socioeconomic-impact-report-2022
[10] Taylor, D., Efrain, N., Ashwell, Q., Maher, A., Maczko, K., & Tanaka, J. (n.d.). *National and State Economic Values of Cattle Ranching and Farming Based Ecosystem Services in the U.S.* Retrieved May 24, 2023, from http://www.sustainablerangelands.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/B-1338-economic-value_web.pdf

The opportunity cost of the rule is high. According to the agency, BLM-administered lands "supported $201 billion in economic output and nearly 783,000 jobs across the country in Fiscal Year 2021." According to the BLM's *Sound Investment 2022* publication, grazing generates $1.439 billion on an annual basis and supports more than 2 million jobs across the West.[11] Modelling conducted by the University of Wyoming about the economic consequences that would result from removing grazing from federal lands in three western states (Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada) showed crippling losses in rural communities. Combined, the data set modelled losses on 5,389 active grazing permits that, if removed, would result in a 60 percent decrease in ranch sales, a 50 percent decrease in labor income, a 65 percent decrease in personal income (from $33,940 to $11,812) and billions of dollars in direct economic losses. This doesn't even take into account the impacts on our nation's food supply chains.

If the proposed rule has a limiting effect on even half the grazing allotments in Nevada, 20 percent of renewable energy projects, 25 percent of recreation, or less than 1 percent of the nonenergy mineral production in Nevada alone, the BLM will have met the threshold for a significant rule and both the RFA and CRA would apply.

The likelihood of such significant impacts appears high. The proposed rule makes clear that conservation leases will not necessarily operate within the context of land use plans,[12] and would not override the subsequent authorization of valid and existing rights "so long as the subsequent authorizations are compatible with the conservation use."[13] The Nevada Department of Agriculture has serious concerns about allowing a new leasing system to operate outside the bounds of a land use plan (which includes statutory requirement for the role of the public) and preemptively confirming that certain uses are likely to be precluded.

With BLM failing to include the RFA analysis in the proposed rule, the agency is preventing federal agencies from considering the rule prior to its publication and limiting the ability of these agencies to consider impacts on larger constituencies.

Content

At first blush, BLM's proposed Public Lands Rules appears to offer a solution to a challenge many in the grazing community have grappled with – allowing ranchers to extend conservation practices on private land to abutting public lands. However, upon further investigation, the content of the rule raised questions and piqued concern among the Nevada public and the ranching community.

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[11] Bureau of Land Management, *Socioeconomic Impact Report 2022,* https://www.blm.gov/about/data/socioeconomic-impact-report-2022

[12] Conservation and Landscape Health; BLM Proposed Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 19591 (April 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 U.S.C 1701 *et seq.)*. See Section 6102.4 – Conservation Leasing: "The BLM will determine whether a conservation lease is an appropriate mechanism based on the context of each proposed conservation use and application, not necessarily as a specific allocation in a land use plan."

[13] Conservation and Landscape Health; BLM Proposed Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 19586 (April 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 U.S.C 1701 *et seq.)*.

The proposed rule seeks to elevate conservation as a "use" "on par with other uses of the public lands under FLPMA's multiple-use and sustained yield framework." [14] All other uses under the multiple-use and sustained yield framework have been clearly established and defined under FLPMA.[15] Each of these uses had been previously authorized on lands that would ultimately be managed by the BLM after 1976 through other laws like the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, the Mining Law of 1872, and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. Each time a "use" was added to the multiple-use management portfolio under FLPMA, Congress authorized parameters and directed the BLM to develop programming to address the use.

While balancing conservation with responsible development of our public lands is at the core of FLPMA, in this instance, the BLM is seeking to add a new use without Congressional direction and defines the new use so narrowly that it could create conflicts with other Department of the Interior (DOI) agencies and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) interpretations of conservation. The proposed rule entirely reimagines the balance of multiple use with no advanced public notice and limited public input.

Further, the proposed rule justifies the reimagining of the multiple use mandate of a novel interpretation of conservation as a use in order to justify a non-competitive leasing system that will make conservation leases a tool that will necessarily be inaccessible to a significant portion of the adjacent public and will simultaneously make public lands less accessible to both user groups and the public at large.

In every action authorized under FLPMA, the BLM is directed to provide early public notice and opportunity for comment: land use plans,[16] withdrawals of land,[17] and more. The BLM has poised conservation leases to avoid these same requirements under FLPMA by bypassing land use plan applicability.

Additionally, the agency has failed to define what is considered a "compatible" use or an "incompatible" use with an underlying conservation lease. While the BLM has previously stated they believe grazing is a conservation tool, the rule contains no text that would make the industry confident that this rule is not targeted to remove grazing access. Further, the rule makes clear that uses like hunting, fishing, and recreation, when done with a commercial component – like outfitting, guiding, and other conservation activities – would not be defined as a "casual use"[18] and could be precluded due to the presence of a conservation lease. In sum, the BLM has proposed a system that will be rife for abuse and litigation without consistent standards and application.

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[14] Conservation and Landscape Health; BLM Proposed Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 19585 (April 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 U.S.C 1701 *et seq.)*.
[15] 43 U.S.C. §1702(c)
[16] 43 U.S.C. §1712(c)(9)
[17] 43 U.S.C. §1714(c)(2)
[18] Conservation and Landscape Health; BLM Proposed Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 19598 (April 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 U.S.C 1701 *et seq.)*. See Section §6101.4 Definitions, "*Casual Use* means any short-term, noncommercial activity that does not cause appreciable damage or disturbance to the public lands or their resources or improvements that is not prohibited by the closure of the lands to such activities."

The proposed rule also seeks to codify the agency's use of ACECs. The State of Nevada is currently home to 48 ACECs, many of which preclude public access or preclude multiple activities. I have significant concerns with BLM's proposed changes to the ACEC process that would make the process less transparent and more restrictive.

Let me be clear, Western agriculture – grazing management of public lands across the West – is conservation. The State of Nevada and the livestock grazing industry are committed to landscape health, continued productivity, improved partnerships, and conservation of public lands – and we're committed to doing it while following the law and including public input. Thus far, the BLM's proposed rule appears to deemphasize and discourage fair public access, public involvement, and stakeholder input.

Utilization of the Antiquities Act

Nevada is home to three national monuments: the Basin and Range National Monument, encompassing 704,000 acres; the Gold Butte National Monument, encompassing 296,937 acres; and one of the system's newest monuments the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, encompassing 506,814 acres. All told, the last three presidents have changed the management of at least 1,507,751 acres in Nevada.

Despite the significant impact in the state, President Biden recently designated the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada. The announcement came without any consultation with my department or adequate engagement with the State of Nevada. In the wake of the designation, Governor Lombardo issued the following statement:

> *Since I took office, the Biden White House has not consulted with my administration about any of the details of the proposed Avi Kwa Ame national monument which, given the size of the proposal, seems badly out of step. Upon learning that the President was considering unilateral action, I reached out to the White House to raise several concerns, citing the potential for terminal disruption of rare earth mineral mining projects and long-planned, bi-partisan economic development efforts. While I'm still waiting for a response, I'm not surprised. This kind of 'Washington Knows Best' policy might win plaudits from unaccountable special interests, but it's going to cost our state jobs and economic opportunity – all while making land more expensive and more difficult to develop for affordable housing and critical infrastructure projects. The federal confiscation of 506,814 acres of Nevada land is a historic mistake that will cost Nevadans for generations to come.*[19]

[19] Lombardo, J. [@JosephMLombardo]. (2023, March 21)., *Since I took office, the Biden White House has not consulted with my administration about any of the details of the proposed Avi Kwa Ame national monument, which, given the size of the proposal, seems badly out of step. My full statement on the designation below.* Twitter. https://twitter.com/JosephMLombardo/status/1638257593134247937/photo/1

The Antiquities Act of 1906 provides for the President of the United States to establish national monuments by public proclamation, provided the lands be "confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected." [20]

The Avi Kwa Ame footprint far exceeds the smallest area compatible; and in this case, appeared motivated by the Administration's desire to avoid development and utilization of resources consistent with the BLM's multiple use mission. The Antiquities Act should not be used as yet another tool for the BLM to avoid fulfilling their multiple use mission.

Renewable Development

Nevada has a broad portfolio of energy resources totaling 4,488.3 megawatts of geothermal, solar, hydro, wind, and other sources. Many of these projects are developed on public lands managed by the BLM. Conflicts have arisen when siting new energy projects on public lands and each of these are managed according to FLPMA guidance.

In April 2023, the BLM announced further development of 23,675 acres in southern Nevada for development of solar resources; and if fully developed, the project could produce 4 gigawatts of renewable energy. The announcement was part of the Administration's strategy to permit 25 new gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands throughout the nation by 2025, a fairly significant endeavor given the acreage required to site solar facilities.

Using the proposed development in Nye County as a reference, solar developments can require between 4,000 and 7,000 acres to develop a single gigawatt. This means the BLM's efforts could result in the conversion of 100,000 to 175,000 acres of multiple use landscapes to solar development.

FLPMA directs the agency to manage public lands in a manner that will provide *"food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic animals."*[21] When conflicts or concerns are raised with the siting of new energy projects, NEPA analysis on the proposed project usually thoroughly addresses likely impacts on habitat for fish and wildlife. However, the impacts on other uses, including the impacts of the proposed actions on food and habitat for domestic animals, fail to rise to the same degree of analysis.

Nationwide, utility-scale solar developments have been sited on prime agriculture lands, often displacing livestock grazing and with it, the natural resource benefits derived therefrom. The considerations and effects on public lands are no different. In seeking to site additional energy resources on federal land, the BLM should consider the impacts from the loss valuable grazed forage or the ecosystem services provided by the grazing permittees; development (and periodic adjustments in use) must be done *"without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land, with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not*

[20] 16 U.S.C. §431
[21] 43 U.S.C. §1701(a)(8)

necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output."[22]

Analysis of the direct and indirect effects upon livestock grazing management:

- large areas of disturbance and fencing,
- decreased Animal Unit Months (AUMs) multiplied by the life of the project,
- potential water quality and quantity impacts,
- increased off- and on-road traffic,
- construction of new roads and all ancillary infrastructure,
- potential vehicle/equipment conflicts with livestock,
- decreased palatability of vegetation and forage from road dust during development activities,
- unsuccessful reclamation that does not return to healthy rangeland conditions,
- introduction and spread of noxious and invasive weeds, and
- other social and economic impacts to livestock grazing permittees and livestock management operations.

Each of these impacts should be fully evaluated as part of a project proposal on federal lands.

With the BLM's proposed Public Lands Rule, the risk to agricultural operations in Nevada is compounded. In addition to the risk of loss of access to forage on grazing allotments due to siting of energy projects, the proposed rule makes clear that efforts to use a conservation lease for mitigation will also have the ability to remove lands from grazing use in order to mitigate energy project disturbance, in effect completely removing a prior valid grazing right. This potential is not limited to livestock grazing. These impacts will not only have an effect on livestock grazing, but will also affect mineral claims, recreation, hunting, fishing, and all other uses that are in areas that are currently being analyzed for construction of renewable energy projects and would be the site of future proposed conservation leasing.

Closing

I remain concerned that the current trajectory of federal policy for BLM lands in Nevada, and West-wide, will compromise the viability of agriculture in the West. In the western United States, public lands and agriculture are inextricably linked. The health of the 245 million surface acres and 700 million acres of subsurface minerals of federal land directly depends on the stewardship of grazing permittees, like those in Nevada, who have managed these lands for years, if not generations like my family.

The recent actions and proposed rule fly in the face of the multiple use mandate; and while the BLM will argue that this is bringing all uses to an equal level, we are already seeing this not be the case in Nevada.

[22] 43 U.S.C. §1702(c)

The proposed rule outlines that conservation leases "*would not override valid existing rights or preclude other, subsequent authorizations so long as those subsequent authorizations are compatible with conservation use.*"[23] The qualifying statement "so long as" negates all of the previous statements, demonstrating BLM's clear intent that uses such as solar, wind, oil and gas, mining, and livestock grazing will never meet the BLM's compatibility clause. This undermines the development and stewardship of all BLM lands.

Without access to public lands and the forage and water they provide, cattle and sheep producers in Nevada would not be able to sustain viable operations, putting the national beef and lamb markets at risk of increased volatility. In Nevada alone, the result would be $202.6 million in lost grazing economic activity, $66 million in lost ecosystem services, and an incalculable loss to the culture, rural communities, and land values across the state. Without stewardship of these ranchers, the BLM would simply be unable to take care of these landscapes – with or without conservation leases. The greatest threat to sage grouse, mule deer, trout, and other key species in the state is habitat loss due to fire and invasive species encroachment. Grazing reduces fire risk, particularly in years like this, where ample moisture will result in an explosion of late-season forage. Without grazing, that forage will dry up and become fuel for catastrophic wildfire. Grazing reduces these fuels as part of normal operations, preventing the BLM from applying chemical or other treatments that cost an average of $150 per acre. The cost savings for acres treated across the West totals billions of dollars annually.

When considering policies that touch every corner of my state, I implore the BLM to increase public input and public access to ensure they are drafting durable regulations and policies that motivate stakeholder that are working to keep these landscapes productive. If BLM continues current trends, they could be putting vast ecosystems at risk from reduced stewardship and compromise their ability to do long-term landscape-level planning, all while compromising food security nationwide. I encourage the Subcommittee to continue its rigorous oversight of the BLM, and I encourage each of you to look at your states and the stakeholders affected by each of these actions.

I thank you for your time and am happy to answer any questions.

[23] Conservation and Landscape Health; BLM Proposed Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 19586 (April 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 U.S.C 1701 *et seq.)*.