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Testimony of Darrel Allred, Chairman Save Our Rural Economy

**Before the Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Chairman Walden, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on a subject of personal importance to me and of critical importance to our nation's forests and the people and communities that live within them.

My name is Darrel Allred. I am Chairman of the organization Save Our Rural Economy or SORE, which is a grassroots organization, in the small town of Glenwood, NM, started in October of 2002. SORE is comprised of ranchers, businesspersons and concerned citizens with the sole purpose of finding solutions to problems regarding the survival of our rural economy.

Glenwood, NM is located in the southern end of Catron County, NM and within the Gila National Forest, Region 3, which has traditionally been a ranching community, however the Rescission Act of 1995 was put into effect. This Act requires that each National Forest System Unit adhere to a schedule for completion of NEPA analysis and decisions on all allotments within the Forest Unit; NEPA must be completed on all allotments listed in schedules that the Chief of the Forest Service directed all Forest units to make, within 10 years. In the Glenwood area, all cattle ranching is done primarily on public lands and since 1995 the USFS has been performing all NEPA's concerning this activity.

SORE believes that since the USFS has been performing NEPA the amount of cattle grazing on public lands has declined dramatically all over the West. In the Glenwood area alone, the 2000 Census shows that the tax revenues collected by the County have declined by over 50% over the last 10 years. Nick Ashcroft, an economist, with New Mexico State University conducted a study in 2003, which shows that the number of Animal Units Months (AUM's) allowed to graze on the public lands within Catron County has been cut by 274,000 since 1976, which equates to approx. 22,833 head of cattle. This is a \$17,962,256.00 dollar cumulative loss of revenue to Catron County. These losses have effected every part of our rural economy. These numbers represent just one county, imagine what the losses are when you start adding up the entire West.

Our local school district has suffered tremendously! We have gone from over 400 children enrolled in our schools to an estimated 186 enrolled for the 04-05 school year. The small satellite school of Glenwood will probably be closed within the next year and children between the ages of 6 and 12 will be forced to ride a bus for one hour each day before and after school in order to be educated.

Catron County suffered great losses in the logging industry and is now loosing most of its cattle industry. Again, if you look at the study performed by Nick Ashcroft of NMSU, the employment has changed from ranches and farms to the federal government or USFS. As of 2001, the government employed 40.6% of Catron County residents, while agriculture only represented 10.8% of residents. In direct correlation to this data, the amount of earnings in government positions has gone up from 1976 to 2001, but the farm/ranch earnings has declined into the negative over this same time period. We are loosing our customs and culture in our rural area; in essence we are loosing our heritage and way of life. Our children can no longer afford to stay in our area and make a living. They are forced to leave in order to raise their families and survive. Our county is therefore becoming predominantly a retirement community with no new life to sustain it.

The USFS is trying their best to get the job done. However, due to the condition of our nation's forests, the increase in wildfires, and the constant barrage of lawsuits filed by environmental groups, they can no longer

keep up. Over the past few years, there is usually just a skeleton crew in our district office who sees to the day to day operations. All other personnel are out fighting fire. This is also a critical time of the growing season when data needs to be collected concerning grazing analysis on allotments, not to mention that all work is put on hold until personnel have returned back to their usual duties. This means NEPA on an allotment can take years. During which time, there is usually some type of change in personnel, a new district ranger or range consultant, and the way data is collected and viewed changes completely. It's like starting the whole process over. There are also inconsistencies from district to district as to how data is collected and processed. Many districts are still using the old cage and clippings method, instead of becoming up to date on current methods and technology and letting the rancher become more involved with monitoring and decision making. The USFS also uses seasonal, unqualified employees for the purpose of collecting data and performing surveys, which can greatly affect allotments.

For example, Marinel Poppie is a local rancher, she purchased the commensurate or deeded property from a three generation ranching family in 2001, who waived their grazing preference to her and therefore she also acquired the grazing permit for the Roberts Park Allotment on National Forest land. The Roberts Park Allotment was transferred to Ms. Poppie at 396 head of cattle and 8 horses. On June 13, 2003 the Glenwood District Ranger, Larry Raley, sent out a proposed action to authorize cattle grazing on the Roberts Park Allotment. The proposed action was to issue a 10-year grazing permit that authorized up to 240 head of livestock per year, a cut of 156 head of cattle, approx. 35%. This letter of notice was sent out without any notice to Ms. Poppie. The letter was also sent out on Wilderness District letterhead with comments to be received by all interested parties by July 16, 2003 and stated that there were only 5 pastures located within the allotment, when there are actually 7. This proposed action was typed up and sent out without any type of on the ground data being performed. When Ms. Poppie asked for a copy of all the data that had been collected to generate this action, she was given a one-page hand written document from 1998. This document indicated, only ocular surveys had been performed, but it didn't specify who had collected the data, why or where it was collected from on her allotment. Ms. Poppie then had to hire her own Range Consultant at her expense to actually come out to her allotment and collect data. The findings were significantly different from the USFS findings. The USFS then had their personnel go out to the allotment and collect data; their findings were very close to the private range consultant.

The NEPA process on the Roberts Park Allotment is currently ongoing and Ms. Poppie is constantly attending meetings/negotiations and getting help from the outside to show the improvements and forage are in place to graze the current numbers on her allotment. During this time there has been at least four changes in personnel, a new district ranger and three different range consultants. The range consultant who started the proposed action on the allotment has been transferred to the Supervisor's office over the district to a position on the NEPA Planning Team. He has taken personal offense to his decision being challenged and is part of the reason the process is being held up on this particular allotment.

Another example of problems with the current system in place happened in January of 2003. A rancher in our area, Mr. Hugh B. McKeen, who has the Cedar Breaks Allotment, was told he had to remove his cattle off of the allotment, because the current pasture was utilizing, the Stout Mesa pasture, was at the available forage limits and the rest of the allotment pastures were at the same or worse conditions. Shortly after removing his cattle, the Glenwood Ranger District hosted a range monitoring class for area ranchers for the purpose of teaching the ranchers the new range monitoring method, the Holechek stubble height method, the district was implementing. The NMSU Range Task Force personnel attended, including Dr. Jerry Holechek, who developed the method.

After discussion, the group went out on the ground to show how to perform the method on the ground. It was decided to go to the Stout Mesa pasture on the Cedar Breaks Allotment. Mr. McKeen was present and agreed. After the group arrived, the Range Consultant for the USFS, Glenwood Ranger District, Mr. Ed Hallaway started telling the group according to the new method being put into place the available forage within the pasture was only 20% and 80% had already been utilized. Dr. Holechek decided to go ahead and just do some on the ground teaching and check the pasture. They had gone to one of the key areas so Dr. Holechek started showing the group how to collect the data and perform the methods in order to get your results. Dr. Holechek then told Mr. Hallaway he was quite wrong, only 20% of the forage had been utilized and 80% was still available. He then proceeded to ask Mr. Hallaway if he had been asleep in class that day has Mr. Holechek had taught Mr. Hallaway in college.

Approx. six weeks after this class, the Glenwood District Ranger, Mr. Larry Raley sent out a letter to all the ranchers stating the district would be implementing a new range monitoring system which would include only some or parts of the Holechek system. This is an example of the mad scientist approach to range

monitoring and analysis as the method being used would never be able to be backed up in court, as the USFS is not using a tried and proven method. Mr. McKeen was not allowed to put his cattle back and eventually suffered a 25% cut on his allotment numbers.

One last example of the problems with the USFS doing their own analysis is shown on the Catwalk National Recreation Trail/Whitewater Picnic Area or Catwalk. The Catwalk was in need of some repairs and maintenance, so the Glenwood District Ranger, Larry Raley, decided to rebuild the old Catwalk and build a new handicap accessible trail on the other side of Whitewater Creek along the canyon wall. Instead of performing an EA or an EIS, the USFS used a Categorical Exclusion and in the biological assessment for the project they determined that the project would have "no effect" on loach minnow or spikedace, two endangered species of the area, yet on allotments in the area the USFS found they would be "a likely to affect" concerning cattle grazing. The USFS proceeded with the project and performed major blasting along the canyon walls in order to install the new trail, which sent all kinds of debris and sediment into the creek, not to mention all of the equipment which was used in the canyon, driven back and forth up the streambed. A complaint was filed with the Fish & Wildlife Service (F&WS). Upon their investigation they found the USFS to be in violation of the Endanger Species Act under 7(a)(1) .

These are just some of the examples with the problems, inadequacies and inconsistencies with the grazing analysis program and how the NEPA process is currently being performed. Our organization believes HR 3102 will make a huge difference in the condition of the forest, especially in rangelands, and make a huge tax savings to the taxpayers of this country.

The Office of Management and Budget has already directed the federal government, through OMB circular A-76, to outsource commercial activities. And I quote, " The competitive enterprise system, characterized by individual freedom and initiative, is the primary source of national economic growth. The federal government has grown to perform a myriad of commercial activities, in addition to providing citizens with a range of programs from law enforcement to stewardship of federal lands. Services in these and other areas are provided by a blend of federal government and private sector sources. For the American people to receive maximum value for their tax dollars, all commercial activities performed government personnel should be subject to the forces of competition." By funding this program it will pay for itself in the savings to the taxpayer.

We have numerous letters of strong support from many different organizations in both NM and AZ . People want on the ground change to sustain our rural lifestyles. By intrusting the entire range analysis and NEPA process to our Land Grant Universities you are entrusting the experts in all fields to analyze our public lands. These are the people who need to be performing these duties and teaching the up and coming generations the proper way to take care of the land for the benefit of the entire nation. You will also be stopping a lot of the lawsuits which are currently being filed, because the work will be getting done and it will be done by the experts who can back it up in court, if necessary. Plus, the Land Grant Universities can perform these duties at a fraction of the cost it is currently being done, which is again a saving to the taxpayers. The USFS will still be making all decisions concerning allotments, but is will be based on good, sound, up to date science and information. This would make a win, win situation for everyone, the rancher, the environmental groups, the USFS, the politicians and the taxpayer. EVERYONE!

Thank you very much for asking me to appear before this Subcommittee.