

BLM restrictions could threaten Utahns' way of life

Sen. Orrin Hatch Guest Editorial 11:52 a.m. MDT May 31, 2015



(Photo: Rick Bowmer / AP)

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As Utahns, we depend on our state's fertile rangeland to raise livestock, grow crops and support thriving communities. Disturbingly, the [Bureau of Land Management's](#) growing restrictions on ranching and grazing operations could threaten our way of life.

Grazing activity in the Grand Staircase-Escalante region began declining in 1996, after President Clinton designated the nearly 1.9 million acres of land as a national monument. The president issued this proclamation without so much as a "by your

leave" to the people of Utah. There were no consultations or hearings; no town hall meetings or radio discussions; no input from federal land managers or state officials; no maps; no boundaries — nothing.

In fact, the president did not even clear his decision with then-Gov. [Mike Leavitt](#), the [Utah State Legislature](#), or the members of the congressional delegation—all of whom were staunchly opposed to the designation. Like many Utahns, I was furious with the president's actions.

Since the designation of the Monument, grazing activity in the region also declined. According to the Utah Cattlemen's Association, the BLM has suspended nearly 28 percent of the area's federal livestock grazing animal unit-months (AUMs) since 1996. Unfortunately, the decline in AUMs on the Monument is indicative of the BLM's poor stewardship across the state.

To make matters worse, the BLM is now considering an amendment that would eliminate grazing on the Monument altogether. Grazing and livestock are absolutely vital to Kane and Garfield counties, and such a drastic decision could wreak havoc on the local economy. Consider what we stand to lose: According to the Utah Farm Bureau, \$12–15 million in economic activity is directly tied to cattle grazing on the Monument. This money creates jobs, contributes to local tax revenue and supports vital public services.

Beyond restrictions on cattle grazing, the BLM's poor stewardship of the land presents yet another risk to the region. Even if the agency changed course overnight and restored grazing to the historic levels that existed before the designation of the Monument, the land in its current state would not be able to sustain that level of activity. Over the last 20 years, we have witnessed a worrisome decline in rangeland health. With this decline, livestock carrying capacity has also decreased.

To address the BLM's mismanagement and restore our rangeland health, I have introduced the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Grazing Protection Act. This bill would restore livestock grazing and direct the BLM to create and implement a management program within the areas of the Monument to improve rangeland conditions for wildlife and livestock carrying capacity. Improving the range would not only benefit ranchers and affected communities; it would also bring significant ecological and environmental benefits to the entire area.

This legislation is part of my broader agenda to empower individuals, rein in the Executive Branch and reform the federal regulatory structure. Our Constitution gives the federal government an important role, but it should not be a heavy-handed regulator.

Rather, government's proper role is to act as a facilitator, creating an environment that encourages development and self-reliance. This legislation cultivates such an atmosphere by improving our rangeland and empowering Utah's ranchers. Supporting this bill will drive our prosperity and improve quality of life for decades to come.

Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch can be reached via email at <http://www.hatch.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/email-orrin>.

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