

# The Ecological Society of America

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*Also sent to:*  
*Sen. Sam Nunn*  
*Sen. Paul Coverdell*

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Representative Charles Norwood  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

Re: Senate Bill 852 and House Resolution 1713, Livestock Grazing Act

Dear Representative Norwood,

I am writing to express my concern as an ecological scientist that passage of Senate Bill 852 and House Resolution 1713, the Livestock Grazing Act, may result in the continued degradation of millions of acres of federal public lands and the streams that drain them. These lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (159 million acres) and the U.S. Forest Service (132 million acres). Many of the public grazing lands of the western United States are currently in poor or fair ("unsatisfactory") conditions (BLM 1994). Without prudent management, the productivity and value of these lands will decline.

I am currently President of the Ecological Society of America, a scientific society of over 7000 professional ecologists who specialize in teaching, research, and application of the science of ecology. My own expertise is in stream ecology, where I have worked for 20 years and have published over 75 articles in peer-reviewed scientific publications.

Scientists have concluded that:

- Western rangelands are suffering from severe erosion, resulting in the loss of valuable topsoil (National Research Council 1994) and the degradation of streams and rivers.
- Overgrazing of riparian zones by domestic livestock has damaged thousands of miles of western stream ecosystems (Armour, Duff and Elmore 1994).
- Livestock damage to fish habitats in streams has been well documented in numerous scientific publications. Damage results from altering riparian vegetation, increasing siltation, decreasing stream flows and increasing water temperatures.

These declines in the ecological health of western rangelands and their streams mean that Westerners are facing reductions of clean and reliable sources of water for themselves, wildlife and livestock as well as loss of revenue from recreation, fishing, and hunting. Scientists have demonstrated that these trends can be reversed if public land managers are able to adjust stocking rates, rotate livestock in riparian areas, introduce fire, and reseed with native grass and riparian species. My concern with Senate Bill 852 and House Resolution 1713 is that they would deny land managers access to the tools they need to fight this decline in ecological health.

Section 136 (b) would limit their authority to manage grazing by using terms and conditions on federal grazing permits. They would therefore be unable to put conditions on the permits to protect water supplies and riparian areas.

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Section 107 prevents the managers from reducing stocking rates below the levels of August 11, 1993, even if those stocking rates were known to cause harm.

Section 114(b) requires that monitoring studies be done before management can be changed but does not acknowledge the importance of monitoring water quality and other non-forage resources of the rangeland. There is also little funding in agency budgets to support the necessary monitoring.

This bill also appears to exempt grazing permits from NEPA compliance, meaning that the agencies would not be able to do the studies that would demonstrate the need for alteration of management activities.

The scientific facts are clear. Livestock grazing damages riparian zones and streams when it is inadequately regulated. These are public lands, and the public expects their agents (Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service) to regulate grazing on public lands such that the long-term value of public lands for forage and for other environmental services (like fishing and clean water) are maintained. Senate Bill 852 and House Resolution 1713 prevent the federal agencies from adequately regulating livestock grazing on public lands, thereby putting at risk wildlife and water quality on public lands.

Sincerely,



Judy L. Meyer  
President, Ecological Society of America

Literature Cited

Armour, C., D. Duff, and W. Elmore. 1994. The effects of livestock grazing on western riparian and stream ecosystems. *Fisheries* 19: 9 - 12.

BLM. 1994. Public Land Statistics, 1993, Volume 178. US Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management. BLM/SC/ST-94/001+1165.

National Research Council. 1994. Rangeland Health, New Methods to Classify, Inventory, and Monitor Rangelands. National Academy Press. Washington, DC.

cc. Representative Don Young, Chair, House Resources Committee  
Representative George Miller, House Resources Committee  
Representative James Hanson, Chair, House Subcommittee on National Parks,  
Forests and Lands  
Representative Bill Richardson, House Subcommittee on National Parks,  
Forests and Lands