



February 25, 2015

Senator Thad Cochran
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Russell Senate Building, Room 128
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Russell Senate Building, Room 128
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado (AGNC) opposes the increase to grazing fees on public land as proposed in the Administration's FY 2016 budget.

AGNC is group of local governments representing five rural counties in Northwestern Colorado. One of the major industries in the region is ranching and with more than 70% of the land in the region under federal control, public land grazing is a critical component to the success of our ranching community.

Ranchers have anticipated and planned for the standard formula adjustment to grazing fees scheduled to take place in March of this year raising the fee from \$1.35 per AUM to \$1.69. To add an additional fee of \$2.50 per AUM would be crippling too many of our ranchers and result in significant job losses.

Our communities lag the state and the nation in economic recovery from the recession of 2008. Many jobs in our communities have been lost and ranching jobs are already at risk. Grazing on federal lands is a critical component of Western Colorado ranching success as there are few private land grazing alternatives. Ranchers are good stewards of their lease allotments and invest significantly in the maintenance of those areas which also benefits wildlife on public lands.

We request that the Committee reject language in the FY 2016 Interior appropriations bill that would authorize such an onerous fee increase. Further, we request that consideration of any future measures like this be openly discussed with the communities and ranchers that rely on federal grazing leases in support of the livestock industry. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Mike Samson in black ink.

Mike Samson
Chairman

Handwritten signature of Jeff Eskelson in black ink.

Jeff Eskelson
Vice Chairman

Handwritten signature of Martin Chazen in black ink.

Martin Chazen
Treasurer