

**Statement of  
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**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, & Mining  
S. 365, To improve rangeland conditions and restore grazing levels within the Grand  
Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah  
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**Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on S. 365, which pertains to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) administration of grazing within the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM) in Utah. The Presidential proclamation designating GSENM in 1996 included language specifically providing for the continuation of grazing on the monument under the normal standards and procedures used to manage grazing on other BLM lands. The BLM supports the bill's goal of improving rangeland health and supporting grazing within GSENM, yet the Administration opposes the bill as currently drafted because it appears to set an arbitrary grazing-level target rather than establishing appropriate grazing levels according to resource conditions and through public processes. The BLM is committed to continuing to work with Congress and the public as we plan for grazing on GSENM.

**Background**

GSENM spans nearly 1.9 million acres of America's public lands. From its spectacular Grand Staircase of cliffs and terraces, across the rugged Kaiparowits Plateau, to the Escalante River Canyons, the Monument's size, resources, and remote character provide extraordinary opportunities for geologists, paleontologists, archeologists, historians, and biologists in scientific research, education, and exploration. GSENM was established in 1996 by Presidential Proclamation 6920 under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to protect a spectacular array of historic, biological, geological, paleontological, and archeological objects. The proclamation did not affect existing grazing permits and specified that grazing uses continue to be governed by the normal standards and procedures used to manage grazing on other BLM lands. No reductions in permitted livestock grazing use have been made as a result of the Monument's designation.

Management of resources at GSENM is governed by the 1999 Monument Management Plan. However, the MMP deferred most decisions related to the management of livestock grazing, and livestock grazing on GSENM is generally managed according to four Management Framework Plans (MFPs), which were signed in 1981, making them among the BLM's oldest land use plans. The MFPs were amended to address grazing on a few allotments in 1999, but most allotments in GSENM are still managed under direction that is now nearly 35 years old. The BLM is currently preparing a Livestock Grazing Monument Management Plan Amendment and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to ensure the long-term sustainability of GSENM rangelands while accounting for the many changes that have occurred since 1981. The BLM is

working in formal cooperation with Kane and Garfield counties and the state of Utah and has allowed for maximum public input in developing the plan.

There are 79 active livestock grazing allotments, with 91 permittees currently authorized to graze cattle and horses on GSENM. Overall permitted use within GSENM is at roughly the same level now as it has been since the early 1990s. No reductions have occurred as a result of the designation of GSENM, though small reductions within limited areas have taken place under normal BLM procedures to protect riparian resources and to address other issues. Similar changes are routinely made across the west to address these sorts of resource concerns. Since 1999, the BLM has used its authority under an annual appropriations rider to renew all expiring livestock grazing permits/leases on the monument.

In contrast to permitted use, actual grazing use levels in GSENM have varied considerably from year to year. BLM range conservationists nationwide work closely with grazing permittees to identify and address resource issues. Livestock operators throughout the BLM often operate voluntarily at an actual level of use that is below their permitted level due to fluctuations in market prices, their operational needs, drought conditions, or vegetation condition. As a result of such voluntary adjustments, actual use levels have averaged just over half of permitted use levels for more than two decades.

### **S. 365**

S. 365 is intended to improve rangeland conditions and restore grazing levels within GSENM. Under the bill, the BLM would be required to implement a management program to improve rangeland conditions for wildlife and livestock and to restore livestock grazing to the level of usage in those areas that existed as of September 17, 1996. In issuing livestock grazing permits, the Secretary would be required to incorporate standards and guidelines consistent with the 1997 “Utah Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM Lands in Utah” and applicable livestock grazing regulations, as is now the case.

The BLM supports improving rangeland conditions by using the “Utah Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management for BLM Lands in Utah” and all applicable BLM regulations related to grazing when issuing or renewing grazing permits on GSENM. Under the BLM’s current planning process, we anticipate updating the grazing direction in GSENM according to the Utah Standards and Guidelines, and we believe the MMP amendment will provide a framework for future restoration work that will address the bill’s goal of improving rangeland conditions. However, the BLM does not support managing rangelands according to arbitrary targets of use, which may be inappropriate depending on resource condition, but rather supports management of rangelands by adjusting targets of use according to resource conditions and through transparent public processes under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for inviting me to testify on S. 365. The Department of the Interior is committed to ensuring that grazing within the GSENM is managed in a manner that will achieve land health standards through proper grazing management. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.