



Livestock Grazing on the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument: the Historical and Cultural Importance to the Region

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Grazing on public lands in Utah is common place. The past several decades, environmental groups have pressured land management agencies to reduce or eliminate livestock grazing on public lands, oftentimes not realizing the consequential effects (Power) (Cole, 2013). The Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument (GSENM) is no exception and since its designation in 1996 (Clinton, 1996), grazing continues to be a controversial issue. Many anti-grazing groups simply argue that if all the grazing on the GSENM were eliminated, its effects to the local communities would be little if any.

Survey Methods

Groups opposed to grazing seldom recognize the cultural and historical impact that grazing has on rural counties such as Garfield and Kane Counties. President Clinton's GSENM monument declaration protects values such as "historical resources" and areas that nature shaped "human endeavors in the American West" which include cowboys and livestock grazing (Clinton, 1996). In order to document the cultural and historical impacts of livestock grazing on the GSENM, all GSENM livestock grazing permit holders were sent a paper survey. The survey covered detailed questions about livestock and economic data for individual permit holders. Another purpose of the survey was to determine the importance of grazing on the GSENM to each individual ranching operation and to determine how ranchers utilize GSENM permits in their operations. All survey information was kept

confidential to protect individual ranching operations.

Survey Results

Forage Resource Dependency

Approximately 40% of the surveys were returned and analyzed. Of the survey respondents, the GSENM provided the highest percentage of forage (animal unit months or AUMs) for the individual operations, 35.94%. The next most important forage source was the Forest Service providing 20.31% of the necessary AUMs. Private sources of native range, improved range and irrigated pastures provide 16.30% of the AUMs. Feeding hay and other sources contribute 14.77% of the needed AUMs. Other BLM permits provide 8.22% of the AUMs. The Glen Canyon National Recreation Area supplied only 3.56% of AUMs. State lands, due to the state land exchange after the creation of the monument, only supply 0.89% of AUMs to the ranching operations. Survey data indicate that mostly ranchers are cow-calf operators as mother cows consume 86.19% of all AUMs. Replacement heifers consume 9.17% and bulls use 4.64% of the total AUMs.

Permit holders are dependent upon their GSENM grazing permits. One hundred percent of permit holders said there is no cost effective way to replace their GSENM AUMs. If the GSENM permits were eliminated, 79.31% of permit holders said they could not reduce the size of their operation to their private property and survive and 72.24% stated they

would be out of the ranching business. The difference between the two numbers is that some indicated that they would move to another location to continue ranching. Nearly 62% said they would need to sell their private holdings to developers and 61.5% indicated they would need to find off-ranch work. The remainder indicated that they would retire from the ranching business.

GSENM permit holders stated that there are a number of project that are needed to improve their allotment(s). Water development projects are needed on 93.55% of allotments, reseeding on 74.19%, woody plant thinning on 70.97%, fencing on 67.74% and flexibility in grazing plans on 64.52%. With these improvements, ranchers estimate that the AUMs would increase by 88.41%.



Culture and Heritage Dependency

Ranching culture within the GSENM is long and extensive. One family tells the story of their great-grandfather in the late 1870s herding cattle from Texas to Utah to establish their current family operation (Chynoweth, 2014). Almost 45% of the

ranching families have ranched on the GSENM for 100 years or more. Fifth and sixth generation families in this area have had ranching operations long before there was a BLM or Monument. Nineteen percent have ranched on the GSENM for over 50 years. Less than 35% have ranched within the GSENM for less than 50 years. This data documents the cultural and historical importance of livestock grazing on the GSENM.

Summary

Survey results of GSENM permit holders document that livestock grazing has influenced the history and culture of Kane and Garfield Counties and any reductions or elimination of grazing would directly affect the history and culture of the GSENM region.

References

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