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To: SRM Board of Directors

From: Rachel Frost

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Chair, Targeted Grazing Committee

Date: January 31, 2012

Re: Conservation Benefits of Rangeland Practices publication

The Targeted Grazing committee is one of the newest and yet largest committees in the Society for Range Management. It is also one of the most active committees in the society having held a symposium on targeted grazing each year since its inception, published a Rangeland's article on targeted grazing and is anticipating the publication of an issues paper on targeted grazing this year.

It has come to the attention of the committee that the 2011 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service publication entitled: "Conservation Benefits of Rangeland Practices" contains errors in regards to grazing management and targeted grazing in particular, that if not rectified will hinder the adoption of targeted grazing as a rangeland restoration practice. Because of these errors we respectfully request the Board of Directors to work with this committee to have the errors in this publication relative to grazing management corrected.

In chapter 1, which addresses prescribed grazing practices, the publication states:

"This chapter evaluates the ecological effectiveness of the major purposes and purported benefits for prescribed grazing as described in the USDA-NRCS National Conservation Practice and Guidelines."

After listing the purposes of prescribed grazing it states:

"This definition is very similar to that provided in the Society for Range Management (SRM) Glossary of Terms (1998)—"the manipulation of animal grazing in pursuit of a defined objective"—and to that of targeted grazing—"the application of a specific kind of livestock at a determined season, duration and intensity to accomplish a defined objective" (Launchbaugh and Walker 2006). Targeted grazing emphasizes objectives associated with landscape dynamics in addition to livestock production."

The term targeted grazing was first used in the 2006 publication "Targeted Grazing - a natural approach to vegetation management and landscape enhancement." Prior to that time the use of grazing livestock for rangeland restoration was commonly called prescribed grazing. Because

USDA-NRCS was using prescribed grazing to define any planned grazing by livestock, the authors of the targeted grazing handbook along with a group of contract grazers and land managers decided that a new term was needed to define what is now known as targeted grazing. Thus after much deliberation the term targeted grazing was agreed upon. By claiming that prescribed grazing and targeted grazing are the same activities the USDA-NRCS publication greatly diminishes a reader's potential to understand the potential of targeted grazing as originally defined to enhance landscapes and restore rangelands to an improved ecological function.

Furthermore, the USDA-NRCS publication misrepresents what targeted grazing is. The targeted grazing handbook actually states:

“Targeted grazing is the application of a specific kind of livestock at a determined season, duration, and intensity to accomplish defined vegetation or landscape goals. This concept has been around for decades and has taken many names, including prescribed grazing and managed herbivory. The major difference between good grazing management and targeted grazing is that targeted grazing refocuses outputs of grazing from livestock production to vegetation and landscape enhancement.”

In contrast to the USDA-NRCS publication, this definition from page 3 of the handbook clearly distinguishes targeted grazing from prescribed grazing and more importantly states that the goal is vegetation and landscape enhancement. When targeted grazing is understood for what it is truly meant to be, then range managers will begin to consider targeted grazing as a method for the restoration of rangeland that is on par with other more commonly used methods such as herbicides, prescribed fire and mechanical control. In fact all of these methods should be considered as complementary and the use of several methods will often result in the most sustainable enhancement of degraded rangelands.

The USDA-NRCS publication also states:

“the goal of this chapter was to evaluate the preponderance of evidence supporting major grazing management practices.”

However, it never discusses the selection of species of livestock, which is the first decision (albeit usually by default), of any planned grazing. By ignoring the importance and different impacts of different species of livestock this publication falls far short of its stated goal.

The deficiencies and errors in this publication need to be corrected and the Targeted Grazing Committee requests that the Board of Directors join with us in working with the USDA-NRCS to develop a more comprehensive description of the ways that grazing can be used to restore rangelands. Specifically, we request that the SRM Board of Directors work with USDA-NRCS to have USDA-NRCS issue a retraction and publish an amended version of “Conservation Benefits of Rangeland Practices.” The Targeted Grazing Committee is available to assist the USDA-NRCS in amending this document to more accurately reflect the current state of the knowledge related to prescribed grazing.