



The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Society for Range Management
100 N 27th St, Suite 600D
Billings, MT 59101

February 26th, 2025

Dear Secretary Burgum,

The Society for Range Management (SRM) writes to express our concerns regarding recent staffing reductions across public land agencies under the Department of the Interior, particularly the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Rangelands and public lands are essential to both our nation's food supply and ecological health, and we fear that eliminating critical field staff positions will severely hinder boots-on-the-ground management efforts, exacerbate existing challenges, and delay necessary action to support sustainable use of public rangelands.

Public land ranchers, farmers, and rural communities rely on dedicated partnerships with field staff across these agencies to ensure effective stewardship of resources, timely responses to challenges, and the careful management required to sustain productivity on public lands. Unfortunately, these cuts target the very professionals who are essential to advancing this mission—those working in the field to implement programs, assist stakeholders, and translate federal priorities into meaningful action. Of note, grazing on BLM lands accounts for nearly \$670 million in direct economic output annually.

The loss of this capacity will have far-reaching consequences for our nation's public lands and those who rely on them. Many ranchers have already been waiting years for critically needed post-fire repair of fences, water structures, and other infrastructure. These delays place significant financial and operational burdens on permittees while stalling essential resource management. Additionally, some permittees have waited decades for the completion of NEPA reviews, foundational to proactive land and resource management. Administrative stagnation is unacceptable in today's digital age and exacerbates critical challenges, particularly as they relate to wildfire risks in the Western United States.

Capacity losses directly heighten the vulnerability of rangelands to wildfires. Ranchers widely acknowledge that wildfire is a natural part of many ecosystems, but catastrophic fires often result from insufficient management practices such as invasive species control, forest thinning, and appropriate grazing. Without enough trained field professionals to guide, implement, and monitor these efforts, wildfires will increase in both frequency and intensity, harming ranchers, rural economies, and native ecosystems alike. Many personnel fighting wildfires are natural resource professionals who perform this critical additional duty.

The benefits of well-staffed public land agencies cannot be overstated:

- Timely management of post-fire rehabilitation efforts.
- Strengthened land management to reduce the intensity and impacts of wildfires.
- Maintenance of infrastructure that supports ranching and resource stewardship.
- Coordination of science-driven strategies essential to ecological balance and economic resilience.
- Technical expertise to address challenges such as invasive species, water management, and wildlife habitat conservation.

A further example, the U.S. Geological Survey plays a key role in efforts like invasive species management, developing groundbreaking tools and strategies to mitigate the spread of species that threaten rangeland productivity and ecological balance. Reducing USGS staff weakens the ability to apply these innovations at scale, leaving rangelands increasingly vulnerable. Continued support for this critical science is essential to ensuring the resilience of our natural resources.

Staffing reductions across BLM, NPS, USGS, USFWS, and BIA not only disrupt frontline management but also threaten the next generation of resource managers. Early-career and probationary employees represent critical investments in workforce development. Losing these professionals intensifies existing challenges, and limits future leadership capacity.

We urge the Department of the Interior to prioritize reforms that improve efficiency and flexibility for field professionals without sacrificing essential boots-on-the-ground capacity. Ranchers and public land users already face significant challenges navigating complex bureaucratic processes. Reducing staffing only compounds these frustrations, limiting agencies' ability to administer programs, complete reviews, and respond to urgent issues. Streamlined processes, strategic use of technology, and increased field-based decision-making flexibility are necessary to reduce bottlenecks and maintain effective resource stewardship.

Secretary Burgum, SRM stands ready to assist and support the Department of the Interior in rebuilding capacity and addressing these challenges. As the voice of professionals dedicated to the science and art of rangeland stewardship, we are committed to working together to develop solutions that balance sustainability and efficiency while addressing the priorities of public land

users and ecosystems. SRM and DOI have worked closely together for decades to ensure its agencies have the resources needed to manage the nation's rangelands effectively. We hope to continue this collaboration under your leadership.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to engaging with your team to address these issues and develop solutions that ensure the health of public lands and the communities that depend on them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeff Goodwin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Jeff Goodwin, Ph. D.
President
Society for Range Management