



The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

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

February 26th, 2025

Dear Secretary Rollins,

The Society for Range Management (SRM) writes to express our concerns regarding the recent agency layoffs and their potential long-term impact on land management and the ranching industry in the United States. Rangelands comprise nearly 30% of the nation's total land area—approximately 770 million acres—and are central to both our nation's food supply and ecological health. These staffing reductions threaten to disrupt essential partnerships and diminish the future effectiveness of rangeland management that supports ranchers, rural economies, and vital landscapes.

America's ranchers work tirelessly to supply high-quality, affordable food to the public while stewarding rangeland ecosystems for future generations. In the Western United States, nearly all beef cattle and sheep begin their lives on open rangelands, which include lands managed by private, state, and federal entities. These landscapes are also home to 20 national grasslands and significant grazing within national forests, contributing billions annually to the U.S. GDP. Successful rangeland-based livestock production has long relied on partnerships between ranchers, agency managers, researchers, and professionals working toward shared goals—sustainable operations, productive landscapes, and resilient ecosystems.

The benefits of these partnerships include:

- Production of high-quality protein for consumers nationwide.
- Economic stability and growth for ranching families and rural communities.
- Science-driven management strategies that sustain America's rangeland landscapes.
- Strengthened land management capacity to mitigate wildfires and other challenges.
- Supported ecosystems that provide wildlife habitat, healthy watersheds, and diverse recreation opportunities.

One of the most pressing concerns tied to these layoffs is the increased risk of large, uncontrolled wildfires. The greatest complaints we hear from public lands ranchers are not about the

occurrence of wildfires themselves but about the lack of proper management practices that allow wildfire risks to escalate. Reducing field staff directly impacts the ability to implement proactive measures such as proper grazing, invasive species management, and forest thinning, all of which are critical tools to prevent excessive fuel buildup. Without these field professionals, the risk of wildfires growing out of control will sharply increase, threatening not only the health and safety of rangelands but also the communities and industries that depend on them.

As ranchers know, long-term success depends on careful investment in high-performing individuals. Similarly, building and maintaining an effective rangeland workforce requires continued commitment to nurturing the next generation of managers and scientists. Losing early-career professionals now will lead to a significant gap in knowledge and capacity, reduced producer profitability, diminished resources for future generations, and increased vulnerability to wildfire.

Cuts to probationary and early-career positions across USDA compound these risks by reducing the capacity of agencies to address urgent management needs. A skilled and highly trained workforce of rangeland managers and agricultural scientists is essential for maintaining the productivity, sustainability, and ecological health of America's rangelands. Unfortunately, these reductions disproportionately target critical programs like USDA's Pathways Program, designed to develop early-career professionals and the next generation of leaders in agricultural science and management. Diminishing investment in such programs will limit opportunities for young professionals and weaken the support systems needed by farmers and ranchers. Maintaining a strong field presence—one that prioritizes skilled professionals capable of implementing on-the-ground solutions—must remain a key focus in building USDA's capacity.

The impact of these layoffs extends beyond workforce reductions into operational inefficiencies that directly burden ranchers and land managers. Bureaucratic hurdles to accessing USDA programs have long been a source of frustration for farmers and ranchers, and these reductions will likely intensify delays in accessing the tools, knowledge, and programs critical to their success. Furthermore, loss of scientists at the Agriculture Research Service jeopardizes the investment in many long-term research projects that document and support the use of millions of acres of public lands for sustainable livestock production and the economic lifeblood of rural communities.

The United States has long relied on a robust agricultural economy that prioritizes efficiency and productivity. Since its founding in 1862, the Department of Agriculture has supported farmers and ranchers with science-based tools and knowledge to improve operations and address challenges. USDA scientists have been essential to ensuring U.S. agriculture remains productive, meeting the nation's food needs while also boosting exports that contribute to economic growth. However, workforce reductions, particularly at the early-career level, hinder our ability to address modern challenges in food security and land stewardship.

SRM recognizes that these challenges are not insurmountable if addressed with strategic reforms and practical solutions. Reducing administrative burden, streamlining processes, and granting more flexibility to field professionals could improve the effectiveness of rangeland management by allowing them to spend more time addressing critical issues such as wildfire mitigation,

invasive species control, soil health, grazing management, and wildlife habitat restoration. Secretary Rollins, SRM stands ready to partner with USDA to tackle these challenges. By improving workforce retention, maintaining pathways for student and early-career professionals, and reevaluating procedures, we can strengthen the capacity to manage rangelands effectively while continuing to support ranchers and the rural economies they sustain. Together, we can ensure that rangelands remain pillars of our nation's economic, agricultural, and ecological success.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to partnering with you on practical solutions to sustain the value of America's rangelands and support those who manage them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Goodwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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