



## WILDERNESS WATCH

*Keeping Wilderness Wild*

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### Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act introduced in Congress to protect public lands, Wilderness and wildlife

**With private livestock grazing currently authorized on over 13 million acres of Wilderness, Wilderness Watch strongly supports the Act**

MISSOULA, MT – Today, the Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act (VGPRRA) was introduced into Congress. VGPRRA would allow federal grazing permit holders to waive their grazing permit back to the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management in exchange for compensation by a third party. The associated grazing allotments would then be permanently retired from livestock grazing.

“We strongly support the Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act because it will help protect public lands, Wilderness, clean water and critical wildlife habitat,” explained George Nickas, executive director of Wilderness Watch. “Most Americans are shocked when they learn domestic livestock are allowed to graze in our protected Wilderness areas—for literally pennies on the dollar, and at a great cost to the land and wildlife that depends on it for survival.”

Livestock are authorized to graze over a quarter of the 52 million acres of protected wilderness in the lower forty-eight states, approximately 13 million acres of Wilderness in total. In fact, in Nevada, 70 percent of all federally-protected Wilderness acres are open to livestock grazing. In Utah, the number is 51 percent, New Mexico 45 percent, and Arizona 41 percent. In California, nearly two million acres of Wilderness are open to grazing.

Due to grazing language in the Wilderness Act and its 1980s-era corollary, the Congressional Grazing Guidelines, grazing has been occurring in otherwise-undomesticated Wilderness areas for over half a century. Livestock grazing damages Wilderness in a number of ways—including harming water quality, spreading invasive weeds, trampling riparian vegetation, and displacing wildlife—yet at one-tenth of a percent of all forage fed to livestock in the United States, grazing in Wilderness hardly contributes to the U.S. livestock industry.

In 2019, Wilderness Watch released a whitepaper, which reviews the history of livestock grazing in Wilderness areas: <http://bit.ly/2Yvshlo>

“The original authors and supporters of the Wilderness Act of 1964 wanted to end grazing in Wilderness, but the politics at the time wouldn’t allow it. Today the negative impacts are much more clearly understood and the importance of livestock grazing in Wilderness to local communities is markedly less,” stated Wilderness Watch conservation director Kevin Proescholdt.

Existing law does not allow for the voluntary, permanent retirement of grazing permits despite grazing’s negative impacts on wilderness, wildlife, watersheds, and the surrounding ecosystem.

“Now is the time to move forward with safeguarding our Wildernesses from the damage caused by livestock and the VGPR is a great step forward,” stated Nickas.

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