



**PUBLIC
EMPLOYEES FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
RESPONSIBILITY**



June 10, 2015

Hon. Sally Jewell
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Mail Stop 7328
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

On behalf of Western Watersheds Project and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), we are writing to express our concern about continuing disintegration of effective range management of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in Nevada. The official BLM response following the latest confrontation in the BLM's Battle Mountain District will, we fear, only encourage even more such standoffs with adverse consequences for both the health of the range and public safety.

Following last year's standoff with Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, you were quoted in news accounts as pledging to use "all possible means to bring Mr. Bundy to justice," adding:

"It's very important to bring lawbreakers to justice. There's no question that my colleagues back here, the governors of Western states, do not want people riding roughshod over the landscape. [Bundy] put our people in grave danger by calling in armed civilians from around the country, and that's not okay."

In the ensuing year, Mr. Bundy was not brought to justice. That inaction has encouraged others to imitate his tactics of confrontation. Due to ongoing drought conditions, in May 2013 BLM closed two grazing allotments (North Buffalo and Copper Canyon) near Battle Mountain, 200 miles northeast of Reno. Shortly thereafter, ranchers Dan and Eddyann Filippini appealed the closure decision and last week the ranchers escalated by releasing livestock onto the North Buffalo allotment and publicly dared the BLM to act.

In a Facebook posting about their public defiance of the BLM closure order, they appealed for others to "Stand with Battle Mountain" to resist BLM enforcement urging that it was time for ranchers to "take a stand!"

Rather than take direct enforcement action, BLM negotiated a settlement allowing the Filippinis to leave their cattle on the disputed lands and to continue to appeal any BLM finding that land is

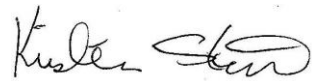
overgrazed (as measured by the height of grass stubble). In return, the Filippinis agree that they have committed a “willful” grazing trespass and will pay an enhanced grazing fee only for the period that their cattle were illegally turned out.

By this settlement, the BLM validated that willful grazing trespass will be a successful negotiating tactic. The foreseeable result will be that more ranchers disinclined to follow BLM management directives will be emboldened to, as here, take the law into their own hands.

It is past time for Interior and BLM to develop an effective strategy to detect and deter grazing trespass. One set of voices that is constrained from developing such a strategy is the BLM district and field managers on the front lines of these conflicts. They are under pressure from both the BLM state office and national headquarters to capitulate to ranchers’ demands, no matter how unreasonable or how contrary to previous agreements. The net result is that your most experienced land managers are not allowed to do their jobs and are forced by an uncommunicative chain of command into a spiral of more contrived confrontations followed by surrenders.

We would implore you to personally involve yourself to end this dysfunctional dynamic. We would also urge you to meet directly with the BLM district and field managers in Nevada to gain their perspective at your earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Stade
Advocacy Director
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility



Travis Bruner
Executive Director
Western Watersheds Project