

Overhaul of public lands grazing regulations seeks to cut public involvement

Throughout the regulations, the agency proposed changes that would keep animals on the land.

Mark Squillace, a law professor focused on natural resources at the University of Colorado Law School, noted that if a rancher appeals an unfavorable ruling, it is automatically paused, meaning the rancher can continue the very practices that had been found to be harmful. "That effectively invites everyone to appeal to avoid the decision," Squillace said. "That is a disaster."

The new regulations also elevate cows' status as firefighters, making it easier to place herds on public lands under the justification that they eat vegetation that could become fuel for wildfires.

Nada Culver, deputy director of the BLM during the Biden administration, said that some provisions would make it more difficult for agency staff to tell ranchers to take animals off the land, hindering their ability to address overgrazing. And renewing permits to continue grazing would be even easier under the new regulations, she said.

"The most text in this regulatory proposal is devoted to explaining why the public no longer gets to participate in pretty much every step of the process," Culver said.

The Trump administration has also prioritized restocking vacant areas, which may be without cows and sheep because they

are far from a water source, they need time to recover from wildfire, or the agency is attempting to eradicate invasive species. Within months of President Donald Trump returning to the White House, political appointees instructed staff to build lists of every vacant plot that might be eligible for more livestock.

“By the end of next year,” Budd-Falen said in her discussion with Lummis, “every single vacant allotment will be filled by a rancher.”

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