

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 9, 2023

The Honorable Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Moore,

We write to request that you immediately and permanently delay the proposed aerial and ground shooting of cattle in the Gila National Forest (GNF) until concerns raised by local stakeholders have been adequately addressed.

On November 17, 2022, the Forest Service issued a scoping letter with a proposal to aerially shoot cattle in the GNF. There is no direct statutory authority that allows the Forest Service to shoot cattle. While we understand the need to remove these unauthorized cattle, this issue has been exacerbated by the Forest Service refusing to issue grazing permits in this area, meaning there is no one there to maintain fences, prevent cattle from straying, and manage the landscape.

We are deeply concerned that issues raised by local stakeholders have not been properly addressed and that alternatives to aerial shooting of cattle have not been considered. According to your Agency's data, there is estimated to be between 50 and 150 unauthorized cattle currently in the GNF. Many of the concerns raised by local stakeholders about the proposal center around the fact that the cattle shot during the operation would be "left onsite to naturally decompose." This would habituate coyotes and wolves in the GNF to eating cattle, which presents a danger to ranchers who have permits to graze their cattle in the GNF and forces these ranchers to expend additional resources to protect their cattle. If a cow or calf is killed by a wolf or coyote, the rancher would then have to go through the lengthy verification process to prove that the animal was killed by a wolf to receive compensation for the killed animal.

Although the November 17 proposal states that staff will attempt to avoid shooting cattle "within or adjacent to any waterbody" and that dead animals identified "within or adjacent" to a waterbody would be removed, past performance in February 2022 shows that dead cattle were shot and left in waterbodies. Leaving dead cattle to decompose in or near waterbodies will pollute the very water that the Forest Service aims to protect, so it is incumbent on the Forest Service to work to ensure that this concern is addressed.

It is our understanding that only one cow has been identified with a brand during previous removal efforts, but it would be next to impossible to identify if one of the cattle being shot from a helicopter has a brand or other identifying mark. Since the dead cattle are being left to decompose onsite, ranchers who did have cattle stray into the area proposed for aerial shooting would not be compensated for the loss. This means the federal government is taking private property without just compensation and with no direct federal statutory authority.

We request that the concerns of local stakeholders are addressed before any action to remove cattle takes place and that you immediately and permanently postpone the proposal to aerially shoot cattle within the GNF.

Sincerely,



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



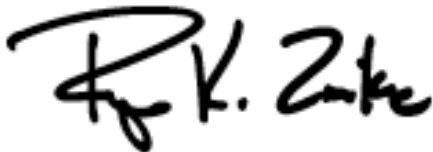
Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



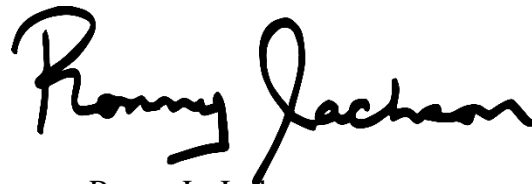
James Moylan
Member of Congress



Chris Stewart
Member of Congress



Ryan Zinke
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson
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