

Washington Report



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Every spring, ICA leadership and staff travel to Washington DC to advance the issues of Idaho's cattle industry and inform politicians and bureaucrats alike about the ever-pressing need for legislative reform and regulatory relief. We plan our trip to coincide with the legislative conferences of the Public Lands Council and National Cattlemen's Beef Association in what constitutes a nationwide cattlemen and women fly-in. It is a beautiful thing to see the hallways on Capitol Hill filled with cowboy hats and to hear the echoes from the heels of cowboy boots, rather than loafers, within the marbled hallways.

While we plan our trip around the dates of the national meetings, the primary purpose and most fruitful part of our time in the nation's capital occurs in the individual meetings we set up with key agency officials and government leaders, along with Idaho's congressional delegation. Given that the current makeup of Congress does not lend itself to productivity, particularly where ranchers are concerned, the main focus of our trip this year was to seek for ways to find regulatory relief within the federal agencies. We were able to meet with and educate top agency leaders within the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior about the impact of their actions on Idaho ranchers and propose ideas for improved management of the land and resources utilizing. Here is a rundown of those meetings:

Bureau of Land

Management - We met with several officials and political appointees at Department of

Interior to discuss BLM-related issues. Our discussions focused on the grazing permit renewal process and the need for reform to the grazing regulations. The permit renewal process is flawed and needs streamlined. As typified by recent problematic permit renewals in Idaho, BLM is processing permit renewals in a way that is not only inefficient for the agency and affected permittees, but results in grazing decisions that are either unrealistic or unattainable and do not adequately provide the ability for grazing permittees to resolve issues of concern through management options. On public lands, there is a great need for increased management flexibility and more localized, site-specific management of the land and resources. Rather than prescribing management actions (that may or may not result in expected outcomes) to meet standards, the system should be reversed—allow the flexibility to manage for objectives that meet standards. To accomplish this, flexibility is needed in both permit numbers and seasons of use. In general,





greater flexibility is needed in order for management to be more responsive to resource, including utilizing grazing to manage fuel loads.

U.S. Forest Service - We met with the USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources whose job is to oversee the U.S. Forest Service. Just as we did with the BLM, we expressed the need for greater grazing management flexibility. We particularly focused our discussion on the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). The GNA program, which was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, has proven successful in establishing productive partnerships between the Forest Service and states to accomplish authorized restoration services across land jurisdictions. Although it has primarily been used in timber projects, we believe that the program has a proven a path forward for federal/state partnerships that can be translated to grazing management. The state of Idaho, through its Department of Lands has successfully implemented this program on timber projects and now has a designated staff person to coordinate GNA authority on rangelands. The program has great potential to improve the way grazing permits are administered on federal lands and to open up partnerships between permittees and federal and state agencies.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - In our meeting with the Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary who oversees the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, we discussed the administration's recent emphasis on increasing access to lands for hunters, fishers, and recreationalists. This issue can prove to be a double-edged sword for our industry. We want to work together collaboratively with other users of public land but

it has been our experience in the past that when conservationists/recreationalists are given priority designation status, grazing use often comes under increased scrutiny and is ultimately forced out. We encouraged the agencies to balance the call for increased access and recreational opportunities while protecting continued grazing use—and to recognize that it is because of ranchers that open spaces are preserved and wildlife habitat conserved across the landscape. We also focused our discussion on the grizzly bear issue and the need to find another path forward for delisting in light of recent litigation. For those producers in Idaho who raise

their cattle within grizzly bear habitat, the species' presence is very real and constant threat and there is a great need to manage the bears and preserve livestock grazing.

Idaho Congressional Delegation – It is not lost on us, as our counterparts in other states cannot even get inside the doors of their congressional offices, that we are very fortunate in Idaho to be represented by congressmen and senators who almost always vote in our favor and see the need to protect our industry. Not only that, but we always find a welcome door to express our concerns and seek for solutions. Although we cannot expect anything proactive to come out of the divided bodies of Congress, we need our delegation to continue to play defense in our behalf, particularly in the House where the current Natural Resources Committee Chairman has a stated goal of removing cattle from the public lands and where the so-called rising star wants to blame “cow farts” for all of the ills of the modern world.

Our presence in Washington is critical in forging relationships with the key officials who can have an impact on your ability to pursue your livelihood, manage your land, raise cattle, and graze livestock on public land. Because of the discussions had this year, and have had in the past, we have opened critical lines of communication with federal agencies and will continue to build upon them to bring about meaningful change.