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## **Conservationists File Complaint with Colville National Forest Over Outdated Grazing Practices in Newly Adopted Land Management Plan**

Spokane, *Wash.*— THE LANDS COUNCIL, WESTERN WATERSHEDS PROJECT, and KETTLE RANGE CONSERVATION GROUP filed a [complaint](#) in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington today, challenging the U.S. Forest Service for allowing excessive cattle grazing in the Colville National Forest, leading to long-term damage to the forest ecosystem.

During the 2019 Forest Plan revision process, the U.S. Forest Service determined that nearly 70 percent of the land in cattle grazing allotments in the Colville National Forest is not capable of supporting cattle grazing and not suitable for that practice, yet it did nothing to curb continued grazing on these allotments. Put simply, the Forest Service considers rangeland capable of supporting livestock grazing if it can produce the forage necessary to sustain native wildlife and domestic grazing, while the suitability analysis determines whether it is appropriate to have livestock grazing in a particular area, when compared to other potential uses of the Forest, including as wildlife habitat.

The lawsuit also alleges that the Forest Service failed to meaningfully address the impacts of overgrazing on sensitive habitats, varied wildlife populations, and recreational uses.

“Ecosystems change every year and evolve due to drought, fire and manmade impacts such as timber harvest and livestock grazing, yet many of the grazing allotments in the Colville have not been evaluated in 50 years,” said Chris Bachman, Wildlife Program Director at the Spokane based Lands Council. “We owe it to ourselves, future generations, and the wildlife that calls the forest home to ensure that the Forest Service is following the law in determining best management practices.”

The 2019 Land Management Plan is the blueprint for how the Forest will be managed for the foreseeable future—the previous plan for the Forest had been in place since 1988. The complaint

alleges the Forest Service violated numerous environmental laws and failed to properly analyze and regulate cattle grazing in the creation of the Plan, and asks for cattle grazing to be halted until these deficiencies are corrected.

“The Forest Service is treating livestock grazing as an inevitable use of the National Forest despite its own assessment that that is not an appropriate use of most of these allotments,” said Jocelyn Leroux, Washington and Montana Director for Western Watersheds Project. “This approach is inconsistent with science and is detrimental to native wildlife and sensitive aquatic ecosystems.”

The Colville Forest spans 1.1 million acres of densely forested, rugged terrain, including old-growth forests and peaks rising to 7,000 feet in the Kettle River Range of northeast Washington. The Forest includes many sensitive riparian habitats, including dozens of lakes, rivers, streams and springs, and supports diverse fish, wildlife, and plant species, including many state and federal threatened and endangered species.

The complaint also asserts that the Forest Service’s decision to leave the cattle grazing program unchanged will continue to cause significant ecological damage to the Forest, destroying valuable habitat, decreasing the value of the Forest for recreational uses, and leading to continued killing of wildlife for conflicts with cattle.

“I’ve lived and worked in the Kettle River Range for over three decades and can attest to the immense damage done by cattle overgrazing each and every year,” said Timothy Coleman, Director of Kettle Range Conservation Group. “Grasses and shrubs are grazed down to bare dirt, streams are fouled, trails are mashed and wetlands are turned into mud holes. It is an abomination that this is allowed to continue on our public lands, and not in keeping with the Forest Service’s public trust responsibility.”

The Lands Council, Western Watersheds Project, and Kettle Range Conservation Group are represented by Claire Loeb Davis and Keith Cohon from Animal & Earth Advocates PLLC.

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*The Lands Council preserves and revitalizes inland Northwest forests, water, and wildlife through advocacy, education, effective action, and community engagement*

*Western Watersheds Project is a nonprofit environmental conservation group working to protect and restore wildlife and watersheds throughout the American West*

*The mission of the Kettle Range Conservation Group is to defend wilderness, protect biodiversity, and restore ecosystems of the Columbia River Basin*

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