

**CRIPPLE COWBOY  
COW OUTFIT, INC**

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Ms. Erin Jones, NEPA Coordinator  
Bureau of Land Management, Northwest Colorado District  
2815 H Road  
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Dear Ms. Jones:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on BLM's Greater Sage Grouse Plan. I am president of Cripple Cowboy Cow Outfit, Inc. A family owned cattle ranch with BLM grazing permits in Colorado and Utah. There have never been a Sage Grouse population on our ranch in my lifetime.

BLM's Greater Sage Grouse Plan is a document that refuses to address the true causes of Sage Grouse decline in Northwest Colorado, and instead focuses on controlling Human activities. Without looking back in history and addressing the differences, then and now, this plan will fail.

In 1776 Escalante and Dominguez 2 Jesuit Priests looking for a better route to California traveled over Douglas Pass and camped at an area close to the present town of Rangely that they named Canyon Pintado. They shot a Buffalo and wrote in their journals of seeing a multitude of game.

In 1873 my Great-Grandfather, Charles Porter Hill, came to the Bookcliff Mountains, first to Utah as Colorado was reservation, then moved to Rangely in 1882 when the reservation was moved to Utah. There was no game in the Bookcliffs. The Utes told him a hard winter had killed all of the Buffalo, Elk, and almost all of the Mule Deer. It killed all of their horses and they walked to Eastern Colorado to steal new ones from the Cheyenne and Arapahoe. One history I read about the Ute Tribe said the Utes stated that the snow was 7 Utes deep. Another thing there was little of was sagebrush, the Utes were constantly burning to increase game and horse forage. Even though there was little game there were large numbers of predators of every species.

In 1890 CP moved his operation to Park Canyon for summer and Park Canyon for the winter. This is the way we still operate.

In 1905 a railroad was built over Baxter Pass to the Gilsonite Mines in Utah. A population of about 5000 people built up along the route along with an unknown number of homesteaders. The mines and railroad were in operation until 1939. During this period miles of road was built. All of Evacuation Creek was logged off for houses, railroad ties, mine timbers and firewood. The entire mountain range was overrun by cattle, sheep, and horses. Which led to my Grandfather Don F. Hill joining the group that encouraged Congressman Ed Taylor to write the Taylor Grazing Act. My Grandfather was also on the Advisory board that decided who would be allowed a permit and at what level. There was no fire suppression. The ranchers decided to get serious about predator control. They followed the wolf packs and lions in the winter till they could get a shot, trapped, and poisoned them. In this day people might say they were wrong in their methods, as with poison they also killed all of the big skunks and probably the Ravens, both of which are major predators of Sage Grouse. In any case by the 1930's there were thousands of Sage Grouse in the Bookcliffs.

Growing up I used to sit and listen to the old timers talk at the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Picnics. One time about 1965 my Grandfather was asked what happened to the Sage Grouse. He said he thought they got so thick they overgrazed and were killed in a couple of hard winters. He said they would find them in the black timber in the late fall and winter. He told about riding through Snow Grove Canyon, a canyon that

is all black timber, one December and the trees were full of Sage Grouse. He said they started cackling and it got so noisy that they had to cover their ears and ride out as fast as they could.

In the late 1960's Scott Johnson of Salt Lake City told me about flying as a sportsman representative on game counts with the Utah Division of Wildlife over Soldier Summit. They would have been at about 10 to 12,000 feet when they found a flock of about 300 Sage Grouse flying beside him and migrating somewhere. When asked where they might be going the game officer said who knows they just move around all the time.

The last I ever hunted Sage Grouse was on Blue Mountain by Dinosaur National Monument, about 1975. By then the only good places to hunt were on the private land whose owners sprayed or chopped sagebrush.

The Mule Deer also benefited by predator control, range improvements, and no fire suppression. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife figures, by 1963 hunters in Colorado were harvesting over 100,000 deer annually. In 1965 we were told by the Vernal Field Office that we could no longer do chaining, burning, or spraying due to a lawsuit by the Sierra Club. The Mule Deer harvest started declining that year.

In 1970 President Nixon outlawed Compound 1080, limited other predator control methods, and in 1971 signed the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act. In the 2 hard winters of 1972 through 1974 all of the Chukar Partridges died and have never returned to our ranch. Those 2 winters killed most of the Mule Deer and in 1974 our hunters did not harvest even one deer. The deer are still having a hard time. Colorado Parks and Wildlife have an ongoing study that shows they are losing population at an annual rate of 2% over recruitment. The reason I mention these other species is that they are also indicators of improper management.

I firmly believe that the Sage Grouse's problems are due to a lack of management, as in no range improvements, total wildfire suppression, and a lack of effective predator control. Until the BLM recognizes that these are necessary methods there is no hope for the Sage Grouse and this plan will fail.

BLM must use all local plans instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, talk to old timers, have the political will to control predators, implement range improvements, including spraying and chopping sagebrush, chaining Pinyon Trees and use wildfire as an improvement tool rather than as a reason to halt development, only then will BLM be able to take a proactive approach that will save the species.

Sincerely,

Jon D. Hill  
President, Cripple Cowboy Cow Outfit, Inc.