

CALIFORNIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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September 24, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol Building, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Emergency grazing grounds and livestock feed opportunities on State lands

Dear Governor Newsom:

The California Cattlemen's Association (CCA) greatly appreciates your August 15th letter, in conjunction with the Western Governors Association (WGA), requesting that President Biden direct FEMA to declare a drought disaster in California and other western states and proposing additional solutions to the dual crises of exceptional drought and catastrophic wildfire. As you are aware, California's unprecedented drought has severely limited the availability of rangeland forage for livestock; the drought has also limited the availability of livestock feed such as alfalfa hay, and prices for such feed have become prohibitively expensive. This dearth of feed and water is confronting California ranchers with the difficult decision whether to liquidate their herds and even whether to sell their prime rangelands for development. Without immediate assistance, ranchers' livelihoods and family legacies could be at stake, and the effects of these challenges could reverberate through rural economies for years to come.

Given those challenges, CCA applauds your suggestion to President Biden that he direct the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to "evaluate grazing grounds and livestock feed opportunities that could be made available for emergency situations where lands can support the additional use." Considering the dire consequences of California's persistent drought and two consecutive years of catastrophic wildfires, however, **CCA asks that you direct the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to evaluate grazing grounds and livestock feed opportunities that could be made available on state-owned and -managed lands where those activities are consistent with the ecological needs of those lands.**

California's land management agencies – the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and California State Lands Commission – manage nearly 7 million acres of State-owned lands within California's borders. Of that, only 138,612 acres – or about 2% – of state-owned lands are leased or permitted for livestock grazing.

CCA recognizes that grazing will not be feasible or appropriate on all state lands; where forage is unsuitable or insufficiently abundant for livestock grazing, where lands are heavily utilized for recreational purposes, or where particularly sensitive wildlife species are present which are vulnerable to harm from cattle or other livestock, livestock grazing should rightly be excluded. But where suitable forage exists and livestock grazing is consistent with the ecological needs of state-

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owned lands, CCA urges your administration to consider emergency authorization of livestock grazing to help alleviate the drought disaster facing the state's agricultural producers.

In determining what lands may be suitable for emergency grazing, CCA urges CNRA to work closely with area extension agents from the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR). UCANR experts have conducted extensive research into lands suitable for grazing based on forage type, wildlife presence and distribution, wildfire risk, proximity to development, and other factors, and have even used this research to model maps of which state-owned lands may prove suitable for grazing. Additionally, local UCANR personnel are familiar with local state-owned lands, have strong relationships with area farmers and ranchers, and in some circumstances have experience implementing grazing on public lands such as county parks.

The WGA letter to President Biden specifically identifies your goal of making “the west more resilient to drought, wildfires and climate change,” and your ambitious 30x30 Initiative reflects the importance of those ecological considerations in California. Grazing, when implemented on suitable state lands, can further those laudable goals. Research from the University of California Cooperative Extension has found that livestock grazing can significantly reduce the intensity and spread of wildfire,¹ and a recent study has recommended “extensive or targeted intensive grazing as a cost-effective method to reduce wildfire risks...especially in ecosystems with high fire risk, such as Mediterranean” climates like that which predominates much of California.²

Research is currently underway to quantify the greenhouse gas emissions reductions attributable to livestock's consumption of fire fuels,³ and it is widely acknowledged that livestock grazing can work to sequester carbon in rangelands. Implementing grazing on state-owned lands – whether on an emergency basis or more enduringly – can further the State's emission-reduction goals.

Finally, grazing state-owned lands will provide benefits for California's native flora and fauna. UCANR research has found that grazing provides habitat and other benefits to 85 of California's 143 threatened or endangered species, such as the California tiger salamander and California red-legged frog. Livestock grazing can also foster healthy native plant communities through targeted grazing of invasive plants.

While CCA applauds your request that the Biden Administration “evaluate grazing grounds...that could be made available for emergency situations where lands can support the additional use,” we urge your Administration to take similar action on state-owned lands without delay. Such action would be a win-win, alleviating the drought crisis suffered by California's livestock producers while alleviating the wildfire crisis that has impacted virtually *all* Californians in 2020 and 2021.

¹ Devii Rao, *The Benefits of Cattle Grazing for Reducing Fire Fuel and Hazard*, BENTOLINK (Sept. 2020), available at <https://benitolink.com/the-benefits-of-cattle-grazing-for-reducing-fire-fuels-and-hazard/>.

² Julia Rouet-Leduc *et al.*, *Effects of Large Herbivores on Fire Regimes and Wildfire Mitigation*, JOURNAL OF APPLIED ECOLOGY (Sept. 2021), available at <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2664.13972>.

³ Devii Rao, *New Study to Investigate Influence of Cattle Grazing on Particulate Matter and Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Wildfire*, BENTOLINK (Oct. 2020), available at <https://benitolink.com/new-study-to-investigate-influence-of-cattle-grazing-on-particulate-matter-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions-from-wildfires/>.

CCA thanks you for your leadership throughout the dual crises of drought and wildfire, and we look forward to working closely with your Administration to identify further solutions that work to the benefit of ranchers as well as all Californians and the State's natural resources which we all hold dear.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirk Wilbur', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Kirk Wilbur
Vice President of Government Affairs

CC: Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency
Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture
Hazel Miranda, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Jessica Morse, Deputy Secretary for Forest Resources Management, CNRA
Carol Tate, Executive Assistant, California Department of Food and Agriculture