



Utah Environmental Congress

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Utah Environmental Congress

PROTECT OUR NATIONAL FORESTS

Of course we will see what it takes to climb some of the biggest rock walls on the planet, how it is to live in the vertical world for weeks at a time, and what it is like to capture these journeys with photography and video.

Admission to Mike Libeck's presentation is \$5 to benefit the Utah Environmental Congress.



SYLVAN SENTINEL

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LEGACY OF DESTRUCTION: LIVESTOCK GRAZING IMPACTS ON NATIONAL FOREST LANDS

Livestock grazing began in the West over 150 years ago. Today, cows wander all over Utah, from the redrock canyons to deep within our national forests, perpetuating an unmatched level of environmental devastation. Aldo Leopold once said that to be an ecologist is to live "alone in a world of wounds." The wounding of our natural world is ongoing. Recognizing a clearcut or an oil spill is easy but the destruction caused by livestock on public lands is so pervasive and has existed for so long that it frequently goes unnoticed.

Supported by more than \$100 million each year in taxpayer subsidies, ranchers have allowed livestock to devour native grasses and trample riparian areas, destroying the rivers and streams that represent most of the habitat for the wildlife and plants in the arid West. Both independent and government studies have identified livestock production to be responsible for more endangered species in the West than any other human activity. One very small but politically powerful industry is destroying our public lands and we are paying them to do it.

The Wasatch Plateau rises to 11,000 feet to form the backbone of the state of Utah. The graceful basins and bowls that drop off each side of the north-south limestone spine of the Plateau were sculpted by glaciers in the last ice age. Covered in alternating slopes of deep forests of spruce and aspen, luxurious meadows and tundra, a hundred or more years ago the high country was a Mecca for sheep herders. Settlers, initially in the Sanpete Valley, learned to count on the plateau's luxuriant growth. In fact, the growth was so prolific that in parks such as Philadelphia Flat they had to put bells on the logging oxen so that they would not be lost in the tall grasses and forbs!



Erosion caused by grazing on the Manti-La Sal National Forest
Photo by: Laird Hamblin.

But these mountains were not as resilient like the lower elevation Midwestern prairies and forests. Mountain slopes made bare from domestic livestock grazing gave way in times of snowmelt and rain to form great landslides and mudflows down the mountain. Reports say parts of the high country lost upwards of ten feet of soil! Trashing the quality and rate of delivery of clean water to the settlers in the valley bottoms, livestock grazing environmental impacts proved to be the catalyst leading to National Forest designation for the

Wasatch Plateau, as well as most of the semi-arid Intermountain West's high country.

The Forest Service went to great efforts to stem the ensuing tide of erosional losses caused by overgrazing. This is evidenced in the massive systems of terraces created to allow the grasses and forbs to regrow and hold what soils are left. The west-facing slopes of parts of Mill Canyon peak far in the Lone Peak wilderness display some large terraces. Take a look: When the snow melt is just right at points every March to May, you can see this clear as day from the southern end of the Salt Lake Valley; even from I-15. The same is the case from Provo when looking up towards Provo peak.

A legacy of inadequate grazing management continues to this day on the Wasatch Plateau. The large areas of bare ground, where there used to be luxuriously tall growth of forbs and grasses, and consistent evidence of actively failing terracing, bear truth to this.

When UEC initially started monitoring the Manti-La Sal grazing program in the late 1990's the Forest was then preparing a small "Environmental Assessment" to reauthorize the same old poor grazing practices on 53 allotments across the Forest. UEC insisted there were very serious problems and a need for a detailed site specific Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) looking at just the Wasatch Plateau portion of this Forest and how to reform what has been going on. This turned into a 42 allotment proposal, and then finally, in 2003 the Forest started a 31 sheep allotment EIS specific to the Wasatch-Plateau. That EIS conceded changes needed to be made in some areas, but systemically overlooked the glaring problems with extensive bare ground and grazing damage to aspen forests, springs and streams. At this point additional environmental interests had become involved. Working with Mary O'Brien and other

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Our Mission:

Reclaiming and acting upon our ancestral responsibility to the land, the Utah Environmental Congress brings people together to engage in genuine protection of living forest systems that provide islands of refuge in Utah's desert country.

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UEC Bids Adieu to Valerie!

For the last year and a half our Office Manager, Valerie Swarz, has worked hard to improve the UEC in all aspects of her duties. Office organization and so much more have benefited from her work, and she will be sincerely missed. She has helped all of the staff with their own job responsibilities and in this support role she helped UEC to protect the Forests and Wildlife of Utah. We would like to thank her and express our gratitude for her work and dedication, and wish her the best of luck in all of her endeavors!

Thank You Val!

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members of the Three Forests Coalition a joint environmental appeal was filed in 2005. The appeal essentially prevailed with the withdrawal of the decision to authorize continued sheep grazing on 31 allotments. However, due to the language in a complex string of unfortunate Congressional appropriations riders spanning back at least to 1995, the Forest Service must continue current grazing management on almost all expired or expiring grazing permits even if their renewal was halted by environmental laws. So the grazing program that we believe to be very poor and contrary to environmental laws has continued across the Plateau.

Rider Abuse; Litigation

In riders hitched to 2005 and 2008 Congressional appropriations bills new language exempted certain categories of grazing permits from environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act. The catches were that current grazing practices could not be changed, and agency monitoring had to demonstrate that impacts from the permitted grazing did not exceed allowances in each National Forest's main management plan. The majority of the 31 allotments in the prior Wasatch Plateau EIS were rubber-stamped for reauthorization behind closed doors and without notice. We believe this was done in violation of the Congressional rider itself, due to the bare ground, poor monitoring, and failures to meet Forest Plan standards. UEC joined in a West-wide lawsuit headed by Western Watersheds Project and attorney Laurie Rule of Advocates For the West that is challenging these and scores of other similar allotment renewals across the American west.

Spin-offs; catch 22's; Looking Forward

The allotments that were not reauthorized behind closed door are being approved individually in smaller Environmental Assessments. One of these is the Little Pete's Hole allotment renewal that UEC recently appealed together with Mary O'Brien. We were very confident that our appeal would ultimately prevail, given the particularly extensive and sub-standard bare ground conditions across this allotment. But just like before and in spite of failures to meet environmental standards, we knew that even if our appeal prevailed that the current, damaging, grazing practices would continue, due to the complicated legacy of a couple decades of Congressional grazing riders. This "grazing appeal catch 22" is very different from a timber sale appeal because when a decision approving logging is withdrawn or reversed the logging doesn't proceed!

UEC signed an appeal resolution agreement for the Little Pete's Hole allotment. Per the agreement sensitive areas including springs are being fenced. The Forest also agreed to specific, joint monitoring of sensitive issues such as bare ground and tall forbs this field season, and to involve the UEC in adjusting the more detailed grazing instructions to make sure that Forest Plan standards will finally be met. We honestly believe this area should be permanently rested from domestic livestock grazing; it's simply inappropriate in these areas. However, when it comes to seemingly intractable grazing issues like this we have learned and demonstrated that strong winning appeals are not necessarily enough to serve the best interests of the land. It is going to take political will and some congressional backbone to end the destructive legacy of domestic livestock grazing on public lands.

Wild and Scenic River Decision Removes Protections for 740 Miles of River Corridor

In January UEC teamed with a number of local and regional National Forest conservation organizations to write an appeal of a state-wide Forest Service decision that 'informally' recommends 10 National Forest river segments for Wild and Scenic River designations. While we agree that the Wild and Scenic River designation (WSR) is excellent protection and vitally needed on our National Forest river segments, but the project's original objectives are duplicitous; the objective is to remove extensive, existing WSR protections from some 370 square miles of National Forest river corridor. Here's how:



Dixie National Forest, Cascade Falls, North Fork Virgin River retained proposed WSA status

Over the last 5 years all six National Forests in Utah have completed WSR eligibility inventories as a part of the revision of each Forest's central management plan, or Forest Plan. This is mandated by late 1980's amendment to the WSR Act that linked this inventory process to Forest Planning. It also requires each of the resulting Forest Plans to have legal standards that preserve each eligible river segment's outstanding WSR values indefinitely. This is very much like the Forest Service's river equivalent of Wilderness Study Areas; they're preserved administratively until the US Congress decides one way or the other.

This meant that about 86 river segments totaling about 850 miles (of generally 1/2 mile wide river corridor) had indefinite WSR protections. That's about 425 square miles of river corridor with administrative WSR protection. The final decision eliminated these WSR protections for 370 square miles of river corridor. That's some 740 miles of river corridor opened up to developments like dams and roads. Furthermore, the agency's analysis systemically denied there could be any indirect or cumulative effects. Utah Rivers Council coordinated the appeal; UEC will continue to work cooperatively with litigation and other efforts to reverse this decision.

President Obama's FOIA Memo

"A democracy requires accountability, and accountability requires transparency." During his first few days in office, President Barack Obama made clear just how important he considers the access to public information. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was signed into law in 1966, and amended in 1996, 2002, and 2007. This act allows for the disclosure of information and documents controlled by the United States Government to the American people. The Act defines agency records subject to disclosure and outlines mandatory disclosure procedures. During the Bush Administration, groups like the Utah Environmental Congress have struggled to get National Forest related information necessary to our Forest Monitoring Program.

A memorandum by Obama stressed the importance of an open government. Organizations have been limited in the past by blatant omissions and lack of responses from FOIA requests. Calling officials and requesting that they do the duty they are legally obligated to complete has been frustrating. In his memo Obama stressed that "[t]he Government should not keep information confidential merely because public officials might be embarrassed..." or "because errors and failures might be revealed... Nondisclosure should never be based on an effort to protect the personal interests of Government officials at the expense of those they are supposed to serve."

This was a big feather in the cap of groups who have to use FOIA as a means to carry out their work. We couldn't agree more that our FOIA requests be taken seriously, and addressed quickly. We commend these actions and are pleased to know that we will be able to receive public information easier in the future.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

"To the Ends of the Earth"

Explorer's Presentation Benefit for Utah Environmental Congress

Thursday, April 23, 7:00pm

Brewvie's Cinema Pub

(Must be age 21+)

677 South 200 West • Salt Lake City, UT

Mike Libeck, internationally famed explorer, will present slides and films from his adventures in a benefit for the Utah Environmental Congress on Thursday, April 23, at 7:00pm at Brewvies Cinema Pub, 677 South 200 West in Salt Lake City. Libeck's presentation, "To the Ends of the Earth," focuses on exploring absolute virgin Earth while seeking first ascents on big rock walls around the world, both completely alone and with partners. We will visit places from very different parts of the planet, like Venezuela to climb first ascents, Western China to climb first ascents on giant granite rock faces that are on the boarder of Kyrgyzstan and China, and Greenland to explore untouched fjords that are home to some of the largest unclimbed rock towers on the planet. As we take these journeys we will experience what it is like to be alone in very remote places without the possibility of rescue, live in 24-hour sunlight, experience amazing flora and fauna, survive in some of the harshest environments on the planet, take on deadly scorpions and tarantulas, witness the beauty of wild polar bears, meet amazing colorful culture and nomadic people living off the land, the list goes on.

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