

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

DAWN N.S. CHANG  
CHAIRPERSON  
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT

RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE  
FIRST DEPUTY

DEAN D. UYENO  
ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES  
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION  
BUREAU OF CONVEYANCES  
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT  
CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS  
CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES  
ENFORCEMENT  
ENGINEERING  
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on  
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, March 27, 2024  
1:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 224 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of  
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 178 AND SENATE RESOLUTION 154  
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL  
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE  
GRASS SPECIES

Senate Concurrent Resolution 178 and Senate Resolution 154 urges the State to prohibit introducing biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) opposes these measures.**

The Department opposes these measures because biocontrol agents are proven and scientifically tested methods to control harmful invasive species. Biocontrol agents are designed and tested to only target a specific invasive species and not have unintended consequences on other economically important non-target species.

The Legislature has defined invasive species as the "single greatest threat" to our communities' economy, natural environment, and health. Biocontrol is one of the tools used to address this threat and preserve natural areas in Hawai'i. Broadly prohibiting the use of biocontrol agents to address potentially damaging grasses would mean these invasive species could be left to spread unchecked, as no other viable treatment options may be available. If left unchecked, some invasive grass species can pose a high cost by contributing to other problems such as wildfires, native species displacement, erosion, and decreased water recharge.

The Department advises that rigorous testing of biocontrol agents has led to the safe introduction of numerous biocontrol agents in Hawai'i over the past 45 years with no environmental or non-target impacts to species other than their intended invasive pest target.

The Department supports the ranching industry but opposes these measures, which would broadly prohibit biocontrol agents on all forage grasses.

The Department provided similar testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems last week. It provided some suggested amendments based on the Hawaii Invasive Species Council (HISC) Resolution 23-1, titled “Recognizing the role of invasive plants as it relates to wildfire in Hawai‘i, and supporting recommendations for the prevention and post-recovery efforts to mitigate future impacts,” which has been provided as an attachment. This resolution recognizes the increased risk of wildfire posed by unmanaged lands and that ranching and other agricultural practices benefit the land and people and lower the fire risk when non-native grasses and weeds are being managed. It also recognizes that a holistic approach is needed for wildfire prevention and post-recovery efforts, considering biocontrol as a tool to manage widespread, high-impact weeds. If this measure does move forward, the Department recommends removing language that would prohibit or restrict the selection of potential biocontrol agents before they can be tested and utilize language from the HISC resolution to read:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the Thirty-second Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2024, the Senate concurring that the State is urged to consider a holistic approach to address wildfire risk by prioritizing fuel reduction of unmanaged lands that can utilize a variety of tools, including grazing, creation of fire buffers, mechanical and chemical controls, and the consideration of the use of biocontrol strategies for landscape-level control, a process that takes into consideration of economic and ecological implications, as well as potential impacts on critical industries; and

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of these measures.

JOSH GREEN  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



## HAWAI'I INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

### VOTING MEMBERS

LAURA KAAKUA  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND & NATURAL  
RESOURCES

SHARON HURD  
HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

KATHLEEN HO, D.Env  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

ANIA WIECZOREK, Ph.D.  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

MARY ALICE EVANS  
BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT &  
TOURISM

EDWIN SNIFFEN  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### RESOLUTION 23-1

RECOGNIZING THE ROLE OF INVASIVE PLANTS AS IT RELATES TO WILDFIRE IN HAWAI'I & SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION & POST-RECOVERY EFFORTS TO MITIGATE FUTURE IMPACTS

WHEREAS the devastating fires in Lahaina and Kula, Maui in August 2023, as well as reoccurring wildfires on Hawai'i Island and throughout the State, are clear examples of the negative impacts of invasive species and a changing climate; and

WHEREAS Hawaii's native ecosystems did not evolve with fire as a regular part of the ecosystem and most native species are not fire-adapted; and

WHEREAS Hawaiian landscapes began a massive change 245 years ago with the introduction of livestock (including cattle, goats, and sheep) and western principles of land management, and also drought-resistant grasses and shrubs for their fodder, and invasive plants that contribute to the degradation of watersheds and loss of native species; and

WHEREAS the transformation of upland native forests to dominated stands of invasive plants like strawberry guava, *psidium cattlianum*, can cause more water to transpire into the atmosphere resulting in less water feeding into streams, aquifers, and cooling forests; and

WHEREAS over the last one hundred years, the average annual rainfall decreased across 90% of the Hawaiian islands with the greatest declines in already dry leeward areas; and

WHEREAS the frequency and severity of drought has increased in the Hawaiian Islands, contributing to increased wildfire risk and the average area burned in Hawai'i increasing by 400% over the last century; and

RECOGNIZING that the natural environment is the first line of defense against climate change and that managing invasive species must be included as a critical component of protecting island resiliency; and

RECOGNIZING that unmanaged lands pose a greater wildfire risk than managed land and that any vegetation, invasive or not, can burn under extreme drought and high wind conditions; and

RECOGNIZING that invasive grasses can dry rapidly resulting in a large build-up of continuous fuels across large areas that allow for easier ignitions and for fire to spread long distances before they are stopped; and

RECOGNIZING that when Hawaiian forests burn, fast-growing grasses and woody invaders are the first to establish by outcompeting native regeneration, thus altering hydrological and nutrient cycling, and making landscapes more prone to future fire; and

RECOGNIZING that some invasive grasses still play a critical role in managed systems like ranching and

agriculture that are economically important industries, as well as in ecological restoration where some species suppress other harmful plants or are adapted to grow in more extreme climatic conditions without the need for irrigation; and

RECOGNIZING that high intensity wildfires can leave bare ground that is at increased risk of large-scale erosion that can threaten the near-shore environment and also deplete soil of vital nutrients that are needed for soil stabilization and revegetation; and

RECOGNIZING that current and projected climate change impacts, including increased land temperatures, a decline in rainfall, increased frequency and severity of drought, and increased storm severity will all serve to increase the risk of wildfire in Hawai'i in the future; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 194, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, authorizes the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council to advise and coordinate invasive species-related efforts with and between local, state, federal, international, and private programs, and to coordinate the State's position with regard to invasive species; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council recognizes that the prevention, management, and control of invasive plants must be prioritized to mitigate future wildfire threats and improve Hawai'i's climate resiliency for the protection and health of communities, native species, businesses and industries, and way of life in the islands; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council supports a holistic approach for land-use planning, including fire codes and taxation policies to incentivize risk reduction and enhance ecosystem services and public well-being that includes identifying support mechanisms that empower ranchers and local agricultural producers to reduce existing fuel loads while also meeting food security goals, and setting aside land for fire buffers around communities using low-fire risk crops, and considering the use of biocontrol strategies for landscape level control, a process that does take into consideration economic and ecological implications as well as potential impacts to critical industries; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council recommends using native plants or non-native plants that are low risk of becoming invasive for revegetation efforts whenever feasible and that local seed sources are used whenever possible to reduce the risk of new invasive plant introductions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council recommends amplifying production of locally appropriate native seed and other plant materials to provide adequate resources for post-fire recovery and fuels conversion projects to reduce fire risk; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council recommends sourcing organic materials for erosion control and re-vegetation from on-island sources, and ensuring if a local source is not available, that material is inspected or treated before transporting to the site for invasive species like coconut rhinoceros beetles (*Oryctes rhinoceros*) and little fire ants (*Wasmannia auropunctata*); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council does not recommend revegetating or creating fire breaks with plants that are considered invasive or high-risk by the Hawaii-Pacific Weed Risk Assessment and the Weed Fire Risk Assessment Tools, both of which are scientifically established and validated methods for assessing a plant's risk of invasion or being fire-promoting respectively; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Governor of Hawaii, the President of the State Senate, the Speaker of the State House of Representatives, and to the

directors or chairpersons of each HISC agency.

Adopted by the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council on the following date: December 19, 2023

*Laura H.C. Kaakua*

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Laura Kaakua, Department of Land & Natural Resources

*Matthew Kurano*

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Matthew Kurano, Department of Health

*Mary Alice Evans*

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Mary Alice Evans, Office of Planning, Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism

*Dexter Kishida*

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Dexter Kishida, Department of Agriculture

*Tammy Lee*

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Tammy Lee, Department of Transportation

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Ania Wiczorek, Ph.D., University of Hawai'i

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
Governor

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
Lt. Governor



**SHARON HURD**  
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

**DEXTER KISHIDA**  
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI  
1428 South King Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814-2512  
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD  
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

**MARCH 27, 2024**

**1:00 PM**

**CONFERENCE ROOM 224 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 178 / SENATE RESOLUTION 154  
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF  
BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN  
ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.**

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 178 urging the state to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species. The Department strongly supports this measure.

The Department recognizes the role of ranchers as stewards of the land and specifically their role in managing the range lands of the state. Grazing is by far the most efficient way of managing our rangelands. The department also acknowledges many rangeland grasses are introduced. However, introduced grasses typically have a quality which native grasses do not: they are suitable for use as forage for livestock. Targeting rangelands for biological control will create a cascade of issues. Native grasses are unsuitable for grazing so replacing forage with native grasses increases the



acreage we would need to manage through mechanisms other than cattle, thereby increasing fire risks.

While not a biological control agent, we can look at the impacts of two-lined spittlebug on the kikuyu rangeland of Hawaii Island to see what kind of impacts biological control can have. In the areas devastated by the spittlebug, the rangeland has been replaced by a variety of weeds. Managing these weeds (fireweed, Christmas berry, pamakani, etc.) is more time consuming. Ranchers affected by the spittlebug are now caught with managing weeds they know are more damaging to the environment and have lost grazing lands for their cattle. Herd sizes have roughly dropped in half in areas where TLSB has devastated the range while management costs are skyrocketing.

The Department has both roles to develop biological control agents and steward their release into the environment by the Plant Pest Control Branch and to regulate the importation and release of biological control agents by the Plant Quarantine Branch. Until Board of Agriculture approval prospective biological agent occurs through the public hearing and rule making process for Chapter 4-71, the introduction and release into the environment of a potential biological control agent is prohibited. Both Plant Pest Control and Plant Quarantine Branches will examine closely any requests to move forward with targeting rangeland forage for biological control and its subsequent release.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this resolution.



**Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.**

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair

Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

**SCR178/SR154**

**URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.**

Wednesday, March 27, 2023, 1:00PM  
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **strongly supports SCR178/SR154** which recognizes the importance of rangelands management for land stewardship and urges the State to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species.

As wildfires become more common and devastating, we turn our attention to ways to prevent these catastrophes. Some organizations and agencies have suggested the introduction of biocontrol to reduce the presence of invasive grasses, but these biocontrol agents have the potential to cause damage to important forage grass species. These forage grasses are important tools for ranchers to use to feed their herds, which in turn produces ecosystem services that benefit the wider community. Ensuring that ranchers can continue to successfully raise their cattle means that there is stewardship of the land and benefits such as carbon sequestration, soil health, invasive species removal, groundwater recharge, fire fuel load reduction – all on top of the production of beef.

We urge the State to protect these important forage grass species and ensure that Hawaii's cattlemen can continue to manage these lands. Instead, a holistic management approach should be taken. Rangeland management can actually be a tool for reducing wildfires, and ranchers have proven to be great assets when fires break out as they have the tools, equipment, personnel, and expertise of the area to assist. Whether it's through contributing water from the reservoirs they manage, cutting fuel breaks with dozers they operate, or generally keep fuel loads down through managed grazing, Hawaii's ranchers are an asset when it comes to wildfire management.

Hawaii's climate allows for grass growth at a rate only seen in a few places worldwide, which is an economic advantage necessary for our geographically isolated businesses to remain competitive in the domestic market. Introducing a biocontrol that has the potential of negatively impacting this strength, could have catastrophic consequences on our industry and ability to manage large landscapes.



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The introduction of a biocontrol for grasses could be devastating to Hawaii's cattle industry. We are willing and able to be part of the solution for wildfire management and urge the State to recognize the important of forage grasses that could be unintentionally targeted by a biocontrol meant for another species.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Our member ranchers represent over 60,000 head of beef cows; more than 75% of all the beef cows in the State. Ranchers are the stewards of over 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase  
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council  
Managing Director

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SCR178/SR154, URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.

Sen AEN Hearing – 1:00 PM  
Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Testimony By: Larry Jeffs  
Position: Support

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Sen AEN Committee:

I am Larry Jeffs, owner and operator of Larry Jeffs Farms, LLC. We have more than 42 years of Hawaii farm experience on Molokai and Oahu. Our family farms grow about 1 million pounds of import replacement produce weekly. I am a volunteer director, serving as Chair of the West Oahu Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). I have been an officer of the Hawaii Farm Bureau for many years.

We appreciate the recognition of ranchers as land stewards of the rangelands that represent about 750,000 acres of the state's total land mass. As rangeland stewards, ranchers are an essential and active part of wildfire management. Livestock grazing is a practical tool for managing forage grasses to reduce the threat of fire.

SCR178/SR154 are supported because introducing biocontrol agents in these grasslands might cause unintended consequences for ranching and beef cattle production. We strongly support policies, funding and other resources for the undermanagement of vegetation on lands in the public and private sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony.

**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/25/2024 10:57:20 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alan Gottlieb	Testifying for Ponoholo Ranch	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Ponoholo Ranch strongly supports SCR178/SR154 which recognizes the importance of rangelands management for land stewardship and urges the State to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species



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March 27, 2024

HEARING BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**TESTIMONY ON SCR 178 & SR 154**  
URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL  
AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS  
SPECIES

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference  
1:00 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice-Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

**The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports SCR 178 and SR 163**, which urges the State to prohibit the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten economically important forage grass species.

As wildfires become more common and devastating, we turn our attention to ways to prevent these catastrophes. Some organizations and agencies have suggested the introduction of biocontrol to reduce the presence of invasive grasses, but these biocontrol agents have the potential to cause damage to important forage grass species. These forage grasses are important tools for ranchers to use to feed their herds, which in turn produces ecosystem services that benefit the wider community. Ensuring that ranchers can continue to successfully raise their cattle means that there is stewardship of the land and benefits such as carbon sequestration, soil health, invasive species removal, groundwater recharge, and fire fuel load reduction – all on top of the production of beef.

We urge the State to protect these important forage grass species and ensure that Hawai'i's cattlemen can continue to manage these lands. Rangeland management can actually be a tool for reducing wildfires, and ranchers have proven to be great assets when fires break out as they have the tools, equipment, personnel, and expertise of the area to assist. Whether it's through contributing water from the reservoirs they manage, cutting fuel breaks with dozers they operate, or generally keeping fuel loads down through

managed grazing, Hawai'i's ranchers are an asset when it comes to wildfire management.

The introduction of biocontrol for grasses could be devastating to Hawai'i's cattle industry. We are willing and able to be part of the solution for wildfire management and urge the State to recognize the importance of forage grasses that could be unintentionally targeted by a biocontrol meant for another species.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this important subject.

**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/25/2024 12:18:10 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support

**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/23/2024 12:28:50 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Yes to; URGING THE STATE TO PROHIBIT THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOCONTROL AGENTS THAT MIGHT THREATEN ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FORAGE GRASS SPECIES.

**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/25/2024 11:54:23 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jimmy Greenwell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this Resolution. If no economically significant forages, then no ranchers. If no ranchers, then no stewardship (i.e. no boots on the ground) managing and caring for the 750,000 acres of rangeland in Hawaii. Then what? Let's proceed cautiously with biocontrol agents. Thank you. Gotta go tend the cows!



**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/25/2024 4:03:48 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Gregory FRIEL	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SCR178 in order to protect economically important forage species that are necessary to the livestock industry. Biocontrol agents while helpful and can also negatively impact non target species. There are other means of management to control invasive or unmanaged species without threatening important livestock forages.

Please support SCR178.

**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/25/2024 5:37:15 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Woody Child	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY support SCR178, in prohibiting the introduction of biocontrol agents that might threaten important forage grass species.

**SCR-178**

Submitted on: 3/25/2024 5:07:48 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/27/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
britt craven	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

There are just a miniscual number of forages that are native to our islands for grazing animals. Our existing forages predominantly non-native to the State are the life blood of every grazing species in the State. Bio measures don't know boundaries, property lines, or fences. They go where they want to go to do what they were brought in for and that's destroy the objective. If this bill passes, the State might as well be destroying a huge segment of our local food industry.

Do we have fire fuel load issues? Absolutely we do. The foraging animals are an incredible tool that can be used to manage the situation. It takes the will of the land owners however, to work with the grazing community in a manner that makes sense. These animals can play a huge benefit on so many levels.

I encourage you not to approved this proposed measure. The unintended consequences of it will destroy several industries, and futher put our State in a food security risk situation.