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Ashland cattle ranch faces failure if grazing is curtailed

Recent study recommends barring cattle from the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument

By Paul Fattig

ASHLAND — Longtime rancher Mike Dauenhauer wasn't surprised that a recent scientific study concluded cattle grazing harmed the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

"I could have told you the results before they were completed — they want us gone," he said.

If grazing is banned on the monument, his family's cattle ranch would be history, he added.

"For me personally, removing the grazing up there would take me out of the cow business," he said, noting his family has had cattle grazing allotments for nearly half a century on the public land where the monument now stands.

He was responding to a report released Monday by 10 scientists who spent several years studying the impact of grazing on the monument established in 2000. Hired by the Ashland-based National Center for Conservation Science & Policy, the scientists have recommended that cattle be permanently barred from grazing on the 52,947-acre monument.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which manages the monument created because of its rich biodiversity, is expected to release a grazing study this fall. The report released Monday will be considered in the agency report, an official said.

While the scientists stressed their studies were conducted independently without bias, Dauenhauer, 46, believes the study's goal is to remove cattle from the monument.

"I would hate to see grazing rights go away," he said, noting that leasing irrigated land to replace the high-elevation grazing would be too expensive.

Moreover, irrigated land is not locally available on the scale his ranch needs, he said.

The Dauenhauers, whose ranch includes some 12,000 deeded acres immediately east of Ashland, are permitted to run up to 350 pair of cows — a cow and calf — on the monument. The grazing season begins in mid-June and runs into fall.

"It's critical for us," Dauenhauer said. "About 99 percent of the ranch is below the timberline. Without the summer range we would only have half a ranch."

The Dauenhauer allotment is on the north side of Highway 66, he said. The monument is located where the Cascade and Siskiyou mountain ranges intersect in the high mountains east of Ashland.

"Cows do very well up there," he said, noting that the fact his family's cattle have been grazing on the land for nearly half a century attests to the land's resiliency.

He hopes the BLM will come up with a plan that allows grazing while protecting biodiversity on the monument.

"I think compromise and working together would be a great thing," he said.

He also has been working with several environmental activists to come up with a congressional buyout package for the roughly 10 ranches that have grazing allotments in the monument. The goal is to get funding from Uncle Sam as well as from environmental groups.

"We've been trying to get a buyout going for two years now — it seems like there is always something in the way," he said.

Meanwhile, he's waiting to see what the BLM will decide on the future of grazing within the monument.

"We see the door slamming," Dauenhauer said of cattle grazing there, then added, "But we're not done fighting yet."