

How to Write Public Comments: Examples of a Weak Letter and a Strong Letter

WEAK LETTER - Comments are vague and hard to follow up on.

(Your name, address, date)

Dear Planners:

I am writing regarding your proposal to reissue a vacant grazing allotment permit in the Rocky Knob Wilderness and the adjacent inventoried roadless area.

Cows don't belong in the wilderness or roadless area. The area is important ecologically and has important archeological values. People who recreate there don't like to be around cows. My family uses this area, and cows would ruin it for us.

Please don't do this.

Jane Doe

From this letter the planner would know that they should double-check on the compatibility of cows in these land designations, and that there may or may not be important ecological and archeological values, but now clue as to where or what. Recreational conflicts are important, but the writer offers no details.

STRONG LETTER - Comments address the same topics, but are much more specific.

(Your name, address, date)

Dear Planners:

I am writing regarding your proposal to reissue a vacant grazing allotment permit in the Rocky Knob Wilderness and the adjacent inventoried roadless area.

The Happy Cow Allotment has now been vacant for 23 years. The previous operator retired in 1992. Grazing is a provisional use in congressionally designated wilderness (see section 4(d) of the Wilderness Act of 1964). The Happy Cow Allotment had not been active for 20 years when the Rocky Knob Wilderness was designated in 2012. Thus the area is not eligible for issuing a new grazing permit in accordance with Forest Service policy (FSM 2320.2 Management of Range) and the Wilderness Act.

Half of the allotment is in the Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). While it may be legal to issue a new permit here, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed.

- The long-term effects of grazing relative to preserving the wilderness character of the area. An analysis of wilderness character should include, but not be limited to the effects of cows on ecological values since wilderness is "untrammeled by man" (or, in this case, mans' cows).

- In particular, the IRA has unique plant communities on serpentine soils including many endemic plant species, some of which are listed as rare (pygmy sandwort, trailing trillium, and broad-leaved bent grass). The pygmy sandwort is an ESA listed species that grows in moist areas especially vulnerable to the trampling caused by cows. Changes to plant communities, including the introduction of invasive species, would erode wilderness characteristics of the area. Excluding certain areas from the allotment or applying best management practices should be used.
- Happy Cow Meadows has been recovering slowly over the last 23 years of no grazing. It has become a very popular place to camp because it is an easy hike or horseback ride for young families. Happy Cow Creek has become a blue ribbon trout stream. Our family camps there once or twice a year, especially when the flowers are blooming making the scenery spectacular. There are usually 3–4 other groups camped here on weekends and many more day users. Adding cows back to this area would make it very difficult to enjoy camping and would degrade water quality. The alternatives should exclude Happy Cow Meadows from a future allotment, and analyze the effects on water quality and the native eastbank cutthroat.
- Happy Cow Meadows and nearby Elk Meadows were also used as native encampments for fishing, hunting, and berry picking. These meadows are likely to have archeological remains. I read about this in the historical column of our local newspaper. The archeological values of these meadows should be protected by excluding the meadows from the allotment.

Assuming cows will be kept out of the wilderness, the analysis needs to design a way to keep cows from wandering into the wilderness from the adjacent IRA. Wildlife-friendly drift fences would probably be needed to contain the cows.

I would also like to point out that Bull Basin, which is adjacent to the IRA, is roadless and pristine, thus qualifying it for inclusion in the IRA. Historically it was excluded from the IRA because of the timber value of the large pines, however legally it meets the definition of inventoried roadless. Since Bull Basin is part of your planning area, it should be added to the IRA as part of this planning process.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please add my name to your mailing list so that I might stay abreast of this project.

Sincerely,

June Doe