

From: Susan Ostlie, Bruce J. Madden and other longtime residents of the Zuni Mountain area.
June 7, 2021
To: Yolynda Begay, Curtis Chee, and Donald Serrano, Cibola NF, Mt Taylor RD.

I am writing to you all to inform you about some serious issues with illegal grazing on Forest Service land that is allowing cattle to access private property. I want to describe the damages that are being done to private property and land values in the eastern Zuni Mountains south of the cattle guards on Zuni Canyon Road and also in the Bad Road meadow which is south of the turn off to FR 50.

While all of the residents are aware of FS limitations on managing grazing issues on private lands, the cattle are being allowed to graze on a FS allotment that was closed to grazing upon the death of the permittee, Louis Bright. I believe the reason for the permit being retired is that it was thought to be too small to be worth managing, and also, and primarily, because there were so many residents that had brought land and built homes along the Paxton Springs Road and west and south of this road.

The cattle are also ranging onto a private meadow on Bad Road, which is where the Buddhist Stupa and our property is located, as well properties belonging to other residents of this meadow in the the 1/4 section of private land. This area of private land is described as follows: Township 10N, Range 12W, SE 1/4 of Section 35.

The rancher, Jimmy Candelaria, whose cattle are allowed to wonder into these areas, has been cited at least twice since the allotment was retired, but the fine was so minimal that is did not achieve the desired result. The cattle guard into Bad Road meadow was replaced to keep cattle out within the last 10 or so years, because it had silted in and no longer kept livestock out like it should have. Candelaria has consistently not fixed the FS fences that were knocked down (or cut), and his cows walk north up the bed of the Agua Fria from Paxton Springs to the dam that is on the south end of the described Bad Road meadow. They also wander onto property owned by Little Bear and Dan Coyle and Jane Chilton, to name a few of the residents that are south of the cattle guard on Zuni Canyon road immediately north of the turnoff to the Paxton Springs Road.

Over the years, these are some of the damages wrought by Candelaria's cattle:

- At the Coyle/Chilton property, cattle have many times trampled and eaten their gardens, to the point where they have given up gardening, except inside their home behind their trombe wall. The cows also eat and trample everything up against the house and poop all over that area and the road leading up to the house. In fact, the cattle have even threatened Jane when she was out trying to get them out of her flower and garden beds. Her dog was barking at them, trying to protect her, and one of the cows injured the dog. The damage was major enough that Jane was forced to put her beloved dog down. Neither Dan nor Jane are in the physical condition needed to move the cattle away from their home - Dan is in a wheelchair, and Jane has major issues with spinal stenosis.
- I am not aware of what type of damages have been done on Little Bear's property, but Jane Coyle mentioned recently that he has had some damage on his property from Candelaria's cattle.
- In Bad Road meadow, the cows have trampled and polluted a wildlife pond constructed by Greg Lansdon and Amy Adshead. This has been happening for several years. Greg has made efforts to move the cattle away from their pond, but to no avail. The only way he could keep them out was to install a small watering trough, which has resulted in the cows creating a path from the gap in the Agua Fria creek dam on the south end of the meadow, and they wander over to the tank several times a day.
- Candelaria's cattle have also damaged a small water feature near the Stupa in Bad Road meadow, which needs to be repaired to the tune of several hundred dollars, according to

Kent Ferguson, who owns the property next to the Stupa, and helps the Giser with repairs at times. Stanley and Shirley Giser, who were responsible for managing the construction of the stupa and the nearby kitchen, bathrooms and showers, several campsites, a meditation room, housing for a prayer wheel, and at least two small houses for their Buddhist mentors, have in the past been instrumental in reporting the damages to the FS and getting Mr. Candelaria to remove his cattle, at least temporarily. The residents of the area, including my husband and I, appreciate the many attempts made by the Gisers to hold the rancher accountable. According to Kent Ferguson, Mr. Candelaria removed his cows after they damaged the Stupa water feature, and then moved a few rocks and tree branches to block access, but the cows were back in less than 24 hours, so obviously the repairs were ineffectual. Mr. Candelaria may be doing his best to manage his cows, given that he is in his late 70's, but it is not adequate. If he has family to help him, they need to step up!

- One of the most damaging results of having Candelaria's cattle in the meadow, however, is the devastating transformation of the local meadows, especially Bad Road meadow from an ungrazed (since the 1970's) paradise of native grasses, willows, sedges, and wildflowers to a desert where the few grasses remaining are chewed down to almost nothing. There are starting to be many areas with bare dirt, which had never been there before. The area is infested with prairie dogs, who of course prefer little to no vegetation around their tunnel outlets. There were always very few prairie dogs in the meadow; the residents believe that the dramatic increase is caused by the lack of natural predators, namely coyotes. There were always coyotes to be seen and heard in the area, along with occasional bobcats, mountain lions, and bears, but now very few coyotes are ever seen or heard in the area. We believe that this is a result of trapping, poisoning, and eradication of coyotes by the ranchers in the area over the last 10-15 years. We ourselves lost a dog to a cyanide trap to the east of the Paxton Springs road area, and several residents in this area have adopted 3 legged dogs that were maimed by traps set by Wildlife Services or the ranchers themselves. The result of this predator/prey imbalance is that the prairie dogs have taken over the meadows. When you add this to improper grazing, it is a cascade of habitat destruction. This Bad Road meadow has been used twice in educational seminars put on by myself for the Rio Grande Valley Broadband of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness. My grazing guru whom I paid to fly down to do the seminar was Dr. Mary O'Brien, botanist and grazing expert for the Grand Canyon Trust. To compare the ungrazed Bad Road meadow to the large areas of bare dirt and the few bits of gramma grass in the Paxton Springs area was an amazing contrast in the differences between a healthy ecosystem and the results of such poor management practices by Candelaria. The only clumps of native grasses in the Paxton Springs area were those that were in places in the malpais where cows couldn't go because it was too rough. The condition of the Agua Fria in the Bad Road meadow was amazingly shallow, meandering, and natural, compared to the many headcuts in the Paxton Springs area all the way down to Highway 53. The bed of the Fria was more and more deeply eroded until the bed is at least 12-15 feet deep, and straight down, even 1/4 of a mile before Highway 53. I have many photos of the contrast between the two areas, and will be glad to share them with the Forest Service if that would be useful.
- The upshot is that the value of the land in Bad Road meadow (for us and the other residents in that area) is badly degraded. We are hoping that if Candelaria's cattle can be kept out of the meadows for 2-3 years, and the eradication of natural predators like coyotes can be stopped so there will be less of a prairie dog infestation, that the remaining seeds of the native grasses, wildflowers, willows and sedges will be able to germinate and restore some of the beauty of the area. Several residents have children who want to continue to keep the area pristine, and what will we be leaving them if this situation continues?
- We believe that the Forest Service is key to that restoration because it is FS fences that are allowing access to the private properties that are being so heavily impacted by Candelaria's cattle. My husband has done some research and discovered that the NM Livestock Board (NMLB) will impound nuisance cattle grazing illegally on private property, and if the rancher doesn't do the needed fence repairs, the cattle can be sold by the board. This seems pretty

drastic for this situation; I would hope that we can fix this situation before my husband gets angry enough to call them. We are tired of shoveling cow poop around our little House of Blues, before we can continue to work on it, and so are others who live in the area full-time.

- I was hoping to discuss this with Donald last Wednesday on the Tres Pistolas field trip, but he is in CA on a fire detail, I have been told. Yolynda and Curtis, if you would like us to meet you for a walk around, just let us know and my husband and I and whoever else we can round up can meet you in Grants or in the Bad Road meadow and explore the meadow, and also to the Coyle/Chilton residence, so you can hear from the full-time residents of the area.
- My cell number is 505-228-5666. I was hoping to discuss this with you at the Mt. Taylor/Zuni Mt. Collaborative meeting on Tuesday 6/8/2021, but it looks like the agenda is pretty full. I will be arriving early for this meeting with Jim McGrath, Sue Small and Dan Taylor - Friends of Little Water Canyon and the Sush Kin Fen areas, so maybe there would be a few minutes before the meeting when I could answer as many questions as possible.
- Photos - I will send as many photos as I can of the area in a separate email - both current conditions and what it looked like before the cattle were permanently ensconced. I don't want to lose what I wrote so far by trying to do too many things in the same email.

Sincerely, Susan Ostlie and Bruce Madden -

Concerned property owners, tax payers, and sometime residents of Grants and the Eastern Zuni Mountains.