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## **Conservationist Groups Challenge Grazing Plan, Seek to Protect Sonoran Desert National Monument**

Phoenix, AZ– Western Watersheds Project and the Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter of the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit in federal court today to challenge [livestock grazing on the Sonoran Desert National Monument](#) west of Phoenix. The plaintiffs seek to overturn the deeply flawed plan that allows livestock grazing to continue on 157,210 acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

“For a decade, the BLM ignored, altered, or simply redefined data that would have forced them to discontinue livestock grazing on the monument,” said Greta Anderson, Deputy Director of Western Watersheds Project. “In dozens of instances, the BLM lowered the bar to ensure private cattle would still use these public lands. I have never seen such a clear case of agenda-driven pseudoscience in a plan.”

The Presidential Proclamation of 2001 establishing the Sonoran Desert National Monument required that BLM complete a Compatibility Determination before allowing livestock grazing to continue on the monument, in order to ensure that livestock were not harming the objects the monument designation was intended to protect. To do this, BLM conducted a land health evaluation, setting objectives that different ecological sites needed to meet to ensure no harm was being done. However, among other manipulations, in each draft of the land health evaluation, the BLM lowered the objectives, changing the outcomes in a direction that consistently favored continued livestock grazing.

BLM also ignored years of data and the conclusions of other researchers regarding the impacts livestock was having on monument lands. BLM even reclassified unsurveyed monument lands as having “light use” in order to justify continued livestock use. As a result, the 2012 plan allowed grazing to continue on the majority of the monument north of Interstate 8.

“With less than half of the lands meeting the land health standards, it is clear that the continued livestock grazing in the Sonoran Desert National Monument is unsustainable,” said Sandy Bahr, Chapter Director for the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club. “To protect the monument’s objects – desert bighorn sheep, pronghorn, desert tortoise, and mule deer, as well as the Saguaro forests – and to allow the land to recover, grazing must be limited.”

“It is a plain violation of the National Environmental Policy Act to allow this flawed grazing analysis to govern grazing on the monument,” said Laurie Rule, Senior Staff Attorney at Advocates for the West, the law firm representing the conservation groups on the case. “There are too many inconsistencies that the plan fails to explain, and these inconsistencies could harm the very things BLM is supposed to be protecting.”

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A copy of the complaint is available [online](#).

[Western Watersheds Project](#) is a non-profit conservation organization with a mission to protect and restore western watersheds and wildlife through education, public policy initiatives and litigation.

[The Sierra Club](#) is one of America’s oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organizations. The Sierra Club’s mission is “to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; and to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environments.”

[Advocates for the West](#) works to maintain healthy landscapes—from the northern Rockies to the Sierras and Cascades, and the vast Sagebrush Sea in between them.

Western Watersheds Project Is A Conservation Organization Working To Protect And Restore Western Watersheds And Wildlife

Be sure to visit the WWP web site at <http://www.westernwatersheds.org>.

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