

My name is Carl Larson and my wife, two sons and I own Larson Livestock, Inc., a sheep ranch in Lyman, Wyoming. We are full-time ranchers and we derive all of our income from our sheep ranching operation. Larson Livestock, Inc. was legally incorporated in 1974, but the operation began in the late 1880's by my grandfather, Anton Hansen, who came to Wyoming from Norway to work as a shepherd. The ranch started because my grandfather asked to be paid in sheep rather than in wages for his work. Today, we are still raising the descendants of those sheep he acquired over 100 years ago.

Larson Livestock along with several other livestock operators, own the checkerboard private lands in the Carter Lease Allotment. Owning checkerboard lands means that we own every other section of land as our private property. The federal government (Bureau of Land Management ("BLM")), owns the alternate land sections. The private lands provide 57% of the forage in the allotment (the name given to the total unit of private and federal lands). The "Federal Preference Rights" in the Carter Lease Allotment allows us to graze our livestock on the federal lands in conjunction with our private lands within the allotment.

As stated above, our family has grazed sheep on these lands for over 100 years and has always taken care to ensure that the land is properly protected. For our use of the federal lands within the allotment, we receive renewable permits from the BLM every ten years. Without these permits, we cannot use the federal lands or our privately owned lands. The federal government will not renew these permits unless the land is well cared for.

Despite our historical use and the care we give our animals and the land, a radical environmental group, Western Watersheds Project ("WWP"), filed litigation in which we were involved. Our case involved the BLM's renewal of the Carter Lease Allotment term grazing permits. The WWP did not have one single shred of evidence or proof that our grazing use was harming any of the plants or animals also living on the allotment, but rather WWP's claim was that the BLM had failed to follow all the procedural requirements for renewing our permit.

Losing this permit would have been devastating to our family, and our livelihood. These grazing permits provide for winter sheep grazing from December 1 through April 30 of each year. We intervened in this litigation because WWP had requested a stay of any grazing on the Carter Lease Allotment until all litigation was settled. This litigation could have taken many years and would have effectively put our family ranch out of business as there is no other place in our area where we could graze our livestock. Purchasing feed for that time would not have been an option, as there is very little if any supplemental feed available. We live in an area of high elevation, averaging between 6500 and 7000 feet above sea level thus our growing season averages less than 60 days.

After months of litigation, the WWP's request for a stay was denied because the WWP could not present any evidence that our continued use of our land was harming

the environment. Thus, for the meantime, our ranch is still in tact. We spent approximately \$35,000 on attorney fees and costs to win the right to stay on our ranch. However, this litigation is still ongoing. Although the court said we could continue our ranching in the meantime, the court also found that the BLM violated some of the procedures it used to renew our permit. Thus, the permit was sent back to the BLM so the agency could jump through more hoops. We have absolutely no control over the BLM's process, but we have to live with the consequences and had to spend \$35,000 to keep our ranch. There is no way to get that money back from the WWP, even though for the short term—we beat them.

In addition to the money we had to spend on the litigation, we have invested a lot of money in allotment boundary fences, water developments, bridges and permanent range trend study transects that are read every few years by rangeland professionals. If the allotment were closed, it would be a major taking of private property rights and my family would lose its business.

We live in Uinta County, located in southwest Wyoming. Farming and ranching have been an integral part of the economy of Uinta County since it was settled in the second half of the 1800s. If the family ranches in Uinta County were eliminated, the County would suffer substantially due to the negative impact this would have economically and socially.

Many environmental groups' agendas, including WWP, are to remove all livestock grazing from federal and state lands. The litigation they file is not justified and has become a large income producer for the environmental groups. Just as with our case, these groups are not suing over our specific ranching practices but are litigating over whether the federal government followed the right time frames and procedures. These groups then utilize the Equal Access to Justice Act ("EAJA") to be paid for all their costs and attorney fees in these types of litigation. Environmental groups should not be paid taxpayer dollars to sue the federal government.