



**National Cattlemen's
Beef Association**



March 16, 2015

The Honorable Scott Tipton
218 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Tipton:

The Public Lands Council (PLC) and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) strongly support the *Water Rights Protection Act* (WRPA). PLC is the only national organization dedicated solely to representing the roughly 22,000 ranchers who operate on federal lands, some of which are U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. NCBA is the beef industry's largest and oldest national marketing and trade association, representing American cattlemen and women who provide much of the nation's supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America's private property. Many of our members also hold private water rights on federal lands, which serve as an integral part of their operations; thus, these water rights keep our members in business and rural communities thriving. However, landowners face an unprecedented threat to the future of their water rights on lands managed by the USFS and potentially other federal agencies.

The Water Rights Protection Act will provide a means to combat the Federal Government, by way of the USFS and the Bureau of Land Management, from seizing water rights without just compensation. It would prohibit federal agencies from implementing a permit condition that requires the transfer of privately held water rights to the government in order to receive or renew a permit for the use of the land. The bill upholds longstanding federal deference to state water law and recognizes the states' right in how groundwater resources are managed.

The bill would also prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture from asserting jurisdiction over groundwater that has been historically controlled by the states. PLC and NCBA submitted comments on the U.S. Forest Service's proposed groundwater directive in September 2014 urging USFS to withdraw the directive on the basis that agency lacks the legal authority to regulate groundwater. We believe the directive is an intrusion into state authority over groundwater. Additionally, WRPA would provide direction from Congress that would prevent USFS from making another attempt to control groundwater.

Our members, family ranchers across the west, face many threats and have much depending on these water rights for their livelihood. We must ensure that ranchers continue to have access to the water rights they own, maintain and have developed. It is important to include all industries that may be impacted in the legislation, to keep our rural communities thriving. Rep. Tipton's bill accomplishes the purpose of protecting all water right holders, including ranchers.

We thank you for your attention to this crucial issue, and for supporting America's ranchers as they continue to be an essential part of rural communities and stewards of our public lands.

Sincerely,



Brenda Richards
PLC President



Philip Ellis
NCBA President

Cc: Reps. Gosar, Amodei, Pearce, Lamborn, Lummis, Ribble, Zinke, LaMalfa, GT Thompson, Simpson, McClintock, Chaffetz, Smith (TX), Stewart (UT)