

NMCGA on the Trail...

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## **Cattle Growers' sues U.S. Forest Service to stop aerial slaughter**

Today, New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association (NMCGA) and others filed a Complaint and Application for Temporary Restraining Order and Preliminary Injunction against the United States Forest Service (USFS) and APHIS in Federal District Court for New Mexico to stop the USFS and APHIS from the cruel act of shooting cattle in the Gila Wilderness from a flying helicopter. NMCGA is joined as plaintiff by Humane Farming Association, an organization with 270,000 members that condemns aerial slaughter of cattle as cruel and inhumane.

In February 2022, NMCGA and others filed suit against the USFS following the announcement that they would start slaughtering stray cattle by aerial means in the Gila Wilderness within days. The USFS and APHIS ultimately shot 65 head of cattle during that operation, many of which were not killed instantly but wandered off, bled out and then died. Photographs showed carcasses in or on the banks of the Gila River. Calves were orphaned, starved and left for predators. The USFS later agreed that it would not rely on the same justification it had used for that action and NMCGA and the USFS agreed to dismiss that action provided that USFS would provide a 75 days' written notice of any future aerial slaughter operations.

"Unfortunately, after a year of abiding by our settlement agreement we are now back to square one," said Loren Patterson, President of NMCGA. "Throughout the past year, we offered real solutions to the Forest Service for the Gila stray problem. Those solutions would address the immediate issue, provide long-term resolution and would be humane."

In its recent filing, NMCGA and others are asking the Court to stop the aerial slaughter operation based on the defendants violating their agreement to provide 75-days' notice of a plan to shoot cattle again, which the USFS and APHIS have not provided. The group further contends that the USFS has no authority to shoot cattle, that the USFS is violating its own regulations, which do not authorize shooting cattle, that the USFS is violating the National Environmental Protection Act and that the shooting operation constitutes animal cruelty under New Mexico law, a criminal violation. NMCGA is requesting an immediate hearing on its application for a restraining order.

The Forest Service aerial slaughter plan has drawn bi-partisan condemnation. The New Mexico House of Representative agrees the slaughter should be stopped and showed its support through signature on letters drafted by ranking member of the House Agriculture, Acequias & Water Resources Committee, Representative Candy Spence Ezzell, and Speaker of the House, Javier Martinez. Many New Mexico citizens and former residents recognize that leaving the carcasses on the ground to rot is a waste of food that could be used to feed the poor in our state. Others in New Mexico and neighboring states believe that, if not stopped, these aerial slaughter operations could become a standard tool for the USFS across New Mexico and the West.

Interested in supporting efforts to stop the slaughter? Please visit NMCGA at [www.nmagriculture.org](http://www.nmagriculture.org) for access to a complete list of officials to contact, once there you can also contribute directly to the NMCGA Litigation Fund through the online donation feature.