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WESTERN WATER AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION: A DESTRUCTIVE PAST AND UNSUSTAINABLE FUTURE, PRESENTED BY: JOSH OSHER, WESTERN WATERSHEDS PROJECT; GEORGE WUERTHNER, PUBLIC LANDS MEDIA; JULIA DEGRW, FOOD & WATER WATCH.

This panel discussed the destructive impacts of large-scale cattle operations on landscapes and ecosystems. The panel focused on cattle grazing and industrial farming as some of the lead causes of environmental destruction in the American West.

Josh Osher spoke about the widespread damages cattle grazing. Not only does cattle grazing affect more than two hundred million acres of land in the American West, but it has also damaged eighty percent of streams and riparian areas in the region. Osher contended that the only way to prevent further degradation of western ecosystems through cattle grazing is to remove the cattle from the land. Once cattle are removed, he argued, lands have shown a surprising resilience and ability to rebound from substantial degradation.

George Wuerthner discussed how legislators and government agencies have failed to combat the cattle industry. Wuerthner highlighted this failure by exploring the Clean Water Act's exception that allows industrial agricultural producers to operate without obtaining discharge permits, despite the fact that cattle in Montana produce waste equivalent to a human population of 100 million. Wuerthner also discussed the disproportionate access the industry has to water. In Nevada for example, the cattle industry only provides some 25,000 jobs but it may take up to eighty-five percent of the state's water. Wuerthner concluded his segment by imploring the attendees to fight this inequity by eating more fruit and vegetables.

Last, Julia DeGraw presented on how important it is for society to shift how we use water. To highlight this importance, DeGraw explored two mega-dairy farms, one in operation and the other slated for future operation, near Boardman, Oregon. The groundwater underneath Boardman has long been in decline, yet the combined dairy farms could withdraw an estimated 1.4 million gallons of water a day to support 100,000 cattle. This would not only severely affect local hydrologic conditions, but it would also reduce local air and water quality. DeGraw argued that the cost of beef does not internalize its environmental destruction.

CALIFORNIA GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT, PRESENTED BY: ALISON DIVINE, COMMUNITY LEGAL INFORMATION CENTER, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO.

Alison Divine discussed how the California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 ("SGMA") has impacted the state. Divine first discussed the history of groundwater management in California, then the general functions of SGMA, and finally how SGMA has developed during its infancy.

California's groundwater system is expansive. Seventy-five percent of Californians depend on groundwater, in some part, for their primary water supply. The state recognizes two types of groundwater: subterranean streams, which consist of groundwater flowing in a known and definite channel; and percolating groundwater, which a California court once eloquently described as "vagrant wandering drops [of water] moving by gravity in any and every direction along