

DOUBLE CIRCLE RANCH
ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
2005

Clifton Ranger District
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest

Approved:

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Permittee

5-9-05
Date

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District Ranger

5/6/05
Date

1. INTRODUCTION

Double Circle allotment was created in 1990 by the consolidation of the NO Bar, Bee Springs, and Water Canyon allotments on the Clifton Ranger District. An environmental assessment and decision authorized a reduction in permitted numbers to 400 head and development of an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) in 1991. Between 1991-2000 several practices were implemented with provided for recovery and restoration of both upland and riparian corridors, including fencing of Eagle Creek, removal of a portion of the Eagle creek corridor from the allotment to aide in recovery, prescribed rest for uplands recovery of watersheds, and applied fire treatments in the Main, Four Bar, and Grey peak pastures to remove tree overstory and improved herbaceous and browse forage. The allotment transferred in 2000, and management quickly deteriorated to a point where administrative action was taken in summer, 2002 that required 100% suspension of livestock numbers to allow for rest and recovery of herbaceous and riparian vegetation, and to be in compliance with the Ongoing Grazing Biological Opinion issued in 2002. The Term Grazing permit for the Double Circles allotment was transferred to the present permittees in March, 2004.

The Biological Opinion of 2002 states that grazing conditions on the Double Circle Allotment to be in poor to fair condition. One of our main goals as new permittees is to improve grassland and browse on the 36,272 acre allotment. According to USFS 1998 analysis, riparian areas along Eagle Creek and Sheep Wash are improving due in large part to the fencing off of livestock from Eagle Creek and Willow Creek and deferred rotation on Sheep Wash and other areas. Another important goal, with the support of Upper Eagle Creek Watershed Association and the USFS, is to continue steady improvement of riparian habitat thereby benefiting several Threatened and Endangered species; such as the Chiracahua leopard frog, spikedace, loach minnow, willow fly catcher, and Gila chub. Proper management of upland areas will increase habitat for both game and non-game species including but not limited to the Mexican grey wolf, antelope, turkey, quail, white tail, mule deer, and spotted owl. As permittees, we are committed to improving rangeland for both livestock and wildlife and maintaining Double Circle Ranch as a recreational gem for the public to enjoy for birding, hunting, fishing, hiking, and just plain peace and quiet.

This Allotment Management Plan (AMP) was rewritten by Wilma Jenkins and Doug Dresser, new permittees, with edits and additions provided by the Clifton Ranger District. The AMP is consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended, and consistent with the original decision which authorized the creation of the original AMP. Proposals within this document, more importantly, are consistent with and provide for compliance with the Endangered Species Act, as amended and offered within the Biological Opinion for Ongoing Grazing dated 2/26/02.

2. DESCRIPTION

A. Permitted Numbers and Planned Deferment

The Double Circle Allotment is permitted to run 400 head yearlong. Permittees have chosen to voluntarily reduce permitted numbers to 200 head year round for 3 years, from 2005 through grazing year of 2007. This time period allows them to maintain and repair fencing, add new fencing, and develop water sources so that all areas of the ranch may be used effectively and cattle may be rotated in a manner consistent with range improvement.

B. Management Units

We will have a 60 day breeding season from June 15 to August 15. During this time, All cattle will be rotated between Pruner Flats and PD Pasture. If forage requires, the cattle may be moved to the Weaning Trap and Cross H Pasture.

After breeding, the bulls will be removed to the Weir Trap and rotated between Weir Trap, Moore Trap, and Double Circle Fields 1, 2, 3, and 4 for the remainder of the year.

Calves will be born between March 23 and May 23. Calving is to be in the Big Dry Pasture. Rotation between Big Dry North, Big Dry South, and Big Dry East insures proper recovery and growing time for spring forages. Calves will be weaned the last week of November. All calves to be sold and any culled cows will be shipped at that time. Heifers held as replacements and steers held for grass fed beef sales will be sent to the old Double Circles Headquarters and rotated between the Airstrip, Ranch, DC North, Center, and South Fields for 60 days so that they can be monitored. They will then be returned to the main herd.

The main herd of longhorn cattle will be moved to the ST Pasture after December 1. They will be grazed from the ST Pasture to Cottonwood, Open Draw, and Greys Peak Pastures until calving time in mid March, at which time they will begin their 3 pasture rotation between Big Dry North, South, and East.

The following winter the main herd of dry cows will be trailed to the Main, 4 Bar, and NO Bar Pastures and rotated between the three. The NO Bar and 4 Bar Pastures are scheduled for prescribed burns, which will dictate which pastures must be rested for grass recovery.

All traps will be used gathering cattle and holding new cattle for observation.

C. TYPE OF OPERATION

The allotment will be grazed with deferred rest rotation allowing for cool and warm season grasses to grow and recover from grazing. Movement varies from year to year so each pasture receives deferment from grazing during the summer and spring growing periods every other year.

D. PROBLEMS AND ADJUSTMENTS

This management plan is not set in stone. It may be adjusted in accordance with completion of water source improvements, fencing improvements, prescribed burns, as well as weather and forage conditions. All pastures will be monitored and cattle rotated in accordance with best management practices. Any changes necessary will be discussed with the USFS.

E. MONITORING

Permittees, in cooperation and guidance from the Clifton Ranger District, USFS, will conduct 2 forms of monitoring, implementation and effectiveness. Implementation monitoring is used to guide day to day and annual livestock operations and success at executing a grazing program. Effectiveness monitoring is intended to determine if execution of the program as planned in the AOI, or adjusted as needed, actually accomplished the results on the ground as planned. Implementation monitoring, as outlined in the Annual Operation of Instructions (AOI) will involve 7 types and will include required reports, photos, and forms as a normal part of allotment management.

These monitoring types include:

1. Forage production
2. Forage utilization
3. Photo points
4. Condition of Improvements
5. Actual Livestock use by pasture (dates and numbers).
6. Grazing Response Index assessment
7. Precipitation records.

All pasture forage will be maintained within allowable use figures provided by the USFS. All care will be taken to insure that our cattle grazing doesn't exceed recommended levels as provided by the USFS.

3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- A. To improve grass plant and browse vigor, density, and composition.
- B. To improve riparian areas and water quality.
- C. To improve conditions of existing range improvements
- D. To plan and complete new range improvements
- E. To maintain open communications and operations with the USFS.
- F. Maintain a viable livestock operation that promotes open space concepts in an unfragmented landscape
- G. Continue with management and promotion of a historic herd livestock program, with grazing of registered Longhorn cattle, that provides for esthetic and photogenic opportunities for the Forest visitor.

The following are current conditions and proposed improvements listed by pasture on the Double Circle Allotment.

BIG DRY PASTURE

Forage is good in Big Dry. Fencing is adequate. Lack of water is the primary problem area because the Big Dry Pipeline is inoperable at this time and Old Tank and New Tank do not hold water. Sheep Wash Tank is breached and dry. Another issue is the necessity to keep cattle from Sheep Wash Spring and the Sheep Wash riparian area from March through September to protect Chiracahua leopard frog habitat.

We propose installing a solar pumping system on the existing well on PD Pasture and repairing the pipeline to Big Dry East. This will allow the installation of 11 troughs to provide dependable year round water to wildlife and livestock.

Also, by running a new fence line from Big Dry East southwest across FR217 ending at the Double Circle Tank in Sheep Wash Pasture, cattle could be prevented from drifting into Sheep Wash riparian areas during critical frog breeding seasons. A fenced lane will assure adequate protection for C.L.F. in that area.

PD PASTURE

Currently PD Pasture, which is 75% private land has fair to good forage and fencing. However, there is no water available at all unless Phelps Dodge Corp. is pumping from their wells.

The new pipeline project previously mentioned would allow 3 troughs to be placed in the pasture and permit adequate distribution of livestock for effective grazing practices and forage utilization.

In addition, Simmons Spring, on the border with Big Dry, may be useable to provide reliable water.

PRUNER FLATS

Forage is fair to poor. Fencing currently needs repair due to runoff from Bear Canyon. Pruner Flats has 1 small trough at the Holder's Solar location and 1 round 7ft. stock tank on the PD Pasture fence line. This tank fills only when PD is operating their wells.

In order to effectively utilize forage on the entire pasture, a trough would be added in the northeast corner and serviced by an extension from the Big Dry pipeline. A larger trough would be added near Holder's Solar site.

BEE SPRINGS PASTURE

Currently forage is good. Fencing is adequate except around the Line Tank, where a new enclosure is needed to prevent livestock from drifting into the neighboring allotment. Water is very limited. Secondary Tank and Lee Tank never hold water. Bee Spring and Bee Canyon Tanks are water sources only during very wet seasons and quickly dry up as do the small water holes in Bee Canyon. Split Tank has water part of the year, but will dry up in drought conditions. The Line Tank at the extreme north end of the pasture retains water year round.

An extension of the Big Dry Pipeline to the southwest end of Bee Spring Pasture would permit the addition of 3 water troughs, which would enable the forage to be grazed efficiently.

An enclosure consisting of under ½ mile of fencing around the Line Tank would allow adjoining allotments, Baseline/Horsespring and Double Circle, to share the tank without livestock encroachment on the adjacent allotment.

CROSS H PASTURE

Forage is good in the Cross H Pasture. Currently, the water gap at the southwest corner of the pasture is nonexistent. The remainder is fair to good. There are no water sources in the pasture. Historically, livestock watered in Eagle Creek. The Creek has been fenced off to protect critical habitat for several Threatened and Endangered Species; such as the loach minnow, spikedace, Gila chub, Chiracahua leopard frog, etc.

The water gap in the canyon will be replaced a cable and moveable fence which will be retracted during periods of non-use.

We propose an extension of the Big Dry Pipeline which will consist of 2 storage tanks feeding 6 troughs in Cross H and 1 trough in the Weaning Trap. This trap was also watered from Eagle Creek and only has a water source when Phelps Dodge is pumping. A trough will also be placed in the Mesa Trap since Mesa Tank dries up most years. These water sources will provide dependable water for livestock and wildlife as well as a sizeable herd of antelope which regularly travel this area.

NO BAR PASTURE

Forage on the NO Bar Pasture is degraded due to unnatural encroachment of pinyon/juniper forest. Water is adequate except to the NO Bar Trap and pen system. Fencing is in need of repair to prevent livestock from drifting onto the neighboring Mesa allotment.

An extension from the Big Dry Pipeline would provide a water supply to the NO Bar Trap as well as the pens, which are the best on the ranch but have no water.

The USFS has proposed thinning and burning to control pinyon/juniper encroachment thereby allowing forages to thrive, benefiting wildlife and livestock. Tentative plans by the USFS include a 2006/2007 thin and burn. Constructing a new fence east to west just north of FR217, dividing the pasture into North and South pastures, would allow a rotational grazing plan which would allow non-use of recovery burn areas by cattle for 2 full growing seasons on the North pasture. The new fence would also protect Smith Canyon riparian areas during critical recovery periods.

4 BAR PASTURE

Pinyon/juniper encroachment is evident to the detriment of forage and browse. Water is adequate. Currently, fencing is in need of repair or replacement along the north boundary around Stock Tank #3, which is shared with the Mesa allotment.

The USFS plans to thin and burn on the 4 Bar Pasture will encourage forage and browse regeneration for both wildlife and livestock. Cattle will be removed from the burn areas for 2 full growing seasons to allow healthy forage growth. The fencing along the north boundary needs to be rebuilt or replaced to prevent cattle drifting to the neighboring allotment. Fencing Stock Tank #3 and installing gates onto both allotments would allow joint use of the tank without cattle encroachment.

MAIN PASTURE

Main Pasture has pinyon/juniper encroachment. Water and fencing are adequate.

The USFS has been burning on the Pigeon Burn Project thereby controlling excessive pinyon/juniper growth to allow for more diverse and productive forage and browse.

GREYS PEAK PASTURE

Greys Peak Pasture has pinyon/juniper encroachment and limited browse and forage for wildlife and livestock. Existing trails for livestock movement are in poor repair. Water is adequate, but could be improved. Fencing is poor to fair.

Proposed USFS burns will encompass portions of the pasture thereby increasing future forage availability. Cattle will be removed as required for burn recovery.

Cottonwood Spring #1 will require cleaning for an additional water source.

TABLETOP PASTURE

Forage is adequate, although this pasture has not been used for years. Water is limited, with Small Tank being breached and Sunflower Mesa Tank being dry most of the year. Fencing along the San Carlos Reservation boundary at Water Canyon is in disrepair and must be replaced before any livestock may use this pasture.

To provide water to the Sunflower Mesa, the Solar System originally provided and flown in by the USFS needs reinstalled. This system pumped from Water Canyon to an existing tank and several troughs on the mesa. This would open a large area which hasn't been grazed in years which would benefit forage growth and production and brush control.

The water gap and fencing at Water Canyon needs replacement to prevent commingling of Double Circle and San Carlos cattle.

OPEN DRAW PASTURE

Forage is fair to good although some pinyon/juniper encroachment is evident. Fences are in fair condition. Water sources are sufficient, but need some repairs.

Open Draw Tank is full of silt and needs cleaned out to continue to adequately retain water. Cottonwood Tank is partially breached and needs repaired before it fails completely, leaving the entire northeast end of the pasture without water.

The pipeline from Cottonwood Spring #2 is in poor condition and needs to be replaced with 1.25 in. NuMex 267 p.s.i. pipe to provide year round water to the 2 new troughs we installed in 2004.

Installing a perimeter fence around the Open Draw Tank would enable the area to be useful in holding and gathering cattle.

DOUBLE CIRCLE HEADQUARTERS FIELDS

Forage in the 8 small fields varies from good to very poor. The only water source is a well in the Ranch Trap, into which we installed a Solar Pumping System in October, 2004. Historically livestock watered from Eagle and Willow Creeks, both of which have been fenced to protect Threatened and Endangered species and critical riparian habitat.

Fencing has been damaged by recent storms along the eastern boundary of the North Field and will need reconstructing. Boundary fencing with the Reservation is in poor condition but is currently being replaced at the Point of Pines crossing.

Intensive livestock stocking for short durations will improve forage in all 8 pastures. Additional water lines and troughs from our solar system pump to Fields 1, 2, 3, and 4 as well as Airport and North Fields will allow for rotation and distribution of cattle so that the forage will rejuvenate.

Fencing damaged by creek channel changes will be reconstructed to promote healthy riparian corridors for wildlife. This area is inhabited by elk, turkey, antelope, mule deer, javalinas, quail, as well as a variety of birds and other game and non game species.

ST PASTURE

Forage is Fair to Good. Fencing is fair. Water is only available from a well which requires a generator to be hauled in to fill an existing storage tank. Seasonal water is available if Sheep Wash is flowing.

The proposed pipeline extension to Cross H Pasture could be extended to fill the storage tank at the ST Pasture and feed the existing trough. This would eliminate the requirement to drive 10 miles every other day to run the generator while using this pasture and would provide year round water for wildlife.

Possibly adding a trough from Cottonwood Spring #3 would provide a source of water at both ends of the pasture promoting efficient livestock distribution.

COTTONWOOD PASTURE

Forage is poor. Fencing is adequate. Water sources in this pasture are inadequate. The Cottonwood Canyon Tank never holds water. Cottonwood Pasture has been heavily used in the past and requires rest. No cattle were grazed in 2004 or 2005 to allow the forage a chance to rejuvenate.

An extension from the Cottonwood Spring #2 pipeline could provide water for 2 new troughs. A trough could be placed at Cottonwood Spring #3.

BIG DRY EAST

Forage is good in this pasture. Fencing is fair to good. Water sources are limited in Big Dry East. Split Tank is not dependable for year round water. The Moore Tank is completely breached. Upper Big Dry Tank at the far north end of the pasture is reliable all year. Seep Tank is good in wet periods only. Sheep Springs is critical habitat and must be protected from livestock damage.

Repairing the Big Dry Pipeline permits water to fill the existing storage tank on Big Dry East, feeding 2 troughs. An extension southeast would allow a trough in the southern portion of the pasture, which would ease the impact of cattle on the Sheep Springs riparian area. Current USFS plans are to fence a lane for livestock use at the springs to protect the riparian habitat critical to the Chiracahua leopard frog.

4. SUMMARY

The necessity of doing so many improvements is the reason we have voluntarily reduced our permit numbers in half. The completion of these projects will provide effective management tools so that the Double Circle Allotment will continue to improve its riparian and upland habitat, water quality, forage and browse production and diversity, and wildlife productivity as well as support a herd of 400 cattle.