



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Tucson Field Office
3201 E. Universal Way
Tucson, Arizona 85756

JUL 16 2019

Jeff Burgess
7650 S. McClintock Dr. #103-248
Tempe, AZ 85284

Dear Mr. Burgess,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Tucson Field Office received your letter dated November 23, 2018 requesting to be put on our office's interested public list in regards to the grazing allotments along the Gila River. Your name has been added to our interested publics list. The BLM Tucson Field Office also received your letter dated April 17, 2019 with questions regarding grazing management on the A Diamond grazing allotment. Attached are our responses to your questions, which are italicized.

The BLM is in the process of writing the Environmental Assessment that will incorporate the terms and conditions for the A Diamond Allotment. The terms and conditions will be written into the grazing lease to restrict river use from April 1 through October 1. As allotments come up for renewal, a Land Health Evaluation and Environmental Assessment will be written to incorporate the terms and conditions of the lease. All BLM allotments within the river corridor will be completed in this same manner and restrictions of use will be incorporated.

Thank you for your questions and please contact us if you have any future questions.

Sincerely,

Margarita Guzman
Acting Tucson Field Office Manager

Enclosures
Attachment1
Thumb Drive-2012 Grazing BO

Attachment 1: BLM Responses to questions about grazing management on the A Diamond allotment

“The 2003 BO also included your description of the existing livestock management situation on the A-Diamond grazing allotment, which is located in this area along the south bank of the Gila River: This allotment currently has fencing in place to restrict livestock grazing in the riparian areas. The current livestock operator does not want livestock to use the river’s riparian corridor. There are no plans to allow livestock access to the river during any season.”

Response: This only applies to the BLM administered lands, it does not apply to the private lands at the headquarters or the state trust lands to the east of the headquarters along the river, where the cattle can access the river in the summer. The BLM administered portion of the allotment is fenced to keep cattle out of the river.

“This allotment currently has fencing in place to restrict livestock grazing in the riparian areas. The current livestock operator does not want livestock to use the river’s riparian corridor. There are no plans to allow livestock access to the river during any season. I presume this was the reason you didn’t include the A-Diamond Allotment in the list of allotments where you promised to exclude grazing along the Gila River from April through October?”

Response: Yes, this is correct and the reasoning for not including the A-Diamond Allotment in the list.

“Furthermore, the 2003 BO also documented that you promised to limit annual upland forage utilization in the local desert scrub vegetation to 30% or less on all of the grazing allotments along this stretch of the Gila River. But in the blog’s interview with the A-Diamond Allotment’s permittee he said he makes “intense” pasture moves.”

Response: The correct wording utilized in the 2012 Biological Opinion is “On BLM lands with suitable or potential willow flycatcher habitat, restrict livestock grazing on riparian vegetation to winter use only from November 1 to March 30, and monitoring will be done to ensure utilization levels do not exceed 30 percent limits on apical meristems of woody vegetation 0-6 feet tall (e.g. cottonwoods and willows). Monitoring will be done prior to, during, and after the livestock have used a riparian pasture. Once the 30 percent utilization limit is met, all livestock will be removed from the pasture.”

There is no reference to 30% utilization on the uplands in the BO. A thumb drive with the 2012 BO is included.

“The 2003 BO’s description of the existing situation on the Battle Axe Allotment also raises questions. It states that grazing will be prohibited in the allotment’s riparian habitat along the Gila River from April through October. But the map on page 143 of the BO appears to show that there are four water gaps that allow cattle direct access to the river. Water gaps are notoriously difficult to maintain, as they employ fences that are located in the stream channel, where they can easily be damaged by high runoff events. The description of the situation on the Battle Axe allotment provided for the BO, however, doesn’t mention the water gaps, or the implementation of any measures to ensure they are intact from April through October.”

Response: The State Trust Lands along the river on the Battle Axe allotment are not fenced and the cattle have access to the river. The State Land at the mouth of Walnut canyon is likely where the writer of the article on the Arizona trail camped amid the cattle droppings as that is about the only area along the trail to access the river. The BLM has no control or jurisdiction over the State Lands.

"In conclusion, it appears the USFWS concurred that the BLM's management of grazing along this stretch of the Gila River was in compliance with the Endangered Species Act based upon inaccurate information provided by your office. I suggest you take remedial measures as soon as possible. To start with, I think you should prohibit grazing along the Gila River on the A-Diamond Allotment from April through October, like you've done with the other allotments in this area."

Response: The BLM is in the process of writing the Environmental Assessment, which will incorporate the terms and conditions for the A Diamond Allotment. The terms and conditions will be written into the grazing lease to restrict river use from April 1 through October 1.