

Decision Notice and

Finding of No Significant Impact

Grazing Authorization for Campaign Bar V Bar Allotments

USDA Forest Service
Tonto Basin Ranger District, Tonto National Forest
Gila County, Arizona

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

This decision re-authorizes livestock grazing and certain rangeland improvements for the Campaign Bar V Bar Allotments on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest in Gila County, Arizona. The allotments include lands designated as Management Area 6B and 6J by the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP). The allotments are located south of Roosevelt Lake in the Superstition Mountains.

The purpose of this action is to authorize livestock grazing in a manner consistent with Forest Plan direction. The need is to implement a management strategy designed to achieve desired resource conditions on all parts of the grazing allotment.

This decision will formally combine the two allotments into one management unit, henceforth referred to as the Campaign Allotment.

The authorization of grazing and the proposed management practices on the allotment were described in the Campaign Bar V Bar Allotment Environmental Assessment (2008 EA, Project Record Volume 4 #12; 2011 EA revision, Project Record Volume 6 #5). The EA was conducted in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA analyzes and discloses the anticipated effects of the proposed action and three alternatives (No Action/No Grazing, Modified Proposed Action, and Seasonal Grazing). It also describes specific mitigation and monitoring requirements that will be implemented as part of the selected action. The EA is available for review at the Tonto Basin Ranger District office in Roosevelt, Arizona and Tonto National Forest Supervisor's office in Phoenix, Arizona.

Decision

Based upon my review of the proposed action and alternatives, I have decided to approve the grazing management strategy described under the **Proposed Action** of the modified EA. The proposed action will authorize year long managed livestock grazing on the Campaign Allotment (Allotment) and consists of four components: authorization, improvements, management

practices, and monitoring. The action will be implemented using an adaptive management strategy. The four components are described below.

1. Authorization

The selected action will authorize managed livestock grazing under the following terms and conditions:

Duration and timing of grazing: Use on the allotment will be authorized year long using a deferred rotation grazing strategy to ensure that each pasture receives periodic rest and that no pastures are grazed at the same time of year in consecutive years. Use on the allotment may be limited or seasonal in drought years when forage and water availability is limited. A yearling herd may be placed on the allotment at any time of the year in addition to the cow/ calf herd if forage, soil and water resource conditions support their use.

The sequence and timing of pasture moves will be adjusted annually and documented in the annual operating instructions. Management may be adjusted through the use period based on monitoring of range readiness, ecological condition, and grazing impacts. If conservative use levels are reached before schedule move dates, livestock will be moved to the next scheduled pasture. If all pastures have been utilized before the end of the grazing season, livestock will be removed from the allotment until the start of the next grazing season.

Intensity of grazing: Forage utilization will be managed at a level corresponding to light to moderate intensity in order to provide for grazed plant recovery, increases in herbage production and retention of herbaceous litter to protect soils. Peer-reviewed grazing studies identifies conservative use as 30-40% average use of primary forage species based on pasture-wide utilization averaged over time (Holechek, et al, 2004). Consistent patterns of utilization in excess of moderate intensity would be used as a basis to modify management practices or reduce livestock numbers in subsequent grazing years.

For riparian areas, guidelines for use are as follows: *obligate riparian tree species*-limit use to <50% of terminal leaders on palatable riparian tree species accessible to livestock (usually <6 feet tall); *deergrass*-limit use to <40% of plant species biomass; *emergent species (rushes, sedges, cattails, horsetail)*-maintain six to eight inches of stubble height during the grazing period. The goal of the deergrass utilization guideline is primarily to provide residual vegetation for stream channel protection, and secondarily to protect plant vigor, which will allow for continued germination of seed and plant propagation. Emergent vegetation is supported by perennial surface or subsurface water, and has high potential for regrowth following grazing. The goal of the emergent species guideline is to provide physical protection to the stream channel.

Objectives outlined in the Tonto NF (LMP) for management area 6B (Superstition Wilderness) include managing for wilderness values, wildlife habitat, and natural ecological processes while allowing livestock grazing that is compatible with these values. Objectives for management area 6J (remainder of the allotment) emphasize managing for a variety of renewable natural resources with an emphasis on wildlife habitat improvement, livestock forage production, and dispersed

recreation. Watersheds and riparian areas are to be improved to satisfactory or better condition. In order to achieve these objectives, it is appropriate to have underutilized or unutilized portions of the allotment. Therefore, re-grazing of pastures during a grazing year will not be authorized.

Administrative actions necessary to implement the decision: The following administrative actions will be used to implement the NEPA-based decision to authorize grazing.

- **Permit Issuance** A new term grazing permit will be issued for the allotment. Using adaptive management, actual numbers of livestock may vary based on the class of livestock and duration of use. This allotment is currently managed as a cow/calf operation with yearling carryover. Initial stocking rate will be 275 head (cows, bulls), the number the permittee is currently grazing. Monitoring indicates that the current stocking rate is appropriate. Further evaluation that compares actual use with forage use and other effects of livestock grazing will be used along with ongoing monitoring to refine permitted use levels as necessary.
- **Allotment Management Plan (AMP)** A new allotment management plan will be developed for the Allotment and will be incorporated into Part 3 of any grazing permit issued under the proposed action. The AMP will identify specific goals and objectives of management, management strategies, range improvements, and monitoring requirements. The AMP will incorporate an adaptive management strategy to identify numbers of livestock, pasture rotations, and the length of time animals will graze on the allotment annually based on resource conditions and management objectives for the Allotment.
- **Annual Operating Instructions (AOI)** The Tonto Basin Ranger District will prepare annual operating instructions each year in cooperation with the permittee. Those instructions will include numbers and class of livestock, timing and duration of use for the year, pasture rotation schedule, monitoring criteria, structural and non-structural improvements to be constructed or maintained, and utilization standards.

2. Improvements

A list of existing improvements is included in the term grazing permit for the Campaign Allotment. The permittee will continue to maintain all improvements to standard as described in FSH 2209.22. If additional improvements become necessary over the life of this decision, those improvements will be addressed through additional analysis as appropriate.

3. Management Practices

Management practices include measures to reduce or avoid resource impacts that may result from this decision. These measures have been used in previous decisions and have been found to be effective at reducing potential negative environmental impacts. They are consistent with applicable LMP standards and guidelines and the terms, conditions, and conservation measures of the Biological Assessment completed for the Allotment. Implementation of these practices in combination with adaptive management strategies is intended to avoid adverse environmental impacts.

- **Soil, Water and Vegetation** The objective is to mitigate effects of livestock grazing and facility construction through the use of Best Management Practices (FSH 2509.22) and adaptive management. Practices include, but are not limited to, the following:

Utilization of key upland herbaceous forage species will be managed to achieve the goal of light to moderate grazing. The objective is to protect plant vigor, provide herbaceous residue for soil protection, and to increase the herbage producing ability of forage plants. A utilization guideline of 30-40% use of key herbaceous species and 50% of shrubby species will be used to achieve this objective.

Practices to achieve proper distribution will be implemented, including herding, salting, and water distribution. Salt or other supplements will be placed no closer than ¼ to water and those locations will be moved annually. Hay or bulk feed is not allowed on Forest lands.

- **Wildlife** The objective is to mitigate impacts to wildlife from livestock grazing and from disturbance associated with the construction of range facilities.

All water developments will include wildlife access and escape ramps.

The location of all proposed structural range improvements will be surveyed for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Facilities will be designed and constructed to have no adverse effects on listed species.

Light to moderate utilization will be implemented across the allotment to protect the watershed and minimize potential downstream effects.

- **Riparian Resources** The objective is to minimize potential negative impacts to riparian areas and associated uplands which provide important wildlife habitat and watershed stability. Use in riparian areas will follow guidance outline in the EA and could be further restricted if resources become limited by drought or flooding.
- **Heritage Resources** The objective is to protect historic and prehistoric heritage sites from impacts caused by range improvement projects or livestock concentration. Before any new range improvements are constructed, an archaeological survey by certified personnel will be conducted to determine the presence or absence of any sites. The survey must then be approved by the Forest Archaeologist before implementation of the project. If it is determined that a site exists, the improvement must be located in such a way that it does not affect the site.

No salting will occur within or adjacent to identified heritage sites.

4. Monitoring The objective of monitoring is to determine whether management is being properly implemented and whether the actions are effective at achieving or moving toward desired conditions. Monitoring described below can occur throughout the grazing year and be

conducted by Forest personnel in collaboration with grazing permittees and other Federal and State specialists.

Effectiveness monitoring includes measurements to track condition and trend of upland and riparian vegetation, soil, and watersheds. Monitoring will be implemented following procedures described in the Interagency Technical Reference and the Region 3 Rangeland Analysis and Training Guide. These data are interpreted to determine whether management is achieving desired resource conditions, whether changes in resource condition are related to management, and to determine whether modifications in management are necessary. Effectiveness monitoring will occur at least once over the ten-year term of the grazing authorization, or more frequently if deemed necessary.

Implementation monitoring will occur at any time during the grazing year and can include such things as inspection reports, forage utilization measurements, livestock counts and facilities inspections. Utilization measurements are made following procedures found in the Interagency Technical Reference and with consideration of Principles of Obtaining and Interpreting Utilization Data on Southwest Rangelands. Riparian monitoring techniques are described in Riparian Area Management Utilization Guidelines (Grove, McBride 2002).

Key areas are described in "Sampling Vegetation Attributes" (Interagency Technical Reference, 1996) as indicator areas that are able to reflect what is happening on a larger area as a result of on-the-ground management actions. A key area should be a representative sample of a large stratum, such as a pasture, grazing allotment, wildlife habitat area, herd management area, watershed area, etc., depending on the management objectives being addressed by the study. Proper selection of key areas requires appropriate stratification.

While monitoring techniques as described above can be conducted in key areas, these may not be the sole locations for gathering information from the grazing allotment to make decisions about the timing, intensity, duration, or frequency of livestock grazing in a given grazing season. The overall condition of the allotment and such things as distribution patterns or rangeland improvement conditions could be assessed at any given time to help make those decisions.

The permittee will be encouraged to participate in all monitoring activities. Records of actual use and movement dates will be kept by the permittee and provided to the District range staff at the annual authorization meeting each year.

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management (FSH 2209.13, Ch. 90) is a tool that uses documented results of management actions to continually modify management in order to achieve specific objectives. The proposed action is designed to provide sufficient flexibility to adapt management to changing circumstances. If monitoring indicates that desired conditions are not being achieved, adaptive management decisions would be used to modify management. Such changes may include administrative decisions such as the specific number of livestock authorized annually, specific dates for grazing, class of animal or modifications in pasture rotations. Such changes would not exceed the limits for timing, intensity, duration and frequency as defined in the term

grazing permit. Adaptive management would be implemented through annual operating instructions, which would adjust livestock numbers and the timing of grazing so that use is consistent with current productivity and is meeting management objectives.

Adaptive management also includes monitoring to determine whether identified structural improvements are necessary or need to be modified. In the case that changing circumstances require physical improvements or management actions not disclosed or analyzed herein, further interdisciplinary review would occur. The review would consider the changed circumstances and site-specific environmental effects of the improvements in the context of the overall project. Based on the results of the interdisciplinary review, the District Ranger would determine whether correction, supplementation or revision of the EA is necessary in accordance with Forest Service Handbook Direction at FSH 1909.15(18) and FSH 2209.13(96.1), or whether further analysis under NEPA is required.

Reasons for the Selection

The selected alternative best meets the purpose and need and achieves desired conditions in the following ways:

1. The proposed action is consistent with the management objectives and direction for Management Areas 6B and 6J as identified in the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan.
2. The proposed action achieves the mission of the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan by providing a quality opportunity to graze domestic livestock while continuing to provide for other multiple uses, including wildlife and fish habitat and healthy ecosystems through conservative grazing strategies and adaptive management.
3. The proposed action provides for the maintenance and addition of range improvements to improve livestock distribution and provide water to wildlife. Improved livestock distribution will help increase vegetative cover to protect soils and watershed health.
4. The proposed action will provide an adaptive management framework that will allow the Forest and grazing permittee to adapt management to changing resource conditions.

Public Involvement

The proposed action for the Allotment was developed in conjunction with the permittee in the fall of 2007. An Interdisciplinary (ID) team was formed in October 2007 to collect the necessary information and met to address resource issues throughout the analysis process. A project initiation letter was sent to Tonto NF specialists to solicit their involvement (November 2007) and comments for natural resource issues on the Allotment. A scoping letter was sent to all interested parties listed on a current District mailing list, including other forest permittees, Tribal, State and Federal agency personnel, wildlife, agricultural, and environmental interest groups, and neighboring parties (January 2008). The Schedule of Proposed Actions was updated to reflect the most current dates for the analysis (January 2008). Additionally, a notice seeking comments was posted in local newspapers (January 2008). Six people responded with comments which were analyzed for significant issues by the ID Team. A collaborative meeting to discuss achievable desired conditions for the allotment was held in March 2008 and included 15 people

from various agencies. Those 21 people then had an opportunity to comment on the draft EA (August 2008) before the decision was signed, and their comments were used to amend the EA and further refine alternatives where appropriate. The permittee was given Applicant Status to review the Biological Assessment (BA) before it was sent to US Fish and Wildlife Service for concurrence and provided feedback in October 2008.

The permittee appealed the original decision in 2009 and the EA was revised in 2011 to address issues raised through the appeal. The revised EA was sent back to those who commented on the 2008 EA and posted as a legal notice in March 2011. No one returned comments on the revised EA. The permittee exercised his applicant status privileges again and a revised BA was sent to USFWS in April 2011. USFWS concurred with agency determination.

Proposed Action and Alternatives Considered

The proposed action provided for continuing year long livestock grazing on the allotment at current stocking rates. Permitted numbers would remain the same as on the current term grazing permit and an adaptive management strategy would be implemented. Grazing by yearlings could be authorized at any time of the year instead of being confined to spring months.

Alternative 2 was a No Action/No Grazing alternative. Lands contained within the Allotment were determined to be suitable for grazing in the Tonto National Forest LMP and through this EA. This alternative is inconsistent with Forest Service policy (FSM 2202.1, 2203.1)

Alternative 3 modified the proposed action in response to concerns from agency specialists and the public who commented during the process. This alternative would implement a deferred rotation grazing plan with winter use of three pastures and non-use of 8 other pastures in years with low annual forb/grass production. A fence along the lake shore would be constructed to allow emerging riparian vegetation to establish.

Alternative 4 proposed seasonal use of the allotment from October 1 through April 30 of each year to provide maximum opportunity for impaired soil and vegetation conditions to move toward desired conditions. A fence along the lake shore would be constructed to allow emerging riparian vegetation to establish.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. No significant effects on public health and safety were identified. The scope of the grazing authorization is limited to the implementation of managed livestock grazing and the installation and maintenance of structural range improvements using hand techniques

or light equipment. These actions are not expected to present significant hazards to workers or the public.

3. There are no known unique characteristics associated with the allotment. The project will not adversely affect parks, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or other resources considered to have unique characteristics (see EA, Chapter 3).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. The environmental analysis process has documented expected environmental effects from the proposed action and alternatives. These effects were discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA, and the proposed action has been designed and mitigated to address the issues raised. The analysis reflects the judgment and expertise of resource management professionals who have applied their knowledge to similar projects and are using the best available science to support their conclusions. The management practices proposed are commonly used practices as described in agency directives (both Forest Service as well as other land management agencies) and in the objectives of the Tonto National Forest LMP. While some members of the public are opposed to public lands livestock grazing, this action is not highly controversial within the context of the National Environmental Policy Act.
5. The Forest Service as an agency has considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented, specifically livestock grazing and management on Forest lands. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA, Chapter 3).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. All future actions will be analyzed through the NEPA process and be independent of the specific nature of this action on the Allotment.
7. The cumulative effects of the action were analyzed in the EA and are described in Chapter 3. They were determined not to be significant.
8. The action will have no significant adverse effects on districts, sites, highways, structures or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (Chapter 3 of the EA). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. While numerous historic and prehistoric sites exist on the Allotment, mitigation measures for structural improvements and management practices will ensure that those sites are not significantly impacted by livestock grazing or associated practices on the allotment.
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Chapter 3 of the EA). Informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service has resulted in concurrence with this conclusion (9/2008). Management practices have been incorporated into the action to avoid effects to listed species.
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. All applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan (see EA, Chapter 1).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to continue livestock grazing on the Allotment is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives as described in the Tonto National Forest LMP, pages 19, 22 (as amended), 24, and 41. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for desired conditions as described in Chapter 1 of the EA.

The action will not impair land productivity (see EA, Chapter 3) and is therefore consistent with the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960.

The action conforms to the terms of the Endangered Species Act through consultation and concurrence of no significant impact from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Campaign Creek, Pinto Creek, the Salt River and their tributaries serve as corridors for migration of birds within and through the Tonto National Forest. No designated Important Bird Areas occur within the action area, so there is no violation of Executive Order 13186 (Neotropical Migratory Birds).

This decision does not impose disproportionately high adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations (see EA, Chapter 3) and is therefore not a violation of Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period following the signing of this decision, implementation may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to regulations at 36 CFR 215. Individuals or organizations who provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action during the comment period may appeal. Interest expressed or comments provided on this project prior to or after the close of the comment period do not have standing for appeal purposes. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer. Submit appeals to: Appeal Deciding Officer Gene Blankenbaker, Forest Supervisor, Tonto NF Supervisor's Office, 2324 E. McDowell Rd., Phoenix, AZ 85006, (602)225-5295 (fax). If hand delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours (Monday - Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm), excluding holidays. Electronic appeals may be submitted to: appeals-southwestern-tonto@fs.fed.us (.doc, .rtf, or .txt formats only). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. Names and addresses of appellants will become part of the public record. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the Payson RoundUp. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Kelly Jardine, District Ranger, Tonto Basin Ranger District at (928) 467-3200.



Kelly L. Jardine
District Ranger
Tonto Basin Ranger District

Date: 8/3/2011