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Environmental Assessment  
Decision Notice  
and  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
New River Allotment Management Plan

The New River Allotment has been grazed as a cow-calf operation under continuous yearlong use. A Production-Utilization Survey conducted in 1984 indicated that the allotment was severely overstocked and that continuous yearlong grazing was unacceptable.

The purpose of an allotment management plan for the New River Allotment is two-fold; to implement improved grazing management and upon implementation of management, to determine an estimated grazing capacity associated with improved management and ultimately balance the grazing permit obligation with the estimated grazing capacity.

Three alternatives were considered and evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Does the alternative provide for opportunity of range, wildlife habitat and watershed resource improvement:
2. Is the alternative realistic and workable on-the-ground in terms of livestock grazing management?
3. Does the alternative allow for practical future intensification of management?

The three alternatives considered are:

- A) No change in existing management of the New River Allotment.
- B) Implement a one herd-four pasture rest-rotation grazing system - - balance grazing permit obligation with estimated grazing capacity after implementation of improved management (est. 1990).
- C) Implement a three herd system utilizing 9 pastures under deferred and modified rest-rotation grazing systems - - balance grazing permit obligation with estimated grazing capacity after implementation of improved management (est. 1990).

## Evaluation of Alternatives

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Alternative</u>		
	A No Change	B 1 herd-three pasture rest rotation	C 3 herd-modified rest rotation & deferred
1. Range, wildlife hab. and watershed improvement	No	Yes	Yes
2. Realistic and workable for livestock management	Yes	No	Yes
3. Allow for future intensification of management	Yes	Yes	Yes

It is my decision to adopt Alternative C, which will create nine pastures within the New River Allotment to be grazed as three units, each under a modified rest rotation grazing system or deferred grazing system. This alternative provides the best combination of range, wildlife habitat and watershed resource improvement and practicality with an opportunity to further improve management in the future.

I have determined that this action will not significantly alter the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination was made considering the following factors: a) fence construction and spring developments will have only a slight effect on the ecosystem; b) there are no irreversible resource commitments; c) there are no apparent adverse or cumulative secondary effects and; d) proposed improvements and management will not adversely affect threatened or endangered plants or animals within the affected area. Any necessary mitigation measures will be addressed in future project-specific NEPA documents.

Management implementation will commence immediately.

### Agencies and Individuals Consulted

- |                           |                                            |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Arizona Game & Fish Dept. | - Sue Morganson                            |
| Vanderwey Ranches Inc.    | - John Vanderwey, President                |
|                           | - Don Pock, Ranch Foreman                  |
|                           | - Dick Rhea, Range Consultant              |
| Tonto National Forest     | - Don Pollock, Zone WL Biologist           |
|                           | - Dave Stewart, Range & WL Staff - S.O.    |
|                           | - Douglas McKinney, Range Conservationist  |
|                           | - Patti Fenner, Range Conservationist      |
|                           | - Richard Kvale, Range & WL Staff, CCRD    |
|                           | - L. T. Cartwright - District Ranger, CCRD |

*Charles C. Wilder*

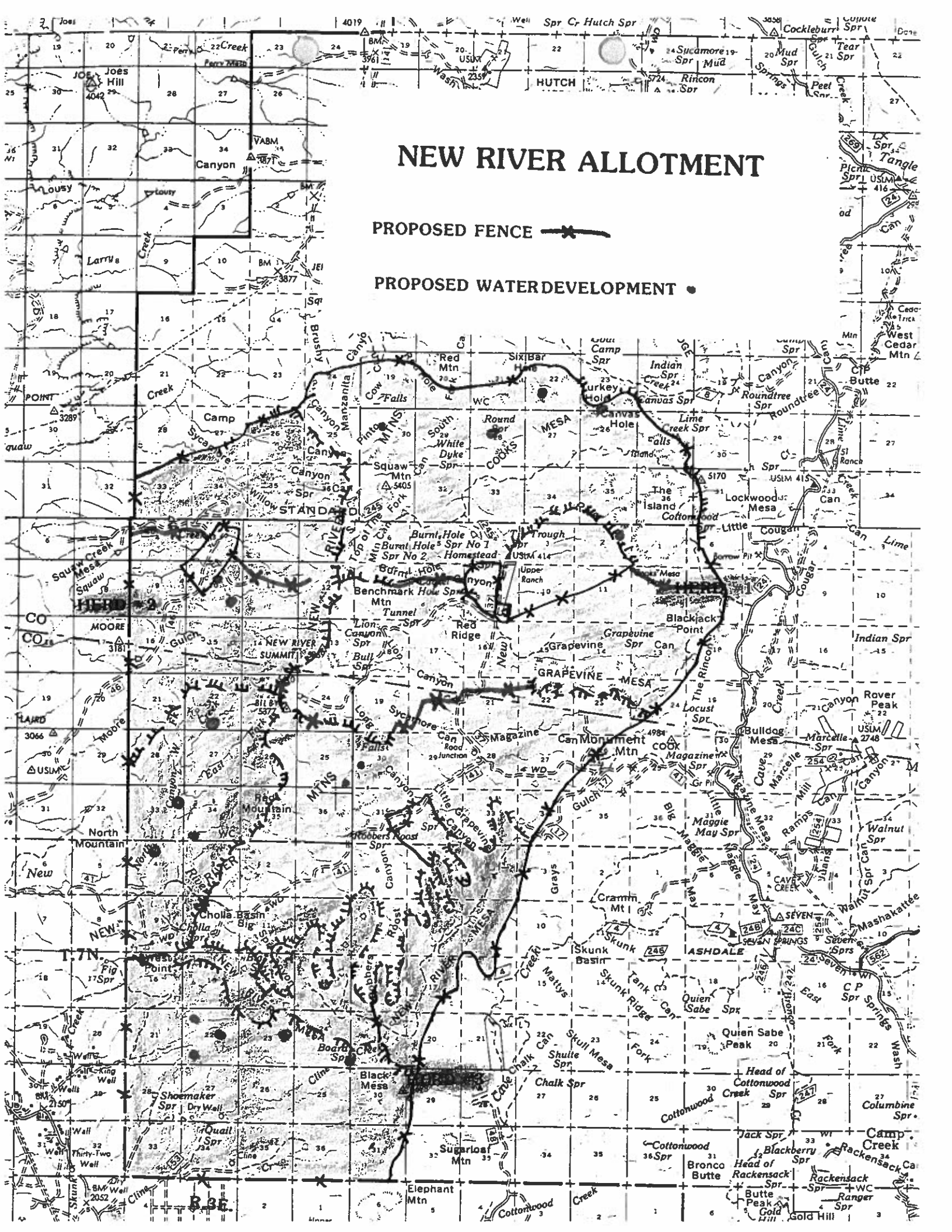
*for* JAMES L. KIMBALL, Forest Supervisor

10-8-85  
Date

# NEW RIVER ALLOTMENT

PROPOSED FENCE

PROPOSED WATER DEVELOPMENT





United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Tonto  
National  
Forest

2324 E. McDowell Road  
P.O. Box 5348  
Phoenix, AZ 85010

Reply To: 2670 Threatened Endangered and Unique Plant and Animal Species Date: September 9, 1985

Subject: Biological Assessment of the Allotment Management Plan for the New River Allotment

To: Cave Creek District Ranger

The preferred alternative for the Allotment Management Plan for the New River Allotment is in full compliance with overall direction and specific standards and guidelines contained in the Tonto Forest Plan. Formal section 7 consultation as required by the Endangered Species Act, as amended, with the USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service on the Plan resulted in the Biological Opinion that it will not jeopardize but will promote the conservation of listed species on the Forest (re: 2-21-83-F-13 biological opinion dated 7/26/85.)

I agree that adoption of the preferred alternative is expected to have no effect on listed or candidate species, therefore formal consultation is not necessary.

LARRY A FORBIS  
Tonto Forest Biologist

*APC*  
DR

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Cave Creek R.D.

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FMO  
 Asst FMO  
 R/W  
 WB  
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R/TECH \_\_\_  
 R&L \_\_\_  
 Asst R&L \_\_\_  
 Wild RGR \_\_\_  
 BMA *Forbis*  
 Payroll



Biological Evaluation of Potential Impacts  
to Listed and Candidate Threatened and  
Endangered Species as Affected by Institution  
of an Allotment Management Plan for the  
New River Grazing Allotment

The Tonto National Forest is currently assessing the environmental consequences of instituting an Allotment Management Plan for the New River Grazing Allotment under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. The allotment encompasses 69,206 acres on the western portion of the Cave Creek Ranger District. Current use is under a continuous yearlong cow-calf operation which had resulted in generally unsatisfactory range resource condition.

The Forest Service preferred alternative for grazing management on this allotment, as identified in the EA, calls for creation of a three herd, nine pasture system in which one herd is managed under deferred rotation and the other two herds are managed under modified rest rotation. Specifics of management can be found in the AMP. Follow up studies will be accomplished between FY88 and FY90 to determine effectiveness of the plan and estimated grazing capacity. Permit numbers will then be balanced accordingly.

The purpose of this report is to assess the biological impacts on listed and candidate T&E species as affected by this proposed change in management. The following species list identifies those species which occur, or may occur on the allotment. Each will be dealt with separately.

Listed Endangered

Gila Topminnow (Poeciliopsis occidentalis occidentalis)  
Agave arizonica

Candidate Species - all are category 2; insufficient information for listing

Desert Tortoise (Gopherus agassizii)  
Gila Monster (Heloderma suspectum)  
Swainson's Hawk (Buteo swainsoni)  
Ferruginous Hawk (Buteo regalis)  
Western Yellow-billed cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus occidentalis)

Gila Topminnow

This species does not occur on the allotment, therefore will not be affected by any alternative. Populations of topminnow are currently being transplanted into waters throughout the Forest. At some point in time, this species could be stocked on the allotment but as yet no suitable sites have been identified. The improved management associated with the preferred alternative will result in more protection of riparian areas thereby indirectly increasing habitat suitability and possibly promoting future transplants.

Agave arizonica

Research is pointing to the likelihood that this plant is actually a sterile hybrid of Agave chrysantha and A. toumeyana ssp. bella and is likely to be

Agave arizonica-continued

delisted in the near future. The plant does occur in various locations in the New River Mountains (type locality) between 3,680' and 5,840' in elevation. The plants are expected to receive less livestock pressure under the preferred alternative due to improved management, improved livestock distribution, and pasture rest, therefore this action will have no effect on this questionable species.

Desert Tortoise

This species occurs on the allotment within the upper sonoran lifezone. Population numbers have not been inventoried. The increased plant diversity and vigor expected with adoption of the preferred alternative for management of this allotment will consequently yield more forage and cover for this species, thereby resulting in no effect to the tortoise population.

Gila Monster

This species also occurs on the allotment in unknown numbers at lower elevations. It prefers lower slopes and canyon bottoms and takes shelter in thickets and under rocks. Adoption of the preferred alternative is expected to have no effect on this species.

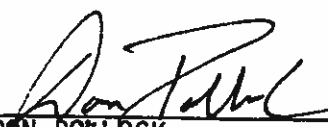
Swainson's Hawk and Ferruginous Hawk

Both of these raptors are rare migrants which could occasionally occur on the allotment, the Swainson's occurring in the summer and the Ferruginous occurring in the winter. Adoption of the preferred alternative is expected to have no effect on these species.

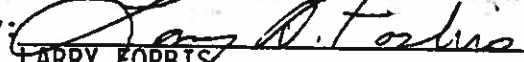
Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo

This species is a rare summer resident whose preferred habitat is dense riparian woodland or mesquite bosque and is often associated with tent caterpillar outbreaks. It is unlikely that this bird occurs on the allotment but limited habitat is available on New River. The reduced grazing pressure on riparian areas associated with the preferred alternative will result in no detrimental effect to potential cuckoo habitat.

In summary, adoption of the Forest Service preferred alternative concerning an Allotment Management Plan on the New River Allotment is expected to have no effect on all listed or candidate threatened or endangered species which occur on those lands. Long term improved management of the allotment may result in indirect benefits to some of the species. Because of this determination, formal Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not needed.

Prepared by:   
DON POELOCK  
Zone Biologist  
Cave Creek & Mesa Ranger Districts

9-5-85  
Date

Reviewed by:   
LARRY FORBIS  
Wildlife Biologist  
Tonto National Forest

9/9/85  
Date