

DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
(FONSI)

CLEAR CREEK ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
Coconino County, Arizona

USDA Forest Service
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests
Chevelon-Heber Ranger District

I. INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Chevelon Canyon, Clear Creek, Limestone and Wallace Allotment Management Plans (AMP) documents the analysis of various alternatives for use of the rangelands within the four allotments. The purpose of the analysis is to determine if livestock grazing should be authorized, and if so, what form of grazing strategy should be implemented. The environmental effects of each of the alternatives is documented in the EA. The project planning record and EA are available for review at the Chevelon-Heber Ranger Station, 2748 Highway 260, Overgaard, Arizona.

This decision applies to the Clear Creek Allotment. The Clear Creek Allotment consists of 17,334 acres and is located 35 miles south of Winslow, Arizona within portions of Townships 12 through 14 N, and Ranges 12 and 13 E, Gila and Salt River Meridian (G&SRM), Arizona. Elevations range from 6,100 to 6,700 feet. The topography is generally characterized by gentle to moderate slopes. Steep slopes do occur, associated with the canyons along Clear and Willow Creeks. The area is generally covered with trees with the dominant overstory species being pinyon and juniper.

II. DECISION AND RATIONALE

My decision is to authorize livestock grazing and implement Alternative 5, including the monitoring plan described for this alternative in Appendix D of the EA. The actions to be taken with this alternative are listed below:

- In the short term, the allotment will be rested from livestock grazing to restore plant vigor. The length of time that the allotment would be rested is contingent upon monitoring results. Livestock would be allowed to return to the allotment when blue grama leaf-length reaches four to five inches and those of western wheatgrass are five to six inches.
- After achievement of the desired grass conditions, the grazing permit will authorize 125 cow/calf pairs to graze from August 16 through October 31, for a total of 312 animal unit months (AUMS). A three pasture, deferred, rest-rotation grazing system and a grazing utilization standard of 30% in key areas would be implemented.
- Distribute 60% of available forage to livestock and 40% to wild ungulates.
- Implement thinning and individual tree pushing on 2,726 acres of pinyon-juniper woodland.

- Maintain 738 acres of existing pinyon-juniper openings.
- Replace approximately 1 mile of pipeline from Tillman Draw to Government Storage Tank.
- Construct approximately 0.25 mile of new fence, with a smooth bottom wire, to exclude livestock access to Clear Creek at Hamilton Crossing. The fence will be constructed before livestock are permitted to graze in the South Pasture.
- Implement the mitigation measures and best management practices (BMPs) that apply to the activities listed above, as described in Appendices E and C of the EA.

I have chosen to implement this alternative for the following reasons:

- This alternative balances permitted use with grazing capacity.
- It establishes utilization standards and season of use that provide for plant physiological needs and the opportunity for range and watershed conditions to improve. The grazing season is one month shorter than under the current permit, utilization standards are from 10 to 20% less than currently permitted, livestock utilization will be monitored, and if standards are not met adjustments will be made in season of use and/or numbers of livestock. The change in entry date from July 16 to August 16 each year will provide the opportunity for the summer rains to become established before cattle enter the allotment.
- This alternative allows for continued livestock grazing, while continuing to provide for other uses and values of the land. The reduction in permitted numbers (42%) under this alternative is the highest amount considered, aside from the "No Action" alternative, however the analysis indicates that these reductions are necessary to gain the improvements in range, watershed and riparian conditions which are needed to provide for sustainable livestock grazing use of the land.
- Approximately 18% of the total herbaceous forage production is distributed to livestock; the remaining 82% of the total herbaceous forage production is available for ecosystem sustainability and wildlife needs, including wild ungulates.
- Of the forage available for ungulate grazing, 60% is distributed to livestock and 40% is available for wild ungulates. This is in agreement with the desired forage distribution ratios agreed to by the Forest Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department, and developed with public input.
- The adoption of BMPs will contribute to the maintenance of satisfactory watershed conditions and water quality where they exist, and aid in their improvement where they are currently unsatisfactory. This allotment is within the Clear Creek watershed. Clear Creek was rated as unsatisfactory in the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A further assessment of watershed conditions was completed as part of this analysis, and found, in general, that dense pinyon-juniper woodlands are in unsatisfactory condition due to insufficient effective ground cover. Treatments to reduce pinyon-juniper densities, and reductions in grazing pressure should lead to increased herbaceous ground cover and improvement in watershed conditions.
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with a "no effect" determination for the following threatened and endangered species and/or their habitat on the allotment: bald eagle; Mexican spotted

adversely affect" determination for the following threatened and endangered species: southwestern willow flycatcher; Little Colorado spinedace; and American peregrine falcon. Impacts to sensitive species are not likely to result in a trend toward listing or loss of viability for the species.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCOPING

Consultation and public involvement on the Clear Creek AMP began in 1998. Since that time, members of the public, interested private groups, grazing permittees, and County, State and Federal agencies have been involved through public and informal meetings, correspondence, personal conversations, and newspapers notices and articles. An extensive effort was made to involve the public and work with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to develop a livestock:wild ungulate forage distribution proposal before completing the site specific environmental analysis for this allotment. A complete list of organizations, persons, and agencies consulted can be found in the project file. All comments received throughout the analysis were considered in the decision.

IV. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Four other alternatives were considered in detail for the Clear Creek Allotment. They included a "No Action" and three alternatives responding to the purpose and need and the issues.

Alternative 1 - The "No Action" alternative would allow no domestic livestock grazing on the allotment. When the current permit expires, the District would take no action to renew or extend the permit. Improvements would be maintained by the Chevelon-Heber District. All available herbaceous forage would be available to meet the forage requirements for the estimated wild ungulate populations. Monitoring forage utilization by wild ungulates would be done by Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) in cooperation with the Forest Service.

Alternative 2 - This alternative reflects the current situation, and would permit 150 cow/calf pairs from July 16 through October 31, for a total of 540 AUMS. Management would be a three pasture, rest grazing system. If this alternative were selected, no direct consideration would be made for wild ungulate herbaceous forage needs, nor would any range developments be undertaken.

BMPs and mitigation measures that apply to the activities listed, as described in Appendices C and E of the EA, would be implemented.

Alternative 3 - In the short term, the allotment would be rested from livestock grazing to restore plant vigor. The length of time that the allotment would be rested is contingent upon monitoring results. Livestock would be permitted on the allotment when blue grama leaf length reached four to five inches and those of western wheatgrass were five to six inches.

Following the rest period, this alternative would permit 157 cow/calf pairs grazing from August 16 through October 31, for a total of 392 AUMS. A three pasture deferred grazing system with an allowable use of 25% in key areas would be implemented.

After water is furnished to the southwestern portion of South Pasture, the permit would authorized 178 cow/calf pairs grazing from August 16 through October 31, for a total of 444 AUMS. The grazing system and allowable use would remain as described above.

Range developments associated with this alternative would be: thinning and individual tree pushing on 2,726 acres of pinyon-juniper woodland; maintenance of 738 acres of existing pinyon-juniper openings;

replacement of approximately 1.0 mile of pipeline from Tillman Draw to Government Storage Tank; installation of approximately 2.5 miles of new pipeline, from Government Storage Tank northwest into North Pasture, and three water troughs; construction of approximately 0.25 miles of new fence to exclude livestock access to Clear Creek at Hamilton Crossing, to be completed before livestock entry to the pasture; extension of approximately 3.6 miles of pipeline and the addition of 4 troughs into South Pasture from Tillman Well; and extension of about 0.9 mile of pipeline and the addition of 2 troughs into East Pasture from Tillman Well.

BMPs and mitigation measures that apply to the activities listed, as described in Appendices C and E of the EA, would be implemented.

Alternative 4 - In the short term this alternative would be the same as Alternative 3. Following the rest period, this alternative would permit 157 cow/calf pairs grazing from August 16 through October 31, for a total of 392 AUMS. A three pasture deferred grazing system with an allowable use of 25% in key areas would be implemented.

Range developments associated with this alternative would be: thinning and individual tree pushing on 2,726 acres of pinyon-juniper woodland; maintenance of 738 acres of existing pinyon-juniper openings; replacement of approximately 1.0 mile of pipeline from Tillman Draw to Government Storage Tank; construction of approximately 0.25 miles of new fence to exclude livestock access to Clear Creek at Hamilton Crossing, to be completed before livestock entry to the pasture.

BMPs and mitigation measures that apply to the activities listed, as described in Appendices C and E of the EA, would be implemented.

V. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have considered the significance of the effects of the project upon the quality of the human environment in terms of both context and intensity of those effects.

I have determined that this is not a major federal action, individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. The determination is based upon the following findings documented in the EA for the Chevelon Canyon, Clear Creek, Limestone, and Wallace Allotments and the project file.

Context

The physical and biological effects are limited to this analysis area. The significance of this project is evaluated within the context of the Chevelon-Heber Ranger Districts and Coconino County.

Intensity

1. These activities do not constitute a threat to public health or safety. This proposal does not involve National Defense or Security. (EA, Chapter I, Project Scope; Chapter III, B, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences)
2. There will be no significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable loss of timber production, wildlife habitats, soil productivity, or water quality. (EA, Chapter III, B, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences; Chapter VII, Cumulative Environmental Consequences)

3. There are no wetlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, or other unique characteristics within the geographic area which would be affected. (EA, Chapter III, B, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences)
4. There is no scientific controversy regarding the effects on the quality of the human environment. (EA, Chapter III, B, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences)
5. There are no known effects upon the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. (EA, Chapter III, B, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences)
6. This is not a precedent setting decision. Similar actions have occurred within the Sitgreaves National Forest and are broadly authorized and evaluated in the Apache-Sitgreaves Land Management Plan.
7. There will not be a significant cumulative impact from this action individually or in concert with other related actions past, present, or in the foreseeable future (EA, Chapter VII, Cumulative Environmental Consequences)
8. No impacts are foreseen on any proposed or listed National Historic Places nor any loss or destruction of scientific, cultural or historic places expected. For the ground disturbing improvements or treatments proposed, additional surveys and consultation with the Forest Archaeologist will occur to ensure the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act are met (EA, Chapter III, B, 6, Heritage Resources)
9. There are no foreseeable significant adverse impacts upon any threatened or endangered species or their habitat. A biological assessment and evaluation was completed for the project. (EA, Chapter III, B, 2, Wildlife; Biological Assessment and Evaluation (BA&E) for Clear Creek Allotment)
10. The actions do not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. (EA, Chapter III, A and B, Description of Alternatives and Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences; BA&E, Clear Creek Allotment)
11. This action is consistent with the Forest Plan and with the EIS and associated appendices for the Forest Plan. This analysis incorporates the EIS for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, Chapters 3 and 4 by tiering, 40 CFR 1508.28

VI. APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 215. A Notice of Appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Content of an Appeal", and must be filed with the Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, 517 Gold Avenue, SW, Albuquerque, NM 87102, within 45 days from the date of publication of the Legal Notice of Decision in the White Mountain Independent.

This decision may be appealed by the grazing permittee on Clear Creek Allotment under either 36 CFR 251, Subpart C, or 36 CFR 215, but cannot be appealed under both regulations. An appeal under 36 CFR 251 must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 251. Appeals must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 251.90 "Content of Notice of appeal" and must be

filed with the Forest Supervisor, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, P.O. Box 640, Springerville, AZ 85938, with a copy simultaneously sent to the District Ranger, Chevelon-Heber Ranger District, P.O. Box 968, Overgaard, AZ 85933, within 45 days from the date of publication of the Legal Notice of Decision in the White Mountain Independent.

I am willing to meet with the permit holder to hear and discuss any concerns or issues related to the decision.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

For answers to questions regarding this project, or for copies of the EA, contact Kate Klein, District Ranger at the Chevelon-Heber Ranger District, P.O. Box 968, Overgaard, AZ 85933, or at 520-535-4481.

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision results in a shortened season of use and a reduction in permitted numbers for the Clear Creek Allotment. As required in 36 CFR 222.4 (8), a one year notification of the decision will be given before implementation of any changes. After the one year notification, modification of the season of use would be implemented, and reductions in permitted numbers would begin, with no more than one-third of the reduction implemented in any one year.

Implementation of this project, other than the change in season of use and reduction in permitted numbers referenced in the previous paragraph, will not occur sooner than five business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the notice of decision in the White Mountain Independent. If an appeal is filed, implementation will begin no sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision on the appeal.

Kate Klein
KATE KLEIN
District Ranger

January 13, 2000
Date