
File Code: 2230
Date: January 21, 2021

Dear Permittee:

As you are aware, the Tonto National Forest and much of Arizona is experiencing an exceptional drought. Forecasts continue to indicate above average temperatures and below average precipitation. Meaningful precipitation may not be likely until the monsoons arrive in July. We understand this places stress on you and your operations. We are committed to cooperatively finding flexibilities and options for management of your allotment that help reduce these impacts without detracting from the long-term health and sustainability of the range and forest resources your operation depends on.

Because actual conditions vary across the forest, livestock grazing management and capacities will be determined on an allotment-by-allotment basis. We will rely on an interdisciplinary approach and established science-based protocols (i.e. Forage Availability Assessment Protocol, Standardized Precipitation Index, and others as appropriate). **I commit to not requiring removal of all cattle from the Tonto National Forest as a forest-wide decision.** Each allotment management plan is unique, and we will recognize that as we work through individual situations. Utilization levels along with protecting other resources such as soil, watershed, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources will be carefully monitored, and management will need to be adjusted accordingly by allotment.

Given the *exceptional* drought conditions we are experiencing, now is the time to consider reduction in numbers towards your Core Herds. If drought conditions persist and/or worsen, further reductions in numbers or time in specific pastures will continue to be necessary. Delaying action now can result in fewer options later.

Please continue to report accurate numbers when you reduce. Fee credits will be authorized for reductions needed for resource protection and do not reflect negatively on your permit. If conditions improve, billing can be adjusted to authorize restocking later. Your range specialist can you help you work through the process, including providing a copy of a Credit Request form for your use.

Now is a great time to get needed range improvement work completed. Cleaning out dry stock tanks before monsoons or fire weather would be useful endeavors. Also consider brushing fence lines to protect from wildfire threats. Contact your range specialist as needed to revise your Annual Operating Instructions regarding:



- Changes to rotations:
- Reduced livestock numbers:
- Shortened grazing season by pasture and/or allotment:
- Range improvement maintenance:

When conditions improve, it is imperative that we take a conservative approach to any increase or re-stocking of cattle. It is imperative that we provide ample forage recovery, so resource and ecosystem health are sustained.

I encourage you to explore USDA programs that offer potential drought relief. Listed below are web links that will give you additional insight regarding programs that may provide some relief.

<https://www.usda.gov/topics/disaster/drought/usda-drought-programs-and-assistance>

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/>

The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension has offered their assistance in evaluating pastures. Please reach out to your Rangeland Management Specialist so they may contact the Extension to coordinate these field visits, and for any other assistance we can provide. Whenever possible, Range Specialists and Rangers will join Extension staff along with you in the field to make determinations.

Sincerely,

TOM TORRES
Acting Forest Supervisor