

Decision Notice and
Finding of No Significant Impact

**Grazing Authorization for Tonto Basin, 7/K and Walnut
Allotments**

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

Background

This decision re-authorizes livestock grazing and certain rangeland improvements for the Tonto Basin, Walnut and 7/K Allotments on the Tonto Basin Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest in Gila County, Arizona. The allotments include lands designated as Management Area 6F and 6J by the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP). The allotments are located in the foothills of the Sierra Ancha and Mazatzal Mountains and are within the Tonto Basin Ranger District, Tonto National Forest, Arizona.

The purpose of this action is to authorize livestock grazing in a manner consistent with Forest Service Policy and the Tonto National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan direction. The need is to implement a management strategy designed to maintain or continue to move toward desired resource conditions on all parts of the grazing allotment.

The authorization of grazing and the proposed management practices on the allotment were described in the Tonto Basin, Walnut, 7/K Grazing Allotments Environmental Assessment (2015 EA). 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 two additional alternatives (No Action/No Grazing, Proposed Action, and Modified Proposed Action). It also describes specific design features and monitoring requirements that will be implemented as part of selected alternative. The EA is available for review at the Tonto Basin Ranger District office in Roosevelt, Arizona and at the 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 EA, with some modifications based on consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and some elements of Alternative 3 to address resource concerns that were identified during the initial project scoping. This alternative will authorize year long managed livestock grazing on the Tonto Basin, Walnut and 7/K Allotments 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 authorizes livestock grazing using a rotational grazing system under the following terms and conditions:

- Tonto Basin Allotment NW Half: Up to 342 head of cattle (bulls, cows) yearlong and up to 262 yearlings from January through May
- Tonto Basin Allotment SE Half: Up to 266 cattle yearlong and 193 yearlings from January through May.
- Walnut Allotment: Up to 150 cattle yearlong and up to 119 yearlings from January through May.
- 7/K Allotment: Up to 150 cattle yearlong and 119 yearlings from January through May.

Use on the allotment may be seasonal in drought years when forage and water availability is limited. By using adaptive management for all allotments, actual numbers of livestock may vary up to this permitted number based on the class of livestock and duration of use. These allotments are currently managed as cow/calf operations. Initial/minimum stocking rates will be for the number of cattle currently authorized, as described in chapter 1 of the EA. Annual authorized livestock numbers may be adjusted from initial stocking levels. A stock and monitor approach, consistent with regional Forest Service direction *R3 Supplement to FSH 2209.13 chapter 90*, will be used to establish grazing capacity over the long term (five to ten years). Actual permitted levels of grazing will be determined annually by the Tonto Basin District Ranger with the permittee based on the results of monitoring and successful implementation of management practices.

The Kayler, Malone Holding, Haystack, Cottonwood, Lake, Bouquet and Cline Pastures will be limited to years with abundant annual forb and grass production while providing rest in drier years, and use will also be limited to 50 percent utilization of current year's annual production as described in Alternative 3. This grazing strategy will facilitate reproduction and growth of native perennial forbs and shrubs, eventually leading to increased organic matter and gradual improvement of soil conditions. The Tonto National Forest anticipates this may take much longer than 10 years to accomplish. It was determined through this analysis that 5 years of nonuse as described in the modified proposed action will not be a sufficient enough time to reanalyze and identify a change in trend.

Use by yearlings will remain seasonal (January through May) and may be significantly influenced by limiting use of these pastures to years with adequate annual forb and grass production. Short-term use of these pastures (less than 30 days) for shipping purposes may be authorized annually regardless of annual forb and grass production. This grazing strategy will reduce grazing pressure on herbaceous and shrubby perennial vegetation and allow it to reproduce with greater success and improved vigor. This will also provide for improved soil conditions in lower elevation pastures.

The Clover/Bearhead pastures on the Tonto Basin Allotment will be grazed initially by a separate herd of approximately 20 cattle while the rest of the herd rotates through the remaining pastures. Through monitoring and adaptive management, the full permitted number of cattle may be authorized as analyzed in Alternative 3.

No grazing will occur within occupied southwest willow flycatcher (SWWF) habitat, designated critical habitat or the Tonto Creek Riparian Unit (TCRU). Tonto National Forest has continued to prohibit grazing on lower Tonto Creek which has alleviated some of the overall negative impacts from historical upland overuse. Due to the proximity of Lake Pasture (Tonto Basin) and Ash Creek Pasture (7/K) to breeding flycatcher habitat, these pastures will be seasonally restricted if the lake levels remain below 60%, flycatcher habitat develops in the areas around Indian point, and flycatchers territories are found during residential survey period. Seasonal restrictions when they occur will prevent cattle from entering these pastures from May 15th through August 15th to protect critical incubation period of SWWF and reduce risk of being parasitized by Brown-headed cowbirds. Due to the proximity and size of Lann Pasture (Walnut) to occupied breeding flycatcher habitat, seasonal restrictions will prevent cattle from entering this pasture from May 15th to August 15th.

The following pastures adjacent to the TCRU will shut off waters within 1 mile of occupied flycatcher breeding habitat to keep cattle from concentrating on the lower areas in proximity to Tonto Creek and flycatcher nesting areas to reduce the risk of cowbird parasitism during the flycatcher nesting period (May 15 to August 15). The pastures are Bouquet/Cline Mesa (TB), Holding (TB), Kayler (TB), Long Mesa (TB), Mesquite (TB), and Red Hill (7/K). Habitat will be considered occupied by previous 3 years of presence/absence surveys conducted by the District Biologist.

The sequence and timing of pasture moves will be set annually and 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 identify conservative use as 30-40% average use of primary perennial grass forage species based on pasture-wide utilization averaged over time (Holechek *et al.*, 2004). Consistent patterns of utilization in excess of moderate intensity will be used as a basis to modify management practices or reduce livestock numbers in subsequent grazing years. Utilization on annual forb and grasses in the Sonoran desert pastures will be limited to 50 percent utilization of current year's growth to protect soils and provide residual litter cover.

For riparian areas, guidelines for use are as follows: *obligate riparian tree species*-limit use to <50% of terminal leaders (top 1/3 of plant) 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. 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.

Figure 29 on page 109 of the EA lists areas that have the potential to support riparian vegetation, but do not support enough cover or density of riparian vegetation to monitor using the methods described under the Implementation Monitoring section of this EA. Administrative actions (described in the proposed action and analyzed in Chapter 3) including herding, changing season of use, resting key reaches, and fencing will be used to allow for recruitment of riparian vegetation until these areas are able to support adequate riparian vegetation. They will then be managed using the riparian utilization measurements listed under implementation monitoring on page 45 and 46 of the EA.

Within the proposed management area (Figure 36 - 2015 EA) usage will be maintained at 20-30% and outside of that area usage could be up to 40%. This will be done through active management. This type of management will cover the majority of habitat related to the survival and recovery of the Mexican Spotted Owl.

2. Improvements

As described in the in the proposed action the following Structural Range Improvements will be constructed. Locations of improvements are displayed approximately in Figures 22 and 24 of the Tonto Basin, Walnut, 7/K Grazing Allotments Environmental Analysis.

Tonto Basin Allotment:

- Boundary fence in the vicinity of Oak Creek Pasture that runs up into natural barriers below Picture Mountain. This fence will divide the East portion of Tonto Basin Cline and Wells permits from the Ewing Permitted section of the Tonto Basin Allotment.
- A small unnamed spring in the vicinity of Punkin Center transfer station may be developed.
- New pipelines will be laid above ground to new troughs from Daniels Spring and Packard Spring.
- New Corrals will be constructed near the transfer station outside Punkin Center (water lot an existing dirt tank).
- A new pasture fence will be constructed on the north side of Greenback Creek to separate Methodist and Bathtub pastures and to exclude Greenback Creek above private inholdings.
- Two new troughs will be added to a pipeline in Cline Mesa Pasture near Twin Buttes
- One trough will be added to an existing pipeline along the fence between Bouquet and Bathtub pastures.

- A new trough will be added in the Bathtub pasture to existing infrastructure in Maverick Basin.

Walnut Allotment

- A new pasture fence will be constructed to split Edwards Spring Pasture.
- A pipeline and trough will be added to the existing development at Edwards Spring to provide water to lower portions of the allotment.
- A storage tank will be added to the existing development at an artesian well to supplement water in Cottonwood Pasture.
- An extension to an existing pipeline from Grapevine Spring will be constructed, tying into an existing line and trough below Hymn Book Spring, which no longer produces enough water.
- A new pipeline from a well on private property will be installed down an existing fence line to a corral in Lann Pasture.

7/K Allotment

- Existing structural range improvements will be repaired or rebuilt. Existing water developments and fences that were not sufficiently maintained during a period of nonuse resulting from drought, fires and other resource conditions will be brought back up to Forest Service Standards.

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 land management plan 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 on current year's growth of key herbaceous species and 50% of shrubs and annual 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 mile 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.
 - Tonto National Forest shall avoid activities within 0.25 mile of PACs during the MSO breeding season (March 1 to August 31) that could result in disturbance to owls (USFWS 2012 LRMP BO).
 - The Tonto National Forest will maintain residual stubble height and limit utilization to conservative use of annual growth on key forage species (between 20 and 30 percent within Mexican spotted owl habitat).
 - Light to moderate utilization will be implemented across the allotment to protect the watershed and minimize potential downstream effects.
 - No grazing will occur within habitat used by breeding southwest willow flycatchers or designated critical habitat.
 - Tonto Basin Ranger District has continued to prohibit grazing on lower Tonto Creek to help alleviate the broader negative impacts from historical upland overuse and promote dynamic developing habitat.
 - Due to the proximity of Lake Pasture (Tonto Basin Allotment) and Ash Creek Pasture (7/K Allotment) to breeding southwest willow flycatcher habitat, these pastures will be seasonally restricted if the lake levels drops below 60 percent of full pool, flycatcher habitat develops in the areas around Indian Point, and southwest willow flycatcher territories are found during surveys. Seasonal restrictions will prevent cattle from entering these pastures from May 15th through August 15th to protect the critical incubation period and reduce risk of parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds.
 - Due to the proximity of Lann Pasture (Walnut Allotment) to occupied breeding southwest willow flycatcher habitat, seasonal restrictions will be implemented in this pasture from May 15th to August 15th.
 - In the following pastures adjacent to the TCRU, water will be shut off within 1 mile of occupied southwest willow flycatcher breeding habitat to keep cattle from concentrating in areas in proximity to Tonto Creek and southwest willow flycatcher nesting areas to reduce the risk of cowbird parasitism during the southwest willow flycatcher nesting period (May 15th through August 15th). The pastures are Bouquet/Cline Mesa, Holding, Kayler, Long Mesa, and Mesquite on Tonto Basin Allotment, and Red Hill on 7/K Allotment.

- Habitat will be considered occupied if southwest willow flycatchers are detected in any of the previous three years of presence/absence surveys conducted by the District Biologist.
 - The Tonto Creek Riparian Unit (TCRU), which runs through portions of the Walnut and Tonto Basin Allotments and includes areas where flycatchers nest, is fenced from cattle grazing year-round. Fences are, and will continue to be, monitored by the permittee and Forest Service District staff when cattle are seen in pastures adjacent to the TCRU.
 - Upland ranges and riparian areas are grazed at conservative levels.
 - Tonto National Forest biologist will conduct southwest willow flycatcher surveys annually if and when suitable.
- **Riparian Resources:** The objective is to minimize potential negative impacts to riparian areas and associated uplands which provide important wildlife habitat and watershed stability. Cattle exclosures may be constructed around Buena Vista Spring and Clover Spring when funding is available and off site water is developed. Other key riparian areas may also be fenced if utilization is consistently exceeded or other grazing management options are not allowing full use of a pasture before reaching riparian use guidelines. Such grazing management options include winter grazing, herding and off site water development.
 - **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 will 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 area monitoring locations have been established across these allotments in a variety of vegetation and soil types. Tonto National Forest range staff and the permittees will monitor vegetative cover, frequency and diversity using the Common Non-Forested Vegetation Sampling Protocol (CNVSP). This sampling method provides the ability of Forest Service Personnel to collect a variety of information quickly while allowing spreadsheets to be produced in the field for analyzing current vegetative conditions. Since allotments have been destocked or very lightly stocked in the previous decade, current monitoring will provide a good baseline to determine progress towards our desired conditions as outlined in the 2015 EA.

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 will be conducted in key areas, these will 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 will 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 will not exceed the limits for timing, intensity, duration and frequency as defined in the term grazing permit. Adaptive management will be implemented through annual operating instructions, which will adjust livestock numbers and the timing of grazing so that use is consistent with current productivity and is meeting management objectives.

If monitoring indicates desired conditions are not being met, the range specialist, in consultation with the permittee and resource specialists as appropriate, should:

- Evaluate the potential cause for not meeting desired condition or indicator such as utilization;
- Evaluate the need to implement alternative actions under an adaptive management strategy; and
- Generate documentation necessary in the AOI and/or permit and allotment files for the action to be implemented.

As necessary, conduct additional site specific monitoring and surveying to determine if the change in management using these adaptive management actions is moving resources towards desired conditions. Actions that may be taken in order to address management concerns and ensure that the allotment is maintaining or moving towards desired conditions as outlined in this document include:

- Extending or shortening the amount of time cattle are authorized in a pasture based on utilization levels for upland and riparian vegetation;
- Assessing the readiness of a pasture, including plant vigor, production, recovery and life stage (such as seed set or dormancy) and changing the timing of use for that pasture within the yearly grazing rotation for the season;
- Resting a pasture for one or more growing seasons;
- In the event of extended drought, severe fire, or depleted rangelands, complete removal of livestock until rangelands have recovered;
- Decrease or increase herd size within the limits of the permitted numbers;
- Temporarily closing off water in a portion of a pasture to manipulate grazing pressure and intensity of use;
- Use of salting and mineral blocks to aid in distribution, especially away from critical areas such as riparian areas;
- Herding livestock;
- Excluding livestock from specific areas temporarily or permanently for other resource objectives; and
- Changing or limiting season of use to minimize impacts to riparian vegetation and water quality.

Adaptive management also includes monitoring to determine whether identified structural improvements are necessary or need to be modified. Adding fencing, constructing

livestock handling facilities, protecting springs, and developing additional watering sources may be beneficial to livestock management, facilitate better livestock distribution, reduce undesirable effects to riparian vegetation and wildlife habitat, or otherwise improve the rangeland resource in order to meet desired conditions. All new structures will have appropriate clearances prior to implementation. The types of improvements that could be constructed include:

- Additional pasture division fencing;
- Holding trap development;
- Development of drift fences
- Construction of livestock handling facilities;
- Reconstruction of existing spring developments
- Livestock enclosures both upland and riparian, or around springs where existing livestock waters currently could provide access for cattle.
- Development of additional saddle or road tanks;
- Development of additional pipelines, storage tanks and troughs; and
- Development of additional trick tanks and water catchments.

In the case that changing circumstances require physical improvements or management actions not disclosed or analyzed herein, administrative actions will be taken. These actions will comply with the Forest Plan and mitigations detailed in the 2015 EA. The review will consider the changed circumstances and site-specific environmental effects of the improvements in the context of the overall project. Based on the site-specific circumstances, the District Ranger will 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 selected alternative is consistent with the management objectives and direction for Management Areas 6F and 6J as identified in the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan.
2. The selected alternative best 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 selected alternative 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 selected alternative 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 actions for the Allotments were developed in conjunction with all permittees for these allotments in 2008, 2011, 2012 and again in 2013 to develop and refine proposed actions for each allotment. All permittees were invited to join interdisciplinary team members collecting data in 2008 and 2009. The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on May 2, 2011. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping May 2 through June 3, 2011. Using comments from the public, local permittees, other federal and state agencies, Forest specialists, and tribal liaisons, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address. Forest range, soils, and wildlife personnel along with the District Ranger held a field trip for permittees in July 2012 to discuss soil conditions in Sonoran desert pastures, and met with permittees following the field trip to discuss soil and wildlife concerns and management implications.

A draft Environmental Assessment was provided to permittees and the public for comment in August 2012. Fifteen people responded with comments which were analyzed for significant issues by the ID Team. The permittees were given Applicant Status to review the Biological Assessment before it was sent to US Fish and Wildlife Service for concurrence and their Biological Opinion and met with the Forest Service and personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife to provide feedback on July 12th 2013 as well as a field visit on July 30th 2013. Additional meetings were held with permittees on February 8th 2013, March 1st 2013, March 15th 2013, March 22nd 2013, November 22nd 2013 and June 12th 2015 along with multiple phone calls and emails.

Proposed Action and Alternatives Considered

The proposed action (Alternative 2) will implement an adaptive management strategy provided for continuing yearlong livestock grazing on the allotment at permitted numbers. Permitted numbers will remain the same as on the current term grazing permits for the Tonto Basin and 7/K allotments and will be increased on the Walnut Allotment to what was originally permitted before the Non-compliance issue in 2002 that reduced the permit by 50%. Grazing by yearlings will be authorized from January 1st through May 31st. A number of range improvements will be constructed to increase distribution and improve vegetation.

Alternative 1 was a No Action/No Grazing alternative. Lands contained within the allotments were determined to be suitable for grazing in the Tonto National Forest Land Management Plan 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 will have placed Haystack, Cottonwood, Bouquet and Cline Pastures in nonuse for five years to monitor soil and vegetation conditions and will only allow for the Kayler, and Malone holding pastures to be used in years with abundant annual forb and grass production. The Clover/Bearhead pastures on the Tonto Basin Allotment will also become part of the full rotation to compensate for limited use of the lower elevation pastures.

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 Land and Resource Management Plan. 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 adversely affect the southwestern willow flycatcher. However, the action will not result in take of individuals and will not adversely affect critical habitat of the southwestern willow flycatcher. The action will not adversely affect Mexican Spotted Owl, Spikedace, Yellow Billed Cuckoo, Mexican or Narrowheaded gartersnakes or their associated critical habitats as determined under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Chapter 3 of the EA). Formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service has resulted in a Biological Opinion (8/2014). 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 Resource and Land Management Plan, 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.

The action conforms with the Bald and Golden Eagle Act through consultation with and terms and conditions set forth by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Tonto Creek and its tributaries serve as corridors for migration of birds within and through the Tonto National Forest. The Roosevelt Lake Wildlife Wintering area occurs within the project area but is not impacted by the action so there is no violation of Executive Order 13186 (Neotropical Migratory Birds).

Sensitive and Management Indicator Species on the Tonto National Forest will be not be significantly impacted and this impact will not lead towards a listing under ESA.

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).

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

The analysis for this Decision Notice was completed under the authority of the Project-level Predecisional Administrative Review Process per *36 CFR 218 parts A and B*. On June 30, 2015, the legal notice for the objection period for the Tonto Basin, Walnut and 7/K Grazing Allotments Analysis project was posted in the Payson Roundup and an email we sent to all participants who had standing to object for this project. In this notice, the public was notified that a draft decision based on the final environmental assessment was made following the pre-decisional objection process, pursuant to Forest Service regulations at *36 CFR 218*. Three formal objections were filed. Of those, two submitters had complied with *36 CFR 218.8(d)*.


These objections were resolved with one clarification and change from the draft decision notice brought forward. An official response to each objector was completed by the Reviewing Officer, Neil Bosworth, Tonto National Forest Supervisor.

Implementation Date

Implementation of activities under the selected action will occur based on this Decision Notice. Once this decision is signed, implementation of the Tonto Basin, Walnut and 7/K Grazing Allotments Analysis project can begin immediately pursuant to regulations at *36 CFR 218*.

Contact Information

Questions about this project should be directed to Eric Hoskins, project manager, at 928-467-3236 or ehoskins@fs.fed.us during normal business hours.



KELLY L. JARDINE
District Ranger
Tonto Basin Ranger District



Date