



**DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
BOTTLE GRAZING ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
VERDE RANGER DISTRICT, PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST
YAVAPAI COUNTY, ARIZONA**

DECISION NOTICE

Based upon my review of the Bottle Grazing Allotment Management Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, which includes the following elements and resource protection measures:

Summary of specific components of Alternative 1, Bottle Allotment

Grazing System	Grazing Season	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas of Satisfactory Condition	Stocking Rate	Equivalent Stocking	Range Improvements
9 pastures with inclusion of Goat Peak pasture using rotational grazing	Yearlong	Upland forage (growing season) – 31-40% Upland forage (non-growing season) – 41-50% Upland Browse – 50-60% Riparian Woody - 20% Riparian Herbaceous – 5" minimum stubble height	Ranging from 1,440 to 2,640 Animal-Unit-Months ¹	Ranging from 120 to 220 head of cattle or cow/calf pairs and bulls	Install 1 mile of pipeline and 3 troughs; construct ½-mile of fence to split holding pasture; reconstruct two well water systems and fence; construct 3 miles of drift fence

Allotment-wide Resource Protection Measures

Grazing intensity guidelines will be applied across the allotment to provide rangeland managers with information needed to adapt management through adjustments, as may be needed, on an annual basis. Examples of appropriate grazing intensity and forage use guidelines for areas of

¹ Animal-Unit-Month (AUM) is the amount of oven-dry forage required by one mature cow of about 1,000 pounds, either dry or with a calf up to six months of age, or their equivalent, for a standardized period of 30 animal-unit-days.

the allotment that are generally described to be in satisfactory condition include:

- Conservative grazing intensity (31-40% use) on key herbaceous species during the spring and summer growing periods (typically April 1 to September 30);
- Moderate grazing intensity (41-50% use) on key herbaceous species during the dormant season;
- Moderate grazing intensity (50-60% leaders browsed) on key upland woody species;
- Five-inch minimum stubble height on key riparian herbaceous species;
- Up to 20% use on key woody species within riparian areas.

Site-specific Resource Protection Measures

These are to be applied in critical areas where the current condition of soils and vegetation components are in less than the desired condition. Soil conditions were determined to be at some risk for the loss of soil function at certain sites in the Holding and Walnut Pastures, as well as one area in the Slick Rock Pasture. The following grazing intensity guidelines will be applied to these critical areas:

- A light grazing intensity guideline (0-30% use) during the growing season at impaired sites; and
- A conservative grazing intensity guideline (31-40% use) during the dormant season at impaired sites; and
- Incidental use² only at unsatisfactory sites, regardless of season.

Riparian Resource Protection Measures

Site-specific measures include:

- Maintenance of 8-inch minimum stubble height on key riparian herbaceous species in Burnt Canyon drainage and Ash Creek;
- Construction of a waterlot fence around the Ash Creek well and a new water trough in the Powell Pasture (gates in the Ash Creek waterlot will remain closed when livestock are grazing in the Slick Rock Pasture);

² Incidental Use: prescribed "Light Use" (0-30%) in all seasons and restrict livestock concentration behavior and/or practices. (i.e. lounging, salting, supplements, holding, watering etc.).

- Repair and maintenance of the Burnt Canyon enclosure fence.
- Livestock enclosure fencing may be constructed at spring/seep riparian areas if desired conditions are not being achieved through control of livestock grazing. (Enclosure fencing will be designed and constructed to protect important riparian vegetation while still providing for livestock watering).
- If after 2-3 years of applying livestock distribution techniques and new water-supply points, progress towards desired conditions cannot be shown, portions of Ash creek within the Walnut, Slick Rock, Burnt Canyon and Hatfield Pastures will be fenced to exclude livestock.

In the event that these resource protection measures do not accomplish site-specific resource objectives, additional optional measures may be implemented. These optional measures will be designed to address site-specific resource concerns and may include, but are not limited to, such things as temporary fencing, electric fencing, drift fences, livestock enclosures, temporary pipelines and water troughs, reconstruction of existing spring improvements and construction of new improvements such as spring boxes and water gaps.

Details of Alternative 1

Adaptive Management

An adaptive management strategy will be implemented. Based on annual monitoring and with consideration of criteria established in the selected alternative, future AOIs may alter the authorized number of livestock, season of use, grazing system or intensity. These actions may be taken, individually or in combination, to provide sufficient growing-season production and reproduction in forage plant species to maintain plant vigor over time and to continue progress toward desired conditions. Such changes would generally be determined in advance and included in the AOI describing authorized management actions for the upcoming grazing season. These changes will not exceed the limits for timing, intensity and duration defined in the selected alternative. Additional NEPA analysis will not be required to implement these changes which may include the following:

- Modification of pasture rotation system: modification of the order of pasture rotation, growing-season deferment or season-long rest of specific areas.
- Modification of time in pastures: change of the grazing season dates such as delayed or accelerated entry into or departure from seasonal pastures or grazing units.
- Change of livestock numbers: change in authorized livestock numbers for a period of time.
- Modification of grazing intensity: change of the grazing intensity guideline for a pasture or allotment for a period of time.

- Temporary suspension of grazing: suspension of grazing on an allotment needed for protection of key resource values when the measures above are not sufficient.

Authorization

The Verde District Ranger proposes to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the Bottle Allotment (including the Goat Peak Pasture) under the following terms:

- The boundary of the Bottle Allotment will be administratively adjusted to include the Goat Peak Pasture.
- A term grazing permit will be issued providing for livestock use over a range of Animal Unit Months from 1,440 to 2,640 AUMs on a year-long basis. (An AUM is defined as the amount of forage consumed by one mature cow over a period of one month.) As an example, this would provide for livestock numbers to range from 120 to 220 head of cattle, cow/calf pairs and bulls, yearlong. Livestock will be managed under a rotational grazing system, with a potential for incremental increases in permitted stocking once certain conditions are met.
- The Term Grazing Permit may be modified to provide for increases of up to 10% of the permitted numbers once the maximum number of authorized AUMs have been grazed on the allotment for three consecutive years and all of the following conditions are met:
 - (a) the District Ranger determines that monitoring indicates adaptive management and resource protection measures have resulted in adequate progress toward meeting resource objectives summarized in Chapter 1 of the EA;
 - (b) existing range improvements are maintained in functioning condition; and
 - (c) proposed new structural range improvements have been constructed.

These incremental increases may continue to be authorized on three-year timeframes as resource conditions on the allotment warrant.

The term grazing permit will be issued for up to ten years. The permit will authorize livestock use within parameters identified in this proposal, and subsequent permits may be issued as long as resources continue to move further toward desired conditions or are being maintained in satisfactory condition, as appropriate.

Range Structural Improvements

Adaptive management would allow for the construction of rangeland improvements if they have been identified and are determined, through monitoring, to be necessary for achieving resource objectives. However, if some or all improvements are not implemented, the upper limits of permitted livestock numbers may not be achievable. In addition to the structural improvements included above in site-specific resource protection measures, the following improvements are authorized for construction:

1. Install approximately 1 mile of 1¼" polyethylene pipe in the Holding, Walnut and Hayfield Pastures. Install 3 troughs at the ends of the pipelines and in the existing corral. Install a 5,000-gallon storage tank.
2. Install ½-mile of fence to divide Holding Pasture.
3. Clean and possibly deepen Ash Creek Well, install new steel casing, install solar pump. Construct a waterlot fence around Ash Creek well and a new water trough in the Powell Pasture.
4. Reconstruct Uncle Sam well with windmill and fence to provide water for Slick Rock, Hayfield, Holding and Pine Pastures.
5. Install approximately 3 miles of drift fence in the northwest portion of Burnt Canyon Pasture (from Mingus Springs Camp east to an existing holding pen and further northeast toward Gaddes Canyon).

Maintenance of Range Improvements: The Term Grazing Permit includes a list of all improvements which the permittee will continue to maintain at a level that effectively provides for their intended uses and purposes. Range improvements will be inspected periodically during the term of the permit to document condition. Annual Operating Instructions (AOIs) will identify range improvements in need of maintenance. Existing improvements may be replaced when their conditions warrant.

Access to Improvements: All authorizations for cross-country motorized travel are subject to existing regulations intended to protect natural and/or heritage resources. Cross-country travel is not allowed when such travel would cause unacceptable resource damage.

No need for deviation from the current access needs for motorized use is anticipated on the Bottle Allotment. Authorization is provided for the permittee to administer the livestock operation and maintain improvements under the Term Grazing Permit.

Annual authorization for actions implementing management direction in the Allotment Management Plan will be included in the Annual Operating Instructions, such as a description of the anticipated level of cross-country travel, travel needed for the maintenance or reconstruction of existing improvements or the construction of new improvements.

Monitoring

Three types of monitoring will be used - implementation monitoring, periodic monitoring of short-term indicators of resource conditions, and effectiveness monitoring.

Implementation Monitoring: This monitoring will be conducted on an annual basis and will include such things as livestock actual use (# of head, # of months) and scheduled and unscheduled inspections to ensure that all livestock and grazing management measures stipulated in permits, AMPs and AOIs are being implemented (e.g. cattle numbers, on/off dates, rotation

schedules, maintenance of improvements, mitigation measures).

Periodic Monitoring of Short-term Indicators of Resource Conditions: Short-term indicators of resource conditions such as forage utilization, residual forage, species composition, plant cover, frequency or density, and/or vegetative ground cover will be monitored on the allotment at key areas and at areas identified with site-specific resource concerns. Methods will include generally accepted monitoring protocols.

The purpose of periodic monitoring of short-term indicators is to determine:

1. If individual plants have had an opportunity to recover, grow and reproduce following grazing impacts.
2. If sufficient residual forage remains at the end of the growing season to provide for other resource values or requirements such as soil productivity, wildlife habitat, and dormant season use.
3. If maintenance or improvement of rangeland conditions are indicated.
4. If management adjustments are warranted for the following season to provide for the physiological needs of primary forage species and other resources identified as concerns.
5. If soils and riparian areas are maintaining or moving toward desired conditions.
6. If critical areas are moving toward desired conditions.

Effectiveness Monitoring: Monitoring, according to a Monitoring Plan to be established in the Allotment Management Plan, to evaluate the success of management in achieving the desired objectives will occur within key and critical areas or on permanent transects at an interval of 10 years or less. Initial baseline information will be collected on this allotment. Effectiveness monitoring may also occur if data and observations from monitoring of short-term indicators suggest a need for additional information.

Decision Rationale

I have selected Alternative 1 because it best meets the Purpose and Need for Action described in the EA, while addressing the multiple use resource needs of the Agency as expressed in the Desired Conditions (page 6 of the EA). Alternative 2 would allow Desired Conditions to be met, but it would not meet the Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands, nor would it comply with Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing, while contributing to the economic and social well-being of people by providing opportunities for economic diversity and by promoting stability for communities that depend on range resources for their livelihood (FSM 2203.1, 2202.1).

The effects of implementing Alternative 1 have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA for Vegetation, Soils, Water and Riparian, Air, Wildlife/Rare Plant/Fish/Aquatic Species, Heritage, Recreation and Inventoried Roadless Areas. I have reviewed these findings and conclude that

the design of the Alternative and the associated mitigation measures will allow for Desired Conditions to be met and will be in compliance with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan. Alternative 1 provides grazing opportunities for the rancher while providing for protection of important riparian resources. This Alternative allows for water development outside the riparian areas to reduce direct livestock impacts.

Alternative 1 uses the principles of adaptive management to quickly respond to changing resource conditions while allowing the rancher flexibility to utilize the best available pastures instead of strict rotation schedules and timeframes. An adaptive management approach uses the results of short- and long-term monitoring to adjust the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of grazing activities. This approach allows for quick response to changing conditions such as drought or long-term climate fluctuations. Alternative 1 specifies an upper limit of stocking that would be authorized on the Bottle Allotment, but actual stocking would be determined on a yearly basis considering forage production, water availability, status of range improvements, and results of past range inspections. Yearly stocking determinations will be made in close coordination with the grazing permittee.

The Bottle Grazing Allotment Management EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

Public Involvement

The proposal has been listed in the Prescott National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since April 2009 at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>. A letter, dated 12/21/09, describing the proposed action for management of this allotment, was sent to the permit holder of the allotment under consideration, to adjacent allotment permit holders, to members of the public and non-profit groups and other entities who have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to state and federal government entities and to six Native American Tribes interested in activities in the area inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal.

A cover letter and Environmental Assessment for the Bottle Grazing Allotment Management was mailed to 25 individuals, agencies, or groups on June 25, 2010, and a legal notice was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on June 30, 2010 that initiated the 30-day comment period. Four responses were received, from which 69 comments were generated. Public comments and Prescott National Forest responses are included in the project planning record.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

Context

The Bottle Allotment is located on the Verde Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest. The allotment runs south from Mingus Mountain, east of Prescott and southwest of Cottonwood, AZ. The allotment, as proposed with the Goat Peak Pasture included, contains a total of approximately 26,311 acres and represents the project area for the environmental analysis. The primary watersheds being evaluated for cumulative effects of past, present, and future activities are the Upper Verde and Agua Fria sub-basins.

Intensity

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial. Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because rangeland management activities similar to those described in the EA have occurred in this area, as well as over most of the Forest, without incident of issue with public health and safety.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area that includes two Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA), the Ash Creek IRA and the Black Canyon IRA. These areas have been identified by the Forest Service as areas without roads where road construction and tree cutting are not currently allowed. The selected Alternative has no provisions for road construction and actions would be in compliance with the Roadless Area Conservation Final Rule (36 CFR Part 294 Special Areas) (EA pages 47-48). There are no designated Wilderness Areas within or adjacent to the allotment. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches occurring within the Bottle Allotment. A segment of the Verde River designated as a Scenic River in 1984 is located approximately 16 miles from the allotment. The allotment is known to contain cultural resources of both prehistoric and historic periods. The Forest Service's proposal to continue livestock management is considered to have a no adverse effect on the heritage properties located within the Bottle Allotment (EA pages 46-47).

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. This Environmental Analysis is tiered to the LMP Environmental Impact Statement. Forest-wide effects of LMP's standards were disclosed in that EIS. The selected alternative with the identified resource protection measures considered in the EA meets LMP standards. In addition, extensive scoping was completed during the analysis in order to identify areas of potential controversy. The scoping activities are identified in Chapter 1 and 4 of the EA (pages 10-11, 49, respectively), this Decision Notice, and the project record. There has been no information presented that would demonstrate that the

action would cause adverse impacts that could not be mitigated. I conclude that it is very unlikely that the environmental effects associated with the action will be highly controversial.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. This action is similar to many past actions, both in this analysis area and adjacent areas. Effects of this action will be similar to the effects of past, similar actions. Livestock grazing has occurred on the Prescott National Forest for over 100 years. The Interdisciplinary Team that conducted the analysis used the results of past actions as a frame of reference, and combined that insight with scientifically accepted analytical techniques and best available information to estimate effects of the proposal (See EA Chapter 3, pages 23-48).

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because effects of this project are predictable, given that similar actions have occurred in the watershed for many decades. Major follow-up actions will not be necessary. I conclude that this action does not establish precedence for future actions with unknown risks to the environment.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The cumulative impacts are not significant. Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 23-48) discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA and information identified during public review of the EA and given in the Decision Notice, I have concluded that there are no significant, cumulative impacts.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities have been surveyed and contain no known sites or structures that are currently listed or eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act has been completed for grazing and proposed improvements and the SHPO has concurred with the no adverse effect determination on 8/23/2010 (see EA pages 46-47).

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The federally-listed Threatened Mexican spotted owl and its habitat occur within the project area. A Biological Assessment was completed on 6/11/2010 and submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for informal concurrence. A letter was received on 6/21/2010 from the FWS that documents their concurrence with the

determination that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the Mexican spotted owl (EA page 41).

Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Chapters 1-3 of the EA (pages 1-48) document the analysis for this project which does not threaten or violate any federal, state or local law imposed for the protection of the environment. This project is fully consistent with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Clean Water Act, and the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976.

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP). The project was designed in conformance with LMP direction concerning resources including range management, soils/watersheds/riparian areas, wildlife/rare plant/fish/aquatic species, and heritage resources (EA pages 7-10).

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

The National Environmental Policy Act provisions have been followed as required by 40 CFR 1500. The EA analyzed a reasonable range of alternatives, including the No Grazing alternative. It also discloses the expected impacts of each alternative and discusses the identified issues. This document describes the decision I have made and my rationale for the decision.

The selected alternative complies with the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The State Historic Preservation Officer and any potentially affected tribes have been consulted. Clearance for this project has been received, with concurrence by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

Water and air quality standards will be met. There are no classified floodplains or wetlands within the project area.

Administrative Review (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 30-day comment period may appeal. The permittee may appeal this decision under 36 CFR 251. 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:

Alan Quan
Forest Supervisor
Attn: Bottle Grazing Allotment Management
Prescott National Forest
344 S. Cortez St.
Prescott, AZ 86303-4398
Fax: 928-443-8208

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-prescott@fs.fed.us (.doc, .rtf, or .txt formats only). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

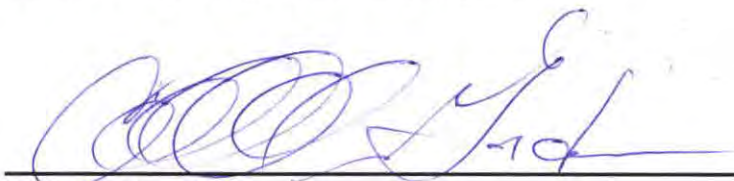
Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the *Daily Courier*, the newspaper of record. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an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

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day 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.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Christine Thiel, ID Team Leader, Chino Valley Ranger District, (928) 777-2211.



Celeste Gordon

District Ranger



Date

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