



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

DECISION NOTICE

Based upon my review of the Buckhorn 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, Buckhorn Allotment

Grazing System	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas of Satisfactory Condition	Grazing Intensity Guidelines – Areas Needing Improvement
<p>An On/Off term grazing permit will be issued providing for livestock use of up to 61 Animal Unit Months (AUMs)¹ yearlong on the Forest Service administered rangeland that makes up 2.5% of the entire ranching operation. This level of stocking is equivalent to up to 5 head of cattle, cow/calf, yearlong. Not to exceed 250 head of cattle for a period of one week.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conservative grazing intensity (31-40% use) on key herbaceous species during the spring and summer growing periods (typically April 1 to September 30); 2. Moderate grazing intensity (41-50% use) on key herbaceous species during the dormant season; 3. Moderate grazing intensity (50-60% leaders browsed) on key upland woody species; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Light grazing intensity guideline (0-30% use) during the growing season on impaired soils (TES 427), and unsatisfactory Rangeland Management Status (RMS) areas with static trend; 2. Conservative grazing intensity guideline (31-40% use) during the dormant season on impaired soils (TES 427) and unsatisfactory RMS areas with a static trend; 3. Incidental use², regardless of season, on unsatisfactory soil sites (TES 477) and unsatisfactory RMS areas with a downward trend (TES 427 and 477). Incidental use applies at TES 427 until apparent trend is upward, leading to satisfactory RMS.

Other Site-specific Resource Protection Measures

In addition to the site-specific grazing intensity guidelines to be applied in areas of resource

¹ An AUM is defined as the average forage consumed by one cow/calf pair over a period of one month

² Incidental use targets the lower range of the light use (0-30%) category in all seasons by applying such practices as herding or by limiting where livestock attractants such as salt or water are placed relative to the area of concern. Adaptive management methods and practices to achieve this will be based on site-specific allotment management scenarios.

concerns, the following will also apply in areas where desired conditions are not being met:

- Maintain the south forest boundary fence on Buckhorn Mesa and close the access gate between Buckhorn tanks and the Buckhorn allotment to disrupt livestock concentration patterns.

In the event that the above 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, reconstruction of non-functional improvements, and construction of new improvements such as drift fences.

Range Structural Improvements

The proposed action includes construction of the following new structural improvement as an adaptive management option. In addition to the maintenance of an existing structural improvement included in site-specific resource protection measures, the following new improvement is authorized for construction. If resource conditions improve sufficiently with implementation of site-specific resource protection measures alone, this fence may not be necessary:

- Construct approximately ½ mile of west forest boundary fence on Buckhorn Mesa.

Prior to constructing this fence, the Buckhorn tank water development in the north part of the allotment will need to be maintained to functional status to ensure livestock access to water on the allotment.

Mitigation Measures

The construction of the western allotment boundary fence will be monitored by a heritage specialist to insure that the installation of the fence posts will avoid any cultural features and artifact concentrations. The fence will be hand constructed using only hand tools or portable power tools.

Details of Alternative 1

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is designed to provide sufficient flexibility to allow livestock management to address changes in climatic conditions, seasonal fluctuations in forage production, and other dynamic influences on the ecosystem in order to effectively make progress toward or maintain desired conditions of the rangeland and other resources. Under the adaptive management approach, regular/annual monitoring of short-term indicators may suggest the need for administrative changes in livestock management. If monitoring indicates that progress toward desired conditions is not being achieved on the allotment, management will be modified in cooperation with the permittee. Modifications may include adjustments in timing, intensity, and duration of grazing. Timing is the time of year the livestock are present in a pasture. Intensity is

the degree to which forage is removed through grazing and trampling by livestock. Duration is the length of time livestock are present in a given pasture. These modifications would be made through administrative decisions such as: the specific number of head stocked on the allotment annually or in a particular season; the class of animals stocked (cow/calf pairs vs. yearlings, steers or heifers, etc.); specific dates of grazing; livestock herd movement; and/or periods of rest, deferment or non-use of portions or all of the allotment for an appropriate period of time, as conditions warrant. Such changes will not result in exceeding the AUMs authorized for livestock use that is included in the selected alternative. Alternative 1 provides for the construction of fencing on the west boundary of the allotment that would allow for better control of the timing, intensity, and frequency of grazing if other methods of grazing management (herding, salting practices, restricting access to waters, etc.) are not sufficient.

Best Management Practices

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are a practice or combination of practices determined to be the most effective, practicable means of preventing or reducing the amount of pollution generated by nonpoint sources to a level compatible with water quality goals, and are developed to comply with the Clean Water Act (FSH 2509.22_10.5). The Interdisciplinary Team followed the guidance in the Southwest Region Forest Service Handbook 2509.22, Chapter 20, in the formulation of resource protection measures related to range management that also function as BMPs to address water quality and watershed concerns. These resource protection measures will be implemented in order to comply with the Clean Water Act.

Authorization

The Bradshaw District Ranger proposes to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the Buckhorn Allotment under the following terms:

- A term grazing permit will be issued providing for livestock use of up to 61 AUMs, On/Off, on a yearlong basis. (An AUM is defined as the average forage consumed by one cow/calf pair over a period of one month.) A maximum of 250 head of cattle would be authorized to graze on this allotment for a period of one week, on range which is 2.5 percent Forest Service administered lands and 97.5 percent other lands owned or controlled by the permittee; or up to 5 head of cattle, cow/calf, yearlong.

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 Improvements

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

needed as conditions warrant.

Access to Improvements: Authorization for cross-country motorized travel is provided for the permittee to administer the livestock operation and maintain improvements under the terms and conditions of the Term Grazing Permit.

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

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 has been 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 (project record³ document #39) while addressing the multiple use resource needs of the Agency as expressed in the desired conditions (pages 2-4 of the EA). Alternative 2 would also 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; Watershed and Water Resources; Wildlife, Aquatic Species, and Rare Plants; Recreation; and Heritage (EA pages 18-32). I have reviewed these summary findings in the EA as well as the specialist reports in the project record, and conclude that the design of the alternative and the associated resource protection 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 while also allowing for improvement and protection of vegetation, soil, and watershed values by implementing light to conservative grazing intensity guidelines and by providing adequate residual ground cover.

The Buckhorn Grazing Allotment Management EA and the project record document the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

Public Involvement

The Buckhorn Grazing Allotment Management project has been listed in the Prescott National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since April 2010 at <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>. A letter dated July 21, 2010 describing the proposed action was sent to affected permit holders, members of the public, non-profit groups, and other entities that have expressed interest in livestock grazing activities. It was also sent to State and Federal governments and to Native

³ Further references to project record documents are listed as "PR #"

American Tribes inviting them to provide information regarding concerns or opportunities related to the proposal. The scoping letter resulted in one response (PR #15A), and one request to remain on the project mailing list (PR #16). The content of the scoping response was reviewed by the ID Team and Deciding Official (PR #29). It was determined that the proposed action as designed with included resource protection measures and following Best Management Practices would serve to address any concerns raised through public scoping. No additional alternatives were developed as a result of public scoping.

The *Environmental Assessment for the Buckhorn Grazing Allotment Management* was mailed to scoping respondents and the grazing permittee, and a legal notice announcing the start of the 30-day comment period was posted in *The Daily Courier* newspaper on February 27, 2012. There was one responses received during this 30-day comment period (PR #37).

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 Buckhorn Allotment is located on the Bradshaw Ranger District of the Prescott National Forest (PNF) covering, an area of approximately 297 acres. The allotment is located in the northwestern portion of the District, approximately 20 miles west of Prescott, Arizona. The Buckhorn Allotment borders the Arizona State Land Department Buckhorn Grazing Lease on the west and private land to the south. North and east sides of the allotment are bordered by National Forest System lands. Average elevation of the allotment is 4,500 feet and the average annual precipitation is approximately 18 inches. Precipitation is bi-modal with monsoon events occurring during the summer and a second period of precipitation occurring during the winter season. The prominent ecotype on the allotment is pinion-juniper with some tobosa grass-dominated mesa tops. There are no riparian areas identified on the allotment. Slope gradients are gently sloping to moderately steep. Major land formations include lowland and elevated plains with some hill features.

The primary watershed being evaluated for cumulative effects of past, present, and future activities at the 6th level hydrologic unit code (HUC) is the Tank Creek 6th code HUC. The Prescott National Forest administers 71% of the lands within the Tank Creek 6th code HUC. The Buckhorn Allotment represents 4% of the area of the Tank Creek watershed.

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 issues related to 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. There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) or wilderness areas on the allotment. There are no eligible or designated Wild and Scenic River reaches occurring within the Buckhorn Allotment. A segment of the Verde River designated as a Scenic River in 1984 is located approximately 70 miles east of the allotment (EA pages 30-31). 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 Buckhorn Allotment (EA pages 31-32).

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 Land Management Plan (LMP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Forest-wide effects of LMP's standards were disclosed in that EIS. The selected alternative with the identified resource protection measures 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 5-6 and 33-34, 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 that are similar to the selected alternative. 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 18-32).

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 have been displayed in this analysis in both the EA and in specialist reports contained in the project record. Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 18-32) discusses the combined effects of the project with other past, current and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on the discussions in the EA, specialist reports, and information identified during public review, 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. Areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities will be surveyed and all cultural resources or historic sites will be avoided. 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. The SHPO has concurred with the no adverse effect determination, and the Forest Supervisor approved the SHPO clearance on 11/18/2011 (PR #32A and B).

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. There are no Federally-listed Threatened or Endangered species or habitat within the project area. The Wildlife, Fisheries, and Rare Plants Report and Biological Evaluation for the Buckhorn Allotment, prepared on 8/28/2011, documents the lack of species or habitat (PR #23A).

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. 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, watershed, and riparian areas; wildlife, rare plant, fish, and aquatic species; and heritage resources (EA pages 4-5).

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:

Betty Mathews
Forest Supervisor
Attn: Buckhorn 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.

Linda L. Jackson

7/16/12

Linda L. Jackson

Date

District Ranger

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

