United States Department Agriculture | Tonto NF | Payson RD | 1009 E. Highway 260 Payson, AZ 85541

Reply To: 2600 **Date:** June 20, 1989

Subject: Biological Evaluation of the Bull Springs Allotment

To: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
C/O Sam Spillar
Ecological Services
3616 W. Thomas, Suite 6
Phoenix, AZ 85019

Enclosed for your review and concurrence is the Biological Evaluation of the Bull Springs Allotment and proposed management plan. My Range Staff Officer Rob Ingram has discussed this evaluation with Sue Rutman. Enclosed with the evaluation is an allotment map showing the routes taken by Rob during his inspection surveys, also enclosed is a draft copy of the Allotment Management Plan and a copy of the Environmental Assessment. We believe that the proposed management may beneficially effect the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon as identified in the evaluation. Please respond your concurrence in writing. Your correspondence will be included with the allotment management plan. We will begin implementation of the proposed allotment management plan following final approval from the Forest Supervisor.

STEPHEN L. GUNZEL
District Ranger

Biological Evaluation

Bull Springs Allotment

JUNE 1989

Introduction

An allotment management plan is proposed for the Bull Springs Allotment. This allotment is located along the East Verde River in the Mazatzal Wilderness. The plan proposes to intensify management by implementing a nine pasture deferred rotation system. The allotment is approximately 33,000 acres and varies in elevation from 2500 feet at the bottom of the East Verde River to 6000 feet in the Mazatazal Mountains. The major vegetative type consists of pinyon pine/juniper woodlands. Most of the woodland has a chaparral understory, however, there are tracts with a herbacious understory. There are approximately 17 miles of riparian habitat that exist along Wet Bottom Creek, Rock Creek, Pine Creek, and the East Verde River. In addition to the woodland and riparian vegetative types there is some grassland and ponderosa pine.

There are 19 threatened and endangered or sensitive species associated with the allotment (Table 1). These species are presently using the allotment, or they were there historically, or there may be potential habitat available. Seven of these species are riparian obligate species. In addition to these the bald eagle and peregrine falcon also depend on the riparian habitat in this area for their existence. Therefore, the riparian habitat and its management is of critical importance. One of the major objectives of the plan will be to protect riparian habitat.

Proposed Management

The management system proposed is a nine pasture rotation with summer deferment. The permit was recently reduced 20% of the total animal months. This reduction combined with the development or reconstruction of fences, improvement of three tanks and installation of a pipeline system, will result in improved vegetative conditions on the allotment.

Listed Species

There are possibly five listed species associated with this allotment. Information regarding possible beneficial or no effect related to these species from the implementation of this proposed plan are listed below by species.

Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon - Aeries for the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon exist outside of the allotment boundary. The bald eagle utilizes the East Verde River within this allotment as part of its nest territory. The river is also used during the non-breeding season by eagles. The peregrine falcon also may use the river within the allotment as part of its nest territory. The allotment management plan objectives propose to improve the riparian habitat. If these objectives are met, management may beneficially affect these species.

Colorado River Squawfish - The East Verde River was historical habitat for the Colorado River Squawfish. However, this species no longer exists here.

Cowania subintegra exists within the Verde River drainage on the Cave Creek Ranger District. Limestone soils exist within the boundaries of the Bull Springs Allotment, but they are not the calcareous type where the cliffrose has been found. Therefore, the probability of occurrence for this species would be low. Numerous inspection surveys have been completed on this allotment by the district range personnel, and no observation of this species has been documented. (Refer

to attached map). Based on the survey information no effect on this species is expected from improved management. Should future surveys identify this species as being present, the district will seek consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for necessary mitigation measures.

Agave Arizonica may exist within the boundaries of the allotment.The Desert Botanical Garden produced a very crude map of possible distribution of the Agave Arizonica. The southern portion of this allotment is mapped as high probability of occurrence. Field surveys conducted on the allotment have resulted in no observations of this species. (Refer to attached map). Proposed management on the allotment calls for winter grazing in the areas identified as high probability. Disturbance to this species by domestic livestock usually occurs to the flowering plant stalk. Since this plant flowers in the summer the proposed management will have no effect on this species. Should this plant occur in the winter range, seed production will be allowed without any conflict from grazing livestock. The Desert Botanical Gardens in coordination with the Tonto National Forest, plan to conduct additional surveys for Agave Arizonica during the next year. Should any positive observations occur outside the winter range, the district will request consultation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for necessary mitigation measures.

Among the proposed, candidate, or state listed species the black hawk, river otter, and Colorado River roundtail chub do occur and are more than just migrants or rare visitors. The black-crowned night heron, white-faced ibis, western yellow-billed cuckoo, spotted bat, fereginous hawk, Swainsons's hawk may occur but do so only as migrants or rare visitors. The narrow-headed garter snake, Mexican garter snake, and Erigeron pringlei may occur but have not been documented. The Gila chub and razorback sucker probably once occurred but are no longer found. All of these species depend on general range and riparian habitat conditions and the objectives of this plan will be for improvement.

Determination of Effect on Listed Species

The proposed Bull Springs Allotment Management Plan and resultant vegetative management will have either "no effect" or beneficial effect on listed species or their habitats on the allotment as noted above. The improvement of riparian conditions and habitat for other listed species are accomplished directly by the main proposed actions. Formal consultation on the effects of this plan will not be required. A copy of this Biological Evaluation will be attached to the NEPA documents for the Allotment Management Plan.

Robert Ingram

ROBERT INGRAM
Range Staff

Mike Ross

MIKE ROSS
Wildlife Biologist

6/12/89

Date

Table 1. Federal and state listed plant, wildlife, and fish species that occur on the Bull Springs Allotment or species that have potential habitat on the allotments, Pleasant Valley Ranger District, Tonto National Forest, 1989.

Riparian Obligate Species

Mammals

river otter ****

Birds

black hawk ****

black-crowned night heron ****

white-faced ibis ***

western yellow-billed cuckoo ***

Reptiles

narrow-headed garter snake ***

Mexican garter snake ****

Fishes

Col. River rndtail. chub ****

Gila chub ***

Colorado River squawfish ***

razorback sucker ***

Nonriparian Species

Mammals

spotted bat ***

Birds

bald eagle ***

fereginous hawk ***

Swainson's hawk ***

peregrine falcon ***

Plants

Cowania subintegra *

Agave Arizonica **

Erigeron pringlei **

---

endangered *

threatened **

proposed ***

candidate ****

state listed