

Payson Ranger District – Bull Springs Allotment Inspection Report

File Code: 2210, 2230
Date: 10/10-10/11/2018
Document: Inspection Report

On October 10th, 2018- North Zone Range Staff Jeff Sturla and Technician Tyler Keller rode horseback into the Bull Springs allotment to check compliance to a mediated agreement between Pratt Brothers Ranch LLC and the Forest Service in response to a Notice of Suspension associated with violations of Term Grazing Permit #12202 for the Bull Springs allotment.

The mediated agreement has deadlines associated with schedule maintenance on the allotment. A letter was mailed to the permittee on July 25th, 2018 reminding of the elements in the agreement and documented a deviation from the agreement and Annual Operating Instructions (AOI). Animals were also document outside of their scheduled pastures for use (found scattered across Polles Mesa pastures) and the permittee was reminded that they were to be in Pocket and Rock Creek pastures until Sept. 14th, 2018.

We began the inspection on October 10th, and started at the Doll Baby trailhead. We took Arizona Trail and headed to Red Saddle Tank on top Polles Mesa. When we got up on the Polles Mesa, the gate to the pasture was laid open across the trail. I observed fresh cattle tracks heading north to Red Saddle Tank. We can confirm tracks were within a day or so, as it had rained no longer than 3 days prior to the inspection.



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East Polles Pasture, October 10, 2018

We followed cattle tracks to Red Saddle Tank. The tank was full and cows are actively watering here. There is a trap surrounding the tank that has recently been repaired. There are several gates around the tank. All gates were left open.



Red Saddle Tank is full and cows actively watering here. This area is not scheduled for use

From here we followed tracks to the northern boundary of the allotment. The allotment boundary gate between Bull Springs and Hardscrabble allotment was found closed. We rode west across the mesa and inspected the fence line. A deadline of May 1, 2018 was given to the permittee to have all northern boundary fence complete. This fence line was complete, although in poor condition. It appears to be of original construction and is not built to Forest Service Standard or any discernable standard.

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Polles Mesa- northern boundary fence. Fence is standing although in poor condition. The fence here is constructed of four single strands of smooth wire and the 5th (bottom wire) is barbed.



Polles Mesa- northern boundary fence. Fence stays are almost entirely wood. There are junipers leaning against the fence propping it up in places.

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As we rode the northern boundary, we crossed from East Polles pasture into Mid Polles pasture, and then into West Polles pasture. The only closed gate I encountered during the entire inspection over the course of two days was found here. I did not have to open this gate to pass through because the fence was down just south of it. Fence between these pastures was down in at least 4 locations and has been for some time. There are cattle trails going through these areas (see attached inspection map).



Fence down between West and Mid Polles Pastures



West Polles Tank is blown out and dry. Here a fence around it is down and separates West and Mid Polles Pastures

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Fence repairs on Polles Mesa was addressed in the January 21, 2015 AOI letter that directed all fences (boundary, pasture, drift, trap) be rebuilt to serviceable condition by December 2015. A failure to complete this work contributed to the term permit suspension during the summer of 2017. When the mediated agreement was developed in August 2017, the Forest Service was informed that interior fences on Polles Mesa had since been completed.

Two unbranded bulls were observed at the north end of West Polles pasture. I got within 10 yards of a black horned bull and did not observe any brands, ear tags or markings.



Two unbranded bulls in West Polles pasture.

We inspected the fence to the south where it bluffed out. Here we stayed overnight at Division Fence Tank. The tank was full. At the tank we watched an unbranded cow/calf come into water. More cows were heard to the east bawling.

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Division Fence Tank

In the morning, Tyler and I split up. He went south to inspect Oak Grove pasture and I went back up on Polles Mesa. I rode west and did a loop across West Polles pasture. I came across 3 unbranded cows (appeared to be a mother with a yearling and calf). I headed off in the direction of the cattle which took me to the fence line between West and Mid Polles pasture. I followed a cow trail through the damaged fence line and located a herd of animals. There were 15-20 animals here. Some animals were branded/marked and some were not.



Cattle at the West Polles/ Mid Polles pasture divide. There were 15-20 animals here.

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I rode around Mid Polles pasture. Seven animals were observed on the east end of the pasture. I heard more animals bawling but was unable to locate them. After riding around the pasture, I headed to Mid Polles tank. The tank was full of water and fence around it was recently repaired. All gates around the tank were down. While inspecting Mid Polles tank a branded bull came to the tank.



Fences down around Mid Polles tank. Gates have been open long enough for vegetation to grow in a sheltered areas where they are protected from grazing.



Gates open between Mid Polles and East Polles pastures. A trap next to the water lot was open and branding irons left to the side.

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Bull at Mid Polles tank

I continued east along to Arizona Trail to Polk Springs. Adjacent to the trail, a rock gabion (used here in fence line construction) appears to have been recently been constructed using metates (Native American grinding stones). Cultural artifacts like these are protected under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA), which governs the excavation of archaeological sites on federal lands and removal of archaeological collections from those sites. There is likely a site nearby and the source of these grinding stones. This appears to be an egregious violation of the Act.

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Several metates can be see displayed in a rock gabion adjacent to the Arizona Trail, next to Polk Spring.

I met with back up with Tyler nearby and we continued back to the trail head. Tyler shared with me what he saw in Oak Grove pasture. He had inspected the Oak Grove trap which was assigned to be completed by August 1, 2018. The fence around the trap was standing, although condition of the trap is poor.

Currently animals are scheduled to be in this pasture along with West River from September 15th to December 15, 2018. Tyler was unable to locate any animals here and didn't to make it to West River. He observed some cattle track along the river but cattle numbers appeared to be much higher on Polles Mesa. Tyler hiked east through the pasture to Pocket Pasture, and then continued East through LF pasture before finally meeting up with me at the Arizona Trail. This concluded our inspection.

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Verde River bisecting Oak Grove pasture



Oak Grove trap was to be completed by August 1, 2018. It appears fence is standing around it although the condition is poor and a limited attempt was made to “complete” it.

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The condition of fence around Oak Grove trap is poor



A gate left open between Pocket and LF pasture. Cattle recently passed through here.

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Results of the inspection:

- A total of 30 miles was inspected from nearly the entire north half of the allotment. During this time, a single gate was found closed at the far north end of the allotment, but the fence line was down adjacent to it. Regardless if fences on the allotment are functioning or not animals, are free to roam across the entire allotment due to all gates left open. This is common to all recent inspections on the allotment.
- The fence line between West and Mid Polles pasture is non-functional. All fences on Polles Mesa were to be repaired by December 2015.
- There are at least 50 cattle currently on Polles Mesa. Cattle are not authorized to be in these pastures. The permittee was notified of this on July 25, 2018 and asked to move them to their scheduled pastures. As per the mediated agreement and general good management practices, pastures will be cleaned within 14 days.
- Fresh tracks or cattle were observed in East Polles, Mid Polles, West Polles, LF and Pocket Pastures. Cattle are not authorized in any of these pastures per the 2018 AOI.
- Nearly half of all animals observed on the allotment were unbranded. Per the Term Grazing Permit, part 2(g), only livestock marked, tagged, or branded as shown in the application upon which this permit is based as may be required under Section 8(f), will be allowed to graze under this permit unless the permittee has advance written approval from the Forest Officer in charge to do otherwise.

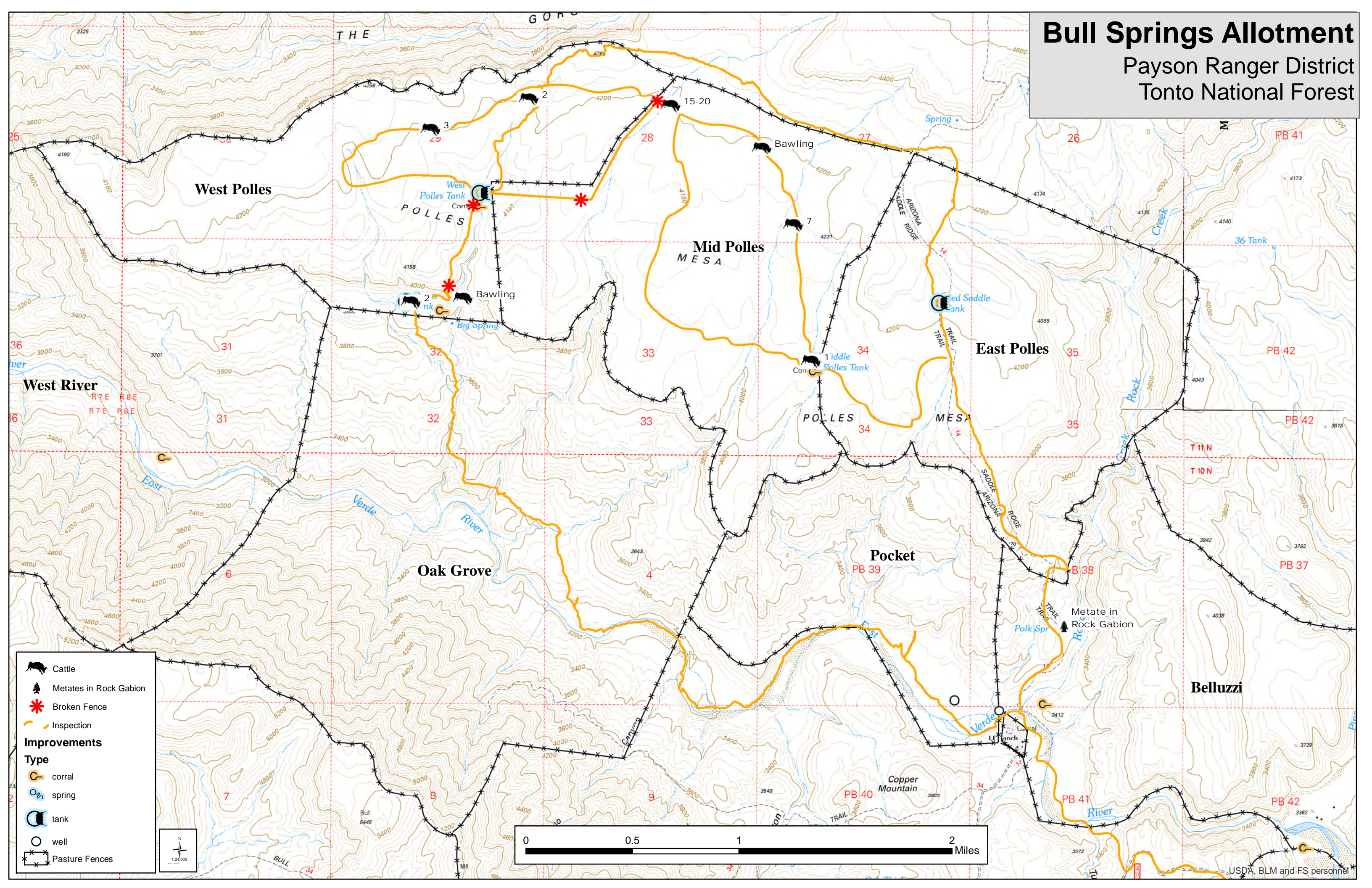
This concluded our inspection.

Jeff Sturla
North Zone Range Staff

Filed Bull Springs 2210; 2230

Bull Springs Allotment

Payson Ranger District
Tonto National Forest



Legend

- Cattle
- Metates in Rock Gabion
- Broken Fence
- Inspection

Improvements

Type

- corral
- spring
- tank
- well
- Pasture Fences

