

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Canelo Hills Allotments Analysis Project

USDA Forest Service
Sierra Vista Ranger District
Coronado National Forest
Santa Cruz County, Arizona

Introduction

The Coronado National Forest, Sierra Vista Ranger District, has completed a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis to evaluate the environmental effects of the proposed authorization of livestock grazing on the Crittenden, Kunde, Mowry, Papago, and O'Donnell allotments, collectively referred to as the Canelo Hills Allotments. A Final Environmental Assessment (FEA), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Decision Notice have been prepared for the proposed project. The approximate location of the proposed project is in the Canelo Hills, Santa Cruz County, Arizona. The location is illustrated on Figure 1 of the FEA.

The purpose of this action is to authorize grazing in a manner consistent with 2018 Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) objectives and the direction to move ecosystems toward their desired conditions.

An environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared to determine whether the proposed action would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and thereby require the preparation of an environmental impact statement to disclose those effects. Preparing the EA has fulfilled agency policy and direction to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The FEA documents the analysis of two alternatives: 1) No Action/No Grazing, and 2) the Proposed Action to meet the purpose and need.

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Based upon my review and consideration of the alternatives and evaluation of the impacts presented in the FEA, my decision is to implement the Proposed Action (selected alternative), which will meet the purpose and need as described in Chapter 2 of the FEA.

The selected alternative is described in detail in Chapter 3 of the FEA and includes:

1. **Authorization** to increase the maximum permitted annual livestock numbers on the Kunde and Mowry allotments, combining the Papago and O'Donnell allotments into one single allotment, and reauthorizing grazing in the Redrock pasture of the Kunde Allotment.
2. Installation of new structural range **improvements** to include several new fences, extensions of existing water conveyance systems, and construction and placement of new water sources, waterlines, storage tanks, and troughs to improve livestock distribution and pasture reliability.
3. Implementation of **management practices/design features** to mitigate impacts to soil, hydrology, vegetation, watershed, wildlife, and cultural resources, and to minimize the introduction and establishment of invasive weeds.

4. **Monitoring**, including implementation of an adaptive management strategy, to allow for the management of grazing intensities and rest or deferment schedules. Using adaptive management, specific number of livestock authorized, specific dates for grazing, class of animal and modifications in allotment use may be modified as necessary based on implementation and effectiveness monitoring and current year production. The monitoring included with adaptive management helps identify if structural improvements or management actions are needed that have not been disclosed or analyzed in a previous NEPA analysis and disclosure. In the case that changing circumstances require physical improvements or management actions not disclosed or analyzed, further interdisciplinary review would occur to determine whether correction, supplementation or revision of the NEPA analysis is required (FSH 1909.15(18) and FSH 2209.13(96)).

The selected alternative was incrementally adjusted and modified throughout the environmental analysis process to incorporate mitigation measures and to respond to comments, identified issues, and needs. This alternative best meets the stated purpose and need for the project while maintaining or improving existing resource conditions to meet the aspirational desired conditions.

This decision is in compliance with the existing Forest Plan; guidance provided by law, regulation, and policy; as well as consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The project record shows a thorough review of relevant information and a consideration of various views while addressing site-specific resource concerns.

Modifications from the Draft Proposed Action

Throughout the development of this project, I considered feedback from public comments and issues identified during the formal scoping and comment periods, as well as the results of Section 7 consultation with USFWS. Based on this input, I decided to modify the draft Proposed Action as described below. Effects to the human environment from these modifications are not expected to differ from those disclosed for the Proposed Action in the FEA.

Adaptive Management

In response to public comments regarding livestock grazing management in the face of drought and climate change, Chapter 3 of the FEA was updated to include additional explanation around the agency's drought management strategy. This information was incorporated into the Adaptive Management section in Chapter 3, and further clarifies how managers consider drought conditions when making management decisions related to livestock grazing. The FEA also describes adaptive management as a critical component of the proposed action that will increase the ability to adapt and respond to climate change. Natural processes (including climate change, wildfires, insect and disease, and drought) were considered in the cumulative effects analyses for each applicable resource as past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

Federally Listed Species

The Special Status Species section in Chapter 4 of the FEA was further supplemented to include updated references and updated content from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information, Planning, and Consultation System (IPAC). This update did not result in a change to the effects determinations. Minor editorial changes were made to clarify the consultation history and streamline the discussion of effects determinations to better align with the Biological Assessment and Evaluation for the Canelo Hills Allotments.

The draft EA was released in September 2019 and included preliminary determinations that the proposed action “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” jaguar and ocelot, and “may affect, and is likely to adversely affect” the Gila topminnow, Sonoran tiger salamander, Chiricahua leopard frog, northern Mexican gartersnake, and Western yellow-billed cuckoo. The draft EA disclosed that these statements were considered preliminary determinations until consultation with USFWS was complete.

On September 30, 2021, the USFWS issued a final Biological Opinion on Ongoing Grazing on the Coronado National Forest (BO) that finalized these determinations. The BO concluded that the Canelo Hills Allotments Analysis is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any federally listed species nor is it likely to result in adverse modification of any designated critical habitat. The proposed action will follow all design features, conservation measures, and terms and conditions from the BO that apply to this project.

The following species-specific Wildlife Conservation Measures from the BO on Ongoing Grazing on the Coronado National Forest will be followed in the proposed action:

- Implement the Stockpond Management Plan.
- Through regular monitoring, the Forest will determine whether there is a need to specifically assess hydrologic function in Redrock Canyon. If watershed improvements are determined to be necessary, the Forest will coordinate with partners to facilitate the installation of check dams in the upper reaches of the watershed.
- Maintain existing exclosures designed to reduce livestock pressure on Gila topminnow habitat. While permitted livestock are grazing pastures bordering an exclosure, the Forest will ensure:
 - Exclosure fences are functional upon livestock entry to these pastures.
 - The Forest and/or the permit holder will check and repair these fences to ensure that no fence is non-functional for more than two weeks.
- Notify permit holders through Annual Operating Instructions of the operational procedures in the Chiricahua leopard frog and Sonoran tiger salamander Recovery Plans to minimize take from the introduction of nonnative species and disease contamination.
- The Forest will continue to commit personnel to coordinate with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and FWS to:
 - Attend stakeholder meetings.
 - Discuss translocating Chiricahua leopard frog to suitable sites on the Forest, emphasizing the enhancement of metapopulation dynamics and long-term population persistence.
 - Support and implement a robust program to control nonnative aquatic organisms on the Forest, particularly bullfrogs, fish in the families Centrarchidae and Ichthyluridae, and crayfish.
- If the construction or repair of range improvements may disturb breeding western yellow-billed cuckoo, then the Forest will avoid that activity within the YBCU breeding season (June 1 – September 30).

Forest Service Sensitive Species

The final environmental assessment incorporates the most updated Forest Service Sensitive Species (FSSS) list cross-referenced with local occurrence data. For FSSS occurring in the project area, some disruption of individuals might occur from the proposed action. This disruption is anticipated to be minimal in scope, duration, and intensity because of the utilization standards and the rest-rotation system outlined in the Forest Plan and the proposed action. Although individuals may be impacted as a result of the proposed action, the effects would not cause a loss in population viability or a trend in population toward Federal listing.

Management Indicator Species

In Chapter 4 of the FEA, the analysis of impacts to Management Indicator Species was removed from the Special Status Species section. The 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) requires all forest plans to follow the monitoring requirements of the 2012 Rule, which includes a transition from monitoring management indicator species to focal species. As part of the forest plan revision effort, the Forest has transitioned from management indicator species to focal species, which are not analyzed at the project-level.

Additional Modifications

In consideration of comments received, the proposed action was modified to include further explanation of grazing management techniques, along with additional analysis and project design features intended to further mitigate any potential unintended effects of project activities. One commenter suggested an alternative to the proposed action that would include a reduction of livestock numbers. The interdisciplinary team determined that an alternative that would reduce livestock numbers would not meet the purpose and need of the proposed action. As stated in Chapter 3.3 of the FEA, monitoring has demonstrated that the allotments can support current and increased permitted livestock numbers while meeting desired conditions. However, there is a need for additional water developments to help with adaptive management implementation. Furthermore, livestock numbers will be adjusted annually to be commensurate with resource conditions.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, one other alternative (Alternative 1: No Action/No Grazing) was considered. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEA, Chapters 3 and 4. In accordance with FSH 2209.13, Chapter 90, a “no grazing” alternative was included to provide an environmental baseline against which the effects of the other alternatives may be compared.

Alternative 1: No Action (No Grazing)

Under this alternative, grazing would not be authorized, and use of the allotments by domestic livestock would be discontinued. Permittees would be given one year from the date of the decision to remove livestock from the allotments. Existing structural improvements would remain in place but would not be maintained. Improvements contributing to resource protection or enhancement, such as water developments important for wildlife, would be maintained where feasible using other program funds. Periodic inspection of structural improvements would be used to determine whether maintenance or removal is needed. Removal or maintenance of improvements would be authorized by a separate decision. Where necessary, maintenance of allotment boundary fences would be reassigned to adjacent permittees with the understanding that livestock are to be kept off of the allotment(s).

While this alternative would meet the natural resource objectives defined for the allotments, it

would not be managed for multiple use and sustained yield nor contribute to a viable rural economy.

Public Involvement and Consultation

Several efforts were made to coordinate with and involve the public and to consult with Tribes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, other agencies, permittees, and partners (see Chapter 5 of the FEA).

This proposal was first listed on the Coronado National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in June 2018 and updated periodically during the analysis. Project information was made available on the project website at http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=54149.

The Sierra Vista Ranger District began 30 days of public scoping on June 29, 2018 with the publication of a legal notice in the *Sierra Vista Herald*, the newspaper of record. Letters were either mailed or emailed to approximately 150 entities and individuals, including local and state governments, Tribes, Federal Agencies, partner groups and individuals who in the past had expressed interest in Forest projects. The Sierra Vista Ranger District received two responses to the scoping letter. The Sierra Vista Ranger District provided a 30-day opportunity to comment on the draft EA for the proposed project on September 18, 2019, announced in a legal notice in the *Sierra Vista Herald*. A letter announcing the formal opportunity to comment was sent to approximately 250 individuals; three comment letters were received during the comment period.

In response to a comment letter submitted by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), the Forest Hydrologist and range staff conducted a site visit with ADEQ on March 3, 2020, to discuss impacts of the project. The Forest specialists reviewed field conditions with ADEQ, identified areas of mutual agreement regarding areas of concern, and worked to establish a mutual understanding of the project.

Tribal Consultation

On June 27, 2018, a letter and scoping notice was sent to the following tribes: Fort Sill Apache Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai Apache Nation, Ak-Chin Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, and Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. Two tribes responded to the consultation.

On September 10, 2019, a letter was sent to the same twelve tribes notifying them of the opportunity to review and comment on the draft environmental assessment. Three tribes responded to the consultation.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Consultation

On February 27, 2019, formal consultation was initiated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Office (USFWS) for Ongoing Grazing on the Coronado National Forest, which includes the Canelo Hills Allotments (USFWS reference: AESO/SE 02EAAZ00-2019-F-0437). A final Biological Opinion on Ongoing Grazing on the Coronado National Forest was received on September 30, 2021; the analysis and decision for this project tier to this consultation.

State Historic Preservation Office Consultation

Due to the determination that no cultural or historic properties would be affected, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office was not required for this project (Cultural Resources Report No. 2019-05-083).

Council on Environmental Quality Regulations

This environmental analysis was conducted according to the Council on Environmental Quality's 1978 regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR §§1500-1508, as amended). The CEQ issued revised regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, effective September 14, 2020. The revised regulations provide the responsible official the option of conducting an environmental analysis under the 1978 regulations if the process was initiated prior to September 14, 2020 (40 CFR §1506.13, 85 FR 137, p. 43373, July 16, 2020).

This project was initiated prior to September 14, 2020, with distribution of a scoping notice announcing the 30-day scoping period on June 29, 2018, and publication of a legal notice announcing the 30-day comment period on the draft EA on September 18, 2019.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The following is a summary of the project analysis to determine significance, as defined by Forest Service Handbook 1909.15_05. "Significant" as used in NEPA requires consideration of both context and intensity of the expected project effects.

Context

Context means that the significance of an action may be analyzed in several contexts (i.e. local regional, worldwide), and over short and long timeframes. The effects of this site-specific proposed action and the significance of the effects are limited to the local level.

This project is a site-specific action that does not have international, national, regionwide, or statewide importance and will not affect regional or national resources. This decision is made within the context of local importance in the project area in the Huachuca Mountains on the Sierra Vista Ranger District in southeastern Arizona.

There are currently 41 allotments on the Sierra Vista Ranger District, including 32 active, 1 inactive, and 8 vacant allotments. The allotments covered by this decision account for approximately 12% of the number of allotments and 13.4% of the land area on the Sierra Vista Ranger District.

Intensity

Intensity refers to the severity of the expected project impacts and is defined by the 10 factors identified in 40 CFR 1508.27(b). My finding of no significant impact is based on the context of the project and the results of the evaluation of effects using the following 10 factors.

- 1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant impact may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on the balance the effects will be beneficial.**

The beneficial and adverse effects of the selected alternative are described in the Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives section (Chapter 4) of the environmental assessment and further detailed in the specialist reports in the project record. These findings have been reviewed and it is determined that none of the actions will result in

significant effects. This decision is based on monitoring and adaptive management practices that have shown the ability to manage sustainable levels of grazing that meet the desired conditions of the Forest Plan.

The selected alternative may result in removal of herbaceous vegetation up to light to moderate use levels (30-45%). These levels would retain litter and plant stubble to provide soil cover and wildlife habitat. Possible structural improvements involve the installation of fences and water systems. Construction of these improvements will result in minor, short-term disturbance but will benefit resources over the long term as a result of improved management, flexibility, and livestock distribution. Water source developments will be located and constructed in such a manner as to avoid or minimize disturbance to riparian areas and streambanks, and erosion and sedimentation to the extent practicable.

Year-round grazing allows flexibility for the resource managers to adjust the timing, intensity, frequency, and duration of livestock grazing and will meet plants' needs for recovery, improved vigor, and recruitment of desirable species. Rangelands, soils, and riparian and watershed conditions are expected to maintain or improve. Adverse effects have been mitigated through proposed management practices and design features. No significant adverse effects were identified during the analysis (see Chapter 4 of the FEA, for each resource).

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

No significant effects on public health and safety were identified. The scope of the grazing authorization is limited to implementation of managed livestock grazing and installation and maintenance of structural range improvements. There are inherent risks associated with these activities, but they are not expected to present significant hazards to workers or the public.

Water quality was considered as part of the watershed analysis, including a section of the San Pedro River and a section of Sonoita Creek listed as impaired for *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). The Watershed specialist report in the project record describes the *E. coli* contamination along approximately 43 miles of the San Pedro River, heading north from the international border with Mexico, and approximately 11 miles of Sonoita Creek close to the confluence with the Santa Cruz River. As stated in Chapter 4 of the FEA, the proposed action would continue to limit access to perennial and strongly intermittent stream sections and associated riparian areas, as well as implement adaptive management and improve livestock distribution, contributing to improved water quality. It is therefore expected that *E. coli* levels would remain the same or be reduced coming off of Forest Service lands. The Forest Watershed Program Manager contacted ADEQ to discuss *E. coli* impacts of this project and set up a site visit. The Forest reviewed field conditions with ADEQ, identified areas of mutual agreement regarding road issues, worked to establish a mutual understanding regarding the project, and communicated with ADEQ regarding completion of agreed-upon road maintenance.

3. 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.

No significant effects on the unique characteristics of the area are expected to occur. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or designated wild and scenic rivers in the project area.

Ecologically critical areas include designated habitat for threatened and endangered species. See factor 9 below for information on the degree to which the action may adversely affect a threatened or endangered species or its habitat.

The project's effects to historical and cultural resources are minimized through the use of project design features that avoid or mitigate impacts. Cultural resources are further discussed in factor 8 below.

Effects to range, watershed, special status species, and cultural resources are addressed in their respective sections in Chapter 4 of the environmental assessment.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

In this context, the term “controversial” refers to cases where substantial scientific dispute exists as to the size, nature, or effects of a major Federal action on a human environmental factor rather than to public opposition of a proposed action or alternative.

The proposed action is supported by science and research. The proposed management practices and design features are commonly used practices described in agency directives, prescribed in the Forest Plan, applied on many other national forests with similar issues, and also used by other land management agencies. The details of the proposed action were reviewed by stakeholders and interested parties, and their comments were factored into the design of the project.

While there is some opposition to grazing use and other uses of public lands, this action is not highly controversial within the scientific context of NEPA. Research regarding grazing in the southwest and on the Forest has repeatedly shown that incorporating appropriate management practices while grazing livestock can minimize or avoid impacts to other resources including water quality, wildlife, soils, and cultural resources.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The effects analysis indicates the effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Forest Service personnel have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects described in Chapter 4 of the environmental assessment are based on the judgement of experienced resource management professionals using the best available information. This action is similar to many past actions, both in this analysis area and across the national forest. It is likely the effects of implementing the selected alternative will be similar to the effects of past, similar actions.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The decision to reauthorize livestock grazing on these allotments does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. This is a stand-alone decision, and each grazing allotment was evaluated independently on its own merits. Future actions will be evaluated on a project-by-project basis through the environmental analysis process and will stand on their own as to environmental effects and project feasibility.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The cumulative impacts of the selected alternative on watershed, range, special status species, and cultural resources were considered and disclosed in Chapter 4 of the FEA and in various specialist reports. The direct and indirect effects of the proposal are expected to be minor in the short term and beneficial or neutral over the long term. While this decision may include impacts to some resources, these impacts are not expected to result in cumulatively significant impacts due to the resource protection measures and adaptive management strategies of the proposed action as described in Chapter 3 of the FEA.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources.

This analysis is in conformance with regulations of the National Historic Preservation Act, 1966, as amended (1992: Public Law 102-575); the National Environmental Policy Act (1969); Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979; Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (1990: Public Law 101-601); and American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978: Public Law 95-341). Forest Service Manual 2360.5 provides agency direction for heritage program management.

The decision 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 (Cultural Resources Report #2019-05-083). The term “historic properties” refers to cultural properties listed or determined as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

As discussed in Chapter 3 under Management Practices/Design Features, mitigation measures such as site avoidance will help to protect cultural resources from direct or indirect impacts. Areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities have been, or will be, surveyed prior to construction, and all cultural resources or historic sites will be avoided.

The Forest Archaeologist has consulted and coordinated with interested and affected tribes regarding the proposed action. Implementation of the selected alternative will not affect tribal access to Federal lands within the allotment areas.

Potential impacts to archaeological and historic resources have been evaluated in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA. Based on the resource protection measures, the selected alternative will have no adverse effect on cultural properties and values. Due to the determination that no cultural or historic properties would be affected, consultation with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was not required during preparation of the FEA.

Pursuant to the provisions found in 36 CFR 800.13, should any previously unidentified cultural resources be discovered during project implementation, activities that may be affecting that resource will be halted immediately (see Management Practices/Design Features for Cultural Resources in Chapter 3 of the FEA). The resource will be evaluated by a professional archaeologist and consultation will be initiated with the SHPO to determine

appropriate actions for protecting the resource and for mitigating any adverse effects on the resource.

9. 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.

As stated above in the Decision Notice, formal consultation was initiated on February 27, 2019 with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Office. An amended final biological assessment was submitted on September 27, 2019. On September 30, 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a final Biological Opinion on Ongoing Grazing on the Coronado National Forest (USFWS reference: AESO/SE 02EAAZ00-2019-F-0437). The following determinations for the selected alternative tier to this consultation:

- **May affect, likely to adversely affect** for Gila topminnow, Sonoran tiger salamander, Chiricahua leopard frog, northern Mexican gartersnake, and Western yellow-billed cuckoo.
- **May affect but not likely to adversely affect** for jaguar and ocelot.

Additionally, a **no effect** determination was made for all species for which the project action area occurs outside the known range of the species and/or does not provide suitable habitat.

The conclusions of the BO are legally binding and are laid out in the form of Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPM) as well as Terms and Conditions for implementing those RPM, as described above under Decision and Reasons for the Decision.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The selected alternative will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for protecting the environment. The selected alternative complies with all standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan as documented in the Forest Plan Consistency section in Chapter 2 of the FEA.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act; American Indian Religious Freedom Act; Executive Order 11593 (Cultural Resources), and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA): Potential impacts to archaeological and historic resources have been evaluated in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA. Due to the determination that no cultural or historic properties would be affected, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office was not required for this project. Implementation of the selected alternative will not affect tribal access to Federal lands within the allotment areas. See discussion above under factor 8.

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act: Possible impacts to bald and golden eagles were considered and are disclosed in the Special Status Species section in Chapter 4 of the FEA. It was determined the selected alternative will not impact bald and golden eagles and is not likely to cause a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability.

Clean Water Act: Arizona Department of Environmental Quality was provided the opportunity to review the environmental assessment. Mitigation and design features to protect water quality are included in the selected alternative (Management Practices/Design Features for Soil, Hydrology, Vegetation and Watershed in Chapter 3 of the FEA).

Endangered Species Act: See discussion under factor 9 above.

Migratory Bird Act: As disclosed in the Special Status Species section in Chapter 4 of the environmental assessment, the selected alternative is not expected to have any measurable negative effects to migratory bird populations.

Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act: Where consistent with other multiple use goals and objectives, the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 declares a Congressional intent to allow grazing on suitable lands. All areas approved for grazing in this decision are identified as suitable lands under the Forest Plan. The selected alternative considers the multiple uses of the various renewable resources, will not impair land productivity, and is consistent with this law.

National Forest Management Act: The decision to implement the selected alternative is consistent with the intent of the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). As described in Chapter 2 of the FEA, the project design was based upon the Forest Plan desired conditions of resources found on the allotments. The project was designed in conformance with applicable forestwide standards and guidelines, and specific management direction for the Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area within the Sierra Vista Ranger District. This project incorporates appropriate forest plan guidance for range management, vegetation, watersheds, riparian areas, soils, and wildlife. Forest Service policy is to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing, provided it is consistent with the Forest Plan and meets the terms of the administrative permit. The project area was determined as suitable and capable for grazing in the 2018 Forest Plan.

Rescissions Act of 1995: The Rescissions Act of 1995 (Public Law 104-19) Section 504(a) requires National Forests to develop a schedule by which they would complete NEPA analyses on allotments. Completing a NEPA analysis and decision that will ensure that livestock grazing is consistent with desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan will result in compliance with the Rescissions Act of 1995.

Conclusion

As the Responsible Official, I am responsible for evaluating the effects of the project relative to the definition of significance established by CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1508.13). I have reviewed the project record and specialist reports and after considering the environmental impacts described in the FEA, I have determined that the selected alternative will not have significant effects 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.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The project was prepared consistent with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations.

Forest Service Sensitive Species: Impacts to Southwestern Regional Forester sensitive species within the project area (listed in table 5 of the FEA) were considered as disclosed in Chapter 4.4 – Special Status Species. The selected alternative is not likely to cause a loss in population viability or a trend in population toward Federal listing.

Administrative Review and Objection Opportunities

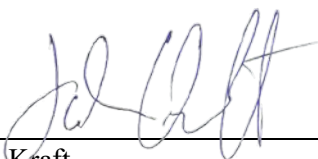
The Canelo Hills Allotments Analysis Project is an activity implementing a land management plan that is not authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and was therefore subject to pre-decisional objection pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218, Subparts A and B. Legal notice of the opportunity to object to the proposal was published in the *Herald/Review*, the newspaper of record for the Sierra Vista Ranger District, with issuance of the draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact on December 1, 2021. Objection letters were sent out to approximately 756 individuals (including all previous commenters) and to 24 representatives from local tribes. The objection period lasted for 45 days, closing on January 18, 2022. The Forest Service received two timely objections on the proposed decision.

The Reviewing Officer has considered the concerns presented in the objection letters received. The findings of the Reviewing Officer are described in letters addressed to the objectors, dated March 14, 2022. In accordance with the recommendations provided, the Consideration of Comments for Canelo Hills Allotments document has been updated to provide additional explanation for the inclusion of the Mowry Allotment and the rationale for not including a cost-benefit analysis in the FEA. These updates are considered minor corrections that have no bearing on the overall analysis and supplemental NEPA is not required.

Copies of the EA and Contact for Further Information

Electronic copies of the FEA and other related documents are available online at http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=44354. For further information concerning the Canelo Hills Allotments Analysis Project, please contact Steven Bluemer, District Range Staff Officer, at steven.bluemer@usda.gov during normal business hours.

Approved by:



John Kraft
Acting District Ranger
Sierra Vista Ranger District
Coronado National Forest

03/23/2022

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