

Decision Notice for the Coolidge-Parker Grazing Allotment Stocking Rate

USDA Forest Service
Globe Ranger District
Tonto National Forest
Gila County, Arizona

Background

The Globe District Ranger proposed to reauthorize grazing on three allotments in 2013. An Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Capitan, Coolidge-Parker, and Ranger Station Allotments was prepared in 2013 to examine this proposed action. A Finding of No Significant Impact was made as a result of this analysis and a final decision to reauthorize grazing on the three allotments was signed in 2013.

Former Globe District Ranger Richard Reitz signed a decision on April 9, 2013 selecting a modification of Alternative 2 based on the EA. This decision authorized carefully managed livestock grazing, yearlong, on the Capitan, Coolidge-Parker, and Ranger Station Allotments. Timing, intensity, and frequency will be managed to allow for increase in perennial forage plants and grazing adjustments will be implemented through the Annual Operating Instructions. Total use at the end of season will generally be conservative, which the EA defined as 30-40 Percent utilization. A range of AUM's was authorized for Capitan and Ranger Station Allotment. The decision authorized construction of multiple range improvements across the three allotments.

No appeals were filed under *36 CFR 215*. One of the permittees did file an appeal under *36 CFR 251* based on three points of the decision for his allotment:

- AUMs of 1,020;
- Moderate grazing (30-40% utilization); and
- Transfer of allotment water use (Ferdell Springs).

After reviewing the permittee's appeal, Forest Supervisor Neil Bosworth reversed, in part, the district ranger's decision as it pertained to the authorization of the Coolidge Parker allotment in terms of the stocking rates and water transfer. The decision related to the Range Station and Capitan allotments and the remaining actions for the Coolidge Parker decision were not affected and have been implemented. Supervisor Bosworth instructed the Globe District Ranger to work with the permittee to develop a new decision for Coolidge-Parker related specifically to the stocking rate and Ferdell Spring project.

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

At this time, I have decided not to continue the Ferndell Spring Water project. If it is later determined to be a beneficial project, additional NEPA analysis would need to take place to authorize that project. I have focused this decision only on the stocking rate of the Coolidge-Parker Allotment, as instructed by Supervisor Bosworth's October 2013 letter.

Based upon my review of the Environmental Assessment for the Capitan, Coolidge-Parker, and Ranger Station Allotments, and working with the grazing permittee to pair actual use data with monitoring information, I have decided to set the stocking rate for Coolidge-Parker at 415 AUM up to 1550 AUM. This number may change from year-to-year depending on localized factors such as changes in forage availability relative to varying climatic conditions. Authorization of livestock will be dependent upon conditions of the allotments as defined in the previous 2013 decision. All other grazing management actions will continue to follow the 2013 decision.

The selected stocking rate, in concert with the 2013 decision, will provide for managing livestock grazing within the Coolidge-Parker Allotment in a manner that is consistent with Forest Plan standards, guidelines, and objectives and maintains or improves natural resource conditions. In order to validate the increased stocking rate, a trial increase was authorized by the District Ranger, increasing numbers from 30 to 55 head up to 85 adult livestock and yearling carryover (up to 1550 AUM). Stocking rates from 2009 to 2016 varied between 55 and 78 head of cattle plus annual carryover.

In 2009, roughly 50 percent of the total acreage of the allotment was used. The permittee was authorized 55 head of livestock and 34 yearlings. Pasture monitoring documented levels of 10-15 percent utilization, well below the 30-40 percent conservative use target for key species. Utilization was low due to the availability of browse and other forage used by livestock. In spring, livestock focus on native and non-native annuals, sub shrubs, and mesquite beans and leaves instead of herbaceous forages.

In 2010, the permittee was authorized 55 head of livestock and 34 yearlings (the same numbers as 2009), and grazed roughly 40 percent of the total allotment acreage. Reading the Range analysis indicated grazing was not apparent across much of these pastures.

In 2011, the permittee's livestock numbers increased by 10 head to 65 plus yearlings. Approximately 48 percent of the total acres of the allotment were used. Utilization was measured below conservative use standards.

In 2012, the permittee increased numbers by two head to 67 livestock and five yearlings which grazed almost 50 percent of the allotment. Sixty-six pasture had higher utilization rates above conservative use levels, but that pasture only constitutes 12 percent of the whole allotment. The rest of the allotment measured less than conservative use.

In 2013 a total of 54 adult cattle and 20 yearlings were grazed in three pastures totaling approximately 26 percent of the allotment. In June, livestock numbers were increased to 64 head in the Mountain pasture, which makes up 32 percent of allotment. Forage utilization in one pasture used in the summer (Antieve) was grazed prior to the monsoon season and end of year utilization was less than 10 percent. Utilization in the West Harvey and CCC pastures showed little grazing pressure on plants. Oak shrub is expected to make up an estimated 40 to 50 percent of their diet along with other browse such as mountain mahogany. In Mountain pasture, honey locust and snow berry are the primary livestock forage.

In 2014, the permittee ran 63 head of livestock and seven yearlings and grazed 56 percent of the allotment. Reading the Range monitoring was not completed due to budget constraints. Permittee ocular estimates of utilization were below allowable use rates.

In 2015, the permittee was authorized 78 head of livestock and 25 yearlings which grazed in 50 percent of allotment. Permittee ocular estimates of utilization were below allowable use rates and there was no indication of degradation.

Since the 2013 decision, several new pipelines, extensions, troughs, corrals, and fences have been constructed or replaced on the Coolidge-Parker allotment per the parts of the decision that was not affected by the appeal. These new improvements will further aid livestock distribution and allow grazing in previously unwatered areas. The grazing increase trials over the last seven years resulted in less than half of the allotment being used while still meeting the 30-40 percent utilization target. These results, coupled with the addition of new range improvements which will aid in dispersing livestock into previously unused areas, indicate that the approximate 30 head increase is within the carrying capacity of the allotment. The 2013 decision provides clear allotment objectives and the stocking rate is only one component in achieving those overarching goals.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The April 9, 2013 decision included the finding of no significant impact (FONSI) as required in *40 CFR 1501.4*. I have reviewed that FONSI and determined that this decision is consistent with that FONSI, as written, and an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

As discussed in the separate resource sections of chapter 3 of the Environmental Assessment for the Capitan, Coolidge-Parker, and Ranger Station Allotments and in detail in the 2013 FONSI, the actions associated with my decision comply with all applicable laws that the Forest Service must comply, including but not limited to: *Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act; Wilderness Act; Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act; Federal Land Policy and Management Act; Clean Water Act; Endangered Species Act; Migratory Bird Treaty Act; and Clean Air Act.*

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

The analysis for this Decision Notice was completed under the authority of the Project-level Predecisional Administrative Review Process per *36 CFR 218 parts A and B*. Decision Notice

On April 30, 2016, the legal notice for the objection period for the Coolidge-Parker Grazing Allotment Stocking Rate project was posted in the Arizona Silver Belt, the newspaper of record for the Globe Ranger District. In this notice, the public was notified that a draft decision was made following the pre-decisional objection process, pursuant to Forest Service regulations at *36 CFR 218*. No formal objections were filed. Therefore, no changes have been made from the draft decision notice.

Implementation Date

Implementation of activities under the selected action will occur based on this Decision Notice. Once this decision is signed, implementation of the Coolidge-Parker Grazing Allotment Stocking Rate project can begin immediately pursuant to regulations at *36 CFR 218*.

Questions about this project should be directed to Andrea Jamie Wages at 928-402-6200 or ajwages@fs.fed.us during normal business hours.

Approved by:



Mark Sando
District Ranger
Globe Ranger District
Tonto National Forest

5/23/16

Date