

United States
Department
Agriculture

Tonto
National
Forest

Payson
Ranger
District

1009 E. Highway 260
Payson, AZ 85541

Reply To: 2670

Date:

Subject: Biological evaluation of the
Deadman Mesa Allotment Mgmt. Plan

To: District Ranger

An allotment management plan is being proposed for the Deadman Mesa Allotment that consists of a winter rotation system through eight pastures for 125 head of cattle. The season of use would be October 21 through May 31. The physical characteristics of the Allotment, present management, and proposed management are described in the allotment management plan and supporting environmental documents. Basically the allotment consists of a large mesa top with Fossil Creek Canyon on one side and Hardscrabble Canyon on the other side. The vegetative types consist primarily of pinyon-juniper (on top of mesa) and chaparral with a small amount of upper Sonoran desert grassland and riparian habitat associated with the canyons.

There are 18 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 is potential habitat available. Twelve of these species are riparian obligate species. Riparian habitat is of critical importance. The riparian habitat is confined primarily to Fossil Creek and Hardscrabble Canyons. Both are large canyons where it is difficult to collect cattle. This is especially true with Hardscrabble Canyon. The bulk of the grazing will occur on the mesa top with a reduced amount of grazing occurring each year in the riparian areas. This in combination with a winter use only (Oct.-May) rotation will minimize the impact on the riparian areas and their associated wildlife species.

Six species that do or may occur are Federally listed. These are the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, spikedace, loach minnow, Cowania subintegra, and Agave Arizonaica. The bald eagle and the peregrine falcon are known to occur in association with this allotment. The spikedace and loach minnow are not known to occur, however, it is thought that there is suitable habitat. C. subintegra and A. Arizonaica may occur, however, they have never been observed and it is thought that they do not occur due to a lack of suitable habitat.

Among the proposed, candidate, or state listed species the river otter, black hawk, razorback sucker, Gila chub, 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, ferruginous hawk, and Swainson's hawk may occur but do so only as migrants or rare visitors. The narrow-headed garter snake and Mexican

garter snake, and Erigeron pringlei may occur but have never been observed.

Aeries are present nearby for the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon and their nesting territories do include some of this allotment primarily the Fossil Creek and Hardscrabble riparian areas. One objective of the management plan is to improve riparian habitat where needed and to maintain the existing riparian habitat that is in good condition. This will be done through reducing and limiting the use now occurring. The effect will not be detrimental. If there is any effect it will be an indirect beneficial effect.

Two listed plant species, C. subintegra and A. Arizona, may occur on the allotment, however, neither have ever been observed. C. subintegra is known to occur in the Verde River Valley in a soil classified as Ustochreptic Calciorthids, Loamy-skeletal, Mixed, Thermic. The soil has a very definite white chalky appearance. None of this soil type is known to occur on this allotment and, therefore, C. subintegra is thought not to occur. A. Arizona is thought to be a hybrid between A. chrysantha and A. Toumeyana var. bella. No A. Toumeyana is known to occur on this allotment and, therefore, A. Arizona is thought not to occur.

In our opinion, the proposed Deadman Mesa Allotment Management Plan and resultant livestock management will have either "no effect" or indirect beneficial effect on listed species or their habitats on the allotment. It is considered to be indirect because the objectives of the Plan is improved range conditions. The improvement of riparian conditions and habitat for other listed species are incidental side benefits to the main proposed actions. Formal consultation on the effects of this plan will not be required. A copy of this Biological Evaluation should be attached to the NEPA documents for the Allotment Management Plan.

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/ KEITH A. MENASCO
Wildlife Biologist

cc:
Forest Supervisor

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Table 1. Federal and state listed plant, wildlife, and fish species that occur on the Deadman Mesa Allotment or species that have potential habitat on the Allotment, Payson Ranger District, Tonto National Forest, 1987.

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

razorback sucker ***
 Gila chub ***
spikedace *
 Col. River rndtail. chub ****
loach minnow *

Nonriparian Species

Mammals

spotted bat ***

Birds

peregrine hawk ***
 Swainson's hawk ***
peregrine falcon
bald eagle

Plants

Cowania subintegra
Agave Arizona **
 Erigeron pringlei **

endangered

threatened *

proposed **

candidate ***

state listed ****